Informal Settlements as Social Places of Life

Informal encampments constitute a fast and cheap sheltering solution for refugees. Due to their temporary nature, few studies aim at exploring these spaces and understanding the dynamics of their evolution. Yet, what starts as transitional and temporary often morphs into a place of social production and identity formation with its own set of interactions, tensions, and power structures. This article aims at understanding Informal Tented Settlements (ITSs) as places of life with a defined hierarchy and organizational systems. It also seeks to analyse the roles of various stakeholders in the emergence and evolution of these settlements.

Following the Syrian crisis, more than one million people found refuge in Lebanon. The Lebanese Government (LG) adopted a non-encampment policy, which made it necessary for refugees to adopt different sheltering and housing solutions¹. Almost

18% of refugees live in Informal Tented Settlements (ITSs) located mainly in the North and in the Beka'a governorates, two regions close to the Syrian border. The regions are characterized by large agricultural plots where thousands of Syrian temporary labourers used to work and live in tented settlements prior to the war. Since 2011, these seasonal workers have become residents and host family members and friends who fled the war in Syria, and tents proliferated, drastically changing the landscape in areas with high refugee density.

If we compare them to 'invisible' urban settlers (like some refugees living in Nabaa hidden behind shops), refugees in ITSs are less vulnerable due to their visibility, as they can easily receive aid and protection. However, in some cases, especially in small and isolated ITSs, settlements' visibility stigmatizes refugees and exposes them to discrimination and violence, owing to the widespread perception that these environments are places of extreme poverty, insalubrity, and crime². Built along the roads in rural areas, ITSs are roughly identical to each other. Shelters appear on the outside as a series of heterogeneous temporary constructions, formed with heaps of panels, tarpaulins, and other recovered materials covering erratically precarious wood or metal structures.

ترجم من الإنكليزية

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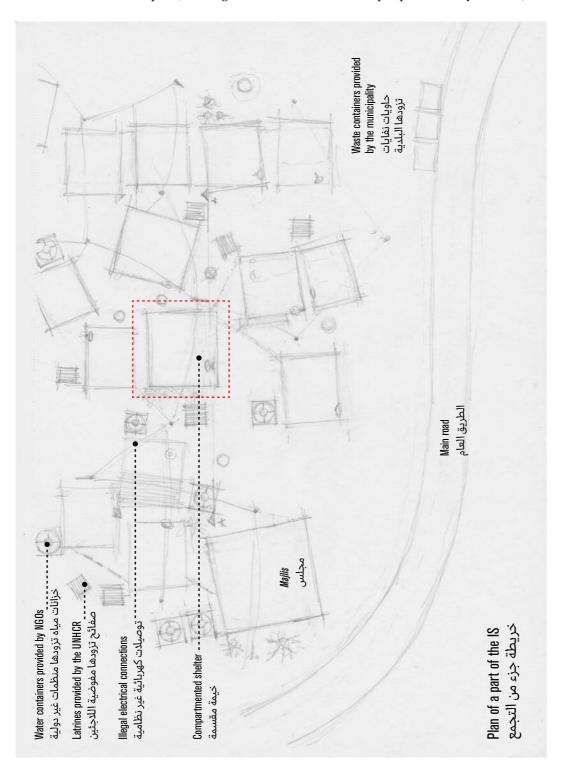
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في هذه الجمعات على التحكم بالفضاء العام، تباينات ملحوظة غمنها سلطة كل من الأطراف السؤولة عن تنظيم وضع اللاجئين نهم ، تاييغتاا منه ببسة (قلمعتسلا الهلاه دلنبا قينقة). الستويات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية، ومن وجهة نظر معمارية عن الآخر، كما تختلف كل خيمة أو ملجأ داخل التجمع، وفق لفلتخ لهنه عمرها إلى ثماني سنوات تظهر انّ كل واحد منها يختلف خفيفا وعشوائيا فوق التجمع. دراسة معمقة لهذه التجمعات علكة قنقركم ، هيخاا نيب قهائنتااه قتقهٔ الميبشخاا فلمعكا نيب قيائلههرائية. تمرياتيا .قيليناتان في مستوعبات وعلب بالاستيكية. تماليا الكابرانية أو دمجت من قبل اللاجئين داخل الخيام. ينمو عدد قليل من بناح بالم تعفوه ويثبكا اللاجئين وضعية للإباد ولمنا أو البني العدنية التي غالباً ما تفتقر إلى القوة والتانة . مراحيض وغيرها من المواد العاد استخدامها التي تغطي الخشب التداعي التناسقة، مكونة عموماً من الصفائح والأقمشة البلاستيكية، بعضاً،إذ تبدو الخيم من الخارج كسلسلة من البني المُوقتة غير التي تبني قرب الطرق الفرعية في المناطق الريفية يشبه بعضها وغير نظيفة وتعج بالجرائم. أن تجمعات الخيم غير المطمة قييقة نكلمكا منه تأا نح قهشتنا قبكفاا بببس ، بفنعااه بييمتلا والعزولة، فإنّ مرئية هذه التجمعات تضر اللاجئين وتعرضهم والحماية. لكن في بعض الحالات، خصوصاً في التجمعات الصغيرة قينالسانها تالعدلسلا للع ببكآ قاههسب لهمعاا نهعيلمتسي فإ سكنية مثل متاجر والورش والعامل، فإن وضعهم أقل هشاشة، عيد نِالبه فِي نهشيعي نياناا مُحاخ مُيالهمعاا بَهَاللَّا فِي النَّامِشُدِ

