

**TIME
AND
POWER
in Azraq
Refugee
Camp**

**A NINE-TO-FIVE
EMERGENCY**

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*To Alia, Qutada, Muawiya, Furat, Ali, Judy, and Watan
That we may meet again, in Syria*

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Preface

Imagine the critical reaction if a camp only provided a grim, gray concrete environment!” Tom Scott-Smith (2020, 329) posed this question in his examination of the bright Yellow Bubble shelter for asylum seekers in France. In many ways, this book has found a complicated response to this question in Azraq. Some forty thousand displaced Syrians reside in a camp that can easily be described as “grim,” “gray,” and “concrete”—and yet, Azraq is also the new humanitarian prototype for housing thousands of displaced people in the Global South.

I set out in this book to make visible an invisible dynamic of displacement: time. I saw in Azraq’s grim, gray concrete environment a future of uncertainty and isolation. I could not predict, however, that a year and a half after completing fieldwork, the outbreak of a virus would turn into a pandemic that would take the lives of more than two million people worldwide. At the time of writing, there have been more than 1.7 million cases of COVID-19 in Jordan (WHO 2022). At the beginning of the pandemic, development programs in Azraq and Za‘tari camps were temporarily put on hold. Only the most essential aid workers visited the camps to run only the most essential operations and distribute hygiene kits, responding to only the most essential needs. For a time, the camps became again what they were in the beginning: a solely humanitarian response. A resident of Azraq sent me a message during this period that stated, “Everyone is just staying in their caravans. We’re terrified.” At first, the physical isolation of the camps seemed to offer some protection, but by March 2020 the disease seeped through Za‘tari’s borders, followed by Azraq’s in September, via aid workers, camp residents, and service providers. Overcrowding in both camps made it all too easy for the virus to spread, causing almost two thousand cases by March 2021 and three deaths by December 2020 (UNHCR 2020a, 2020b; Navlakha 2021). While Jordan quarantined travelers in

five-star hotels at the Dead Sea, infected camp residents and their families were moved to isolated compounds in the camps (Alaoui 2021). Fortunately, Jordan prioritized the distribution of vaccines in both camps during its rollout beginning in January 2021 (Navlakha 2021).

When the United Kingdom imposed strict lockdown measures in the first months of the pandemic in an effort to keep people at home, I found that many of my friends, family, and colleagues were experiencing the very themes I had been writing about in the displacement context for the past several years: isolation from social networks, uncertainty and lack of control, biopolitics and the halting of biographical progress. For many of us, it was not so much the physical isolation but the temporal isolation of “pandemic time” that felt the most insurmountable. The first month of this lockdown in much of the world, March 2020, seemed to stretch on for years, but March 2021 arrived quickly. There was a somber acknowledgment of the one-year mark—many had expected the pandemic to last for a few weeks at most. Many of us felt consistently bored, stagnant in our life plans, and we sought to fill this emptiness through the biographical projects that were within our reach: some threw themselves into work, others renovated their homes, and others married and had children. For those who were unemployed, the mundanity of this abundance of time was an even more pressing burden, as time appeared to pass without so much as looking back, taking with it opportunity and potential for the foreseeable future.

We also waited. We waited for governments to respond, we waited for beds in hospitals, we waited for vaccines, we waited to enter the supermarket, we waited for normal. We celebrated Ramadan, Hanukkah, Diwali, Christmas, and Ramadan again. We had hope, but it was laced with anxiety. Trust became fragile. We were overstimulated by video calls and understimulated by our pandemic routines, and it was exhausting. Our governments told us we would be back to normal by summer, by the holidays, by summer again—if we just behaved ourselves and followed the rules. This was also exhausting.

What I have just described is the closest many of us will feel to the experiences of the displaced individuals included in this book. But of course, the pandemic reached the camps too. Camp residents’ experiences before the pandemic, similar to our experiences during the pandemic, have only been intensified. Whatever existential uncertainty faced those living in the camp before the rise of COVID-19 became even more unbearable once operations in the camp came to a halt. The pandemic is not a “great

equaliser” but an amplifier of “existing inequalities” (Crawley 2021, 5). It discriminates along lines of race, gender, age, and legal and socioeconomic status. The beginning of the vaccine response witnessed northern governments cementing these disparities, blocking much of the South from receiving vaccines while at the same time speaking of the universality of the pandemic: we are “#alonetgether,” Americans were told. The pandemic has acted as an X-ray, “revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built” (Guterres 2020).

