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The (Re)Making of a Palestinian Ghetto

Syrian Displacement and Urban Transformation in the Beddawi Refugee Camp

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Introduction

In the beginning of 2018, UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) announced that they had chosen the Palestinian refugee camp Beddawi as the site for the implementation of an ambitious camp improvement process and project. The more than sixty-five-year-old refugee camp was afflicted with a variety of urban problems, high levels of unemployment, and 'security'-related challenges. Camp improvement programmes (CIPs) are area-based approaches (ABAs) implemented by UNRWA that focus on improving and addressing the complex urban challenges that are emerging in Palestinian refugee camps, which conventional humanitarian approaches are unable to address. CIPs use participatory processes to develop innovative visions for improving Palestinian camps while identifying and implementing community priorities. UNRWA is also empowered through this process to implement large-scale projects while acquiring new funding from sources beyond its core budget, which is approved by the UN General Assembly on a yearly basis. Given that UNRWA's core budget has been insufficient in the past 10 years to cover UNRWA's basic services to the Palestinian refugees, CIPs open new possibilities for improving living conditions within Palestinian camps.

However, three years after initiating the project and halfway through its implementation phase, UNRWA suspended the CIP in Beddawi camp due to a variety of local conflicts. Discussions with various professionals and community members who worked on this project referred to the chaotic conditions in Beddawi camp and the ease with which local 'strongmen' can halt projects to demand personal favours or shares of contracts. Members of the community participatory platform routinely received physical threats, and local camp authorities and notables were unable to protect the participatory process or implementation of the projects. It was thus common to hear descriptions of Beddawi as a 'ghetto', which also goes hand-in-hand with descriptions of Palestinian camps as urban ghettoes in both media and academic contexts (Ashour 2012; Agier 2011; Ron 2003).

During the past fifteen years, Beddawi camp had undergone major social and urban transformations. Due to conflicts in both Lebanon and Syria, thousands of refugees arrived in Beddawi camp seeking shelter. Today almost half the camp's population is Syrian refugees. In order to accommodate them, new high-rise buildings, some reaching eleven stories, are emerging within the camp's dense and overcrowded urban fabric. Although a lucrative rental market is emerging in Beddawi camp, its physical urban fabric is deteriorating, and a large percentage of the homes in the camp suffer from a lack of natural light and ventilation.

This research is based on my involvement with the Beddawi camp improvement programme as an urban planner during 2018–19. The chapter also builds on interviews that Sara Kayed in 2020–21 conducted with camp residents, building owners, and real estate developers in Beddawi. The chapter first discusses some of the historic and contemporary tensions between local political activism in the camp and international humanitarian assistance in the context of Beddawi. I then detail the urban and social transformations that have changed Beddawi over the past fifteen years. More specifically, this chapter discusses the emergence of a new building typology in the camp, known as 'commercial buildings' (Ar. *mabani tijariya*), that is playing a central role in the densification, social transformation, and deterioration of the urban fabric of Beddawi. While local displacement and population growth led to the emergence of the commercial buildings, the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011 also significantly impacted them. Finally, the chapter aims to discuss the potential and limitations of area-based approaches and the lessons from camp improvement programmes in Beddawi and other Palestinian camps.

The Formation of Beddawi Camp

Beddawi is one of twelve Palestinian refugee camps established in Lebanon after Zionist armed militias forcefully expelled Palestinians from historic Palestine with the goal of creating a Jewish state in May 1948. This ethnic

cleansing (Pappe 2007) project resulted in the expulsion of 80 per cent of the indigenous population from their homes and lands in what then became the state of Israel, with around one hundred thousand (Sayigh 1979) Palestinians arriving in Lebanon. The path to Beddawi was long, and it took the Palestinian refugees around seven years to arrive at Beddawi, as they moved from southern Lebanon to Beirut and eventually to various informal encampments in northern Lebanon.

The informal camps created a dilemma for UNRWA, which preferred concentrating refugees in camps to facilitate its humanitarian operations. The Lebanese state also preferred concentrating refugees into fewer official camps rather than having them dispersed into smaller and more numerous informal camps – but in its case, mostly to facilitate surveillance and control (Berg 2014). By the mid-1950s, various groups of Palestinian refugees scattered across the southern, northern, and eastern regions of Lebanon were relocated to newly established camps in Beddawi (north Lebanon) and Rashidieh (south Lebanon).

From the beginning, Beddawi differed from most Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. This was a 'planned and modern' camp established later than other camps that had been constructed in 1948–49 by the refugees themselves. The design was based on a rational grid pattern, unlike the organic urban structure of camps built by the refugees. House shapes and sizes were uniform and modular, and the tiny sheds were constructed from tin and asbestos, unlike the tents found in the other camps.

The Palestinian refugees resisted relocation to Beddawi (Yassine 2014), because as a 'modern camp' it was perceived as part of a plan to settle Palestinian refugees in the new host countries, which was part of UNRWA's initial mandate for refugee reintegration (Schiff 1989: 62). Refugees feared that agreeing to be settled in Beddawi's camp meant forgoing their right to return to Palestine, and thus the camp remained empty after its construction. Such developments mark the beginnings of the symbolic relations between the materiality of camps of Palestine and the right of return to Palestine. These developments also underline the tensions between international agendas of development aid and Palestinian aspirations and political priorities.

