Homemaking in Emergencies: Resident-Led Infrastructural Development in Za'atari Refugee Camp

by
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Abstract

Narratives surrounding public health infrastructure in refugee camps are critical to understanding the lived experiences of camp residents but are often understudied. This project draws on James Scott's conceptions of the ways urban planning and governance strategies in the imperial era were used to render communities 'legible' to their foreign governments, arguing that the ways humanitarian organizations in these camps create and maintain infrastructure is tied to a similar conception of 'camp legibility.' It argues the legibility of a refugee camp is a product of its physical and administrative order, its temporariness, and the maintenance of international narratives of refugee passivity.

This theoretical framework is formed and discussed through the lens of wastewater infrastructure in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, which remains the largest Syrian refugee camp in the Middle East. Through first person accounts from residents and aid workers on the ground, it traces the history of these systems from 2012, when the camp opened and camp governance implemented temporary washblocks that put many camp residents in danger, to 2019, with the completion of one of the largest development projects ever to have taken place in a UNHCR refugee camp. Through these narratives it becomes clear that while the humanitarian apparatus' primary concern was maintaining the legibility of the camp, both in Jordan and in the international sphere, camp residents were primarily concerned with its livability—or how bearable an environment it was—over the course of the many years that they would be there. This concept of livability is an extension of Catherine Brun's concept of 'homemaking' in refugee settings, a theoretical framework used to describe how residents of these camps constantly work to make them more habitable, both physically and psychologically.

This focus on livability led to conflicts over the public washblock system and when aid organizations pushed back, refusing to concede to the necessity for non-public systems, the tension eventually prompted residents to independently construct household latrines. In the end, these makeshift toilets created a public health crisis for which the solution was a 51-million-euro wastewater network. In an effort to maintain camp legibility, the public reasoning for this system became sustainability and cost effectiveness as opposed to residential action. This crisis points to the critical consequences of such a disconnect between humanitarian and residential priorities in a refugee camp but its response sheds light on the possibility of rebalancing this tension between legibility and livability through residential activism as well as the importance of reframing refugee narratives around the work these individuals do to make their lives more bearable each day.

Keywords: Za'atari Camp, refugee, humanitarian, Jordan, infrastructure, homemaking, emergency, legibility, public health

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Introduction

It is indisputable that urban infrastructure is integral to the experience of those within city centers. This is true not only of residential experiences—infrastructure plays a key role in residential mobility, health, and equitable access to public goods—but also the experiences of those governing it. This idea was perhaps most famously discussed by James Scott in *Seeing Like a State* with his discussion of the ways in which high modernist design schemes can be used to make societies "legible" to those governing them.[1] In other words, the ways in which communities are designed can make them more easily governable. This discussion of 'legibility' is one that is immensely valuable in the context of refugee camps where governing authorities such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—the branch of the United Nations responsible for refugee aid in crises—are tasked with governing populations they may have little previous experience with in an effort to both protect them and control their movement across borders.[2]

This project seeks to interrogate the balance between protecting these populations—providing a 'livable' environment for them—and governing them, in large part by making them 'legible' and the ways in which this balance is constantly renegotiated by the UNHCR and the residents of its refugee camps. It does this through a close reading of refugee camp infrastructure—specifically, water, sanitation, and health (WASH) infrastructure in Za'atari

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[1] Scott, James C. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. 4. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999.
[2] Stephan Scheel & Philipp Ratfisch (2014) Refugee Protection Meets Migration Management: UNHCR as a Global Police of Populations, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 40:6, 924-941, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2013.855074

Refugee Camp in Jordan, which is currently home to more than 80,000 Syrian refugees—contributing to a body of literature that is currently sparse despite its value. This is a telling case study for two major reasons. First, improvements to WASH infrastructure made from 2013 onwards, when the camp came under UNHCR governance, were primarily resident driven. Through their advocacy and action residents of the camp made it clear that the communal washblock system created by the UN in which camp residents shared overcrowded public toilets and showers was unlivable. This suggests that initially the balance created by the UN's standardized approach to emergencies was skewed in the direction of legibility.[3] Second, as a direct result of the action taken by these residents, in March of 2017 the United Nations and its affiliates completed the first phase of construction for a $51 million wastewater network[4] to replace the communal washblocks. This network was one of the largest infrastructural development projects to ever take place in a UNHCR refugee camp. As such, it not only calls into question the often-repeated monetary justification for the harsh conditions of camps such as this one, but also suggests that under these specific conditions—some of which may be replicable—there is a possibility that a balance can be struck through joint refugee and humanitarian action to balance the humanitarian aims of livability and legibility more equitably.

Throughout this project, I make three major arguments. First, the communal washblocks and the process by which they were built by UNICEF and the UNHCR were a part of a larger apparatus of emergency infrastructure historically used to provide legibility in refugee crises. Second, actions taken by residents of the camp show that from their perspective, this

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[3] Clarke, Killian, "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." Project on Middle East Political Science. February 3, 2017. Accessed November 20, 2018.
[4] ACTED. "First Step Completed towards Zaatari's Wastewater Network - Jordan." March 16 2017. Accessed February 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/first-step-completed-towards-zaatari-s-wastewater-network.

infrastructure was unacceptable, and the consequences of these actions provide a clear example of the drawbacks of focusing too heavily on legibility over livability. Third, though humanitarian agencies continued to prioritize camp legibility even after these consequences became apparent, the eventual construction of the wastewater network indicates that there is a future for refugee camp infrastructure that challenges conceptions of humanitarian legibility without compromising individual or organizational safety.

A Brief History of Za'atari

Built in an extreme emergency setting primarily by the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO)[5] with aid from the UNHCR, Za'atari Refugee Camp opened in late 2011 to house Syrians fleeing what is generally referred to as the Syrian Civil War.[6] The international organizations often disagreed with the Jordanian charities and governmental representatives on the ground, leading to a clash in approach that added to the already precarious situation within the camp due to its massive overpopulation. The product of these factors was a situation that quickly overwhelmed the JHCO, which had been formally governing the camp since its creation.[7] As such, in March of 2013 governance responsibilities within the camp—at that point home to almost 140,000 refugees[8]—were handed over to the UNHCR. The next year was characterized by a lack of cooperation between United Nations agencies and the Syrians living within Za'atari, with the press using metaphors such as an "open-air prison" to describe the

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[5] The Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) is one of the primary national aid organizations in Jordan. It began as a government initiative in 1990 to provide aid to Sudan as it suffered through a drought. *See:* McGrath, Marie. "Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation." *Field Exchange 48*, August 4, 2015, 110.

[6] Christopher Phillips & Morten Valbjørn (2018) 'What is in a Name?': The Role of (Different) Identities in the Multiple Proxy Wars in Syria, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 29:3, 414-433

[7] Clarke, Killian, "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." Project on Middle East Political Science. February 3, 2017. Accessed November 20, 2018.

[8] Hashem, Marwa, "Jordan—Za'atari Camp" The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (April 2018)

security apparatus set up to prevent camp residents from trying to flee and more generally address the sometimes violent dynamic between the UN agencies and those they were supposed to serve.[9] This conflict made Za'atari 'illegible' as a refugee camp for two major reasons. First, core to the idea of 'legibility' in a camp is the maintenance of order—as will be discussed, the UN has a standardized system that creates almost identical refugee camps around the world that are more easily governable. Second, the conflict between camp residents and aid workers did not fit the model of the ideal benefactor-beneficiary relationship—refugees are generally painted as passive victims grateful for aid in aid campaigns, an expectation that was clearly violated in Za'atari's early years. This illegibility—the lack of adherence to the ideals set forth for displaced population control and order envisioned by its governing bodies—is core to understanding the importance of the standardized infrastructure that was put in place throughout the transition.

As infrastructure began being implemented, UNICEF—the UN body given leadership of water and sanitation policy under the overarching authority of the UNHCR—began installing public latrines for the camp—a common strategy they have used in refugee crises in the past. The public latrine system consisted of 417 communal WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) blocks consisting of communal toilets, showers, and kitchens.[10] These WASH blocks, as is the case with most infrastructure built by UN bodies in camps, were built with an eye towards exactly the kind of orderly, high modernist urban planning described by Scott, with the explicit

[9] Rudoren, Ranya Kadri and Jodi. "Tensions High After Riot at Syrian Refugee Camp in Jordan." The New York Times. April 20, 2013. Accessed November 20, 2018.

[10] "From Emergency to Sustainability in Za'atari Refugee Camp and Support to Host Communities in Jordan." September 3, 2019. Accessed February 2020. https://www.wereldwaternet.nl/en/latest-news/2019/september/from-emergency-to-sustainability-in-zaatari-refugee-camp-and-support-to-host-communities-in-jordan/.

intention of working to mitigate security breaches and maintain order within the camp setting,[11] making them more easily able to control movement across borders.

Theoretical Background: Discourses of Emergency

The roots of modern-day humanitarianism are conventionally traced to the founding of the International Committee for the Red Cross by Henri Dunant following his reflection on the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino in 1859.[12] The initial reaction to Henri Dunant's plea for the creation of this organization was distaste, but this was quickly followed by a recognition of the fact that "Dunant's proposal might help them legitimate and save war."[13] As war became more brutal, the moral veneer that the presence of humanitarian actors provided surrounding the treatment of civilians protected the governmental actors from much of the public disapproval that they likely would have faced otherwise. In many ways, this initial principle mirrors the ways in which refugee agencies today protect the nation state system from breaking down due to their focus on containment and relief of outliers of the system. The containment and relief, in this case, is what validates the system itself. As such, the idea that these crises are temporary is core to the international community's ability to find order in these conflicts and contain them in such a way that they do not threaten individual nation-state control.

Historically, solutions to these temporary problems have also been temporary in nature, but in recent years there has been an increase in discussion in both academic and humanitarian circles on the differences between emergency aid provision and development, and the ways in

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[11] Beehner, Lionel. "Are Syria's Do-It-Yourself Refugees Outliers or Examples of a New Norm?" 68, no. 2 (2015): 157.

[12] Barnett, Michael. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism.* 78. Reprint edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.

[13] Barnett, Michael. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism.* 79. Reprint edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.

which the life-saving short-term approach of many humanitarian organizations can make

circumstances for refugees living in camps for long periods of time very difficult—encompassed

here as part of the balance between livability and legibility. Cathrine Brun's article[14] on the

temporal and spatial decontextualization of refugees through the concepts of crisis, ethics, and

emergency describes this very phenomenon. She explores how emergency discourses

surrounding refugee crises ignore the day-to-day lives that refugees are building within

protracted emergency situations. This idea that emergency aid provision does not account for the

lived experiences of refugees living in camp settings is also present in Stephen Dobson's book,

Cultures of Exile and the Experience of Refugeeness, which explores the community-based

mechanisms that are integral to refugee resilience but only possible when communities can be

built in a manner that is not aligned with the aforementioned UNHCR emergency approach,[15]

which often works to maintain control in crisis through order in urban planning. Both of these

works focus on how the core emergency aspect of the humanitarian apparatus can become

ineffective at creating a livable community within a protracted crisis.

Theoretical Background: Home Making and Politics

Brun's intervention in this emergency discourse calls for a shift in the ways in which both

humanitarian organizations and those that study their interventions discuss refugees—a shift to a

discussion of "thinking beings rather than embodied ones" as theorized by Andrew Dobson in

political science.[16] This requires an understanding of the daily actions residents of these camps

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[14] Cathrine Brun (2016) There is no Future in Humanitarianism: Emergency, Temporality and Protracted Displacement, History and Anthropology, 27:4, 393-410, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2016.1207637
[15] Dobson, Stephen. *Cultures of Exile and the Experience of «Refugeeness»*. Bern ; New York: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2004.
[16] Dobson, Andrew. "Thick Cosmopolitanism." *Political Studies* 54, no. 1 (2006): 165–84. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00571.x.

take to make their personal environments more livable—even as they live within a transitional state she refers to as "limbo."[17] She calls these acts 'homemaking.'[18] This focus on homemaking allows for a theory of residential agency that acknowledges the difficulties camp residents face that are out of their control but does not paint them as passive recipients of aid. This kind of re-evaluation of humanitarian theory and intervention in favor of individual refugee agency becomes especially important in the context of this now 8-year conflict, where residential action was critical in improving camp conditions.

The wastewater network built in Za'atari was the result of very forms of refugee 'homemaking' described by Brun in her work—a product of an understanding of the protracted state of limbo they would be in and a resulting motivation to make this extended period of time one that was tolerable. These changes were a specific reaction to infrastructural concerns that not only disallowed residents of Za'atari from making homes in the many years they were housed in the camp but were also a direct threat to their individual safety.

A Brief Discussion of the Washblock System and its Stakes

It is sometimes easy to begin viewing discussions surrounding urban infrastructure as policy concerns detached from the lived experiences of those using it. The extreme vulnerability of camp residents as they go through not only war and the journeys to neighboring host countries, but also the rigorous legal processes and harsh conditions characteristic of the refugee status make it critical to avoid this pitfall in the context of this case study. Residents of the camp

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[17] Cathrine Brun (2016) There is no Future in Humanitarianism: Emergency, Temporality and Protracted Displacement, History and Anthropology, 27:4, 393-410, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2016.1207637
[18] Ibid.

were not simply taking action for better conditions—almost every individual interviewed attested in some form or another that they were working for *bearable* conditions.

"I tried to forget the system after I left…it was disgusting, [I] hated it."[19] Variations of this response were common when discussing the public wastewater infrastructure in Za'atari refugee camp. If this visceral disgust over the multi-year period for which people were using the washblocks was not enough of a justification for the construction of their in-home latrines, multiple former residents also stated that the toilets were the reason for a number of them falling ill.[20] Some of these health concerns were so severe that coupled with the scarcity of healthcare available in the camp, especially in its early years, they drove a number of residents to flee the camp—often illegally.

A former resident's daughter, for example, contracted a liver infection while using the washblocks. Hospitals were overcrowded at the time and her mother could not get in touch with camp authorities. With no way to get medical attention for the condition, she began looking to hospitals outside the camp for help, but the borders to the camp had already closed in an effort to maintain order and prevent movement into Jordanian neighborhoods that had begun to protest against the influx of Syrians they were experiencing. She was eventually able to use the contacts that her extended family had in Jordan to smuggle herself and her daughter across the border. Her daughter was eventually cured, but she and her mother were now illegally living outside the camp, with the fear that if they returned, she would contract a similar disease. They have spent the last few years avoiding UN outposts in Jordan that are the primary sources of much-needed refugee aid for fear of legal consequences.[21]

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[19] Interview R.7. Interviews have unique identifiers according to the population they were in (Resident-R and Humanitarian-H and the number of the interview)
[20] Interview R.5.
[21] Interview R.3.

This is only one of many stories that help illustrate the ways in which the washblocks in Za'atari made life in the camp unlivable, even as they provided order for camp authorities struggling to streamline governance. This infrastructure came at the cost of physical and mental health—especially for women, who quickly learned that in a camp without electricity, using communal washblocks after dark was a dangerous endeavor. It is these stories that must underly any discussion of emergency infrastructure if one is to appreciate the stakes of an intervention in the built environment of a refugee setting.

Methods and the Use of the Word 'Refugee'

This project is primarily based on first-person interviews with former residents of Za'atari, nine of which were working with a women's-only branch of the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) in Mafraq at the time of being interviewed. JOHUD's Mafraq branch is an organization that functions more as a community support institution funded by the government than a formal UN affiliate. As such they are able to help both legally registered and unregistered women. Another four interviews were conducted through the Yarmouk Center for Refugees and Displaced Populations in Irbid, with two university students and two university employees. Due to the disproportionate negative impact of this form of WASH infrastructure on women it is important to note that eleven of the interviews are with women. Not all former residents of Za'atari who are included lived in the camp for the same period of time, but the majority of them lived through the transition period from JHCO to UNHCR leadership and they all witnessed the impacts of the initial washblock system. The project also includes interviews with representatives from all the major NGOs working on the ground in WASH infrastructure at this time, with the exception of JEN, which was no longer

working within the camp by 2019 when the interviews were conducted. In addition to these interviews, the NGO perspective is included through an analysis of documentation such as community engagement materials and camp crisis response meeting minutes.