There is no doubt that the next few years will see the publication of countless studies on the impact of the pandemic on displaced people and refugee camps. Researchers, and especially ethnographers, now must ask ourselves how to conduct research in the postpandemic world and how to account for the amplified inequalities in the communities we study. The pandemic will have permanent implications for the future of camps, and it is even more imperative that we continue to examine time in this shifted context. The pages that follow describe what I understood to be the reality in Azraq, which now only more cruelly persists through the pandemic. Only time will tell—quite literally—how its power differentials will manifest in the aftermath of COVID-19.

March 2023 marks three years since the coronavirus outbreak and twelve years since the 2011 Syrian uprisings and the subsequent displacement of thirteen million Syrians. The situation for Za‘tari’s and Azraq’s residents looks more dire every day, as the Syrian president appears only to gain more control while the international community looks on. This implores us—academics, humanitarians, policy makers in the Global North and South—to work *alongside Syrians* to find meaningful alternatives to the refugee camp as the “easy” solution.

Time can be a powerful discriminator, something outside our control, but it can also be an opportunity. Anniversaries are opportunities for reflection, and temporal markers of the pandemic and the Syrian uprisings should prompt us to question the natural “order” of things and the parts we play in it. It is as Arundhati Roy (2020) has so eloquently written: “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

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Note on Transliteration

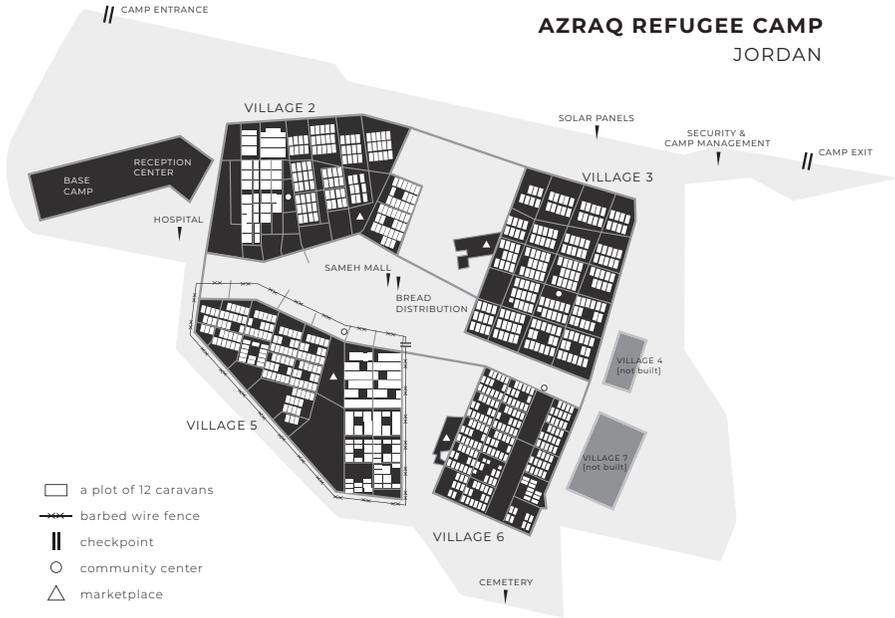
I have transliterated Arabic included in this book based on the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* transliteration system, excluding diacritical marks other than the ‘ayn (‘) and the hamza (?). When quoting from spoken Arabic, I have transliterated according to the dialect of the speaker.