In 1955, the Abu Ali river located on the northern edge of Tripoli flooded, destroying the historic urban fabric that bordered the river, as well as an informal Palestinian refugee camp composed of tents. The Palestinian refugees who lived on the Abu Ali riverbanks still resisted relocation to the new Beddawi camp. After the destruction of their tented camp, the Lebanese state prevented its reconstruction, and the Palestinian refugees were forcibly relocated to Beddawi, as well as to other informal encampments in the north.

Because of the Abu Ali refugees' forced resettlement to Beddawi, the camp's social and urban structure differed from that of the other Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Most of the other camps were refugee-created camps

with an organic urban fabric that was initiated with makeshift tents. Thus, refugees from the same village set up their tents close to one another and searched for family members and fellow villagers, inviting them to set up camp within existing tent-based clusters. Camp neighbourhoods were therefore based on the refugees' village of origin in Palestine, and became sites for maintaining the refugees' village identities in exile. In Beddawi, however, UNRWA managed the distribution process of sheds to different families (Hajj 2014: 404), based on various criteria such as family size, registration numbers, and a first-come-first-served basis. Thus, the village of origin and neighbourhood structure were not as pronounced in the Beddawi camp as they were in the other camps. An exception to this pattern, however, was the neighbourhood of Shefa-Amr, whose members originally stayed in the Beqaa valley but had to relocate to Beddawi because of family feuds. After collectively resettling in Beddawi, they formed a large village-based neighbourhood at the western edge of the camp, which turned out to be more socially cohesive and homogeneous than the other neighbourhoods in the camp. This difference would eventually play a role in the patterns of urban development in Beddawi.

Political and Urban Transformations in Beddawi, 1956–2005

The political developments within Palestinian refugee camps between their formation in 1948 and the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) have been well researched and documented. At first, the Palestinian refugee camps emerged as sites for the liberation of Palestine, thus hosting a political project that was inspired by global movements confronting imperialism and colonialism (Sayigh 1979). However, in the post-war period this political project was compromised, with the Palestinian political leadership abandoning the camps and their cause (Sayigh 2000). That political leadership 'forgot' the Palestinian refugees' right of return, the camps transformed into urban slums, and the residents turned into non-citizens deprived of civil rights. This transition from 'sites of anti-colonial resistance' to 'urban slums' is essential to understanding the urban developments that took place in Beddawi after 2005.

Beddawi camp joined the Palestinian liberation project in 1969, when the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the main umbrella group for Palestinian politics and resistance, reached an agreement with the Lebanese state on how the PLO could engage in armed struggle from the Lebanese territories. This agreement, which was brokered by Egypt and was known as the Cairo accords, allowed the PLO to officially manage the Palestinian

camps in Lebanon. And thus with these developments Beddawi became not only a centre for Palestinian resistance, but it also became a military target for Israeli air strikes and assassinations of the camp's leadership. In February 1973, Israeli commandos infiltrated Palestinian camps in northern Lebanon and assassinated Abu Hassan Mansour Kortam, a military leader from Beddawi.[1] Targeted assassinations of leaders of the Palestinian resistance, artists, and intellectuals have been part of a long-standing Israeli strategy that has harmed Palestinian communities in the diaspora camps, in Arab or Western cities, and living under Israeli occupation (Gregory 2004; Said 1992). There is, hence, a relation between the eradication of Palestinian leadership (and elites) and the urban deterioration of the camps that is resonant of other colonial and racial regimes seeking to control, eradicate, and subjugate indigenous populations (Pappe 2007; Bob and Nepstad 2007; Wolfe 2006).

During the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian liberation project got entangled with Arab politics, and Palestinian factions' alliances got split between the different local and regional actors. The refugee camps thus became a hotbed of regional, internal and civil conflicts. A new generation of Palestinian leaders, fighters, and activists were killed or went missing during this period, and internal conflicts emerged between those loyal to PLO's chairman Yasser Arafat and other factions who allied with the Syrian regime.

When the PLO opted to engage in a negotiation process with Israel and signed the Oslo Accords (1993), the internal Palestinian political scene became even more fractured. The Palestinian refugees felt that the political elite had abandoned their cause for the liberation of Palestine and the 'right of return' to their homeland. These elites wanted to reap the fruits of armed struggle and overnight transformed into state-builders and diplomats.

In the aftermath of the civil war, the Palestinian refugees became scapegoats, blamed for starting the war. The consequent legal discrimination by the Lebanese state and the fact that their political leaders had abandoned them caused tens of thousands of refugees to emigrate to Western countries or become expatriate workers in the Gulf countries. What appeared as the fragmentation of the Palestinian liberation project at that moment thus motivated a new exodus from the camps.

Parallel to that, a new humanitarian development industry emerged in the camps, as dozens of Palestinian NGOs emerged to provide humanitarian assistance and services, but were neither able to improve refugee livelihoods nor address their root causes, such as legal discrimination against Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The NGOs were seen as 'businesses' competing for aid money, and they contributed to maintaining the status quo by transforming Palestinian activists into humanitarian aid workers(Smith

2017; Choudry 2010). While NGOs played important roles in channelling development funding into the camps and also succeeded in coordinating humanitarian efforts in various moments of crisis, they were unable to foster new social movements that could address the deteriorating conditions of Palestinian civil rights in Lebanon.