The idea of the 'refugee' is heavily weighted in the Jordanian context, in part due to the multitude of refugee crises that the country has seen in the past. The longest of these was the Palestinian Refugee Crisis, which has gone on for decades without an end in sight and has resulted many Palestinian refugees in Jordan being resettled and integrated into Jordanian host communities.[22] This has led to some individuals arguing that there has been a loss in what constitutes a 'Jordanian' nationalism,[23] an argument that has become more common as the economic situation in the nation has deteriorated. Alternatively, individuals who oppose the term 'refugee' often argue that the history of pan-Arabism in the region and the relatively arbitrary manner in which borders were drawn to separate Arab countries, especially greater Syria and the Levant region,[24] make the term obsolete when individuals are fleeing between nations. They argue there has historically been a very strong relationship between Syrians and Jordanians with many people having extended family across the borders in both countries. As a result, many Jordanians refer to Syrians, especially those living in host communities (more than 80% of the total Syrian refugee population in the country)[25] as *al akhwan al Suriyeen* or (our) Syrian brothers. Those who do not use this term often use the word 'guests' in order to stress the fact that they are welcome members of society as opposed to an 'other' that is fundamentally

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[22] "Jordan Is Palestinian: Middle East Quarterly." Winter 2012, pp. 3-12 Accessed February 2020. https://www.meforum.org/3121/jordan-is-palestinian?_fb_noscript=1.

[23] Bani Salameh, Mohammed Torki, Walid Khalid Abudalbouh, and Raya Farid Al-Silwani. "The Socio-Political Implications of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Jordan: 2011-2018." *Journal of Politics and Law* 13 (2020): 89.

[24] Victoria Mason (2011) The Im/mobilities of Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Pan-Arabism, 'Hospitality' and the Figure of the 'Refugee', Mobilities, 6:3, 353-373, DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2011.590035

[25] Francis, Alexandra, and Alexandra Francis. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. September 21, 2015. Accessed February 2020. https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/09/21/jordan-s-refugee-crisis-pub-61338.

different from Jordanians. Non-governmental organizations have also worked to avoid this term as a result of the stigma around it, opting instead to use the word 'beneficiaries.'

Throughout this project I will avoid the word refugee except when discussing legal infrastructure relevant to the argument being made. When discussing decisions made by Syrians living in Za'atari, they will be referred to as such (Za'atari residents, or simply Syrians, as they were the only individuals living under the humanitarian governance structure of the camp). This will be done in an effort to keep in mind the historical and political conflict that resulted in the crisis, as well as maintain the individual agency each resident of the camp.

The three chapters that follow focus on the ways in which the tension between the resident's goals for the camp—to make it as livable as possible—and the humanitarian agencies' goals—to maintain camp legibility—was critical to evolution of Za'atari's wastewater systems. The first chapter provides more detail on this theoretical framework, outlining the international aid organization's conception of camp legibility in more detail and then arguing that the initial washblock system was a product of this focus on legibility. The second discusses the experiences of the camp residents with regards to the system, showing that while legible, this system was not livable and discussing the work that Syrians in Za'atari did to rebalance the system in favor of livability. The third focuses on the consequences of the initial imbalance and the ways in which the eventual construction of the wastewater network can be read in the context of humanitarian aid and its priorities, both in Za'atari and more broadly.

Chapter 1: Legibility in Crises: The Creation of Za'atari and its Infrastructure

Interviewing humanitarian workers, especially career humanitarians, felt repetitive at times. There was clearly a proffered script—the tone for which echoes the sentiments on public websites in a way that could sometimes make interviews with officials at the highest levels of the UN feel futile. More often than not, it was the entry-level humanitarians—the often relatively young Jordanians hired as the humanitarian sector in the nation expanded in tandem with the crisis—that provided a new perspective on the novel realities of working in the midst of such a crisis.

One such interview that stands out in my memory was with a Jordanian woman only a few years older than I was. She worked for UNICEF as part of the WASH hotline team—when residents of the camp had difficulties related to the water and sanitation system within the camp they would call the hotline and she would either provide them with an answer herself or direct them to a resource who could. After having heard countless stories from residents of the camp about the extreme difficulties associated with the WASH system, even as it transitioned into wastewater network, I was inclined to think that this would be an exceedingly difficult task. She had no previous humanitarian experience and when asked why she had decided to work in the camp, she responded that it was "a good job" and that the crisis had brought many like it into the country as she was graduating.[26]

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[26] Interview H.4.

When we began talking it quickly became apparent that while it could be stressful, the work was not quite as difficult as I had imagined. Though she conceded that there were often residents who were upset with the provisions they had been given, and that this could make for difficult conversations, she also said that she had been trained to know exactly what to say in each possible situation that she was faced with—that she had a "list of answers."[27]

In humanitarian emergencies the UN mobilizes the cluster system, which allows them a template through which they can disseminate critical responsibilities to other bodies—UN-affiliated or otherwise.[28] Under the cluster system for refugee emergencies the UNHCR works with a number of community mobilization partners in order to ensure that there is one overarching organizational body that others can look to for coordination in terms of the provision of services.[29] This system was created in part to help improve community engagement through local expertise.[30] In practice, though, it has often had the unintended consequence of moving UN employees out of roles where they are working on the ground and engaging with members of residential communities and into coordination roles at headquartered offices. As such, in Za'atari, the people who interacted with Syrians on a daily basis did not come from the UN. Though they were given their instructions by UN coordinators, the vast majority were employed by community engagement organizations and almost all of them—UN-affiliated or otherwise— were local Jordanians as opposed to career humanitarians.[31]

It is in this context, where there are hundreds of individuals who have no humanitarian experience being brought into a crisis—that the importance of legibility often becomes clear. The

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[27] Interview H.4.
[28] "What Is the Cluster Approach? | HumanitarianResponse." Accessed April, 2020.
https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach.
[29] Ibid.
[30] "UNHCR - A Community-Based Approach in UNHCR Operations." Accessed April 18, 2020.
https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/legal/47ed0e212/community-based-approach-unhcr-operations.html.
[31] Interview H.5.

order provided by the coordinating body makes jobs like the WASH hotline far less overwhelming. This is not to say that it does not have its drawbacks—providing canned responses to concerns of camp residents is far from the kinds of active community engagement that leads to these residents having high levels of trust in these organizations—but under the current humanitarian system, it allows individuals with very little experience to more easily complete tasks given to them, providing clarity in an otherwise often chaotic context.

In a refugee camp setting, I argue there are three core characteristics of a refugee camps that render them 'legible.' Again, in this context legibility can be understood as how closely the camp and those within it resemble the 'ideal'—or the most governable—response to a refugee crisis. This anecdote points to the importance of legibility as it relates to order within the camp— the kind of legibility that is necessary in some capacity in order for aid workers to be effective in their roles. Another core aspect of this legibility is the temporariness of such a conflict—as will be discussed, refugee crises are considered by nature to be temporary conflicts, and the infrastructure created to address them mirrors this perception. The last component of this legibility is the idea of the refugee as a passive beneficiary—an individual that does not take any kind of political role in making decisions with regards to the camp. These last two components of legibility are less directly relevant to daily aid dissemination and camp governance, but they are critical to understanding camp discourse as it applies to asylum and donor politics within the international community. This chapter traces the history of these three components of camp legibility, both in Za'atari and in the larger history of refugee aid, arguing that this definition of legibility is not only deeply ingrained into the kinds of interventions sponsored by the UNHCR on a grand scale, but also clearly implicated in Za'atari's WASH infrastructure.

The Creation of the Camp

In March of 2011 the people of Syria rose up in pro-democracy protests against the nation's government, led by President Bashar Al-Assad. What began as a series of protests was met with a swift and violent response from the Syrian government, creating the beginnings of what would become the Syrian Civil War.[32] As the months went on, the international community began choosing sides in the conflict—a task increasingly complicated by their uncompromising devotion to their own nation-state interests, legacies of the Cold War, and the increasing presence of non-state actors such as the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL).[33] This war, which quickly came to resemble an international conflict bounded by Syria's borders more than a civil war, has now led to the displacement of over 9 million people.[34]

The first months of the war saw the first thousands of people fleeing Syria's border into neighboring countries. One of the nations that opened its borders was Jordan, a nation that in past decades has dealt with large influxes of refugees from conflict in South Sudan, Iraq, and Palestine.[35] As the number of Syrians in Jordan began rapidly increasing, the government made the decision to mobilize an empty patch of land in the north of the country as a refugee camp that would house asylum-seekers.[36]

Za'atari Refugee Camp opened on July 28th, 2012.[37] In nations that are party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees—a document ratified by much of the international community

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[32] Christopher Phillips & Morten Valbjørn (2018) 'What is in a Name?': The Role of (Different) Identities in the Multiple Proxy Wars in Syria, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 29:3, 414-433

[33] Ibid.

[34] "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained." Accessed February 2020. https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/.

[35] Lewis Turner (2015) Explaining the (Non-)Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan, Mediterranean Politics, 20:3, 386-404

[36] Ledwith, A. "Zaatari: The Instant City | ALNAP." Affordable Housing Institute, 01 Jan 2014 Accessed February 2020. https://www.alnap.org/help-library/zaatari-the-instant-city.

[37] Ibid.

to address the displacement resulting from World War II—when a refugee crisis takes place, primary responsibility for the emergency is handed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[38] Under the overarching authority of the UNHCR, the cluster approach then indicates a specific United Nations body or affiliate to be put in charge of each sector, such as the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) for water and sanitation or the World Health Organization (WHO) for health.[39] Jordan is not party to the 1951 convention, nor is it party to its 1967 protocol, which expanded the scope of the convention beyond those displaced as of 1951.[40] As a result, the Jordanian government makes all final decisions with regards to the manifestations of the Syrian refugee crisis within its borders. When the camp was mobilized, the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO), an organization borne out of an initiative to aid the Sudanese in 1990 and then address the Iraqi refugee crisis,[41] was its primary leadership body. Though the JHCO was the largest NGO in the country, it had very little experience with any kind of camp management.[42]

As such, the first months after Za'atari was mobilized were what one might conceptualize as a typical humanitarian emergency. Constant movement of individuals into the camp had caused an increase in population from 100 families to 140,000.[43] Accounts from residents indicate that there was very little NGO presence felt, with one former resident saying "in the first

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[38] Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for. "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." UNHCR. Accessed February 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html.

[39] "What Is the Cluster Approach? | HumanitarianResponse." Accessed February 2020. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach.

[40] "OHCHR | Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." Accessed February 2020. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolStatusOfRefugees.aspx

[41] McGrath, Marie. "Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation." *Field Exchange 48*, August 4, 2015, 110.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Hashem, Marwa, "Jordan—Za'atari Camp" The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (April 2018)

days there was no system in Za'atari. There weren't enough volunteers and there was chaos."[44]

This was shown not only in the infrastructure (or lack thereof), but also in physical conflict

within the camp at this time—UNHCR security reports show that security concerns were at an

all-time high before and during this leadership transition.[45] This was a point at which the

emergency taking place in Syria was acutely reflected in the conditions of the camp itself and

anecdotes from camp residents show that the 'chaos' of the camp—the lack of order—not only

rendered it illegible to those looking to govern it, but also to those seeking its refuge.

There were a few major reasons for this chaos. According to research done on the history

of the security apparatus in the camp by Killian Clarke, who focuses on refugee protest and

leadership, the NGO representatives themselves rarely fully entered the camp. Instead, they set

up bases at its edges, distributing supplies at the main gates.[46] The security apparatus—"150

Gendarmes, 20 Civil Defense forces and approximately 30 policemen and officers from the

Public Security Department (PSD)" lacking experience as a singular police unit—functioned in

much of the same way. Stationed on the outskirts of the camp, they would from time to time

venture in to quiet unrest using teargas.[47] In addition to this, there was a fundamental difference

in the approaches of the two major NGO actors within the camp at the time. The JHCO focused

more on "distributing aid quickly and directly to residents" while the UNHCR and its affiliates

adopted an "infrastructural" approach,[48] that worked to build the order and processes they saw as

necessary to the mobilization of a camp of this kind based on their past experiences.

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[44] Interview R.1.

[45] Clarke, Killian. 2018. "When Do the Dispossessed Protest? Informal Leadership and Mobilization in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 622.

[46] Clarke, Killian. 2017 "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Refugees and Migration Movements in the Middle East* 25: 16.

[47] Clarke, Killian. 2017 "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Refugees and Migration Movements in the Middle East* 25: 16.

[48] Clarke, Killian. 2018. "When Do the Dispossessed Protest? Informal Leadership and Mobilization in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 622.

The conflict between these bodies, in addition to the general scarcity of resources and constant influx of camp residents, led to a sense that the camp itself was also an emergency setting. As stated, camp coordination meeting minutes at the time show that early 2013 saw some of the highest numbers of security incidents since the camp's creation as residents of the camp organized in an effort to obtain provisions and voice their dissatisfaction with camp infrastructure.[49] As these security incidents continued and the camp continued to grow with little possibility of an end to the war causing the crisis, the JHCO opted to hand over administrative privileges to the UNHCR.[50] Though the Jordanian government continued to be the highest authority within the camp, the cluster system was now activated, with provisional and infrastructural decisions being taken primarily by the UN.

Restoring Camp Legibility: Early UNHCR Leadership

After taking over the camp on March 1st, the UNHCR immediately set up a security working group focused on restoring order within the camp. They also implemented an infrastructural system which would make monitoring the population to prevent future difficulties and disseminating aid more feasible. In the first three weeks of February, directly before the transition out of JHCO leadership, there were four separate instances where the Gendarme—the aforementioned security force within the camp—were called to directly intervene in the camp due to security breaches by camp residents. UNHCR security reports state that these incidents "could have been…[a] testing of the authority of the new security apparatus by certain segments

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[49] UNHCR. "Za'atari Refugee Camp 2013 Safety and Security Report - Jordan." 3. Accessed February 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/za-atari-refugee-camp-2013-safety-and-security-report.

[50] Clarke, Killian. 2018. "When Do the Dispossessed Protest? Informal Leadership and Mobilization in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 623.

of the camp's population."[51] This view of the protests taking place within the camp as instances of refugees "testing" the strength of camp governance is characteristic of the security discourse surrounding the necessity for order in times of refugee crisis more broadly, as well as an underlying anxiety about the consequences of being unable to maintain it. It is also fundamentally at odds with perceptions of camp residents surrounding these protests, who cited a number of factors that led to this violence, often along the lines of frustration stemming from unemployment and trauma on the one hand, and anger at camp governance—particularly due to the fact that Za'atari's borders were being closed at this time, removing residents' ability to leave the camp—on the other.[52] This being said, residents and aid workers do agree on the difficulties these protests this caused for those trying to live independently of them, especially at after nightfall.[53]

When I asked them what stood out to them about this time in the camp, residents focused on the methods used by the camp government to quell the protests and conflicts. An older woman described her experience by saying "youth would protest, and people would get tear gassed. Almost every night. It was scary for us."[54] Many of them did not seem to see much of a difference between the NGO apparatus and camp security. When asked whether NGOs listened when they needed things, a woman responded "they didn't listen to us because we were Syrians—they used to shout at us—the security in the camp—telling us to get out"[55] making this association between the humanitarians working to help them and the security forces restoring order through violence clear. Though protests continued to be handled by Jordanian forces, the

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[51] UNHCR. "Za'atari Refugee Camp 2013 Safety and Security Report - Jordan." 3. Accessed February 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/za-atari-refugee-camp-2013-safety-and-security-report.
[52] Interview R.2., R.6., R.7
[53] Interview R.6.
[54] Interview R.9.
[55] Interview R.7.

immediate reaction to the terms 'camp authority' or 'camp government' seemed to be some level of involvement from both of these bodies, raising important questions surrounding the extent to which the securitization of the camp influenced camp residents' subsequent understandings of the consequences of working against the UN or engaging with them in any capacity. In this vein many residents discussed a general unwillingness to approach NGOs about issues that they saw with their methods of governance and aid provision because "[they] did not have any other form of security" beyond the humanitarian apparatus, and thus did not want to come into conflict with them. [56] In this case, even after the security forces had left it seems the attempt to make the camp more legible had made it less livable for those within it.