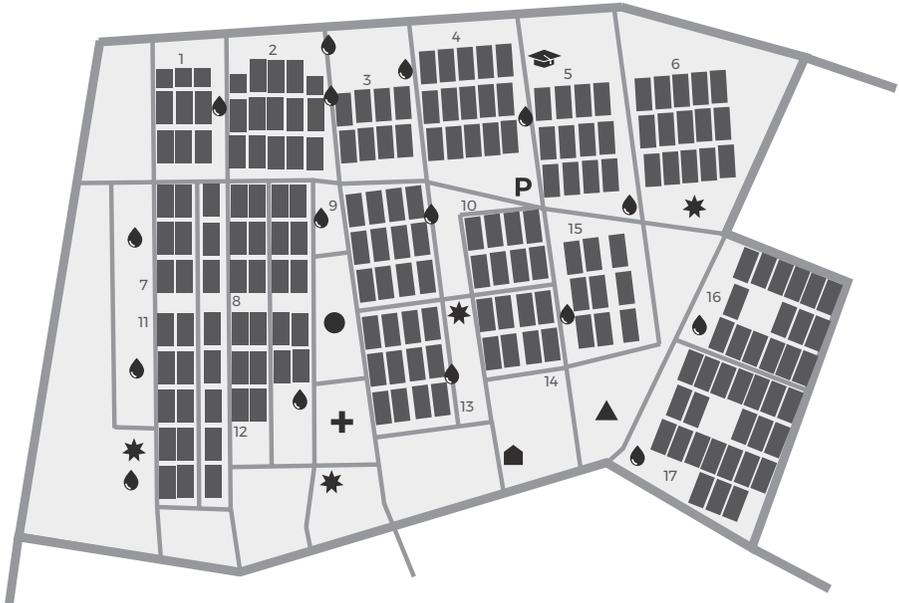


ZAI'TARI REFUGEE CAMP JORDAN



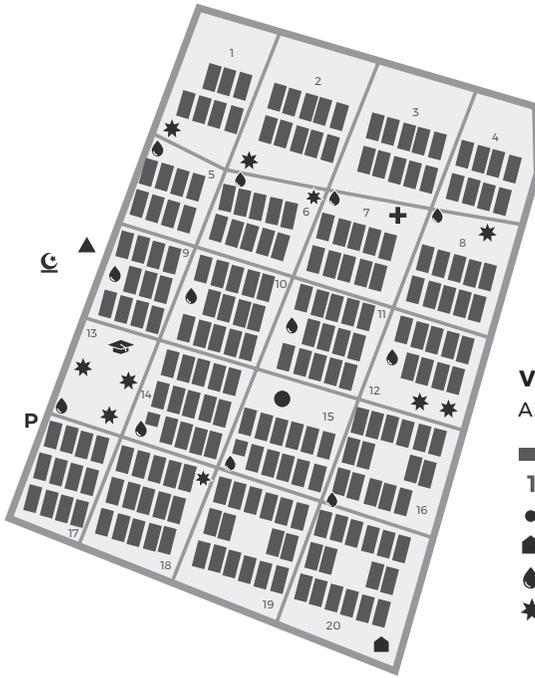
AZRAQ REFUGEE CAMP JORDAN





VILLAGE 2
AZRAQ CAMP

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------|
|  | a plot of 12 caravans | P | community police |
| 1 | block number | + | health clinic |
|  | community center |  | marketplace |
|  | distribution center |  | school |
|  | water tap |  | NGO center |



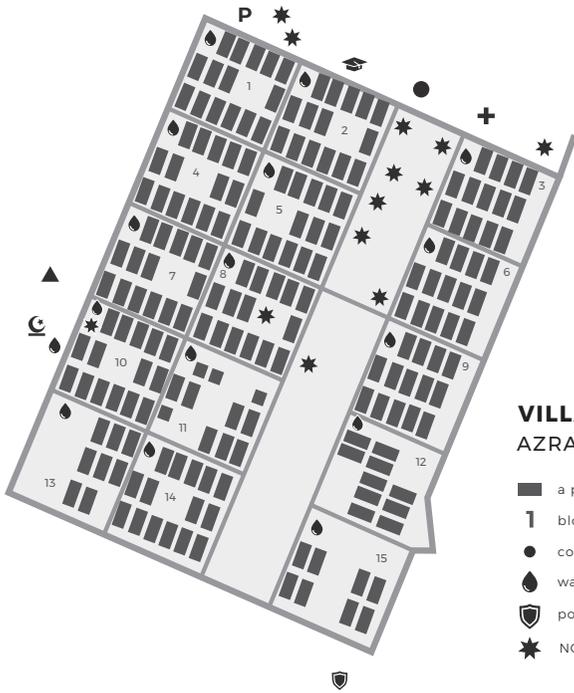
VILLAGE 3
AZRAQ CAMP

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| a plot of 12 caravans | P community police |
| 1 block number | + health clinic |
| community center | marketplace |
| distribution center | school |
| water tap | mosque |
| NGO center | |

VILLAGE 5
AZRAQ CAMP

-  a plot of 12 caravans
-  block number
-  community center
-  distribution center
-  water tap
-  police station
-  checkpoint
-  community police
-  health clinic
-  marketplace
-  school
-  mosque
-  NGO center





VILLAGE 6
AZRAQ CAMP

-  a plot of 12 caravans
-  block number
-  community center
-  water tap
-  police station
-  NGO center
-  community police
-  health clinic
-  marketplace
-  school
-  mosque

Introduction

Why Time?