Thus, the post-1990s marked a steady deterioration in the social and economic conditions in the camps and a corresponding increase in refugee dependencies on different types of patrons, whether NGOs, Lebanese political leaders, Palestinian political parties, or militant Islamist movements. During this period, the Lebanese state charged its own military intelligence apparatus with the surveillance and control of the Palestinian camps. The Lebanese military controlled the camps from their outside perimeter, and they depended on the cooperation of the Palestinian factions for the internal security management of the camps. Later Lebanese military intelligence expanded their own intelligence networks among strongmen and collaborators within the camps, which eventually strengthened their influence over local camp dynamics (Sheikh Hassan 2017).

For example, in Beddawi the Palestinian factions selected the head of their own security committee to liaison with the military intelligence on security issues. With time, the head of the security committee became the strongest and most powerful actor in the camp, since his power was manifested through the direct relations with the Lebanese army. The factions depended on the head of the security committee for favours from the army, and his influence grew to include non-security-related matters as well.

Situating Area-Based Approaches within Palestinian Refugee Camps

In principle, area-based approaches (ABAs), such as the camp improvement programme in Beddawi camp, are better positioned than traditional humanitarian approaches to address complex urban challenges that have emerged in Palestinian camps over the past two decades. Humanitarian interventions that that have dominated development work typically fund interventions targeting one theme or sector at a time, for instance only addressing health issues or education. By contrast, ABAs target specific urban areas and develop inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder projects that can enable collaboration on project assessment, development, and implementation (Schell et al. 2020). Theoretically, this approach is better suited to the complex social, economic, and infrastructure problems that typically exist in marginalised communities and underserved areas.

Figure 5.1. Northern border of the Beddawi refugee camp. © Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan.

However, the limits of area-based approaches arise when communities suffer from structural and legal discrimination (Tosics 2009) at a national level. In such conditions, even the comprehensive and integrated approaches of ABAs will struggle to address the systematic inequalities that have been constructed and maintained over decades within such populations. These can only be addressed by changing national policies and discriminatory laws to finally impact the root causes of the plight within communities. These are similar conditions to camp-based Palestinians in Lebanon, who suffer from discriminatory policies and laws and are denied the right to work and to own property (Hajj 2016).

Another limitation of ABAs arises in contexts that are rife with corruption, especially because of the reliance of ABAs on collaborative planning methodologies and consensus-building practices within communities. In the Beddawi camp, local activists were uncomfortable engaging in participatory decision-making processes with local corrupt politicians and thugs. This forced a group of young activists to eventually withdraw from the project's participatory platforms. This situation highlights one of the limits of collaborative planning approaches within such contexts, where instead of participation succeeding in empowering nascent reform initiatives and young activist groups, they often end up legitimising powerful stakeholders who are better positioned to control the participatory process and benefit from its foreign-funded projects (Sheikh Hassan 2015). Still, the potential of ABAs emerges in conditions where the primary challenges are physical in nature (Tosics 2009), which is the case in Palestinian refugee camps that are suffering from deteriorating housing conditions. This was especially the case in Beddawi camp, where the proliferation of commercial buildings contributed to the deterioration of the urban and physical environment of the camp (Figure 5.1).

Beddawi Camp's Commercial Buildings

Background to Commercial Buildings

Between 2005 and 2011, three events had significant impacts on the urban fabric of Beddawi. The first was the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, which weakened the influence of Syrian-backed Palestinian political parties in Beddawi and started fierce rivalries among the more than twenty Palestinian factions vying for control of the camp. The political confrontations and territorial competitions between these different factions affected the governance of service provision and the management of civic issues. The internal conflict also manifested in the camp's urban fabric, where prior to 2005, a four-story limit was enforced in the construction of new buildings within the camp in order to maintain acceptable natural lighting and ventilation conditions. After 2005, the construction limit was no longer enforced, and local strongmen allied with different Palestinian factions allowed contractors to construct taller buildings in their areas of influence in exchange for a 'fee'. Thus, higher-rise buildings started to emerge in Beddawi camp.

The second event was the army siege and destruction of the nearby Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el Bared in 2007 (Knudsen 2018), where the large majority of the displaced residents found shelter in the Beddawi camp. Initially, the residents of Beddawi shared their homes with the Nahr el Bared displaced while the UNRWA schools and classrooms were transformed into temporary housing. However, with the prolongation of the battle in Nahr el Bared and delays in the reconstruction process, the displaced were eventually forced to search for apartments to rent in Beddawi. In this way, a new and lucrative rental market was created in Beddawi, which was further reinforced by UNRWA's financial support of the Nahr el Bared displaced through payment of rental subsidies. New pressures on the rental market in Beddawi emerged with the arrival of Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis in 2011, who received rental subsidies from the UNHCR. As a result of the new demand for housing, a construction boom began in Beddawi, and a new building typology emerged known as 'commercial buildings' (Ar. *mabani tijariya*).