This chapter does not seek to make a judgement on the ordering of the camp. In fact, many accounts of the relationship between NGOs and the residents of the camp in the first years of the UNHCR's leadership treated humanitarian apparatus as if it were wholly inaccessible precisely because the lack of order within the camp made it so. This is especially true of accounts of the first months after the UNHCR took control, which indicated that there were no available mechanisms through which one could interact with the NGOs on the ground even if they wanted to. A woman who had left the camp in 2014 stated that she had not even known that there were specific NGOs that could provide her with support until six months after she had left—she was aware that there was support, but she was not aware of the organizations behind it.[57] Another stated that she knew that the NGOs would visit specific houses to check for major vulnerabilities and issues, but when she requested a visit they did not come.[58] This had a profound impact on trust between the aid organizations and the residents of the camp, with one woman saying "At

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[56] Interview R.7.
[57] Interview R.3.
[58] Interview R.4.

first we trusted them a lot because we were coming from war and nobody was supporting us. When people started to complain the NGOs would not respond [and] the trust became less…[though] there are organizations that cooperate with us and organizations that do not."[59] As the camp became more ordered, aid was disseminated more quickly and equitably. And though it took multiple years after this period for aid organizations to begin actively engaging with residents of the camp in a productive way beyond baseline aid dissemination—likely far longer than it should have had it been a priority—this kind of measured community engagement and collaboration only became a consideration once these initial changes were made.

It is important to note that legibility is tied to the urgency with which UN agencies sought to end these protests beyond re-ordering the camp as well. The legibility of the camp is complicated by any kind of physical or verbal protest—especially protest which may seem political in nature. Humanitarianism is widely considered an apolitical form of intervention.[60] Many humanitarian organizations, whether or not they believe themselves to be wholly apolitical, see this effort to keep humanitarianism rhetorically independent of politics as core to their ability to perform the work they see as necessary on the ground. This emphasis on a lack of politics is closely tied to donor relations—there is a widespread perception that one must maintain control over an emergency humanitarian situation to appeal to these donors, and that any sort of political dissent complicates the narrative that these humanitarian organizations deserve donations due to the benevolent nature of their work. Political protests which challenge the governing body of a camp in any capacity render the camp setting less legible as an apolitical humanitarian setting—the refugees are no longer easy to present as passive and uncomplicated

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[59] Interview R.11.
[60] Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2011; Barnett, Michael. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*. Reprint edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.

beneficiaries. As such, protests that take place against humanitarian agencies are rarely treated as such—on the rare occasions that UNHCR representatives address them publicly, they often state that they are targeted towards host governments or home-country conflicts.[61] This is likely also part of the reason these protests were presented as a way of 'testing' the new security apparatus. If the very real economic and political reasons for these protests were not discussed, the protests could be framed as security skirmishes that were inevitable in a new environment as populations became used to the new governance structure.

Maintaining International Legibility through Temporariness

There is one final core characteristic of a legible refugee crisis that the UNHCR remains preoccupied with throughout a conflict. Though they did not need to restore the idea of a camp as temporary the way they needed to restore order or the popular narrative treating refugees as passive beneficiaries, it was critically important that the infrastructure they built and the policies they adopted made clear the temporary nature of the camp. This is not only due to the very practical reason that the Jordanian government was hesitant to allow any kind of permanent settlement or strain on its resources, but also a result of a longer history of the ways in which refugee crises are framed by the international community.

Peter Nyers, in his work entitled *Rethinking Refugees Beyond States of Emergency* argues that the current idea of a 'refugee emergency' comes from a view of refugee issues as political disruptions of a world order[62] or, as Lisa Malkki describes it, the "national order of things." This disruption is a product of the fact that individuals are not only physically displaced,

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[61] Carolina Moulin, Peter Nyers, "We Live in a Country of UNHCR"—Refugee Protests and Global Political Society, *International Political Sociology*, Volume 1, Issue 4, November 2007, Pages 356–372.
[62] Nyers, Peter. *Rethinking Refugees Beyond States of Emergency*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 1.

but also displaced from their political identities as citizens—identities crucial to the maintenance and protection of the prevailing nation-state system.[63] This idea of refugee crises as a global political emergency is also echoed in past words of UNHCR representatives, with the head of the UNHCR often making statements such as "the subject of refugees and displaced people is high on the list of international concerns today not only because of its humanitarian significance, but because of its impact on peace, security, and stability."[64] Quite simply put, the anxiety surrounding the temporariness of refugee crises, is at its core an anxiety surrounding the fallibility of the nation-state system. If refugees are treated as more than singular disruptions that will eventually be removed through one of the United Nations' three solutions to refugee crises—repatriation to their country of citizenship, resettlement within another nation, or integration into their host nation during the crisis—they are being allowed to exist outside of the system altogether, which could eventually lead to its breakdown. Though this discourse may seem abstract due to the overwhelming scope of a macro-political approach that is focused on protecting the international community and nation-state stability, it also has very tangible impacts on the UNHCR approach, and thus on the daily solutions experienced by those it governs.

Nyers argues that this discourse of emergency creates "a problem-solving mentality that defines refugee movements as a technical problem in need of rapid solutions."[65] This problem-solving approach is also one explained by Robert Cox in his work *Social Forces, States, and World Order* as maintaining the prevailing world order and all of the hierarchies and relationships within it, and then forcing these institutions to function by "dealing effectively with

[63] Malkki, Liisa. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 24-44. http://www.jstor.org/stable/656519.
[64] Nyers, Peter. *Rethinking Refugees Beyond States of Emergency*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 1.
[65] Nyers, Peter. *Rethinking Refugees Beyond States of Emergency*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 3.

particular sources of trouble"[66] while keeping these hierarchies intact. As such, the solutions

created by humanitarian bodies work to address the consequences of the problems—the refugees

themselves—without mention of the problems themselves—the wars that displaced them, or the

nation-state system and the way it governs individuals through the creation of borders. In

ignoring these root causes and instead providing a narrative of aid that treats these emergencies

as anomalies, they reinforce the unquestionable nature of the nation-state system.

Arguments against this theoretical critique of problem-solving in emergency argue that

this is not the only concern at play in situations of crisis. This is true—Husson, in his work

Observations on Crisis, is merited in his argument when he says that in these settings, "the living

conditions of the most vulnerable or exposed groups deteriorate; their very lives may be in

danger."[67] We see this in Za'atari's earliest days, and to some extent, even now. Both the reasons

for its creation and the refugee camp itself can be sources of danger that need to be dealt with

swiftly—arguably more swiftly than an upheaval of the concept of the nation-state or an end to a

war could be achieved. This being said, he also says that in crises, "the rules which govern

collective life no longer function"[68]—a justification for a kind of 'blank check' on the part of

humanitarian agencies that seems to go too far. One can appreciate the immense amounts of

pressure these organizations are under while also acknowledging that they themselves have a

vested interest in maintaining the prevailing world order that they are a part of, and thus their

solutions are often created with an eye towards nation-state maintenance as well as the protection

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[66] Cox, Robert W. "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory." *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1981): 208. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298810100020501.

[67] "Observations on Crises," in *Responding* to *Emergencies* and *Fostering Development*: The *Dilemmas* of *Humanitarian Aid*, ed. *Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson,* and *François Grunewald* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 12.

[68] "Observations on Crises," in *Responding* to *Emergencies* and *Fostering Development*: The *Dilemmas* of *Humanitarian Aid*, ed. *Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson,* and *François Grunewald* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 12.

of the individual. In other words, one must acknowledge that the rules that govern collective life are compromised not just by the emergency, but also by the preference given to the international order over them.

On a more micro-level, the emphasis on "technical problems in need of rapid solutions"[69] discussed by Nyers serves to alienate the very populations the UN works to help in two major ways—first, through the implication that solutions must be developed in advance of emergency and then rapidly deployed in a manner that rarely leaves time for community input and creates a 'one-size-fits-all' model, and second, through a privileging of a kind of technical expertise that is borne out of experience within the humanitarian apparatus, as opposed to within the emergency context itself, as is partially discussed by Barnett in his work *Empire of Humanity.*[70] As such, solutions to problems that refugees face are often constructed without much active engagement with these refugees, focused instead on emergency provisions of services and logistics. A study done by the UN General Assembly on the emergency preparedness and response of the UNHCR following a number of crises that took place in the Persian Gulf in the early 90s concluded that the agency needed to better coordinate the emergency response within regions to avoid "inefficiency," "confusion," and "duplication."[71] These recommendations are part of what eventually led to the aforementioned Cluster System formulated by the UN, regardless of the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach has proven difficult to successfully implement on the ground— especially when it does not immediately ally itself with local organizations that know the socio-

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[69] Nyers, Peter. *Rethinking Refugees Beyond States of Emergency*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 3.
[70] Barnett, Michael. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*. Reprint edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.
[71] General Assembly Resolution 46/182: Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. United Nations General Assembly. December 19, 1991. Accessed February 2020.

political context of the emergency. [72] This results, again, in a situation where order and legibility of a solution to the crisis are privileged over how livable the solution is for those directly affected by it.

Beyond this, due to the necessity of treating refugees and thus the solutions that govern them as impermanent, physical infrastructure in these camps is also temporary in nature—regardless of the longevity of the conflict. This focus on temporary infrastructure on the part of refugee agencies can be seen in the attempt made by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to work with the UNHCR which resulted in a report where it was stated that the UNHCR's "results-based management (RBM) framework" as well as other core aspects of their organizational structure "are all a poor fit with [the program's] systems"[73] The intentional discouragement of permanence is often spearheaded by the requirements of the host countries in which UN refugee camps are being built—the Jordanian government, for example, is weary of any solution that suggests that Syrians might be in the country for longer than the duration of the war—but it is important to note that organizations rarely protest against this requirement, regardless of how difficult it is for residents of camps to live with this temporary infrastructure for extended periods of time.

It is in the context of this historical and theoretical record that one can view the competing priorities of the UNHCR when building Za'atari. Though they are a humanitarian organization tasked with protecting the refugee population, they work to govern this population by rendering them legible in the eyes of their own aid workers and the larger international

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[72] Brun, Cathrine, and Anita Fábos. "Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 31, no. 1 (April 2, 2015):
[73] Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for. "A Review of UNHCR's Engagement with the 'Delivering as One' (DaO) Initiative." UNHCR. May 2015. Accessed February 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/research/evalreports/55e068589/review-unhcrs-engagement-delivering-dao-initiative.html.

community. Throughout this time there was acute awareness of the requirements set forth by the host government—[74] that, "stabilization…was not the intention of the local authorities."[75] These factors are inevitable considerations within the current international humanitarian system, but it was the weight that was given to legibility over livability that led to the extreme difficulties faced by residents and the city built around them.

This description of the ways in which residents of Za'atari view their relationship with humanitarian agencies—and the camp's infrastructure more broadly—is at the crux of the conflict between these agencies and their beneficiaries. To an individual camp resident, the prospect of living within Za'atari for multiple years is one that in the best cases, inspires forms of homemaking in an effort to make the camp context a more 'livable' place to live in the long term. Some community engagement aid workers on the ground were aware of this dynamic, with one saying

> "The community reaction towards NGO services depends on Syria's situation. For example, one year ago when ISIS was not covering most of the areas where refugees come from, which was Dar'aa, [they thought] 'we need some more time and we're [going] back to Syria.' Then, the situation changed they don't feel they will [go] back to Syria soon, and the way that they are taking the services and things has totally changed… [now they ask] 'is it sustainable?'"[76]

Whether or not they are aware of this dynamic, creating a livable, "sustainable" long-term context for these camp residents is not the priority of international aid organizations. To the humanitarian agency, an institution that has seen many multi-year crises—according to UNHCR data, refugee camps are active for an average of 17 years once they are mobilized[77]—and is

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[74] Interview H.2.
[75] Interview H.1.
[76] Interview H.8.
[77] Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for. "Evaluation of UNHCR's Emergency Response to the Influx of Syrian Refugees into Turkey - Full Report." UNHCR. 66. Accessed February 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/research/evalreports/58a6bbca7/evaluation-unhcrs-emergency-response-influx-syrian-refugees-turkey-full.html.

tasked with providing temporary solutions to these crises in order to maintain nation-state order, settlement of any kind is not the goal. Instead, solutions remain at their emergency level indefinitely, creating a context in which the refugees they work with live in "limbo"[78]—both in a political sense, as subjects of a state not taking responsibility for their protection, but more importantly in this case, in a physical sense, under temporary infrastructure and living environments—indefinitely.

As has been discussed, the first year of the camp under the JHCO was characterized by what residents of the camp at the time called "chaos." As such, even the shift from a joint JHCO/United Nations operation to one operated solely by the UNHCR could be conceived as a 'settling' of sorts—a move away from the feeling of emergency that permeated the camp during its earliest months as the UNHCR worked to restore order. Counterintuitively, it was this marginal settlement that likely helped shift the mindset in the camp to one more aware of what Catherine Brun calls "permanence of temporariness"[79]—an awareness of the extended period of time under which residents of the camp would be living with the temporary infrastructure they had been allotted by the governing bodies of the camp. What followed is what Brun has called homemaking—an effort to build a home, both in a literal sense and in a psychological sense, that would be bearable for an extended period of time. This homemaking came into direct conflict with many of the systems of legibility—whether infrastructural or otherwise, that the UNHCR worked to implement once they took control of the camp.

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[78] Brun, Cathrine, and Anita Fábos. "Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 31, no. 1 (April 2, 2015): 5.
[79] Ibid.

Creating Legible Infrastructure

Za'atari's infrastructure fundamentally changed once the UNHCR took control. The UNHCR's urban planning mechanisms consist of identical and orderly rows of tents or caravans, strategically placed resource centers, and water and sanitation blocks placed in patterns across the different camp districts.[80] This kind of planning is done in advance of a specific crisis actually taking place—NGO employees working in Za'atari often cited the solutions they implemented as having been used recently in Sudan, though other examples were given from time to time.[81]
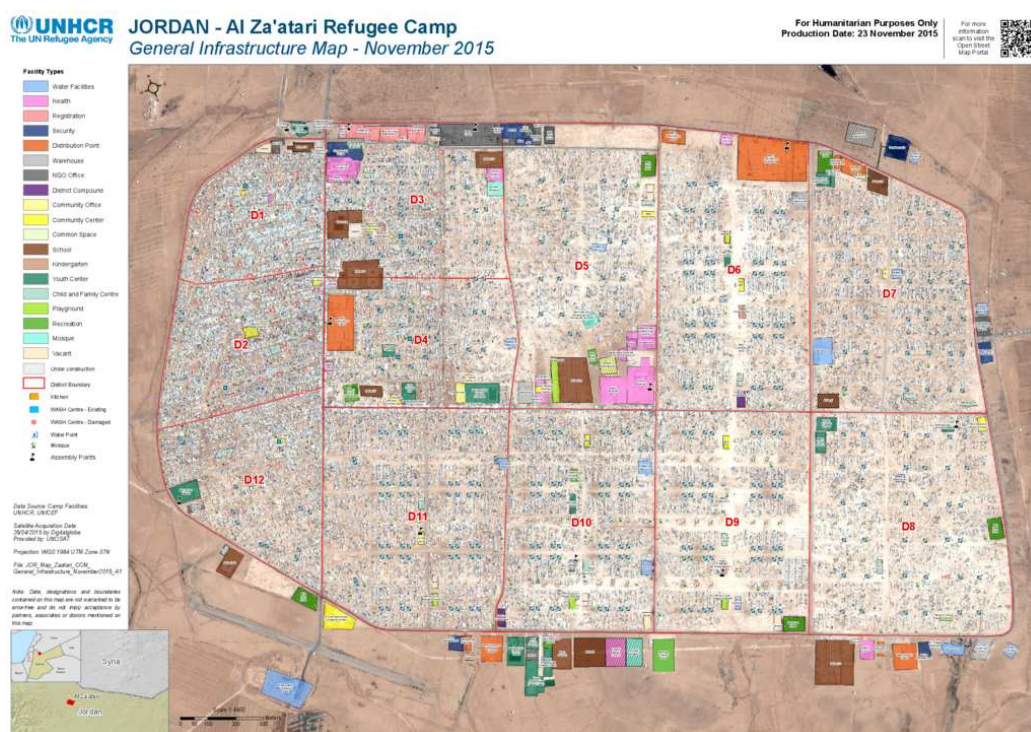
Figure 1: The general infrastructure map created by the UNHCR as a reference for camp responsibilities[82]

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[80] Clarke, Killian. 2017 "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Refugees and Migration Movements in the Middle East* 25: 622.