The camp is time and time is the camp.
—Yousif Qasmiyeh, “*The Camp Is Time*” (2017)

In a caravan some ninety kilometers south of the Syrian border, Fadwa¹ knelt on her prayer mat. I chatted with her colleague, who, like Fadwa, lived in Village 3 and worked at the nongovernmental organization (NGO) center, where we had positioned ourselves directly under an air-conditioning unit. We spoke quietly, mindful of the children who were sleeping in this room that served as a nursery and of Fadwa, who at this moment was finishing her prayers. “As-salamu ‘alaykum, as-salamu ‘alaykum,” she whispered softly as she looked over each shoulder. She sat still a moment and then turned to join our conversation.

“So what topic are you researching here in Azraq?” she asked excitedly, and I gave her the usual response, that generally I am interested in time, how it passes and how it is experienced by people who live and who work in the camp.

“There is no time in the camp [*ma fi wa’t bil-mukhayyam*]!” Fadwa responded. “Our schedules are so full, we are busy all the time.”

“It’s a good thing you are busy, no?” I asked, remembering how others in the camp loathed the idea of sitting at home in their caravan with nothing to do.

“No, it’s not better!” both Fadwa and her colleague remarked in unison. Fadwa continued, “We feel pressure [*daght*] all the time, we don’t have time to rest, we don’t have time to give our minds a break [*ma fi ‘andna wa’t mnurtab, ma fi wa’t mnurayyib balna*].”

I would quickly come to realize from speaking with others like Fadwa just how loaded the concept of time is for Syrians living in Jordan’s Azraq camp. What did Fadwa mean when she stated that “there is no time in the

camp”? She related “clock time”—for her, a daily schedule filled with work, chores, and childrearing—to an abstract concept of time that does not allow for a break from camp life. To say that “there is no time in the camp” not only conveys a sense of busyness in the everyday but could also portray a feeling of isolation from “outside” or “national” time. Time as Fadwa may have experienced it in her hometown of Quriyateyn, Homs, before the war does not exist within Azraq’s borders.

Several kilometers to the south in Village 5, Nour, a spirited Aleppan woman, directed an NGO center. Nour loved her job, where she was in charge of the residents employed at the center and oversaw NGO programming six days a week. She kept busy between work and home life, in which she and her husband were raising six children. Nour told me that she did not like to sit still and hated the thought of not having work to occupy her time: “If I didn’t have my job, I wouldn’t stay here one minute [*law mani musbtagleb ma badil dagigeb*]!” At this time, she had been in Azraq for about two years, a period she likened to “a lifetime [*‘umr*].” Like Fadwa, Nour had a full schedule and had also grown tired of the camp environment; every few months it seemed she renewed her vow to leave the camp, declaring, “That’s it, I’m tired of the camp [*khalas ta‘ibit min al-mukhbayam*]!”

Nour expressed a sense of urgency, not wanting to waste one more “minute” in Azraq if she did not have the opportunity to work because she felt that the camp had already deprived her of a “lifetime.” Her experience was one of busyness juxtaposed to an uncertain duration of time that Fadwa and her colleague lamented in the discussion quoted earlier. Nour and Fadwa both demonstrated that time in the refugee camp is endless and unwanted. While perhaps filled from day to day, Azraq time is also in abundance—there is too much of it—and neither woman has the ability to break from this time conundrum. In both cases, the abundance of time is not a luxury, but an experience of exhausting endurance. To desire a break from camp life is a wish for freedom not only from temporal confines but also from physical ones—that is, to be outside the camp’s borders. Azraq is separated from Jordanian civilization by thirty-five kilometers on either side—again, the abundance of space is not a luxury but a symbol of isolation, as a factsheet of the humanitarian agency CARE identified the camp’s location as precisely “in the middle of the desert” (CARE 2015).