لهم هربوا من الحرب في سوريا، فتكاثر عدد الخيم، مما غيّر بشكل ملحوظ الشهد العمراني في الناطق التي تتميز بكثافة عدد اللاجئين. إذا قارنا هؤلاء اللاجئين باللاجئين غير الرئيين الذين يسكنون

فاتن قيقانو قيدلمتجا نكلمأل قمانيد تالعمجتا White latrines marked by the UNHCR logo are either located near individual shelters or integrated by refugees inside tents. Scarce plants grow sporadically in plastic containers and pots. Electrical cables hang between makeshift wood posts, creating a scattered

canopy. A thorough study of these 7-years-old settlements however shows that they now vary from one to another, as do shelters within each settlement on economic and social levels, and from an architectural and an urban perspective. Many variables, including

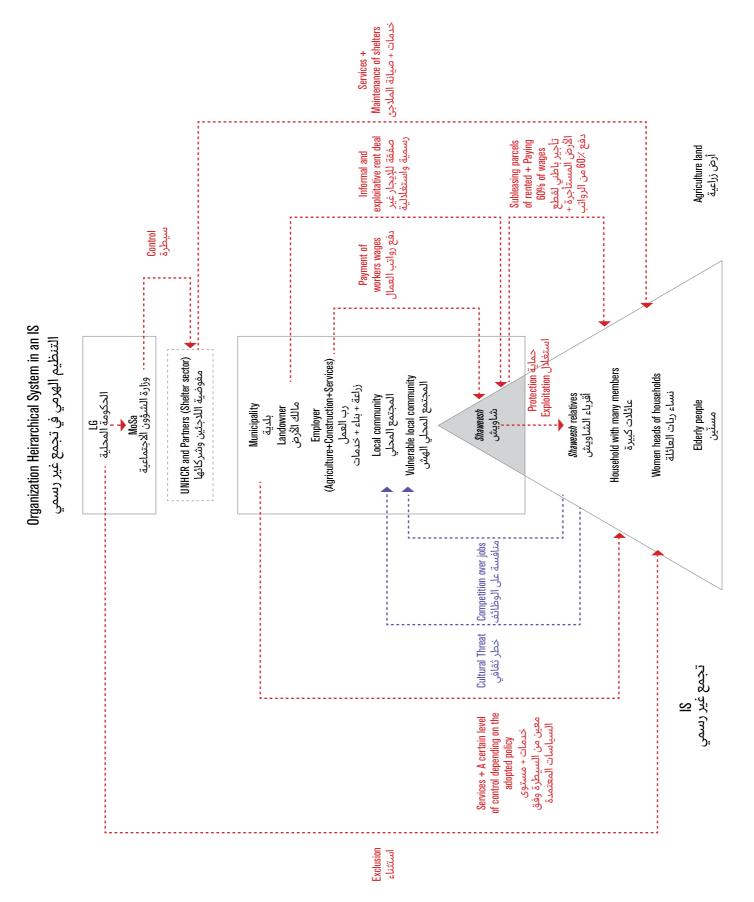


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البلديات بببب غياب السياسات الواعدة للتعلقة بإدارة أزمة اللاجئين من قبل الحكومة اللبنانية، خاصة عند بداية الأزمة، منحت البليات هذه المشواية. اختلفت بنائا السياسات العتمدة من