[81] UN and ACTED employees interviewed in this study primarily discussed their experiences in relation to those they had in Sudan, but previously cited studies done on Za'atari identified the UN approach to infrastructure as coming from experiences in Africa writ large. *See:* Clarke, Killian. 2017 "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Refugees and Migration Movements in the Middle East* 25: 622.

[82] UNHCR "Document - REACH Zaatari Camp General Infrastructure Map - November 2015." Accessed February 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/44561.

Beyond the fact that these solutions are created in Western contexts before the outbreak

of such crises with quick mobilization in mind, theoretical reasonings for this heavily ordered

system vary but support the idea of legibility being a core necessity within the camp. One side of

the debate states that the system of control is implemented in an attempt to mitigate the security

issues that often result from high levels of unemployment and the aftermath of war—both of

which often exist in a refugee camp context.[83] The other, more critical view on this kind of urban

planning traces its history back to that of European colonial powers, arguing that a type of

policing of refugees is taking place that is reminiscent of imperial control—a kind of orderly

urban planning that was considered part of the "civilizing mission."[84] Regardless of the

reasoning behind such kinds of planning and implementation, in recent years scholars have

begun to question both the ethics of attempting to create this kind of order and the efficacy of the

strategy itself. Ethnographic work done by Lionel Beehner in Za'atari argues that this kind of

system had the impact of at one point turning the camp into a kind of "defacto penitentiary,"

where the perceived criminalization of camp residents led to increased unrest and more security

concerns rather than fewer.[85]

Beyond the unintentional difficulties these systems can create between residents of the

camp and camp authorities, this infrastructure is also exceedingly difficult for residents of the

camp to live with for a number of reasons not always immediately apparent to these camp

authorities. For example, the original system of caravan rows housing nuclear families was

fundamentally at odds with the community support that residents of the camp were used to

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[83] Sarah Kenyon Lischer, Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[84] Jennifer Hyndman, Managing displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[85] Beehner, Lionel. "Are Syria's Do-It-Yourself Refugees Outliers or Examples of a New Norm?" 68, no. 2 (2015).

receiving back in Syria, where extended families often lived close to one another in clusters, compounding an already stressful context.[86] Though the humanitarian agencies initially resisted, in the past few years the orderly rows of caravans have been restructured by the residents of the camp into small neighborhoods in line with kinship relationships between different families.[87] Another example of a systematic difficulty that resulted in a number of complex community responses tied to Brun's idea of homemaking is the narrative surrounding the water, sanitation, and health (WASH) system implemented within the camp.

After UN bodies began governing the camp, UNICEF led the efforts to build 417 communal WASH blocks across the camp. These 10x10 washblocks consisted of showers, toilets, and sinks.[88]

Figure 2: The initial washblock system in the camp[89]

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[86] Interview R.13.
[87] Interview H.8.
[88] "From Emergency to Sustainability in Za'atari Refugee Camp and Support to Host Communities in Jordan." September 3, 2019. Accessed February 2020. https://www.wereldwaternet.nl/en/latest-news/2019/september/from-emergency-to-sustainability-in-zaatari-refugee-camp-and-support-to-host-communities-in-jordan/.
[89] "From Emergency to Sustainability in Za'atari Refugee Camp and Support to Host Communities in Jordan." September 3, 2019. Accessed February 2020. https://www.wereldwaternet.nl/en/latest-news/2019/september/from-emergency-to-sustainability-in-zaatari-refugee-camp-and-support-to-host-communities-in-jordan/.

It is important to note that the communal washblocks were not the first attempt at an

infrastructural solution for waste management within Za'atari. Though there is little record taken

by the JHCO on the public health provisions under their leadership, accounts from former

residents of the camp show that portable toilets had been added when it was first being

mobilized.[90] These accounts describe the former approach with far more disgust than the

following washblock system and individuals who had experienced this form of emergency

infrastructure tended to be far more accepting of the washblock system installed under UNICEF

and the UNHCR, often speaking in comparisons between the system under the JHCO and the

more permanent structures set up by the UN bodies.[91] This again, points to the ways in which

providing order within the humanitarian system can benefit residents of the camp. It is the other

two major components of camp legibility—temporariness and the representation of the

individual refugee as passive that provide the most useful lens through which to view the

drawbacks of the new system, pointing to the ways in which it was built with an eye towards

making the camp legible as opposed to livable. After all, a system of temporary public latrines

that is built and maintained without any community input regardless of its obvious drawbacks is

one that is clearly almost impossible to live with over the span of a now eight-year conflict and

camp.

In an interesting parallel to the ways in which refugees are framed as passive victims or

beneficiaries, critiques of humanitarian organizations are sometimes met with the response that

these organizations are simply operating within the bounds of the larger nation-state system—

that they actually have very little control over some of the decisions made in emergencies to

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[90] Interview R.7.
[91] Interview R.7.

maintain their donor base—an argument similar to Husson's above.[92] In the following chapters I will continue to argue that this is untrue. While there are clearly ways in which canonical understandings of what refugee camps and those living within them should act and look like subconsciously influence policy and community engagement, in many other cases there is a conscious tradeoff between legibility and livability. In these cases, the decisions of the UNHCR are often actively made with legibility in mind in an effort to balance the constraints they are given by the nation-state system—to suggest otherwise would be a disservice to the many years of experience that the UNHCR and its affiliates have in this field. Beyond this, even in situations where these ideals of legibility are subconscious influences or seemingly immobile systematic constraints, there is a potential to overcome them, at least in part, in order to improve the lives of camp residents. The following two chapters will argue that in the case of Za'atari's wastewater system, there was clearly an imbalance in the direction of legibility over livability which resulted in a breakdown of the system itself, and that it is both possible and necessary to find a more sustainable balance between the competing priorities of legibility on the part of the UNHCR and livability on the part of the residents of such a camp.

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[92] "Observations on Crises," in *Responding* to *Emergencies* and *Fostering Development*:
The *Dilemmas* of *Humanitarian Aid*, ed. *Claire Pirotte*, *Bernard Husson*, and *François Grunewald* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 12.

Chapter 2: Legible but Unlivable: Impacts of the Washblock System

Towards the end of my time in Jordan, I interviewed a mother and daughter who worked doing odd jobs at a university. Up until that point, the only women I had interviewed were those I had met through JoHUD—I had spoken to a few college students, but they were all male. Though I had effectively stopped doing interviews at the time, the daughter was about my age and when she offered to speak with me about her experiences, saying her mother would be happy to give her input on the project as well, I quickly agreed. I thought about asking to do individual interviews with the two of them but they seemed so much more at ease together that I didn't have the heart to tell them to split, and I found myself looking forward to a conversation on what the camp had looked like from an intergenerational perspective at a particular moment.

They had lived in Za'atari for the first two years of the communal washblock system— the years most critical to the transition to household latrines—and when I asked what the greatest difficulties they faced living in the camp were, the water and sanitation infrastructure was quick to come up. "It was disgusting—you can't even imagine it. You would want to vomit when you went inside…I still think about it sometimes."[93] I turned to the young woman's mother, waiting to see if she had a similar perspective on the system and she nodded, but then paused and said, "She doesn't remember—it wasn't just disgusting. It was dangerous for us. The was so dark that girls couldn't go after *Maghrib*.[94] It was crazy—we used to stop drinking water at 5pm so we would not have to use the toilet." She laughed lightly after saying this, but I remember being

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[93] Interview R.7.
[94] The evening prayer in Islam.

struck by the extreme difficulty of such a situation. Had the initial washblock system been held in place, how long would women have been dehydrating themselves in a desert for? Would it have been all eight years of some women's lives in the camp? It was no wonder that when I asked her how they dealt with such a situation, she answered "we made a toilet in our home"[95] as if it should have been obvious.

This story and many others make it clear that though the infrastructure built by the humanitarian organizations governing Za'atari helped make the camp more legible to the international community and the aid workers on the ground, what may have looked like an effective solution in theory did not create an environment that was livable for the residents of the camp in practice. This chapter discusses this imbalance between legibility and livability in more detail, as well as the humanitarian reactions to the household latrines which show the ways in which UN agencies worked to maintain legibility through this infrastructural project even as it became clear that this was not what the residents wanted. It ends with a short discussion of the severe consequences of this continued imbalance.

The Communal Washblock System

Descriptions of the washblocks given by former camp residents are vivid, and it is obvious that the visceral disgust people felt when using them is difficult to forget. Washblocks were "unusable,"[96] "disgusting,"[97] "unbearable,"[98] "filled with disease,"[99] and made those using them "want to vomit."[100] When discussing why this system may not have worked, multiple aid

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[95] Interview R.7.
[96] Interview R.8.
[97] Interview R.1.
[98] Interview R.2.
[99] Interview R.3.
[100] Interview R.7.

workers stated that the majority of Syrians living in the camp were Muslim, a religion and

surrounding culture that puts a large amount of emphasis on the importance of cleanliness.[101]

This implies that the system could have been successful in non-Muslim contexts, but it is

doubtful whether this would be the case—the standard of cleanliness in Za'atari did not seem to

be one that was particular to an Islamic culture. Accounts of the same trucks being used to

remove waste from camps and then bringing back drinking water that was disseminated to camp

residents[102] or being asked to use a public toilet shared by 200 other families[103] would likely be

difficult for the vast majority of people who had come from homes that had been taken away

from them through war to adjust to—not just for those from a Muslim background.

Another major concern was the lack of practical segregation within the washblock

system. Though UN accounts of the system and interviews with NGO employees indicated that

the washblocks were segregated by gender,[104] accounts from former residents of Za'atari show

otherwise.[105] In discussions with both aid workers and residents of the camp, the greatest focus

in this vein was the extent to which this impacted women's privacy during menstruation,[106]

which is not often something discussed outside the private sphere—not just in Syrian

communities, but around the world more broadly—but there was another major impact of this

public health infrastructure that was discussed primarily by women who had lived in the camp at

this time—the issue of Gender Based Violence (GBV).

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[101] Interview H.4; Interview H.5.
[102] "The Politics of Refugee Relief | Dissent Magazine." Accessed April 18, 2020.
https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/politics-refugee-relief-zaatari-camp-humanitarian-crisis.
[103] Interview H.8.
[104] Interview H.11; REACH, UNICEF "Jordan: Wash Infrastructure & Services Assessment in Zaatari Camp
Assessment Report (March 2017) - Jordan." Accessed October 21, 2019. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-
wash-infrastructure-services-assessment-zaatari-camp-assessment-report-march.
[105] Interview R.7.
[106] Interview R.12.

When it was first built, Za'atari did not have electricity. As such the camp would quite literally go dark after nightfall, making the often too-long walks to the washblocks extremely dangerous. This was especially true in the early stages of UNHCR leadership. As has been mentioned, the joint UNHCR-government security apparatus was much less developed than it currently is, and the governing bodies within the camp had not yet been able to engage with the community leaders in an effective and productive way.[107] There was fear of both sides: the crowds of primarily young men who were fighting in the streets as a result of massive unemployment, social and political inequality, and closing camp borders, and the reactions from camp security, run-ins with which could bring one face-to-face with cans of tear gas.[108] And though these often violent confrontations[109] made movement after nightfall difficult for most, they made it virtually impossible for many women. Gender-based violence (GBV) in refugee camps is an issue that is often not discussed in infrastructural development or aid provision, but it is one that Syrians themselves are acutely aware of. Reports of rape in Za'atari are numerous, and many of these reports specifically identify the walk to public latrines as the setting for this violence.[110] This fear had a number of ripple effects beyond the fear that led to women avoiding water after the sun began to set[111]—a practice that would be difficult to live with for days or weeks, let alone the years for which the washblock system was mobilized.

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[107] Clarke, Killian. 2018. "When Do the Dispossessed Protest? Informal Leadership and Mobilization in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 625.
[108] Interview R.2.
[109] Clarke, Killian. 2018. "When Do the Dispossessed Protest? Informal Leadership and Mobilization in Syrian Refugee Camps." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 625.
[110] CNN, By Arwa Damon. "No Sanctuary for Syria's Female Refugees." CNN. Accessed October 20, 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/26/world/meast/syria-refugees-child-brides/index.html.
[111] Interview R.1.

One of the social effects of GBV in the camp was the increase in "protective marriages" for girls who were not even teens out of a familial fear that they would otherwise be assaulted.[112] For those women who lived in districts with lower numbers of assault cases, memories of rape as a "weapon of war"[113] in Syria where it was used against both men and women in extremely high numbers as a well-known favorite tactic of the Assad regime made them fearful of putting themselves at risk in any capacity regardless. The theme of the disproportionate impact of this WASH infrastructure on women and girls persisted throughout accounts of the impact of the washblock system, as well as the systems that would follow it, shedding light on the ways in which a one-size-fits-all model can often overlook clear differences and structural inequalities within a society it seeks to help.

Community Engagement and Refugee Passivity

In the early years of the camp, each of Za'atari's districts was assigned to one of three community partners. The community partners at this time were the Japan Emergency NGO (JEN), the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam), and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED). The constant across them was the much larger number of local Jordanians they seemed to employ as compared to the large number of career humanitarians from the West employed by the UN. Beyond this, they shared very little in terms of standard practice or coordination. As such, until 2016 when camp mechanisms were standardized across all districts,[114] these organizations functioned very differently, leading to

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[112] CNN, By Arwa Damon. "No Sanctuary for Syria's Female Refugees." CNN. Accessed October 20, 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/26/world/meast/syria-refugees-child-brides/index.html.

[113] Greenwood, Phoebe. "Rape and Domestic Violence Follow Syrian Women into Refugee Camps." *The Guardian*, July 25, 2013, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/25/rape-violence-syria-women-refugee-camp.

[114] Interview H.5

very different experiences for the residents. This was especially true with regards to community engagement mechanisms, which were the practices used to collect input from the Syrian community and act on it. This lack of an emphasis on effective community engagement clearly aligns with the humanitarian priority of keeping the camp legible to the international community. To clarify, I am not arguing that the humanitarian apparatus was working to suppress the voices of camp residents, but rather that active engagement with these residents was not a priority the way that maintaining order within the camp was because of the priorities that this focus on legibility creates. Not only this, but the lack of active community engagement ties in to the international narrative that sees refugees as passive recipients of aid, while engagement from residents that spoke out against UNHCR policies would have jeopardized it.