There is a sense among Azraq’s residents that the time they desire—one in which future life trajectories are attainable and remain intact—is slipping away, that the future has been lost even before it has come. Many

felt that the future had already “passed us by [*rah ‘alayna*].” Azraq is the kind of place with simple childbearing facilities and a cemetery, but not much for the life that happens in between.

This book seeks to foreground time in Azraq camp. It aims to examine how a politics of time shapes, limits, or enables everyday life for the displaced and for aid workers in the camp. Why look at time? Displacement is most often a study of space. But in displacement, it is seldom only a question of *where* but also of *when*. Power permeates through temporal politics just as much as it flows through spatial frontiers. To analyze time and space together is to view a more complete picture of how systems are articulated. It also illuminates the ways that such power creates opportunities for resistance and alternative subjectivities. Most importantly, it allows for a more productive dialogue *between the two*: how the camp system shapes lives *and* how camp residents navigate them.

Temporal experience easily carries “a guise of universality” (Cohen 2018, 10). The universality of time—one thing that every living being shares is the experience of time and its simultaneous finitude and infiniteness—lends it the tempting misperception of existing outside the political. But time is, on the contrary, inherently political. The geographer Ian Klinke (2012) argues not only that time is just as political as space; he puts forward the assertion that chronopolitics, the politics of time, must be acknowledged as existing and operating already *within* geopolitics. Following Klinke, anthropologist Laura Bear (2016, 488) traces how ethnography has challenged the idea of a “single chronopolitics”—that is, the concept that time is universally linear. Time is messy, multiplicitous, intangible, everywhere-and-nowhere (see Adam 1998; Chakrabarty 2004; Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2021). Through ethnography, this book explores the multiple intertwining and often contradicting temporalities embedded within everyday life in Azraq camp, folding back layers of permanence and transience to reveal less visible “timescapes” (Adam 1998, 10). Invoking the vocabulary of timescapes enables us to conceive of time and temporal relations, including pace, rhythms, tempos, practices, interactions, bodies, and dimensions, in a more accessible manner.

Following time throughout the camp illuminates what appear to be opposing themes as actually interdependent: emergency and bureaucracy, waiting and resisting, care and control. A focus on space alone would reveal the oppressiveness of the camp—and it is oppressive—but this would be an incomplete examination. The contrasting, but not always opposing,

temporalities experienced by Jordanian aid workers and camp residents within the same space illustrate how Azraq's logic of emergency prioritizes the system over the individual. As is explored throughout these pages, time and space in the camp are interlaced vessels through which a bureaucratized response to forty thousand displaced residents is formulated. I call it a "nine-to-five emergency."

To be clear, that time in the camp is isolated from "outside" time does not imply that the camp is an exceptional space in the Agambenian² sense that it is extraterritorial or, I might also add, extratemporal. Narratives of physical and temporal "stuckness" in scholarship on displacement and in popular media can contribute to the image of the refugee as existing out of place and time. Although Fadwa expressed that there is no time in Azraq, the camp is of course not devoid of time. In his seminal text *Time and the Other*, anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983) critiqued the discipline for situating field sites (and those who occupy them) in a separate temporality from that of the anthropologist. Anthropology, he argued, had historically denied "coevalness": the fact of field sites (often in the South) and those who occupy them existing in "the same Time" (30) as that of the ethnographer (from the North). This denial of coevalness has effectively reinforced the logic of Othering that anthropology often claims to address (Ramsay 2020).

While this book is not intended to exceptionalize the experience of Azraq's residents by framing them as spatial and temporal Others, it also cannot claim that these residents occupy the same temporalities and temporal privileges as those outside the camp. Syrians in Azraq are, after all, kept from participating in the normative biographical trajectories and capitalist temporalities afforded to Jordanian citizens and even many displaced Syrians living in Jordanian cities. To put forward a claim of coevalness in this case would not only center the North as the "referential contemporaneity" (Bevernage 2016, 358), it would fail to recognize the systemic inequalities and power structures that have forced those in Azraq into different tempos and timescapes. Instead, a more productive framework moves beyond the concept of coevalness to acknowledge "heterotemporality," or the idea that multiple temporalities coexist as a consequence of imperial power systems and legacies (Bevernage 2016; Chakrabarty 2008; Jordheim 2014; see also Foucault 1986; Massey 1995). Thus, this book acknowledges how existing vocabularies and logics of exceptionalism, driven both by state governments and humanitarians, enforce a temporal isolation of camp residents

that is too often underexamined, masking the heterotemporal complexity of life in the refugee camp.