قينعماا فالمكأا

the power of different stakeholders over space cause these disparities^{3,4.} This article aims at understanding ITSs as places of life where refugee communities form a defined hierarchy, and develop organizational systems and creative coping mechanisms⁵. It also seeks to analyse the role of different stakeholders in the organization of these places and the dynamics of their evolution.



Stakeholders

Municipalities

Due to the absence of a clear LG policy at the outset of the crisis, management of the refugee situation was delegated to municipalities. Policies adopted by municipalities vary from totally exclusionary in some areas - a complete refusal to host refugees - to permissive and welcoming in others. This is due to many factors including: the need for low-wage workers or lack thereof; the cultural and religious fabric of residents; the instrumentalization of refugees to attract development projects financed and implemented by NGOs; the ambition of realising specific political agendas; the complacency of municipalities with residents who benefit from renting agricultural land or other accommodations to settle refugees; poor logistics or weak governance within municipalities; and others. Dissimilarities in policies are causing the ghettoization of Syrian communities in some regions and, as a result, giving rise to a feeling of expropriation within host communities. In such contexts, the level of unemployment amongst refugees and amongst vulnerable Lebanese has increased considerably because most refugees don't enjoy a legal status and their freedom of movement is limited, thereby constraining them to seek livelihood opportunities close at hand to their living quarters.

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Landowners

Refugees' occupation of their settlements is often based on informal and precarious rental agreements with Lebanese landowners⁶. Interviews conducted with local authorities and refugees show that rents can become exploitative, especially when, in order to exert greater control on refugees' location, municipalities forbid them from moving their settlements from a specific lot. In some cases, proximity of ITSs to villages generates fear amongst local communities, who request their eviction. This may occur as municipalities have the legal authority to impose removal or displacement of ITSs⁷ although they seldom do so in order to avoid tensions with landowners who obtain far greater benefits from renting the land than from agricultural production.

MoSA, UNHCR and NGOs

The LG entrusted management of the crisis to the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA). Due to restrictive rules imposed by the MoSA aiming to prevent permanency in ISs, the UNHCR and other NGOs including UN-Habitat are only allowed to ensure the maintenance of shelters. Consequently, actions on shelters, such as waterproofing or the reinforcement of structures are not durable and have to be repeated yearly, costing important sums of money at a time when aid is dramatically decreasing. Moreover, MoSA's prohibition of building new shelters despite the occasional increase in the number of refugees (newly born children, new arrivals of refugees or their displacement from one settlement to another) is causing overcrowding and lack of privacy amongst refugees.

الخصوصية بين اللاجئين.

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وزارة الشؤون الإجئين وللجئين والمنظمات غير الحكومية

البلية تتمتع بالحق القانوني لفرض هذا الإيجار على اللاجئين، أ فهي غالباً ما تتجنب فعل ذلك تجنباً لغضب أمحاب الأرض الذين سنةفيرن أكثر من تأجيرها للاجئين بدلاً من زراعتها.

The shaweesh

The shaweesh is the camp manager who protects and simultaneously exploits and controls. He is usually Syrian himself with legal documentation, which allows him freedom of movement and affords him the possibility of dealing with Lebanese authorities in matters regarding the settlement. He arranges employment deals with land managers and often benefits from 40% of workers' wages, which explains why he favours renting shelters to families with numerous young and healthy members who can potentially work and thus constitute a source of income for him.

He also settles the agreement concerning the land rental with the landowner and subleases to each household – sometimes reaping a profit to himself – parcels of the land required for the occupation of each shelter.