The typical building type in Palestinian camps and Beddawi is the extended-family building (Ar. *mabani al 'ayilati almumtada*), which began as a single-story unit with additional floors being added to accommodate new family members and married couples. The buildings were therefore constructed organically over time in response to the needs of expanding family. By contrast, commercial buildings are purpose-built high-rises planned, financed, and constructed by real estate developers; hence their name 'commercial buildings'.

Extended-family buildings typically have a lot of common rooms and shared spaces. This could be a central 'salon' on the ground floor, used by

all building residents for receiving guests and for social events. The rooftops serve as a collective open space for the family that is used for social events (weddings, family gatherings), food preparation (drying foods, cooking), laundry, planting, and as a playground for children. The staircase of the building is an extension of the apartments and is still part of the private domain of the family.

Unlike the traditional dwellings, the commercial buildings have rigid distinction between the inside (private sphere) and the outside (public sphere). They lack the diverse, semi-private and shared spaces that typify extended-family buildings. This is also related to the fact that most commercial buildings house 'strangers', that is, families who have no family ties with their neighbours. Given the conservative nature of Palestinian communities in the Beddawi camp, this diminishes the potential for socialising with those who live in the commercial buildings. Adding to this, the families who live in the commercial buildings are mostly tenants who tend to stay for a limited period, which makes forming social relations between neighbours more difficult.

The Emergence of Commercial Buildings

In 1992, the first commercial buildings were constructed in Beddawi, by a local contractor and real estate developer known as Abu Jack. He obtained an exception from the four-story construction limit from the popular committee[2] by paying a fee and won over neighbouring residents by bringing in a new electricity line from the national Lebanese grid and digging three wells in the neighbourhood. The eight buildings Abu Jack constructed at first housed newly married Palestinian couples.

Another precursor to the 'commercial buildings' began when families decided to demolish old and deteriorating family homes and built new ground-floor foundations on which higher buildings could be eventually constructed. The demolition-construction process was financed using remittances from relatives working in the Gulf countries to construct these new multi-story buildings for the extended family. However, the families would sometimes sell apartments in the new building (to finance the construction) or rent some of them out to secure a reliable source of income for the longer term. This hybrid building typology mixed elements of the extended-family buildings with the commercial building. However, the hybrid buildings would often transform into fully commercial buildings, especially when other high-rise buildings started to emerge in the neighbourhood.

Even before the emergence of commercial buildings, many of the existing buildings and apartments in Beddawi suffered from a lack of adequate natural lighting and ventilation. Before started adding new floors, the owners first expanded their homes horizontally by adding new rooms that ex-

Figure 5.2. Interior architectural layout of Beddawi homes. © Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan.

tended to the edges of their plots. As all their neighbours did the same, most of the newly built rooms would lack windows or only leave a meagre 30 cm space between the buildings. The new rooms were devoid of natural light and ventilation, and when more floors were added this problem became even worse.[3]

It is quite common in Beddawi to find apartments with four rooms but only a single window. People therefore live in rooms that are humid and pitch-dark even in the middle of the day (Figure 5.2). Respiratory problems were thus very common in Beddawi camp, given the presence of mould in the houses caused by darkness and lack of natural ventilation.

The new commercial buildings further deteriorated the camp's urban fabric. Traditionally, the extended-family buildings in Beddawi averaged between two and three stories, while the commercial buildings ranged from five to eleven stories. This meant that lighting and ventilation conditions deteriorated sharply for the homes next to the commercial buildings. It also meant that electricity and water shortages increased in the neighbourhoods, given the increase in population within them. As the number of new in-coming refugees to Beddawi increased the rental market expanded significantly and

more commercial buildings started to be constructed. This led to conflicts between the old and new residents amidst problems with waste collection/disposal and sharing of the limited electricity and water resources. The steep rise in building density and residents increased noise levels in the neighbourhood and encouraged owners of extended-family buildings to sell their homes to real estate developers.

In the Beddawi camp, there are now at least seventy-five new commercial buildings that are rented exclusively to Syrian refugees. Landlords prefer to rent their apartments to Syrian refugees rather than to Palestinians, as Syrians can be more easily evicted if they cause problems or are unable to pay the rent. Evicting Palestinians is much more complicated, because it involves negotiations and even confrontations with family, kin and social networks..

Who Are the Real Estate Developers?

Some of the hybrid and commercial buildings were funded and instigated by the homeowners themselves, who hired local contractors to implement the construction projects. However, there were also local 'real estate developers' who scouted for opportunities to buy buildings or plots of land in the camp. They typically targeted corner plots, which enabled them to have two sides of the building open to the street (instead of just one), and so that they could have more windows and better ventilation. They also preferred to purchase plots with one-story structures, which were most often the original huts with asbestos roofs built by UNRWA back in the 1950s. They were either empty, because the owners had migrated, or housed very poor families who could not afford to improve them. Real estate developers offered to the buy plots for cash or, alternatively, to provide the original owners with two or three new apartments in the new commercial buildings as financial compensation. For poor families, these deals were seen as an opportunity to significantly improve their housing conditions and secure stable incomes from rent.