In line with this logic, this book's analysis of time in an Arab context also does not support tropes of the Arabic-speaking world as exceptional, as following a different temporality from that of the rest of the world in which "nothing ever happens" (Bauman 1998, 45), as moving more slowly or being "behind" in a teleological sense. On the contrary, while in many ways Azraq is a particular space, the book offers an interrogation of the camp's spatiotemporal politics that can inform future discourse on the management of displacement in other geographical contexts.

Migration Governance in Jordan: The Syrian Refugee Crisis

In March 2011, when Syrians began to protest President Bashar al-Assad's regime, calling for reforms and his ouster, Assad responded with violence. The Syrian conflict has become one of the most violent outcomes of the 2011 Arab uprisings. By the time I first entered Azraq in 2017, almost 12 million of the 23 million Syrians living in Syria had been displaced, with about 6.7 million internally displaced within the country and 6.6 million residing in neighboring countries (USA for UNHCR n.d.). Of these neighboring countries, Turkey has taken in the most displaced Syrians—over 3.5 million—but Lebanon hosts the most displaced Syrians relative to its population: almost one in seven people. Jordan, with a population of almost 10 million, is host to more than 1.5 million displaced Syrians, although only 0.5 million have registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN organization responsible for refugee response.³

Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have taken varying approaches to hosting displaced Syrians, but those exiled in any of the three countries all experience some level of precarity. Lebanon, while requiring formal paperwork from Syrians in order to grant them entry into the country, exercised a "no-policy-policy" (Nassar and Stel 2019, 46; see also Ghaddar 2017; Hamdan and Bou Khater 2015; El Mufti 2014), refusing to recognize displaced Syrians as refugees in the legal sense. It also forbade the creation of formal camps in light of the protracted situation of exiled Palestinians in the country. The support provided to displaced Syrians living within Lebanon's borders remained informal and inconsistent until 2014, when the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan was adopted, a policy that did little to support Syrians

and instead reinforced the government's tactical "institutional ambiguity" (Nassar and Stel 2019) by "formalizing informality" (Lebanon Support 2016). Within this context of uncertainty, informal settlements emerged (Sanyal 2017), and by the end of 2014, 1,421 small settlements housed usually not more than a thousand occupants each (Clarke 2018, 626). The central government's inconsistent response to the displaced enabled local governors' almost complete authority over the camps in their jurisdiction and, thus, an increased securitization and monitoring of Syrian communities at both the national and local levels. Unable to work in the formal market, many Syrians have taken to the informal market, and child labor and exploitation are prevalent.

Turkey, on the other hand, established official camps along its borders with Syria from the outset of the crisis. While the vast majority of Syrian refugees in the country live in urban areas, today there are twenty-two camps for Syrian refugees with populations ranging between five hundred and thirty-one thousand. The tent and container camps in Turkey have been described as "five-star" (International Crisis Group 2013, 9), providing "classrooms, hospitals, areas for recreation, sport, and religious worship, laundry and television rooms, meeting tents, and even hair salons" (Chatty 2018, 230). But other scholars have pointed to the draconian measures through which Turkey operates the camps. The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, which manages the camps under the supervision of the prime minister, "declined repeated offers of assistance from UNHCR and international NGOs, insisting that it was able to run and manage the camps on its own" (Clarke 2018, 625). Close surveillance of the camp populations through security cameras is central to how the government enforces order. This panoptic surveillance confronts camp residents with the constant threat of deportation, as exhibited through a consistent practice of using security camera footage to identify and deport "troublemakers" (625), or demonstrators, back to Syria. The camps are also structured according to the "logic of high-modernist urban planning" (625), featuring symmetrical rows and open and visible streets and paths.

From mid-2012, the Jordanian government sought to keep all newly arrived Syrians seeking refuge in camps to avoid an influx of displaced people into its urban sites and labor market. However, only about 131,000 Syrians, a mere 20 percent of Syrians who have formally registered as refugees, reside across three camps (see figure 1) as of 2022⁴: Za'tari (81,000), Azraq (44,000), and the Emirati Jordanian camp (6,000). After the extremist

group ISIS, also known as Daesh, claimed responsibility for a suicide attack that killed several Jordanian soldiers at the Syrian border in 2016 (Sweis 2016), Jordan closed its borders with Syria completely until 2018, at which point movement resumed for nationals but not for Syrians fleeing south.