What the interior space reveals

After 7 years of life in ITSs, a social hierarchy among inhabitants is clearly expressed by the specificities of each habitation: the dimensions of the shelter, space layout, and interior design. The shaweesh and his close relatives usually live in the largest and most comfortable shelters. In such shelters, the space is compartmented according to the number of family members and to functional requirements. Despite the MoSA and municipalities' ban for any permanent elements, in most shelters, the floor is a concrete slab covered with a patchwork of tiles or carpets. There are makeshift kitchens, home appliances, and basic furniture such as mattresses, shelves, and in 'richer' settlements, second-hand beds, sofas, and closets. Colourful fabric usually covers the structure on the inside, with draperies, thin cords, and tassels. Wood panels distributed by NGOs are used for partitions and doors, sometimes sculpted in the shape of arches. The most precarious shelters are occupied by old people or female heads of households. They are single-spaced habitations with mud floors and enjoy very little of the commodities described above.

Little attention is paid to the cleanliness of outdoor areas. However, hygiene is a very important aspect in the life of the refugees inside their habitations:

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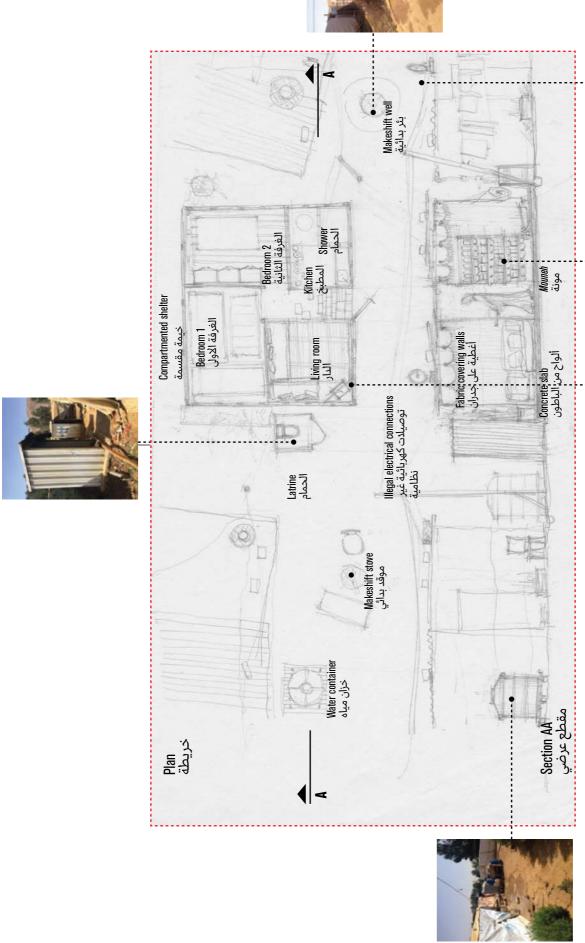
In big settlements, one of the largest tents is a majlis where honourable guests are hosted and special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and religious feasts take place. The interior walls and ceiling are covered with appealing fabric, carpets lay on the floor, and mattresses are arranged against the walls in a U-shape. In the centre of this space is a stove with traditional accessories for coffee ceremonial, a testimonial to Syrian hospitality.

Observing the interior space of shelters uncovers noticeable class differences. However, on the outside, shelters commonly reflect the same precarious appearance making some question whether this is the reproduction of a cultural architectural feature, traditional Islamic houses being almost similar on the outside, hidden behind discrete walls and, on the inside, revealing the social class and life style of their