Some real estate developers were traditional contractors, but others were local strongmen who had just recently entered the construction business. At least one of them was a member of the Beddawi popular committee. One of the well-known local developers was a lady called Um-Darweesh, originally the owner of a clothing shop in the camp, who grew to become a real estate developer and owner of many buildings and apartments in the camp. In the beginning, she would walk around the camp scouting for potential plots to buy, but later people started to contact her to buy their plots. When the Nahr el Bared camp was destroyed in 2007, Um-Darweesh owned ten apartments, and she rented all of them to the Nahr el Bared displaced. Later, she built two more buildings that she rented out, and then she purchased another fourteen apartments and rented all of them to Syrian refugees.

The Dilemmas of Leaving the Camp and Selling the Home

A family's decision to leave the camp and sell the family home to a real estate developer was always a very difficult one, and it sometimes leads to internal family conflicts. Neighbours also try to stop the construction of commercial buildings, but tend to lose when faced with powerful real estate developers and contractors, supported by local strongmen, members of security committees, and Palestinian factions receiving financial payoffs. An exception to this pattern is the Shefa-Amr neighbourhood, whose residents all come from the same village in historic Palestine and who have had strong social ties to one another since the foundation of the Beddawi refugee camp. Attempts to build commercial buildings in this neighbourhood were stopped by the residents, who forcefully resisted new constructions and demolitions. This illustrates the power of cohesive family and village-based communities in preventing the construction of buildings they opposed and confronting various perceived threats to their small community.

Mohamad was a homeowner and political activist in the Fatah movement who was wanted by the Syrian regime during the Lebanese Civil War. His story illustrates the complicated processes by which an extended-family building is transformed into a commercial building:

> In 1985 my house was hit [by] a mortar shell, and I had to escape from Beddawi camp to avoid capture by the Syrians. We fled to Saida . . . My daughter became sick with leukaemia and the treatment was very expensive. We had no choice but to sell part of the ground floor of our home in Beddawi to pay for her treatment.[4]

The part of Mohamad's house that was sold was converted by the new owners into commercial shops, but he maintained his ownership of the roof slab above the shops. When he returned to the camp in 1999, he was surprised to find that Abu Jack, the real estate developer, had constructed a commercial building next to his home, and that the sewage pipes passed over his roof without his permission. This started a conflict between the two families that eventually turned violent. Later, Mohamad's son became wanted by the local authorities because of this conflict and was smuggled from Lebanon to Ukraine. The family was then once again broke and therefore sold the rooftop and the right to build on it to Um-Darweesh, another local developer. The sale was completed in 2013 for a sum of USD 12,000 – and Um-Darweesh later added five storeys to the ground floor. With this money, Mohamad's family moved to an apartment in Jabal-El-Beddawi outside the camp.

When his son returned from Ukraine with his wife and family, they preferred to live in the family's ground-floor home in the Beddawi camp. However, the house was humid, lacked natural lighting, and the ceiling was

crumbling. As a result, the son moved back with his family to the Jabal-El-Beddawi apartment and rented their house in the camp to Syrian refugees:

> We never wanted to sell our family home, we loved our house and our neighbourhood. We often talk about it, and we feel a lot of regret, but life did not give us much choice in this matter.[5]

Building commercial buildings was usually a consensual decision even though some family members were hesitant or tended to regret it afterwards. In some cases building commercial buildings led to fierce family conflicts. This was the case for Yehya, who worked in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while his wife and children lived in the family home in the camp next door to his brother's family home. Since his home suffered from severe humidity problems, Yehya's wife wanted him to rent another house for them outside the camp. Yehya was reluctant, as he preferred that his children grow up in the camp. This motivated him to demolish the old family home and build a new, better house and settle there with his family after his retirement. He agreed with his brother and neighbour to use a part of the brother's garden in order to make more room for a new building that would be used only for extended family members. However, once construction started, Yehya realised he was unable to cover the costs and was forced to collaborate with a real estate developer to continue the construction in exchange for providing the developer with several apartments in the new building. This caused a conflict between the two brothers that continues to this day, as Yehya's brother objected to the construction of a semi-commercial building next to his home and on part of his private land.

Constructing commercial buildings within the cramped camp's space is a difficult exercise, whether internally, within the extended family, or in relation to neighbours. This new construction was also inevitable, given the huge demand for apartments, especially with newly arriving Syrian refugees after 2011. Given the dismal economic conditions among the residents in Beddawi, commercial buildings presented golden opportunities for improving family livelihoods.

The construction of commercial buildings changed the camp's social structure especially as it pushed frustrated Palestinian camp residents to relocate to new neighbourhoods outside the camp with better living conditions. An example of this is Jabal-El-Beddawi neighbourhood, an urban development project that was constructed at the eastern edge of the camp (Map 5.1). It consisted of modern high-rise buildings that followed official Lebanese zoning laws and became an urban extension of Beddawi camp. As the camp's elites and better-off families started to move to Jabal-El-Beddawi, the social structure in Beddawi camp started to change and for the most part, only the poorest families remained. In this way, the power of families and local notables declined, as most no longer lived inside the

historic camp boundaries. Meanwhile, the power of local thugs, contractors, armed groups, and security committee leaders collaborating with military intelligence increased significantly.