With regards to perspectives on the camp and its solutions, community partners within the camp—likely both as a result of the number of local Jordanians that worked within them and because of their greater physical proximity to residents of the camp—tended to inhabit a middle ground between residents and the UN agencies that lead the interventions. They seemed to recognize the difficulties of the state of limbo that residents of the camp were in as they struggled to live with temporary provisions and infrastructure for multiple years, and spoke more often about the difficulties of living in the camp as compared to UN aid workers. This arguably serves to illustrate one of the many hierarchical divides that exist in the international humanitarian field: the divide between those with expertise and beauacratic power mentioned previously and discussed at length by Didier Fassin in his work on humanitarian governance. Those who can most closely identify with the victims of the crisis due to their physical proximity and thus often have a more acute understanding of their concerns are not given the power to make the big-picture decisions within the camp. Instead, these decisions are left to the

international humanitarians,[115] who work to provide international legibility for those nation-states and individuals observing, donating to, and sometimes helping create the crisis. Unfortunately, there was very little activism observed on the part of community partners working to change the system of the camp. Instead, even if they spoke out in sympathy of the difficulties faced by camp residents from time to time, these partners worked under the UN to continue to enact the emergency humanitarian response that had been constructed by the international cluster system. This being said, it is important to identify which responses to residential action came from community partners and which came from UN bodies due to the differences one can often observe between them.

Responses from the Ground: Working to Maintain Temporary Infrastructure

UNHCR security reports from Za'atari in 2013 state that "communal facilities (toilets and kitchens) were…regularly targeted for vandalism and theft," which led to the "intimidation of implementing staff…in the more established areas of the camp."[116] The language used here, as well as the very fact that this is mentioned within the security report along with protests that were quelled by military intervention, paints a picture of a population working to disrupt the daily workings of the camp—to disrupt the order that the UN had so carefully built after they took control. This idea is supported by discussions with those who were working in Za'atari at the time who state that, "vandalism was very high"[117] and that working with the Syrians in the

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[115] It is also worth mentioning that the pension system within the UN is such that many individuals choose to work in countries that are 'hardship posts'—such as Jordan at this moment—towards the end of their tenure as humanitarians, as the pay they will receive in these posts is higher and then will inform what they will be paid in retirement. Hardship posts such as this one are also considered to be pipelines to headquarters in New York and Geneva, as evidenced by the fact that multiple interviewees from this project have already been moved out of the Jordanian office and into the New York office since the completion of these interviews in April of 2019.
[116] UNHCR. "Za'atari Refugee Camp 2013 Safety and Security Report - Jordan." 3. Accessed February 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/za-atari-refugee-camp-2013-safety-and-security-report.
[117] Interview H.1.

camp was difficult as they were often "agitated."[118] Speaking to former residents of the camp about this vandalism, though, leads to a very different story—one where the residents of the camp realized their environment was impossible to live with for an extended period of time and took matters into their own hands after aid organizations did not improve it.

The construction of household latrines by Syrians living in the camp did not happen all at once. Instead, it began from the very onset of the camp in 2012, and gradually increased until 2015, when 89.6% of households had built their own toilets.[119] During this time, many residents attempted to engage with humanitarian organizations on the ground with little to no success. According to former camp residents that had attempted this, what the NGOs provided was "very basic"[120] and "NGOs only listen to the refugees if they want to."[121] This second point was one of high contention within the camp—former residents expressed multiple times that cash-for-work programs, which were the mechanisms through which NGOs hired Syrians within the camp and one of the only possible sources of income for those living in Za'atari at the time, were often run through a system of nepotism.[122] This perception that the likelihood of an NGO employee listening to your concerns was dependent on your connections within the camp, whether or not it was true, likely contributed in some cases to these residents' decision to take action on their own terms.

There also seemed to be an understanding that humanitarian organizations worked slowly, deliberating extensively on each issue, with one former resident explaining "most of the time when we ask for something the NGO does not say yes or no. They take the subject and they

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[118] Interview H.3.
[119] "Jordan: Wash Infrastructure & Services Assessment in Za'atari Camp Assessment Report (March 2017) - Jordan." ReliefWeb. Accessed October 21, 2019. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-wash-infrastructure-services-assessment-Za'atari-camp-assessment-report-march.
[120] Interview R.1.
[121] Interview R.1.
[122] Interview R.12.

study it," and another saying "it didn't always change honestly. Sometimes we'd say things over and over again and nothing would change…then there was nothing else we could do."[123] The general consensus seemed to be that "If you complain about things" eventually they would change "but they need a long time—like 6 or 7 years."[124] On issues of sanitation and health, in a context where the washblocks were described as generally unbearable, the idea of waiting for multiple years for a solution was not viable. Even so, some residents of the camp continued to attempt to engage with the UN bodies on the ground.

As the number of household latrines continued to grow and the issues with infrastructural 'vandalism' continued, camp governance took notice and began a community engagement
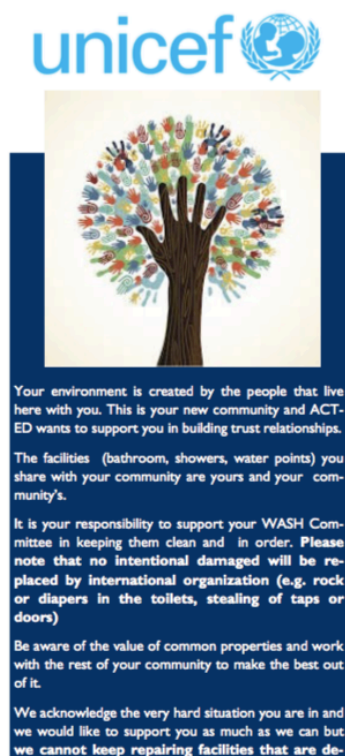
Figure 3: UNICEF Community engagement announcement (2014)

campaign to encourage camp residents to use the washblocks in the manner they saw fit. There were two major community engagement strategies used, though others such as community meetings, home visits, and district-wide announcements were also used.[125] An example of one of these district-wide announcements[126] from November of 2014 can be seen in the figure to the left, the most telling line of which is "please note that no intentional damage will be replaced by international organization…we cannot keep repairing facilities that are

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[123] Interview R.5.

[124] Interview R.12.

[125] Interview H.2; Interview H.10.

[126] There versions of this document disseminated within the camp were in Arabic. UNICEF's online archive, where this was taken from, holds the French, Arabic, and English versions, the last of which was inserted here. *See:* UNICEF "Document - WASH Committees Community Engagement in Sanitation of Facilities in Districts 1, 2, 9, 10, 11 and 12." November 10, 2014. Accessed February 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/42432

deliberately vandalized."[127] The first of these major community engagement mechanisms was

The Road, Za'atari's community magazine, as shown in figure 3.[128] The publication was created

as a community engagement mechanism by JEN. Though all content is written by residents of

the camp, one aid worker mentioned the content is often curated, edited, or added to by

humanitarian organizations on the ground in order to disseminate messages they feel are

important for the community to see.[129] Because these articles seem to come from the community,

it is often used as a low-cost community engagement mechanism, especially on widely

contentious issues such as this one.

Figure 4: A copy of The Road Magazine

The second, more active community engagement strategy used by camp leadership at this time was a set of community mobilization meetings where community leaders came together to discuss the difficulties with the WASH infrastructure in the camp.[130] The leaders

ranged from locally selected 'street leaders' from informal leadership networks within camp

communities to individuals selected by the NGOs running the programs themselves. As has been

mentioned, community mobilization efforts varied drastically between districts in Za'atari due to

the fact that other forms of infrastructural provision and ordering were considered more pressing.

As such, the community engagement meetings surrounding the difficulties with the communal

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[127] UNICEF "Document - WASH Committees Community Engagement in Sanitation of Facilities in Districts 1, 2, 9, 10, 11 and 12." November 10, 2014. Accessed February 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/42432

[128] 1 Journey Festival. "The Entrepreneurial Spirit of the 'Shams-Elysees'- Zaatari Refugee Camp." March 29, 2018. Accessed February 2020. https://www.onejourneyfestival.com/blog/2018/3/29/the-entrepreneurial-spirit-of-the-shams-elysees-zaatari-refugee-camp

[129] Interview H.10.

[130] Interview H.10; Community Engagement Materials, Oxfam. 2014.
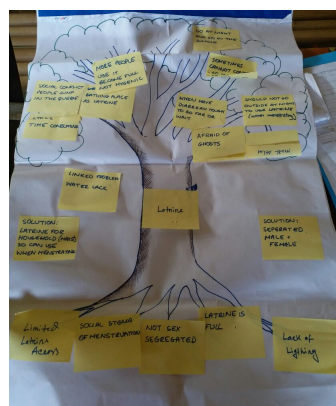
washblocks were run independently according to district by community partners from Oxfam, JEN, and ACTED, though most materials collected on these efforts indicate that Oxfam was the most engaged in this effort of the three organizations. Meetings often consisted of a discussion surrounding the difficulties with the system, followed by a brainstorming session wherein community leaders would identify potential solutions to the problems. After lengthy

Figure 5: Oxfam community engagement meeting reflections (2014)

discussions surrounding ways in which community accountability to the washblocks could be fostered—which would, in theory, increase cleanliness—the solutions that community leaders would point to would often consist of some kind of household system—a toilet for each family— which mimicked the system that was currently being built by individual families within the camp.[131] An example of a meeting strategy—a problem and solution tree focused on the washblock system can be found in the figure below. The two solutions identified in this exercise were "latrine for each household (max 5) so can use while menstruating" and "segregated male and female."[132] Following these meetings for the first few years, there was very little action taken by camp authorities to make changes in line with these community engagement meetings, and no response to these ideas that the residents had heard of. This being said, when asked retroactively about whether they considered this system when the residents first proposed it, aid

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[131] Community engagement materials, Action Planning and Mapping Session, Oxfam. 2014
[132] Community engagement materials, Action Planning and Mapping Session, Oxfam. 2014

workers who had been working on community engagement at the time all seemed to respond the same way. "We focused on the old system."[133] The importance of the "old system" working becomes clear when viewing this transition through the lens of camp legibility. The washblock system was clearly temporary, and while this new system would maintain its order in some ways, it would also make the camp more livable and thus might make it a less temporary a settlement. As will be discussed, the international humanitarian organizations were acutely aware of this, with one aid worker stating that "the host government would worry about the Syrians not wanting to leave."[134] Not only this, but a change in the system might also require an acknowledgement that residents of the camp were unhappy with the infrastructure, complicating the image of residents of the camp as victims of conflict who, through UNHCR intervention, become passively grateful recipients of aid.

It is interesting to note that former residents of Za'atari were aware that this kind of extensive deliberation period seemed to only be relevant with regards to issues that humanitarian organizations did not consider emergencies, with "issues of sickness, or of childbirth for example" being solved relatively quickly.[135] This again points to the disconnect between these humanitarian organizations and the residents of the camp in terms of their conceptions of emergency relief. Humanitarian agencies see their role in refugee camps as providing essential services—the items and infrastructure necessary in a temporary emergency—but very rarely work to create contexts that are livable throughout the course of the many years refugees are statistically in camps for. This is regardless of the fact that the critical need for such intervention becomes clear as countries close their borders to resettlement and conflicts that lead to such

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[133] Interview H.8.
[134] Interview H.5.
[135] Interview R.9.

crises become long and drawn out proxy wars more and more frequently, making repatriation difficult if not impossible.

As time went on, and it became clearer that there would not be any change coming from the humanitarian organizations and the rate of families constructing their own household toilets rose quickly. As has been stated, though many of these structures began as dug-out sewage pits behind tents and caravans, residents quickly found that using pieces of the communal washblocks or linking household toilets to these blocks allowed them to make more effective structures. What was framed as vandalism by UN documents—an act of dissent by an "agitated" population—was usually represented by that same population as an attempt to create a more livable context under a governing body that refused to implement more effective infrastructure on their behalf. Instead of being an act *against* the governing bodies of Za'atari, this was an act *for* Syrian households and camp livability. The reason it is not seen this way by humanitarian narratives is the very conflict that separates the goals of camp residents from the goals of the humanitarians—the tension between legibility and livability, especially in the long term.

Humanitarian Reactions to Homemaking

Za'atari's residents began building household toilets because the washblock system was not livable for the multiple years for which they were being asked to use it, which implies a more long-term view of the issues at stake. The residents also saw the household wastewater infrastructure as a necessity—it was not something they were willing to compromise on. This highlights two major disconnects between the humanitarian actors on the ground and the residents of the camp. The first is the long-term view of livability adopted by residents of the camp which conflicts with the international understanding of a refugee crisis as a temporary

phenomenon, which has already been discussed. The second is the idea of household latrines as a necessity—the humanitarian actors on the ground viewed the washblock system as part of a much longer history of what they saw as effective and legible humanitarian intervention and as such, treated any form of protest by the camp residents almost unreasonable, arguing that it was specific to the population in Za'atari.

This disconnect between what does and does not constitute a necessity can be explained in part by the ways in which humanitarians framed the issues they believed Syrians had with the communal washblock infrastructure. The extreme difficulties that many residents of the camp—especially those who were female—experienced when using these washblocks have been discussed at length: the lack of cleanliness and resulting disease, the psychological terror and physical danger from the threat of sexual assault, and the fundamental incompatibility of the communal system with the types of privacy ingrained into the society that these residents were used to. When NGO employees discussed the reasons for the private latrine construction, they only cited the last of these concerns, almost always stating that the "refugees did not like the system for cultural reasons."[136] The use of culture as a justification became a way of asserting power over what was 'necessary' as opposed to what was 'cultural.' By positioning the refusal to use the washblocks as a product of a specific set of chosen practices that are particular to the region that the camp was set up in, humanitarian actors attempted to perpetuate the narrative that these solutions would continue to work in the future while reinforcing counterproductive understandings of the population as 'combative' when discussing their decision to move away from the public system.

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[136] Interview H.8.

There are two major flaws with this framing of the camp residents' decision, which both states that the concerns surrounding this system were cultural and dismisses these concerns as less valid than other more 'acultural' concerns. The first is that this does not provide a complete picture of the health issues that were at stake at the time. This is in line with a history of humanitarian agencies ignoring the gendered dynamics of refugee camp life, in part due to their creation of solutions in a context independent of the conflicts they are intervening in or the populations they are seeking to help. Nadine Puechguirbal, in her work on Gender and Conflict, illustrates the extreme of this mentality with her anecdote about an aid worker stating they were there "to save lives, not ask whether or not someone is a woman or a man before [they] provide assistance or to give priority to women over men." [137] Though it seems highly unlikely that aid workers in Za'atari would respond to women's health issues this way, it does point to an existing bias within the humanitarian space.

The other issue with this kind of justification for inaction is that it treats 'culture' as an inadequate reason for changing infrastructure in a refugee context in and of itself. Stephen Dobson, in his ethnographic work *Cultures of Exile and the Experience of Refugeeness,* discusses the crucial importance of community and culture to resilience in displaced communities.[138] The idea that culture is not a valid reason for changes to camp infrastructure is one that is particular to the emergency one-size-fits-all mentality of the humanitarian apparatus—one that creates solutions for crises in Syria and Jordan from organizational headquarters in Geneva and New York—but it is rarely a sustainable mentality across multi-year conflicts. The recent rise of cultural competency literature with regards to vulnerable populations

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[137] Nadine Puechguirbal, "The Cost of Ignoring Gender in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations: A Feminist Perspective," Amsterdam Law Forum 4, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 16.

[138] Dobson, Stephen. *Cultures of Exile and the Experience of «Refugeeness».* Bern; New York: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2004.

has made the need for more context-specific solutions clear. This is especially true in the case of healthcare provision and policy in the realm of psychosocial support,[139] though it is an important concept across aid provision. In this case, as will become clear, the ways that residents of the camp reacted to the lack of culturally competent and gender-informed infrastructure led to an unnecessary public health crisis that illustrated this importance through its extremity.

One might argue that in the context of a humanitarian crisis there are no resources for cultural competency as opposed to bare, life-saving aid, but there are a few reasons that this does not explain away the dismissal of culture as a valid reason for camp reform. Firstly, this is a theme that one can see across camp resource provision, even if the changes are not costly and drastically improve quality of camp life for its residents—the aforementioned caravan formations are such an example. In addition, there were no mentions of financial tradeoffs when discussing these concerns, the tone being more that these concerns did not have the necessary weight to be discussed from a funding perspective to begin with than the idea that there was no funding to deal with them. In any case, as the public health crisis grew, the funding for a state-of-the-art system that fulfilled these requirements was found—51 million euros.