Jordan has historically, even before statehood, been “a way of getting somewhere, a path between power centers, the border between adjoining worlds” (Day 1986, 10). While perhaps lacking the rich cultural prestige of Syria, Jordan can similarly be understood as a “refuge state” (Chatty 2018). Within the last century, Jordan has hosted those fleeing conflict in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Sudan. Palestinians who fled Israeli occupation in 1948 and 1967 and settled in Jordan created camps that today blend into the surrounding built environment of Amman’s sprawling hills. These camps, built upward to make room for each new generation, continue to receive aid from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The camps claim a significant political presence in the country, allowing their residents to maintain a separate Palestinian identity that has historically caused tension with Jordanians.⁵ Narratives of Jordanian sovereignty have always been inextricably linked to the presence of displaced populations within its borders, and the Palestinian “precedent” has caused the state’s increasing reluctance to accept stateless people seeking refuge since then. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Jordan accepted three major movements of Iraqis as “guests,” not granted the official rights or protection that come with refugee status. Iraqis who were not already affluent before displacement moved into Jordan’s poorer urban communities, most notably throughout East Amman. Between Jordan’s inadequate acknowledgment of its displaced Iraqi communities and a fatigued international response to the Iraqi conflicts, Iraqis in the country received, and continue to receive, little assistance. For comparison, the humanitarian response to Iraqis exiled in Jordan between 2006 and 2009 drew in \$50 million in international funding, while the peak of the Syrian refugee “crisis” in 2013 would attract \$668.8 million (Zyck and Armstrong 2014, 7).

In the first years of the Syrian conflict, displaced Syrians were generally welcomed into Jordan, both by citizens, who often refer to Syrians as their “brothers,” and by the government, which greatly benefits from the influx of financial aid. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Jordanian government has attempted to use Syrian communities as scapegoats for preexisting economic strife and systemic corruption (Baylouny 2020).

Some Jordanians, and even Palestinians, echo this xenophobia with the narrative that *Syrians are taking our already limited jobs and resources*. Ola, a middle-aged Palestinian resident of Amman, expressed to me that she felt bad for Syrians, but “Jordan doesn’t even have enough for us, how can we give to Syrians?” She came from a family twice displaced (from Palestine to Kuwait in 1948 and from Kuwait to Jordan in 1991) but did not make any connection between her displacement experience and that of Syrians today. Others who once welcomed Syrians with open arms, not expecting to still be hosts a decade later, have had their patience wear thin. In this way, time has played into the already existing contestations of space, with overcrowding in urban neighborhoods that have accommodated displaced Syrians and the presence of Syrians in the (mainly) informal economic arena (see L. Turner 2015).

Such are the frustrations that the Jordanian government defensively plays into when shaping its discourse on refugee response and other related policy matters. In 2018, for instance, the government ended the bread subsidy, and bread consequently doubled in price. To justify this decision, the government stated that the subsidy had benefited only displaced Syrians and other foreigners, and that Jordanians would receive what money would be saved (Al-Khalidi 2018). Not all Jordanians accepted this justification, however, and would protest this and other unpopular economic policies a few months later (see Schwedler 2022). Indeed, a survey conducted by the *Washington Post* in 2018 illustrated that the majority of Jordanians did not blame displaced Syrians for the country’s poor economic situation, even if they believed that hosting them contributed to its deterioration (Arababa’h and Williamson 2018; see also Ali 2021; Baylouny 2020).

The domestic narrative about Syrian refugees formulated by the Jordanian government has been mirrored at the global level, in which hosted Syrians have become geopolitical pawns in the bargain for financial aid. Jordan, these narratives claim, has shouldered a burden too heavy to carry on its own. In 2017 Jordanian prime minister Hani Mulki warned EU and Gulf countries that waning international aid would result in “further spillover of the crisis” (*Jordan Times* 2017b), citing also recurring terrorist attacks at the Syria-Jordan border. *Jordan is managing to keep chaos at bay, but only just so*, was his underlying message to states that prefer to pay to keep displaced people out of their countries. In 2018 an editorial in the government-owned *Jordan Times* declared that the state had reached its limit in hosting exiled Syrians on behalf of the international community:

“Enough is enough!” (*Jordan Times* 2018a). The state plays into the image of Jordan being “forever on the brink” (Schwedler 2022, 11), surrounded by conflict in neighboring Iraq, Palestine, and Syria, to project a consistent need for the regime’s stability into the future. This narrative works both at the global level (ensuring ongoing support for the regime from historical allies like the United States and United Kingdom) and on the domestic front (garnering popular support for the regime especially in the shadow of the Arab uprisings). It is as much a *temporal* discourse as it is a geopolitical one (see Schwedler 2022).