Syrian Refugee Experiences in the Beddawi Camp

> Having crossed the Syrian-Lebanese border, they [Syrian refugees] were physically on Lebanese territory and yet explained that they travelled directly to and arrived in Beddawi camp, where established residents and local organisations offered them shelter, food and clothes. In many ways, the urban camp has superseded the [hyper visible] Lebanese state, with many refugees from Syria explicitly stating that, from the very onset of their journeys, they had identified Beddawi refugee camp as their intended destination. (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016a)

Syrian refugees flock to the Beddawi camp because the rent and general living costs are cheaper than in Lebanese cities. Beddawi camp is also served by local and international NGOs, and the Syrian refugees can access medical care and schools. More importantly, the Syrians arriving in Palestinian camps felt more welcome in sharing an urban space with other refugees where they could become part of the 'broader "refugee nation"' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b: 27).

Some Syrian families had prior social ties and economic relations with the Palestinians in the camp, and they depended on these relations to find work, protect their families and access affordable housing. (cf., Yassine et al. 2019). Beddawi camp also became a site where new social and political relations were formed. Intermarriage between Palestinian and newly arriving Syrian families after 2011 was common. The young Palestinian activists who raised charity money for the poor in the camp raised money for both Palestinian and Syrian families (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020), while some young Syrian refugees joined local youth groups. The camp's economy increased with the Syrians' arrival, and the Beddawi camp's historically very small market serving local customers expanded. Meanwhile a new and larger market emerged in Abu el Fowz Street, with Syrian shopkeepers opening new shops there.

However, the narratives of the Syrian refugee presence in the camp were not always so welcoming and positive (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b). It is not uncommon to hear complaints against Syrian refugees in Beddawi camp, who are blamed for rising unemployment, lack of water and electricity, and the deteriorating urban conditions of the camp.

While sentiments such as 'Syrians are stealing our jobs' or 'Syrian brides are stealing our young men' exist in the camp and can be exaggerated by local organisations in order to attract more development aid from international donors, they are also contested. At a conference on accessing employ-
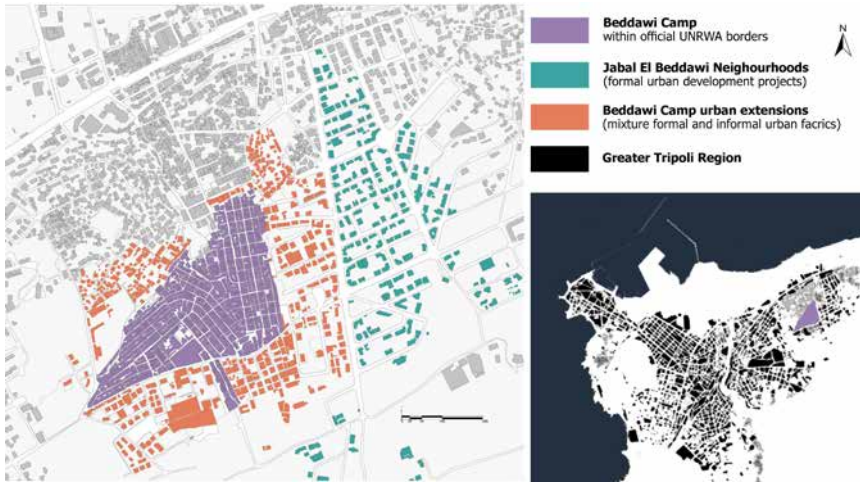
Map 5.1. Map of the Beddawi refugee camp.

ment for Palestinian refugees organised in 2019, one of the directors of a large Palestinian NGO asked for restrictions on Syrian refugee employment in Palestinian camps. Young Palestinian activists, however, opposed such restrictions, denouncing such statements and arguing that thriving economies are created by exchange and solidarity and that Beddawi and the other Palestinian camps should not follow the actions of some Lebanese municipalities in restricting the Syrian refugees' movement and employment.

The narrative of Ali, a Syrian refugee who had sought refuge in Beddawi, illustrates some of the contradictions of living in the camp. Ali came as a refugee to Lebanon in 2012 and moved to Beddawi in 2016. Before that he lived in a Lebanese neighbourhood known as Wadi-Nahleh, but his family was forced to leave because of the many conflicts between the Lebanese and Syrians. Ali worked in a bakery near the Beddawi camp, and he was invited to move to Beddawi by his Palestinian co-workers. Ali complained of sometimes hearing discriminatory remarks against Syrians, but when a fire started in his rented apartment, all the Palestinian neighbours rushed to the family's rescue. His wife recalled that:

> Palestinians rushed to our help in that difficult time, much more than the Syrians in the camp! Neighbours came and helped us to paint the house and brought supplies, and our neighbour Um Magdi gave us furniture and things from her house.[6]

Still, there are other segments of Syrian refugees who have no social connections with the other families in the camp, whether Palestinian or even Syrian. They are also the poorest and depend on charity handouts and humanitarian aid for their survival. This was the case for Buthaina:

> I came to Beddawi camp because it is closer to the hospitals. All of my three children have kidney diseases and [are] dependent on dialysis treatments that I can't afford. I'm divorced, my husband does not provide any financial support and I cannot find a job.[7]