القماش الذي يغطي جدران الخيمة ويغسلن الارغيية بالماء أمر مهم جدا. تطوي النساء كل يوم السجاد والفرش ويرفعن الخارجي تلقي قليلاً من الإهتمام، لكن داخل الخيمة النظافة أرضها من طين وفيها قليل جداً مما ذكرناه سابقاً. نظافة الفضاء ربات العمل مع أطفالهن. هذه الخيم مكونة من غرفة واحدة، أقواس. أكثر السلكن فقرا هي التي يسكنها الكبار في السن والنساء تستخدم هذه الألواج أيضاً كأبواب يتم نحتها أيضاً على شكل الخيم بواسطة ألواج الخشب التي توزيعها مفوغية اللاجئين. البني الداخلية، مع تزيين في البرادي والحبال والشربات، وتقسيم نالاغني توجد اسرّة وكنبات وخزائن. وعادة ما يغطي قماش ملون تالحجان في الوحدات للمنها كالفرش والرفوف. في الوحدات في معظم الساكن هي من الإسمنت مغطاة بسجاد أو بلاط! نلاحظ بن الله المأاء لمنا الله المناع لمن الله المحتاث الماليا المناع المناطبا المناع المناطبة المن وحاجيات أفراد العائلة. على الرغم من منع وزارة الشؤون الحلية راحة يسكنها عادةً الشاويش وأقاربه، وهي تقسم حسب عدد وطريقة التمميم الداخلي والتزيين. الساكن الأكبر والأكثر تظهر من خلال خصوصيات كل خيمة (أو وحدة سكنية) الحجم، التراتبية الاجتماعية الخاصة باللاجئين القيمين في مجتمع معين

تصميم الخيم الداخلي

تأجير الخيام للعائلات التكونة من عدد كبير من الأشخاص القادرين على العمل، فهم يشكلون مصدر دخل له. كذلك يشرف على الاتفاقات التعلقة بتأجير أرض الجمع ويؤجر بدوره لكل عائلة من اللاجئين الساحة اللازمة لبناء سكن أو خيمة عليها، وغالباً ما بأخذ جزءاً من البلغ الذي تدفعه كل عائلة ربحاً له.









inhabitants, or simply the only way shelters can be built given the limitation of available materials.

Space appropriation and power over space

Given the flexibility of the structure of shelters, refugees are often able to transform them and adapt them to their needs. Appropriating their space represents an act of resilience: with very limited means, refugees transform shelters into "homes". Space management and cultural and personal markings are conditionned by many factors including the availability of land, households' financial situation, the power-based relation of refugees with local authorities and the shaweesh, the level of humanitarian assistance, the duration of stay, and the place of origin.

In specific cases, although refugees could afford renting apartments or rooms, they prefer living in ITSs with members of their community. In fact, many of the respondents I interviewed declared that despite the instability and the precariousness that characterize these structures, living in ITSs gives them a sense of freedom and power over their living space, something they wouldn't enjoy if they were scattered in different locations in urban areas where they would be restrained due to proximity and tensions with host communities and to the control and regulations imposed by local authorities.

idyl إلى مرونة بنية الساكن، فإن اللاجئين غابيا ما يتمكنون من تحويلها وتطويعها وفق حاجاتهم. امتلاك الكان يمثل عملاً مقاوماً: مع قدراتهم الحدودة يحوّل اللاجئون الساكن المُفتة الله «منازل». إنّ التقسيم الداخيل والتعبير الثقافي والشخمي داخل الكان تحددها العديد من العوامل منها توفر الأرض التي يني عليها المحمع، والقدام العلائة، ونوع علاقة اللاجئين

(دلىففاا را] دلمتنكل بالإعلان (المعور بالانتماء إلى المكان)

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S. Lefebvre, H. 1972. Le droit à la ville, Éditions anthropos.

† Ripoll, F., & Veschambre, V. 2005. L'appropriation de l'espace:
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¹ Thrner, L. 2015. Explaining the (non-)encampment of Syrian refugees: security, class and the labour market in Lebanon and Jor-

بالسلطات الحلية والشاويش (الذي يملاك السلطة في داخل التجمع)، ومستوى توفر الساعدات الإنسانية، ومدة البقاء في التجمع، وللكان الذي نزح اللاجئ منه.

 $^{^1}$ Turner, L. 2015. Explaining the (non-)encampment of Syrian refugees: security, class and the labour market in Lebanon and Jordan, $Mediterranean\ Politics,\ 20(3),\ 386-404$

² Agier, M. 2011. From refuge the Ghetto is born: Contemporary figures of Heterotopias, *The Ghetto-Contemporary Global Issues* and Controversies, 265.

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⁴ Ripoll, F., & Veschambre, V. 2005. L'appropriation de l'espace: sur la dimension spatiale des inégalités sociales et des rapports de pouvoir, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

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