The other work this framing of residential difficulties as 'cultural concerns' did within humanitarian discourse was to imply that in other contexts, these systems would continue to be effective. Even when culture was not the primary justification given for these concerns, the difficulties residents of the camp faced were treated as a "particular source of trouble"[140] under Cox's description of the humanitarian problem-solving mentality, with aid workers focusing on

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[139] Dana R.H. (2007) Refugee Assessment Practices and Cultural Competency Training. In: Wilson J.P., Tang C.S. (eds) Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD. International and Cultural Psychology Series. Springer, Boston, MA

[140] Cox, Robert W. "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory." *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1981): 208. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298810100020501.

specific implementation concerns surrounding the system as opposed to the system itself. In

these cases, aid workers referred back to the Sphere Standards as the ideal to reach.

Emergency humanitarian infrastructure is built to adhere to the Sphere Minimum

Standards in Humanitarian Response, which require that WASH infrastructure is gender

segregated and incorporates privacy and cultural practices—though what these cultural practices

may look like in the context of emergency water and sanitation provision is unclear.[141] The

Sphere Standards also require that there are fewer than 250 people per tap and fewer than 50

people per latrine.[142] This occupancy ceiling was clearly not met in the case of the infrastructure

installed in Za'atari—and this was repeatedly brought up by aid workers when they were asked

why these washblocks might have failed. Many of them used the example of Azraq Camp—the

second largest Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, as a context in which these standards were met

and thus as a form of validation for the washblock approach. Statements such as

> "In Azraq there are communal washblocks and they are generally accepted but the sizing
> of the washblocks and the number of people they serve is dramatically different. In Zaatari
> they were overloaded—there were 200 families per washblocks or something whereas in
> Azraq there are 8 families using a washblock consisting of two latrines, so the families get
> together to make sure those facilities are looked after"[143]

suggest that the washblocks were not fundamentally flawed as emergency interventions expected

to function over the course of multiple years, but instead were simply mobilized in Za'atari in a

manner that was not as effective as it could have been.

This holds true, in part. Many of the difficulties that camp residents faced were highly

exacerbated by the extreme overcrowding of these systems. This being said, this numerical, data-

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[141] Sphere 2011 The Sphere Project – Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.
Practical Action Publishing, Bourton on Dunsmore, UK.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Interview H.3.

driven explanation fails to take into account the radically different layouts of the two camps. Killian Clarke's work, which consists of comparative analyses between refugee settings, shows that there are a number of different factors that can encourage camp residents to exert agency over their environments and that Za'atari's particular conditions made it the most politically mobilized Syrian refugee camp in the region.[144] Azraq is far more secluded from major Jordanian cities, meaning that there were fewer opportunities for individuals to find a way to make extra income which they could use to develop their caravans. The camp is also more spread out, with much more stringent security forces that have been in power from its initial mobilization.[145] These factors worked together to make it far more difficult for residents of Azraq to work against the humanitarian apparatus in the same ways that those in Za'atari had. It is also worth noting that following the wastewater construction in Za'atari the residents of Azraq began campaigning for a similar system, albeit with less pushback from the humanitarian apparatus as the system had already been implemented elsewhere.[146] In other words, the initial lack of protest against the washblock system in Azraq was not necessarily emblematic of its efficacy—it seems more likely that it was a product of the restrictions put on the population in the camp.

Not only this, but this argument fails to take into account that fact that though there are clearly ways in which a larger number of washblocks would help increase cleanliness by reducing their overpopulation, many of the problems outlined—especially those which disproportionately affected women and girls—would likely have persisted unless the washblocks were far closer to each individual family—a system that, based on past UN statements on

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[144] Clarke, Killian, "Protest and Informal Leadership in Syrian Refugee Camps." Project on Middle East Political Science. February 3, 2017. Accessed November 20, 2018.
[145] Interview H.3.
[146] Interview H.3.

priorities for refugee emergencies, would likely be seen as cost prohibitive. As such, any system built on the Sphere Standards would likely continue to put the most vulnerable populations in these settings at risk. This raises the question of whether meeting these standards—or adhering to the long history of legible humanitarian intervention focused on temporary order—would have been enough to make residents of the camp content with using this system for the eight years for which it has been active and the many more years for which it could be.

Public Health Impacts of Camp Imbalances

By 2015, when the percentage of families with a household latrine was reaching 90%, many of the residents had agreed that changes they saw taking place in the camp would only come from their own efforts, with one saying "if you have money you can fix your house. If you don't have any it will stay the way it is."[147] Acts of homemaking, whether they were directly related to the WASH infrastructure of the camp or not, were often still considered to be vandalism by NGOs on the ground[148]—acts that disordered the camp and were thus treated as security threats. In addition to these security concerns, though, there was a new set of concerns brought on by the makeshift household toilet systems that became more pressing as time went on.

The household toilets that residents of the camp had built behind their homes had created open cesspools of waste that needed to be continuously drained for fear of the public health crisis they would otherwise create. As the communal washblock system continued to break down and these cesspools grew larger and more frequent, the camp authorities—more specifically UNICEF

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[147] Interview R.3.

[148] "Document - WASH Committees Community Engagement in Sanitation of Facilities in Districts 1, 2, 9, 10, 11 and 12." Accessed April 18, 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/42432.

headquarters, which continued to coordinate water and sanitation efforts aided by ACTED on the ground—tried a number of different solutions to prevent this crisis. They began by using trucks to move waste out of Za'atari but were met not only with high operational costs—the operation costed about $3.6 million per year—but also a number of truck driver strikes as drivers brought the difficulties of economic and employment-based instability from surrounding Jordanian cities into the camp. These difficulties were considered by humanitarian leadership to be "unsustainable"[149] in the long-term—a conclusion which paints an economic and logistical picture of what UN agencies consider sustainable, as opposed to one rooted in the experiences of camp residents. They then began using portable waste treatment plants to decentralize the process of waste management and lower costs[150] [151] but continued to face difficulties as they focused on the symptoms of a breakdown in infrastructure as opposed to the root of the problem—the infrastructure itself.

As UNICEF struggled to find temporary solutions, sanitation-related health concerns became more and more apparent. The cesspools were increasingly easy to contract diseases from, especially for the children who would play near them.[152] Za'atari's government had focused too heavily on making it legible, and the insistence on temporary infrastructure and lack of active engagement with camp residents—many of whom had tried to communicate how critical they believed household toilets were to the livability of the camp—had led to a public health crisis. It was this emergency, resulting from a critical imbalance between the legibility and livability of

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[149] Interview H.7.

[150] "Ministry of Water & Irrigation and UNICEF Launches Cost Efficient Waste Water Treatment Units in Za'atari Refugee Camp." Accessed October 22, 2019. https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/ministry-water-irrigation-and-unicef-launches-cost-efficient-waste-water-treatment.

[151] Interview H.3.

[152] Interview H.5; Helm, A. W. C. van der, A. Bhai, F. Coloni, W. J. G. Koning, and P. T. de Bakker. "Developing Water and Sanitation Services in Refugee Settings from Emergency to Sustainability – the Case of Za'atari Camp in Jordan." *Journal of Water Sanitation and Hygiene for Development* 7, no. 3 (September 2017): 523. https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2017.107.

the camp, that eventually became the driving force in leading the UNHCR and UNICEF to begin

building the permanent wastewater network.

Chapter 3: Legible Development: Maintaining the International Narrative

The UNICEF office in Amman is tucked away behind the Kempinski hotel in a wealthy neighborhood called Shmeisani, a few short minutes from the multi-million-dollar Boulevard shopping complex. Once one walks through the security checkpoint and makes it up the elevator onto the third floor, the office looks much like any other UNICEF office around the world. The people in the office are largely not Jordanian—many of them are career humanitarians who are coming from the West or former assignments in other parts of the world. They sit at laptops from which they write reports for donor campaigns or track data coming out of the camp that are being provided to them by community partners working on the ground or other affiliated research agencies. To the left of the main floor is a glass conference room with a stack of large post-it notes covered in the remains of a recent brainstorming session—this room is one of the places within the building that decisions affecting the 80,000 residents of Za'atari Camp are made.

It was here that I had the opportunity to interview some of these career humanitarians— the individuals who had made the final decision to build the wastewater network and had raised the necessary monetary and political capital to do so, thus effectively formalizing the system that residents of the camp had been advocating for and working towards on a daily basis. These were also the individuals who had repeatedly tried reimplementing the washblock system, even as it became more and more apparent that it would not work. I remember one of the senior leaders of the organization chuckling ruefully as he admitted "we never learn."[153] There is another answer

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[153] Interview H.9.

that stands out to me from these interviews. When asked about the role of residential concerns in the creation of the network, a UN employee based out of New York responded, "discussions about the network have been ongoing since 2013—the decision was taken by our office due to the size of the camp and its needs."[154] The residents of the camp had constantly stated that the wastewater network was built because of action they had taken—they had advocated for themselves, refusing to use the unlivable public infrastructure and it had paid off. Aid workers from the community engagement organizations who I had spoken to on the ground in Za'atari had said that it was the public health crisis that had moved camp governance to action, as had many lower-level UN employees. Though these reasons differed, they both maintained that the role of camp residents was crucial to the network's creation. This narrative was fundamentally different, though. It framed the decision to build the network as completely independent of the camp residents in a way that seemed at odds with the realities of the camp.

This chapter discusses the consequences of the imbalance between livability and legibility through the lens of the camp's sewage public health crisis and then outlines the ways in which the framework of legibility can also be used to understand these conflicting narratives of camp development. It does this through an analysis of the importance of refugee passivity to the legibility of a camp such as Za'atari, arguing that public narratives of infrastructural development rarely mentioned the role residents of the camp played in the wastewater network's construction for fear of complicating both the image of their beneficiaries as passive victims and the image of the camp as a highly ordered and controlled temporary intervention. It closes arguing that despite the humanitarian apparatus' insistence on maintaining Za'atari's legibility throughout the crisis and the subsequent construction of the network, this case study provides a

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[154] Interview H.6.

valuable example of livable infrastructure being created in a camp setting and may point to a future where such infrastructure becomes more common.

An Infrastructural Breaking Point

By mid-May of 2014, almost a year before the number of household latrines had hit its peak, there were 90 trucks making 270 trips to the camp a day, frantically working to de-sludge pits that had filled with sewage and become health hazards.[155] Towards the end of the year, many of these drivers would go on strike, demanding higher pay and lower working hours.[156] The combination of these strikes and the rapidly increasing number of household latrines led to a massive public health crisis—there were open sewage pits on most corners, polluting the air, and no matter how much the residents of the camp tried, the sheer number of them made it exceedingly difficult to keep children away. One aid worker described the streets at the time by simply saying "it was awful."[157] And yet, residents of the camp still refused to move back to the washblock system, showing that to them, this was clearly a better alternative.

As the public health crisis continued to threaten the lives of camp residents—especially children—the UNHCR goal of keeping Za'atari a legible settlement with all it entailed was overtaken by the larger humanitarian goal of keeping people alive. Fassin argues that humanitarianism, especially emergency humanitarianism, reduces individuals to their biology in pursuit of its goal to save lives.[158] In other words, changes to camp infrastructure were made

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[155] UNHCR. Zaatari Water Technical Working Group. March 8, 2014. Accessed February 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/40598

[156] Interview H.6; UNHCR. WASH Sector Coordinator Meeting Minutes. October 12, 2014. Accessed February 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/42278

[157] Interview H.8.

[158] Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2011. 242.

through an appeal to the fundamental ways that the humanitarian apparatus understands refugee lives in relation to their understandings of emergency—as biological and in need of saving. This appeal was manifested through the actions of residents of the camp who were able to conceptualize a new form of sustainable living and homemaking. The active de-prioritization of the social realities of residents' daily lives—the livability of the context they were living in—is closely aligned with the idea of camp residents as passive victims that need not actively participate in the creation of policies that directly affect them.

Balancing Host Nation Concerns of Permanence

Though the humanitarian agencies had been moved to action, the Jordanian government was still the higher authority within the camp and thus the UN needed their approval before funding could be found for the project. The justifications that had to be given to the Jordanian government with regards to why this system should be built are a clear example of the nation-state variables in the international humanitarian system that sometimes require the maintenance of a narrative of legibility. According to UN leadership within the camp, the government's primary concern was that if this wastewater network was built, it would encourage residents to overstay their welcome within the nation,[159] overwhelming an already overburdened system which was not getting nearly enough aid from other nations to handle the crisis.[160] As such, the decision to build had to be framed in a way that not only showed that construction was in the host nation's best interest, but assuaged concerns surrounding its permanence.

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[159] Interview H.5.

[160] Francis, Alexandra, and Alexandra Francis. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. September 21, 2015. Accessed February 2020. https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/09/21/jordan-s-refugee-crisis-pub-61338.

Beyond the stakes of the public health crisis, which some humanitarian actors stated were a concern for the host government[161] there were two major justifications given to the Jordanian government that encouraged them to agree to the network—both of which maintained the legibility of the camp. The first was that Za'atari was built atop an aquafer that provided the clean water for major cities in Jordan, and this project would protect it.[162] Due to the nation's status as the second most water-scarce country in the world and the recent population influx, there was a generally heightened anxiety surrounding water provision within the nation, as well as a number of tangible logistical issues resulting from the scarcity.[163] These public fears not only put pressure on the government, but also increased tensions between Jordanian host communities and Syrians living within them as refugees became scapegoats for water scarcity issues.[164] This justification for the network both eased these tensions and allowed the parties involved to ignore the residential action core to its construction—action that likely would have been seen as an extension of the unrest the government had to confront in the early days of the camp.

The creation of the wastewater network helped reduce nation-wide tension based on concerns that the Za'atari waste system was polluting the aquafer but it also increased local tensions surrounding the camp as the low-income communities who lived close by began realizing that the residents of the camp were being offered more effective water and wastewater infrastructure than they were. In this vein, the other promise made to the government at the time was that after Syrians were repatriated following the war, the infrastructure would remain

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[161] Interview H.2.
[162] Jordan Times. "Zaatari Aquifer Water Unpolluted — Water Minister," February 18, 2014. http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/zaatari-aquifer-water-unpolluted-%E2%80%94-water-minister.
[163] Farishta, Aleena. "The Impact of Syrian Refugees on Jordan's Water Resources and Water Management Planning." Columbia University, 2014. https://doi.org/10.7916/D80K26P3.
[164] Ibid.

available for the surrounding Syrian communities to use.[165] By framing the infrastructural

investment this way, leaders in these humanitarian organizations were able to put governmental

fears of encouraging a more permanent settlement of Syrians in the country at ease. Following

the Jordanian government's approval, UNICEF and the UNHCR turned to the international

donor community, eventually securing a 35-million-euro donation from Germany through the

KfW Development Bank as well as smaller donations from the US, Canada, and the UK to

eventually meet the 51-million-euro total.[166]

Community Engagement and Conflict Through Construction

The de-prioritization of the lived experiences of the residents of the camp through the

focus on their biological lives can also be seen through the continued lack of effective

community engagement mechanisms throughout the network's construction. Though the

community mobilization materials from community partners state that ideally, "communities are

consulted during the assessment phase and before designing new activities"[167] discussions with

NGO workers on the ground—especially those who were working to improve the community

mobilization mechanisms that existed at the time—state they would work to "enforce the

community to do something" and then if necessary, "change [their] plan based on the community

reaction."[168] An aid worker who was a part of the leadership team for the community

mobilization program went as far as to say "they weren't doing real CM (community

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[165] Interview H.5.

[166] UNICEF "Environment Friendly and Cost Efficient Water and Sanitation Network in Za'atari Camp." May 3, 2018. Accessed February, 2020. https://www.unicef.org/jordan/press-releases/environment-friendly-and-cost-efficient-water-and-sanitation-network-zaatari-camp.