Many of the poorest Syrian refugee families live in relative isolation and suffer from anxiety and panic attacks due to the trauma of their displacement and of the violence that they have experienced and witnessed in Syria. Several of them talked of waking up in fear at night, hearing gunshots in Beddawi camp, and said that they never knew who was fighting, what was happening and whether they were in danger. These socially isolated and extremely poor Syrian refugees typically live on the ground and lower floors of old buildings with the worst lighting and ventilation problems in the camp. They suffer from high levels of humidity and mould, lack of water and electricity, and infestations of rodents and insects. Many of them move frequently either because they cannot afford the rent, cannot handle the unhealthy housing conditions anymore, or fear for their safety, as the interview with Samira illustrates:

> We had to leave the first house we [rented] in Beddawi camp, because my son was in a fight with local young men. We didn't know what to do or who to talk to and were worried that things were escalat[ing] and feared for his safety. So we moved to another house in Beddawi camp to avoid any problems.[8]

Area-Based Approaches and the Unmaking of the Palestinian Ghetto

Issues such as the lack of natural lighting and ventilation in the interior of Beddawi homes cannot be addressed by the typical home and shelter rehabilitation projects that various international organisations in the Beddawi area have implemented. These projects typically focused on small-scale emergency interventions aiming to benefit the largest number of individuals. Such projects are thus designed to deal with access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and to repair structural problems in buildings. Meanwhile, addressing lighting and ventilation issues requires more expensive and intrusive interventions in the urban fabric of Palestinian camps, which must be coordinated with improving local governance practices. Thus, camp improvement processes (CIPs) and area-based approaches (ABAs) appear to be better situated to address these urban problems in Palestinian camps.

Addressing these housing challenges in Beddawi requires an in-depth investigation into the history, building practices, and socio-economic processes that have generated the urban densification patterns in the camp. Also needed is a thorough architectural analysis of the lighting and ventilation
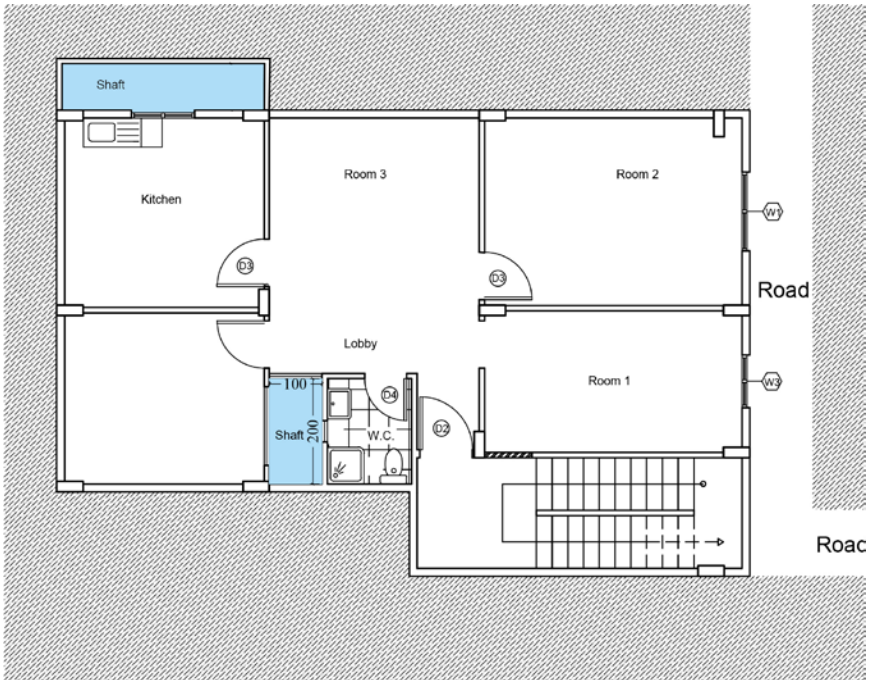
Figure 5.3. Newly inserted light wells (shafts). © Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan.

problems and a mapping of their locations at the building, neighbourhood, and broader urban levels of the camp. Such research can guide the design of architectural interventions and address them at the scale of buildings, urban clusters, or even urban blocks. The CIP in Beddawi camp succeeded in initiating such a process. Pilot projects were launched with residents at the building level or the urban cluster level in some of the neighbourhoods with the worst lighting and ventilation problems. Through negotiation and building consensus among neighbours, different design interventions were developed that would change the internal layout of homes and implement light-ventilation wells (voids) between buildings. These shared light wells bring natural light into the interior of the homes and improve cross-ventilation within the urban fabric (Figure 5.3).

Around thirty such interventions were implemented in Beddawi. They were envisioned as a first step of a broader strategy of developing urban guidelines to better manage the construction of new buildings without deteriorating the urban conditions in the camp. This broader strategy also involved the creation and rehabilitation of much-needed public and open spaces in the overcrowded camp. However, due to the hijacking of the par-

ticipatory platform by local strongmen and the subsequent suspension of the CIP in Beddawi, this process and its projects were discontinued.

As a preliminary assessment, it can be argued that ABAs are unable to achieve all of their objectives within contexts where the rule of law is fragile and where the political landscape is rife with corruption and infighting amongst multiple factions at the local level. Such contexts are unstable and the ability to implement participatory processes can be easily compromised. This adds an additional layer to the limits of ABAs in contexts where there is structural and legal discrimination at the national level (Tosics 2009).