The mechanics of Jordan’s refugee response involve “many hands” (Ali 2021) of the state: numerous government institutions and bureaucracies, the security sector, and a helping hand from international organizations. Following the logic of unending crisis at Jordan’s door, security is a top priority. The King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Centre is a large military ground outside Amman used to train the Jordanian military through combat simulations. Importantly, the center features a mock refugee camp, which the state justifies as preparation for potential outside attacks on the Syrian camps. However, when camp boundaries are enforced by the Jordanian military regarding who can *leave* just as much as who can enter, the line here is blurred between “who secures, who is secured and who is secured against” (Schuetze 2019, 207). Sponsored by a private US security firm, the training center conflates terrorism and refugees, identifying displaced Syrians as a “security threat.”

It is within this context that “managers of displacement” (Farah 2020, 130), such as international NGOs and UN organizations, operate. As a result, humanitarian organizations end up filling an ambiguous role in migration politics between aiding and disciplining refugees (El Qadim et al. 2021). Since 2012, Jordan has witnessed an “NGO-ization of humanitarianism” (Farah 2020, 133), driven by more than 450 local and international NGOs (*Jordan Times* 2017a) that have collectively defined Jordan’s migration governance.

The aid sector relies on visibility in order to sustain funding for its operations, and refugee camps are key devices to achieving greater visibility. The nonencampment of displaced Iraqis had relieved Jordan of its responsibility to them, but it also meant less international aid (Peteet 2011; Seeley 2010; L. Turner 2015). Jordan benefits from the visibility of its Syrian refugee camps, which the state frames as “emblems of burden” (Ali 2021, 9) to the international community. At the same time, the camps

function as devices of seclusion and exclusion for their residents to serve national security interests (see S. Turner 2016a). A displaced Syrian living in Amman told me, “Really, you don’t need the camps. One hundred thousand-plus people, it is not that much. But Jordan will never get rid of the camps or tell people to leave. They need the camps to show every once in a while that they are doing something. And Azraq . . . Jordan can always get people for that camp. If they need to, they will just open Rukban again and then fill the camp.” His reference to the Rukban alludes to the 2016 transfer of ten thousand Syrians from the closed Rukban border zone to Azraq camp. His commentary aligns with the type of discussions taking place among NGO directors in Azraq camp, such as in one meeting in which a director declared, “With the refugees will come the [aid] money!”

Creating the Ideal Camp: “Lessons Learned” from Za’tari

When violence in Syria escalated in the beginning of 2012, Syrians fled the country’s southern region of Dar’a in the thousands. Many set up camp next to the village of Za’tari near the northern Jordanian city of Mafraq, where they were met by the UNHCR. Over the course of two weeks, the encampment loosely materialized as Za’tari refugee camp (see figure 2). What would quickly become known as the “fourth-largest city in Jordan”—at least among journalists in the Global North (see Doucet 2013; Herlinger 2016; Weston 2015)—started out as UNHCR-branded canvas tents pitched in an empty plot of muddy desert. According to the *Za’tari 2013 Safety and Security Report* (UNHCR 2014b), the last seven days of January 2013 saw an average of 3,270 individuals registering in the camp each day, and by spring of that year, the population had ballooned to 200,000 people across five square kilometers. By mid-2014, just after Azraq camp was officially opened, Za’tari’s population had dropped to 80,000, due to residents moving to urban cities or being transferred to Azraq.

Za’tari’s first years were unstable and sometimes violent for both camp residents and humanitarian staff (Arraf 2012; Kadri and Rudoren 2013). These first years would come to shape not only Za’tari’s environment but also Azraq itself. We can better understand Azraq’s system when examined within the context of Za’tari’s evolution.

In the first weeks of January 2013, resident-led riots and demonstrations in Za’tari were common in response to heavy snowfall affecting service distribution, shelter, and heating. Until then, the Jordanian military had been responsible for camp security but was not consistently present in the camp