[167] Community Engagement Materials, Oxfam. 2014.

[168] Interview H.1.

mobilization)."[169] These statements serve to further shed light on the ways in which the UN was spurred to action not by refugee engagement and advocacy, but through actions and their consequences.

Beyond the lack of active engagement with the community, aid workers seemed to believe that residents of the camp were trying to work against them—the understanding of the ideal 'victim' as one who passively accepted aid made the acts of homemaking taking place in the camp seem like direct challenges to the humanitarian authority. It is interesting to note that narratives from former residents of the camp suggest that they did not see the action they were taking to build private infrastructure against the wishes of the humanitarian apparatus as political at all. There were mentions of the protests taking place in the camp at the time—discussed previously with regards to the UNHCR security concerns in the camp, especially in its first year—but people who discussed these protests often created some level of distance between themselves and the political protestors.[170] This being said, many of them were involved in the construction of the private latrines, which they did not see as a part of the wider political context of the camp. Regardless of this, many aid workers seem to have viewed these actions as expressions of agency independent of their control, and thus framed them as acts of antagonism.

This understanding of homemaking as antagonistic became clear many times in discussions with aid workers, especially those working within community engagement organizations. Responses such as "we tried everything but there was nothing else we could do"[171] or "you cannot compare them with other camps…here, no their attitude is different somehow and their acceptance, until now they didn't accept the environment around them"

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[169] Interview H.2.
[170] Interview R.9.
[171] Interview H.1.

making it a "very bad experience"[172] largely focused on the difficulties that these humanitarians felt they faced when working with a population that refused to accept the state of the camp the way it was provided to them. This view of Za'atari residents as unsatisfied with aid provision, and by extension ungrateful and unwilling to work with humanitarians is echoed in the broader discussion of relationships between residents of the camp and the community partners working with them. There was a general understanding that "particularly in the early days of Zaatari…the population was agitated on many fronts,"[173] once again conjuring images of a population working to challenge camp authority as opposed to creating sustainable lives for themselves. Again, this framing fails to recognize the inevitability of such a clash due to the extended nature of the conflict and the physical danger that resulted from the temporary public systems that were previously in place.

This is also seen more implicitly in the ways community partners discuss residents who are paid to mobilize other camp residents, serving as liaisons to individual communities as part of the efforts to achieve goals set out by the humanitarian organizations on the ground. Statements such as "[they are] part of the community and they know how to communicate with them"[174] paint Syrians as individuals that the humanitarian organizations do not know how to communicate with due to their unwillingness to adopt the perspectives and goals expected of them as recipients of aid. This perception of residents of the camp as fundamentally 'other' in a way that is difficult to understand is unproductive—it does not encourage the kinds of active engagement that would help avoid difficulties such as the ones that took place in Za'atari's earlier days—and yet it seems to be widely accepted.

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[172] Interview H.2.
[173] Interview H.3.
[174] Interview H.1.

My focus on the lack of effective community engagement in Za'atari is not in an effort to suggest that the ultimate goal of saving biological lives is not a difficult and admirable one—it is both of those things. Nor is it contesting the fact that there are time and resource constraints on such an operation and thus decisions need to be made and prioritized. What it is suggesting though, is that contrary to the way that it is currently viewed, community engagement is critical to the goal of saving lives itself. Engaging with camp residents to build a more livable experience—something that was clearly possible in this context—not only makes humanitarian intervention more thoughtful and humane, it also helps achieve a balance between livability and legibility that achieves the very goals currently outlined by these humanitarian agencies more effectively.

Maintaining Refugee Passivity through the International Narrative

Despite the fact that there was not much work done to engage with the community while the decision to build the network was being made, it is clear that the household systems that residents of the camp had constructed were the blueprints for the eventual construction of the wastewater network. As such, one would expect that a discussion focused on how the wastewater network was built would inevitably include mention of the fact that the impetus for such a system came from the community itself. Though community partners on the ground were open to discussing the role the residents of Za'atari had in the decision to build the wastewater network, responses from UN leadership painted a very different picture. The popular narrative seemed to be that the humanitarian organizations had recognized independently of camp politics that a more sustainable solution was necessary for wastewater in Za'atari and thus done the work necessary to implement this solution. Unless one asked specifically about the impact of the old

system on the residents of the camp, answers beyond this internal shift to long-term development usually focused on the aquafer under Za'atari and the government's concern that it would be polluted[175] or the cost of the trucking system that existed[176]—with no detailed mention of why that system had existed to begin with. As has been stated, one of the UNICEF leaders who was promoted to a position in the New York office halfway through the completion of the project stated that the plans for the network had been in the works since 2013—only a few months after UN leadership took control of the camp.[177] Though this is possible, there is no mention of these conversations in the publicly accessible WASH meeting minutes and according to residents and community partners, throughout this time camp leadership was still heavily encouraging communal washblock usage[178] and working against attempts to build private infrastructure.

The narrative that excludes the role of residents of the camp in bringing about change also clearly parallels the few documents the UN and its affiliates have published on the wastewater network. These documents, insofar as they provide an insight into the types of narratives the humanitarians in Za'atari hope to push forward to the leadership in their organizations and their donors, should also be considered important data points. There were two major reports focusing on this change—the first a practical paper co-written by an individual from the UNHCR office in Jordan and the second a joint research report between UNICEF and REACH.[179] Both documents present the shift in the camp as a "fast conception of a refugee camp as an urban setting, with an integrated sustainable approach" that was "novel."[180] The practical

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[175] Interview H.1.
[176] Interview H.7.
[177] Interview H.6.
[178] Oxfam Community Engagement Materials; Interview H.3.
[179] REACH is a humanitarian research initiative that often works in tandem with non-governmental organizations in order to inform more effective intervention.
[180] A. W. C. van der Helm, A. Bhai, F. Coloni, W. J. G. Koning, P. T. de Bakker; Developing water and sanitation services in refugee settings from emergency to sustainability – the case of Zaatari Camp in Jordan. *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development* 1 September 2017; 7 (3): 522.

paper states that this sustainable approach was conceived of two years after the camp opened,[181] while the REACH report states the shift occurred "six years after the onset of the Syrian crisis,"[182] which was around the time that the wastewater and water network projects were announced. Both reports state the shift was spearheaded by the UN organizations leading the intervention.[183] Though the practical paper mentions some of the other relevant factors— "equitable water and sanitation access, public health conditions, environmental conservation and operational costs"[184]—they both generally focus on a shift to development as a result of a more long-term conception of the camp as the core reasoning for the network independently of changes that the residents of the camp themselves made. Though it is likely that this shift was in part influenced by a global discussions surrounding the intersections of development and emergency aid that have been taking place, it is important to note that in contrast to the ways in which it is represented in these documents, this change would not have come about without the refugee action that enabled it. Beyond these documents, the UNICEF press release that announced the construction of the new wastewater network listed "increased cost effectiveness in the provision of water and wastewater services through reduction in trucking operations— savings of up to 66 percent"[185] as a core reason for the network's construction, once again, with no discussion of why the trucking operations had to exist to begin with.

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[181] Ibid.

[182] REACH, UNICEF "Jordan: Wash Infrastructure & Services Assessment in Zaatari Camp Assessment Report (March 2017) - Jordan." Accessed October 21, 2019. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-wash-infrastructure-services-assessment-zaatari-camp-assessment-report-march.

[183] Ibid.

[184] A. W. C. van der Helm, A. Bhai, F. Coloni, W. J. G. Koning, P. T. de Bakker; Developing water and sanitation services in refugee settings from emergency to sustainability – the case of Zaatari Camp in Jordan. *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development* 1 September 2017; 7 (3): 521.

[185] UNICEF "Environment Friendly and Cost Efficient Water and Sanitation Network in Za'atari Camp." May 3, 2018. Accessed February, 2020. https://www.unicef.org/jordan/press-releases/environment-friendly-and-cost-efficient-water-and-sanitation-network-zaatari-camp.

World Waternet, an organization that works to help achieve the sustainable development goals with respect to water and sanitation, was also involved in the planning and financing stages of the project as well as in other projects improving waste management in host communities across Jordan. Their reflections on the project are presented on their website under the headline "From emergency to sustainability in Za'atari refugee camp," pointing again to the pattern of framing the undertaking as a sustainability effort, with no description of the residential role in the process. Instead, they provide a brief description of the 'before' and 'after' states of the system, focusing on how this work helps achieve their mission of more sustainable waste management.[186] This case provides a particularly clear example of the ways in which organizational mission and donor politics influence representations of development processes or humanitarian work more generally. In order to continue to receive funding from their donor base—those who are invested in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN—the organization frames the work they do in those same terms, regardless of the kinds of political nuance this approach might erase.

Another avenue through which the popular narrative surrounding the construction of this wastewater network was created was the news coverage of the system from within Jordan. Even more so than any of the technical documents created by the humanitarian agencies involved in the process, these documents paint the picture of a decision taken by camp governance structures—both the Jordanian government and the humanitarian agencies—with environmental and economic sustainability in mind. The most detailed article on the topic is one published by *The Jordan Times* in March of 2019 following the completion of the project. After using the

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[186] "From Emergency to Sustainability in Za'atari Refugee Camp and Support to Host Communities in Jordan." September 3, 2019. Accessed February, 2020. https://www.wereldwaternet.nl/en/latest-news/2019/september/from-emergency-to-sustainability-in-zaatari-refugee-camp-and-support-to-host-communities-in-jordan/.

word 'sustainability' multiple times in the initial descriptions of the project, the article quotes the UNICEF Jordan Representative saying, "ending the reliance on trucking for water and wastewater provision is not only cost-effective, it has also ensured a more equitable distribution of the services for families."[187] Again, in this case cost-efficiency is at the forefront of the public justification for the system. Though the impact on equity for residents of the camp is mentioned, the quote continues to frame UNICEF and other humanitarians as the active agents in the situation while the residents of the camp are passive recipients of this aid, reaffirming popular representations of refugees as passive victims.

Perspectives from residents of Za'atari are framed in a similar way, centering their passivity as opposed to the active part they took in the construction of and campaign for the network. For example, the article quotes a 10-year-old boy saying "we used to go far over there, far away, where the water was...It would take us an hour to bring the water all the way home. But now we have no worries. We can sit in our homes, play, do our school work and have access to water anytime." [188] Both the quote and the choice of a child as a spokesperson for the refugee community within the camp reinforce the stereotypical representations of refugees as victims, effectively ignoring the active part they take in constructing the system.

So why is it that these narratives are so fundamentally different from those provided by community engagement leaders and residents themselves? The answer seems to lie once again in the idea of what constitutes a legible camp—and a legible victim of war. The understanding of refugee camp legibility as critically tied to temporariness is fundamentally at odds with the work

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[187] "UNICEF Completes Construction of Water, Sanitation Network in Zaatari Camp | Jordan Times." March 18, 2019. Accessed April 18, 2020. http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/unicef-completes-construction-water-sanitation-network-zaatari-camp.
[188] "UNICEF Completes Construction of Water, Sanitation Network in Zaatari Camp | Jordan Times." March 18, 2019. Accessed April 18, 2020. http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/unicef-completes-construction-water-sanitation-network-zaatari-camp.

these residents were doing to 'settle' into the camp. There was clearly a fear that if this wastewater system was built, it would create a context so livable that it would become less temporary—it would act as a disincentive for residents of the camp to repatriate to Syria once the war was over—despite the fact that the camp continues to be a far less than ideal place to live, with few opportunities for employment, bare minimum provisions, and very little possible mobility.[189] Towards the end of my interviews, I asked a UN leader in camp water and wastewater network discussions whether residents might eventually take over the wastewater network's operations in order to create a self-sustaining micro-economy which would increase individual residential agency and remove some of the financial burden from the UN. I believe it was this anxiety that was speaking when he responded that he thought that would be "inappropriate"[190]—that ownership of the system would never lie with the residents of the camp.

   Beyond the anxiety surrounding the creation of permanent infrastructures, there was also the question of individual refugee legibility. A legible victim of war is one who will take what is given to them in crisis and remain grateful to donor nations and the humanitarian apparatus despite the difficulties of life under such circumstances and the role these donor nations often play in the very conflicts that displaced them. In this case, these representations of Za'atari residents are both intentional and intentional—while some humanitarians work to reframe camp politics in an effort to appeal to donor nations by showing them what they expect to see—and what will elicit a sympathetic response—individuals who did not have much first-hand experience of the camp likely had their understandings of camp development—and thus their

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[189] Tiltnes, Åge A, and Guri Tyldum. "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Better off than before but Still Vulnerable," Research on European Management of Migration and Refugees (MARE) October 2019, 4.
[190] Interview H.5.

writing—influenced by their own stereotypical understandings of refugees and victims of war in similar ways to the community engagement aid workers mentioned above.

The Importance of (Illegible) Representation: Agency and Victimhood

Beyond the critical impacts this understanding of legibility in a camp can have on aid worker-resident interaction, there are also larger effects of this narrative of refugee passivity on global refugee discourse, which in turn impacts refugee policy. A discussion of these effects helps outline the stakes when considering the ways in which Za'atari's residents were removed from the narratives surrounding its development by both humanitarian leadership and the popular news media. Roland Bleiker, in his piece "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory" states that representations are the medium through which meaning is made public and that this public meaning shapes the socio-political structures within our world.[191] It has been widely discussed that the representation of the refugee is one of the victim—a representation that is dehumanizing in its single-minded focus on trauma.[192] Heather Johnson, in her work on visual representations of refugees in the UNHCR archive, points out that this is a marked departure from representations of refugees following World War II, wherein refugees were considered empowered political figures fleeing Axis Power states for fear of persecution due to the political or ideological beliefs they held.[193] Since the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the UNHCR's involvement in a series of refugee interventions in the Global South, she states the

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[191] Bleiker, Roland. "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory." *Millennium* 30, no. 3 (December 2001): 515. doi:10.1177/03058298010300031001.

[192] Malkki, Liisa H. "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404. https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1996.11.3.02a00050; Nyers, Peter 'Introduction: what's left of citizenship?', *Citizenship Studies*, 8(3), 2004, 203.

[193] Heather L Johnson (2011) "Click to Donate: visual images, constructing victims and imagining the female refugee," Third World Quarterly, 32:6, 1029, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2011.586235

image of a refugee has become one of a "depoliticized victim, emblemized by a 'Third World' woman and child."[194] Core to this idea is also that of an insurmountable number of these refugees—Johnson's work has clearly shown an increase in photos of unidentifiable masses as opposed to individuals concurrent with this shift to an imagined victim from the Global South.[195] In this imaginary, the refugee is "voiceless and without political identity or the corresponding possibilities of agency,"[196] a concept discussed at length by Liisa Malkki.

This abstraction of a victim is strategic—it is used by humanitarian agencies to increase sympathy for the plight of those who have been made victims through no fault of their own and thus increase donations to the cause—but it also has negative effects on the policy surrounding refugee asylum. One clear example of this is the use of instances of trauma as indicative of a 'true' victimhood—most often rape.[197] This is not only exploitative in the ways in which refugees who have experienced this trauma must recount it in order to receive asylum, but also becomes an exclusionary mechanism through which some are denied access to services and safety. Beyond this, political agency under the nation state system is reserved for citizens of said states, and thus the ability of refugees existing outside the system to hold political agency of any kind threatens this system. As such, the representation of the refugee as a victim serves to reinforce the state-citizen relationship that international politics is built on. Lastly, Johnson argues that the visual of the 'masses' in addition to the victimization of refugees encourages a policy of "humanitarian intervention and prevention rather than asylum," allowing Western

[194] Heather L Johnson (2011) Click to Donate: visual images, constructing victims and imagining the female refugee, Third World Quarterly, 32:6, 1029, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2011.586235
[195] Heather L Johnson (2011) Click to Donate: visual images, constructing victims and imagining the female refugee, Third World Quarterly, 32:6, 1027, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2011.586235
[196] Malkki, Liisa. *Purity and Exile*. University of Chicago Press. (1995) 11-12.
[197] Honkala, Nora. "The Rights of Women Seeking Asylum: Procedural and Evidential Barriers to Protection." *Research Handbook on International Refugee Law*, September 27, 2019. https://www.elgaronline.com/abstract/edcoll/9780857932808/9780857932808.00028.xml.

nations to close their borders and "justify aid 'over there' rather than asylum here"[198]—even as they stay deeply involved in the wars that lead to the humanitarian crises themselves.