However, one can still argue for the need of ABAs, specifically given their ability to address certain physical urban challenges in the camps that traditional humanitarian projects framed in an emergency mind-set are unable to resolve. There is a direct link between the deterioration of the physical environment and the migration of better-off families, notables with influence, middle-class business owners, and various local actors who have valuable social capital and networks within the camps. This migration plays a role in further empowering corrupt local actors and thugs, given that these social networks that previously had some capacity to hold them accountable and limit their negative practices have gradually eroded and moved away. On the longer term, such developments typically open up populist discourses at the national level calling for the removal of such 'slums' when they become, in the words of policymakers, 'ungovernable' or 'hotbeds for crime'. And thus, cities lose the few sanctuaries that have provided spaces of refuge for the poor, migrant workers, refugees, and other marginalised communities for many decades and instead make way for new neoliberal and 'sanitised' real estate development projects.

In many ways, the Beddawi camp resembles an earlier stage of the urban trajectory of the overcrowded Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, with its dense urban fabric, minimal open space, and dismal living conditions for residents in the rickety high-rise buildings that reach more than seven stories high. On 1 June 2020, Wurud Kanj, a 28-year-old mother carrying groceries in one arm and her baby in the other, was killed in the crossfire between drug traffickers in the Shatila camp (France 24 2020). This incident reflects the growing power of local thugs, drug dealers and weapons dealers who are protected by corrupt actors in both the Palestinian and Lebanese authorities, especially as local communities grow poorer and more socially fragmented.

Yet the ability of ABAs to even partially succeed will depend upon the presence of talented and progressive professionals who can lead these processes, properly utilise the strategic disbursement of their funds, and articulate creative solutions to the camp's most pressing urban challenges. Their success will also be heavily dependent on their ability to forge alliances with local social movements and some empathetic policy makers with influence within the Lebanese government. Such strategic coalitions can create win-

dows of opportunity that enable the ABA processes to manoeuvre around or at least contain corrupt local actors so as to partially shield the projects from their negative influence.

However, there are other layers that will significantly impact how ABAs operate within the Lebanese context, especially when we consider that all ABAs being implemented in Syrian or Palestinian camps are in fact internationally funded. This is a different institutional set up than ABAs that are implemented within liberal democratic societies and funded by local governments with aims to improve their local communities and cities (Andersen 2001). Internationally funded ABAs will therefore lack much of the institutional, political, and citizen support that comes with such projects when they are funded by local governments and local taxpayers' money. Consequently, the ABAs implemented in the refugee camps in Lebanon suffer from the same problems that afflict most internationally funded projects in the Lebanese context: corrupt and sectarian local politicians who manipulate how and where international funding is spent, especially since international organisations need their permission to implement projects. This reinforces the role of local politicians as gatekeepers and patrons while increasing the marginalised communities' dependence on sectarian actors, which is one of the tragedies of international aid in a Lebanese context.

The politics behind the international funding inevitably impacts how such projects are perceived locally, especially as they relate to EU's agenda of limiting migration towards Europe. The EUR 2.2 billion that was provided by the EU to Lebanon between 2011 and 2020 (European Commission 2020) has been described as reinforcing the notion of 'Fortress Europe' and as an 'outsourcing of the Syrian refugee crisis to Lebanon' (Facon 2020). This is also how Palestinians and Syrians perceive the rationale behind humanitarian aid, especially as refugees are sensitive to the contradictions that exist between humanitarian slogans and the tragedy of their entrapment in different types of camps and extra-legal conditions.

Internationally funded ABAs in the context of Palestinian refugee camps will always be burdened by such politics. Thus, the depoliticised readings of Palestinian camps as economically impoverished urban slums that only need adequate funding to stop their deterioration will always have its limits. On the other hand, scholarly readings of Palestinian camps as 'ghettos' can help articulate more effective strategies for dealing with the seemingly irreconcilable dilemmas posed by these sites. The importance of situating Palestinian camps in the theoretical context of ghettoes is that it places them in a political-urban category that has globally and historically been identified as an outcome of injustices that should be overcome through political means and collective struggle and not (only) through humanitarian assistance. It is through such lenses that the structural, historical, and ongoing injustices that relate to the refugees' dilemmas can start to be more clearly brought to

light. This in effect has been the paradox of Palestinian camps since their very inception, as they bring together the victims and potential challengers of the s colonial and post-colonial regimes that have created and maintained these sites into one common urban space.

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Notes

1. Other political activists from Beddawi who were assassinated by such operations are Yunis Qishqash and Mohamad Gimhawi.
2. Popular committees and local governance bodies in the Palestinian camps are typically composed of representatives of all Palestinian political parties and factions (one representative per faction). They play roles in service provision and other responsibilities that municipalities usually address.
3. Other reasons for a worsening of natural lighting and ventilation conditions are dividing apartments into sections to accommodate expanding families and constructing new floors covering internal courtyards which also reduce the available light and ventilation.
4. Interview by field researcher S. Kayed, Beddawi camp, April 2021.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

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