The story of public health infrastructure in Za'atari is one that has the potential to highlight ways in which refugees are political agents, locating them outside of the stereotypes of victimhood that reinforce power structures contributing to future humanitarian crises. As such, the erasure of this agency is something that not only needs to be interrogated, but corrected in an effort to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which victims of crises are also political and social agents—people who work towards progress in the world around them even when constrained by those humanitarian agencies tasked with helping them.

Looking Forward: Progress in Limbo

Though there are clear issues of misrepresentation of the agents behind the change that took place in Za'atari, it is important not to minimize the positive impact this system has had or the trend of positive development it has contributed to within the camp. It is clear, both from the timeline of camp development and from the narrations of community partners and UN employees that the decision to build the wastewater network became symbolic of the fact that the camp was 'settling' into a more long-term context, and thus it coincided with a number of different changes in the humanitarian culture and Za'atari's composition. In this way, the residential homemaking, once formalized in infrastructural and development projects, led to other kinds of settlement—some of which were, in fact, spearheaded by humanitarian agencies on the ground.

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[198] Heather L Johnson (2011) Click to Donate: visual images, constructing victims and imagining the female refugee, Third World Quarterly, 32:6, 1033, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2011.586235

For example, 2016 saw a systematic overhaul of the community mobilization program from the top down.[199] The new community engagement programming was intended to "close the feedback loop" and "advocate on people's behalf" in an effort to "leverage [NGO employees] power for [refugee] benefit."[200] Aid workers on the ground stated there was an effort to engage more intentionally to collect community input at this particular moment, as "the situation [was] calm and there [was] enough time."[201] These reflections show that the creation of development infrastructure caused a shift in the ways in which the camp was conceptualized. Though implementation of these systems is difficult, the shift points to an increased awareness of the needs of residents of the camp beyond those camp leadership could identify or considered necessary for their biological survival.

There was also a water network built at this time to bring water to each household. As one community partner involved in building the blueprints for the system stated, "After the wastewater network, we started talking about the water network."[202] Aid workers on the ground acknowledged that as there were permanent structures being built and conceptualized, it became more and more difficult to simply consider the camp an emergency setting without any longer-term settlement taking place.[203] In the years since, the internal camp economy has also grown, allowing for a marketplace to be created that has furthered this development process.[204]

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[199] Interview H.3.
[200] Community engagement materials, Oxfam, 2014.
[201] Interview H.1.
[202] Interview H.3.
[203] Interview H.3.
[204] Ledwith, A. "Zaatari: The Instant City | ALNAP." Affordable Housing Institute, 01 Jan 2014 Accessed February 2020. https://www.alnap.org/help-library/zaatari-the-instant-city.

Figure 6: The major market street in Za'atari, nicknamed "Shams Élysées"[205]

These projects have improved the standard of living in Za'atari drastically, but they did

so after a crisis that need not have taken place. Avoiding such a crisis in the future will require a

fundamental shift in the ways in which that the UNHCR and its affiliates view the balance

between livability and legibility. The process through which the wastewater network was created

and the ways that it is described to donors and the popular media show that this shift may still be

a ways off—that the focus of the aid organizations continues to be skewed in the direction of

legibility as opposed to livability. This focus on legibility is cyclical—the ways in which projects

like the wastewater network are described influence perceptions of camp residents creating

disconnects such as the lack of active community engagement in the early years of the camp.

This cycle will continue to be a difficult one to break, but the resilience of refugee populations

such as the residents of Za'atari and their insistence on improving the context they live in is also

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[205] 1 Journey Festival. "The Entrepreneurial Spirit of the 'Shams-Elysees'- Zaatari Refugee Camp." March 29, 2018. Accessed February 2020. https://www.onejourneyfestival.com/blog/2018/3/29/the-entrepreneurial-spirit-of-the-shams-elysees-zaatari-refugee-camp.

something that is not likely to change, and one can hope that infrastructural projects such as this

one can point to ways that the ideals of legibility can be compromised in an effort to provide a

better life for displaced populations.

Conclusion: Rebalancing Livability and Legibility in an Emergency Context

When re-examined, Scott's discussion of legibility in the imperial context can be restructured as a lens through which to view humanitarian decision making, not just in Za'atari, but in refugee camp planning and governance more broadly. A camp is 'legible' to its governing bodies and donors only when it meets the ideal of what such a camp should look like. As such, it must align with the forms of discourse that have historically been used in such contexts, creating cyclical policies and interventions that have historically created camps that are unlivable for those residing within them and discouraging any progress that threatens the institutions that are core to the nation-state system.

These discursive practices have real and tangible impacts on all relevant stakeholders. They result in an erasure of the agency of individual camp residents that further encourages the perception of refugee communities as passive humanitarian subjects, which in turn cyclically reinforces the unchecked and uncriticized power of the humanitarian agencies governing these spaces and discourages active engagement between aid workers on the ground and those they seek to serve. They also allow donor nations to create interventions to support these refugees in other developing countries, even as they refuse to open their own borders to comparable numbers of asylum seekers. Though this case study shows that the actions of these residents—whether they are given credit for them or not—will continue push these interventions forward in the direction of humanity and progress, it also shows the crucial importance of reframing these narratives to highlight this agency.

What is offered here is a look at the way the focus on creating a legible camp impacted the policies in Za'atari. The case study suggests that the fervor with which these ideals were maintained was a product of a system that often privileged nation-state actors' requirements over the experiences of camp residents. Rather than being a product of malevolent intentions on the part of any single humanitarian actor, these priorities rise almost inevitably out of the international system that humanitarianism functions within, which makes aligning interventions with these narratives of legibility and donor politics often seem like the only option for those on the ground. It is the work of camp residents that moved the needle in the direction of camp livability, providing a much-needed rebalancing of camp piorities in favor of a more bearable humanitarian context. Despite the difficulties of the humanitarian system this case study points to, the final product of this rebalancing—a multi-million-euro development project, shows in and of itself that some kinds of progress are being made in the sphere of refugee intervention. Even as recently as ten years ago, this project would have been unlikely to have been funded. Its completion, even when considering how taxing the process was for the residents of the camp, indicates that there may be some cause for optimism for those of us who believe that livability should be the ultimate goal of these agencies and their interventions.

Developmental Changes in the Humanitarian Landscape

As humanitarian crises become more drawn out the average time for which people are displaced by conflict continues to increase[206]—likely in parallel with activism from these communities in the hopes of creating more livable contexts. This has begun to help the

[206] Refugee Studies Centre, Responding to protracted refugee situations: Lessons from a decade of discussion, January 2011, Forced Migration Policy Briefing 6, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4da83a682.html accessed April 2020

humanitarian apparatus shift towards a more open-minded view of development within temporary political contexts, as emergency aid organizations begin forming ties with development agencies. In 2015, only two months after the preliminary steps were taken towards building the wastewater network in Za'atari, a report entitled "A Review of UNHCR's Engagement with the 'Delivering as One' (DaO) Initiative" was released.[207] DaO is primarily a program concerned with the coordination of UN development agencies in situations where they are needed. The UNHCR has committed to working with the UN Development Programme in protracted refugee crises such as the one resulting from the proxy war taking place in Syria throughout the last decade. The report on the UNHCR's work within the DaO initiative states that among other observations, progress in advancing this agenda has been "patchy"[208] and again, "while there is some good practice, it tends to be the exception."[209] It goes on to state that, as has been alluded to, the very institutional makeup of the UNHCR is at odds with the approach of long-term development agencies.

Though the initial findings of this report do not seem indicative of an easy road ahead with regards to such a partnership, its existence also points to a growing development discourse surrounding protracted refugee crises. Residents of the camp were the primary drivers for this development project—even with the high levels of residential activism it is likely that the enormity of such a project was in part made possible by this changing discourse and the gradual recognition that protracted crises require more long-term solutions than those initially envisioned by these agencies. Shifts in discourse must originate somewhere, though, and it seems likely this

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[207] Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for. "A Review of UNHCR's Engagement with the 'Delivering as One' (DaO) Initiative." UNHCR. May 2015. Accessed February 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/research/evalreports/55e068589/review-unhcrs-engagement-delivering-dao-initiative.html.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

cultural shift was one brought on by the residents of these camps themselves as opposed to one that resulted from the spontaneous awakening of the international community to the difficulties faced by individuals who are asked to live with temporary infrastructure and provisions for many years on end. Though this project focuses on residents of a camp that fled Syria, there are no doubt similar clashes that take place regardless of population or placement of a camp as individuals displaced by conflict work to make homes in contexts that discourages any form of permanence.

As the humanitarian apparatus moves towards development, both in the context of Za'atari and more broadly across the international community, the question becomes what the end state of this development is. Development projects such as the wastewater network that has been constructed in Za'atari have the potential to provide self-sustaining economies for the residents of the camp through the provision of both local services and local employment opportunities. Unfortunately, as was shown from comments by UN leadership that community ownership of such systems would be "inappropriate," this does not seem to be the end state goal in Za'atari. As such, it seems even as progress is made towards stabilizing the current situation through infrastructural development, there is a limit to where this progress can be taken.

This is unsurprising due to the set of constraints set by the very makeup of these humanitarian institutions. As products of the prevailing nation-state system it is not only their duty to protect it, but also in their own political self-interest. Refugee humanitarianism, in its current form, could not exist without the concept of the 'refugee,' which is by nature a side-effect of the exclusionary practices of the nation state. The development of autonomous communities that are non-citizens of the countries in which they are resettled, and thus are not subject to the territorial jurisdiction of any of the states within the international order, poses a

direct threat to this infrastructural layout, not only to countries like Jordan, which has allowed

refugee camps to be situated within it with many economic and social caveats, but also for the

humanitarian agencies themselves. Thus, there will always be a "net import of dollars into the

camp"[210] in order to maintain a dependency on these agencies. This project does not argue for or

against the efficacy of the current system. While it is clearly not ideal, few people have put forth

viable alternatives as it currently exists. As such, it is more useful in the current moment to use

this case study to interrogate which components of legibility have proven to be crucial to the

systems functioning, and which components can be compromised in an effort to improve the

livelihoods of camp residents.

What comes next? Rethinking Legibility

The major components of legibility—the characteristics of an intervention that align it

with the historical ideal—are order, temporariness, and residential passivity. Order, in this case,

remains similar to what Scott argues was considered necessary in imperial urban planning, but

more than that, is considered a way to make aid dissemination effective and painless—especially

when aid workers rarely have the time for extensive training. Temporariness has been discussed

here at length—any kind of permanence in intervention can indicate that the crisis itself may be

permanent, evoking an existential fear of the breakdown of the nation-state system in both donor

nations and humanitarian organizations tasked with keeping refugees 'temporary problems.'

Residential passivity is core to the humanitarian apparatus' ability to garner donations through

the re-framing of refugees as 'victims' that need help—often from the West. These narratives are

not only continuations of long histories of missionary work and imperial intervention in the

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[210] Interview H.5.

developing world but also help maintain aid agencies as the ultimate authorities in camp settings, as they make the very idea of any kind of protest against them seemingly impossible.

There are aspects of this framework of legibility that are arguably very necessary in a camp such as Za'atari. Based on the discussions with aid workers on the ground that made up part of this project it became clear that order does, in fact, allow for more effective aid dissemination. This being said, there are many ways in which this order can manifest—there continues to be a functioning system of reporting difficulties and having these difficulties fixed when necessary with the new network of household latrines and though there are now more individual toilets, the problems with them are far easier to fix than the damage that was being done to the communal washblocks. Not only this, but if one takes residential standard of living to be indicative of aid efficacy, the sharp increase in standard of living within the camp seems to indicate that aid is being disseminated far more effectively than it had been with the communal system. The UN has proven time and time again that it can systemize such contexts, and thus create order, even with more long-term infrastructure.

This brings up the discussion of temporariness within a camp context. This is more difficult—as has been discussed, maintaining the temporariness of these refugee crises is core to the nation-state system, and very few countries would allow camps to be built within their borders if they felt as though they would become permanent settlements. Here too, the case of Za'atari points to a compromise. UN bodies were able to reframe the development project as something that would be beneficial for the Jordanian government after the crisis ended—a settlement for low-income Jordanian populations which would have more effective sewage and water systems than those they currently used—both creating an incentive for the government to agree to such a project and, critically, creating a plan for after the crisis that maintained its

temporariness. The case of Za'atari shows that infrastructure need not be temporary for a crisis to continue to be framed as such.

The last component of interventional legibility is the passivity of camp residents. Throughout this case study, this is the only component that has shown to have very little merit as part of the wider system. This is clearly arguable—it is possible that if camp residents were not framed as helpless victims, donations to Za'atari would have decreased, disallowing the construction of the network. This being said, much of the research on donations to Za'atari and the Syrian refugee crisis more generally has shown that the primary reason for the large number of donations from western nations, especially those like Germany which resided in Europe, was a fear that if Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey—the three primary host nations for Syrians following the onset of the war—were underfunded, they would open their borders and allow Syrians to move West.[211] If this discourse is not leading to higher donations, what we are left with is a narrative that continuously dehumanizes victims of war—specifically those that come from the Global South—framing them as unable to take part in the construction of the world that they are living in—even if temporarily. This could not be further from the truth. Residents of Za'atari proved that they were resourceful, engaged, and willing to take risks to create a better future for themselves and their families—even when they shouldn't have had to.

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[211] Kelberer, Victoria "Negotiating Crisis: International Aid and Refugee Policy in Jordan | Middle East Policy Council." Winter 2017. Accessed February 2020. https://mepc.org/journal/negotiating-crisis-international-aid-and-refugee-policy-jordan.

Where the Camp is Left Now

In 2018, there was a widely circulated article on Za'atari entitled "Reimagining Camps as Livable Cities" [212]— the core argument of which was that Za'atari was one of the most livable camps that had ever existed since the conception of the camp itself. Other articles followed suit in news outlets that had once criticized the way the it was run, with many beginning to refer to the camp as "Jordan's fourth largest city,"[213] implying that it was on par with other metropolitan areas on the country. No matter who I asked about the way Za'atari was run now, the answer would always be that it might be the best refugee camp that had ever been built by the UNHCR, with some former residents joking that they never should have left[214]—or saying very seriously that life seemed easier there, for their relatives still behind its borders.[215]

Life in the camp is not easy—one must always remember that the standards for what constitutes a "livable" refugee camp, by virtue of the way the international system privileges those with access to a nation state, will almost always be far lower than the standards for what constitutes a "livable" city. It is true though, that there has been substantial progress made in the last few years. What continues to be missing from acknowledgements of this progress is recognition of the many hours of labor and resistance on the part of the camp residents that drove it. Until we can recognize that labor and critically interrogate the narrative that camp residents are not the driving forces in improving their own lives, case studies such as this one will not have their maximum possible impact—they won't inform international policy or improve intervention

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[212] Elmasry, Faiza. Voice of America (VOA). "Re-Imagining Refugee Camps as Livable Cities" March 22, 2018. Accessed February 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/re-imagining-refugee-camps-livable-cities.
[213] Weston, Phoebe. "Inside Zaatari Refugee Camp: the Fourth Largest City in Jordan." The Telegraph. Telegraph Media Group, August 5, 2015.
[214] Interview R.4.
[215] Interview R.10.

in a manner that effectively rebalances the needs of the international humanitarian community

and those it seeks to serve.

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