

# BEYOND THE BORDER

NARRATING THE JOURNEY OF THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

Beyond the border  
By Abdullah Natsheh ©

Chalmers School of Architecture,  
Department Of Architecture & Civil  
Engineering, Chalmers University

Examination: Emilio Brandao  
Supervision:  
Shea Hagy (main supervisor)  
Liane Thuvander (co-supervisor)





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# ABSTRACT

This thesis intends to narrate the journey of Palestinian refugees, choosing Jordan as the study area. It will highlight the stages of the Palestinian journey from exile, displacement, the legal right to return to their homeland, and their lives as refugees in a different country.

With a focus on analyzing the tangible and intangible aspects of a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan in light of its state of permanent temporariness; as it acts as a significant factor in the lives of the Palestinian refugees and their journey.

The temporary role of the refugee camps has caused an issue for the lack of certainty on how long this temporary state might persist, often it lasts longer than anticipated, and in the Palestinian case it has gone on for 74 years, which had negative impacts on the built environment of the refugee camps and the sense of identity.

The outcome of this thesis focuses on preserving the Palestinian journey and conserving a nation's memory while raising awareness about the lives of millions of unfortunate individuals who were forced to flee their homeland to survive. It is also a personal notion of being a link between the author and his ancestral roots, being a Jordanian citizen from Palestinian roots.



## **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

Although I do not believe I am fully qualified to discuss this subject, I am hopeful that by writing this thesis, I will be able to shed a light on the Palestinian case from an activist standpoint.

Writing this thesis was an eye-opening experience that taught me more about my own roots and history, and I would like to share it with others who share my background as Jordanian citizens with Palestinian roots who have never visited Palestine or had any direct links to it other than their ancestry.

In this thesis, I will start by sharing the Palestinian journey, and then transition into the living conditions within the Palestinian refugee camps by analyzing one case study in Jordan and underlining what distinguishes it from other camps in the light of permanent temporariness.

Finally, as a starting point for a dialogue about the Palestinian identity in Jordan, I will share my family's journey. A starting point for story sharing that will allow us to think and connect to our own identities as Palestinian refugees.

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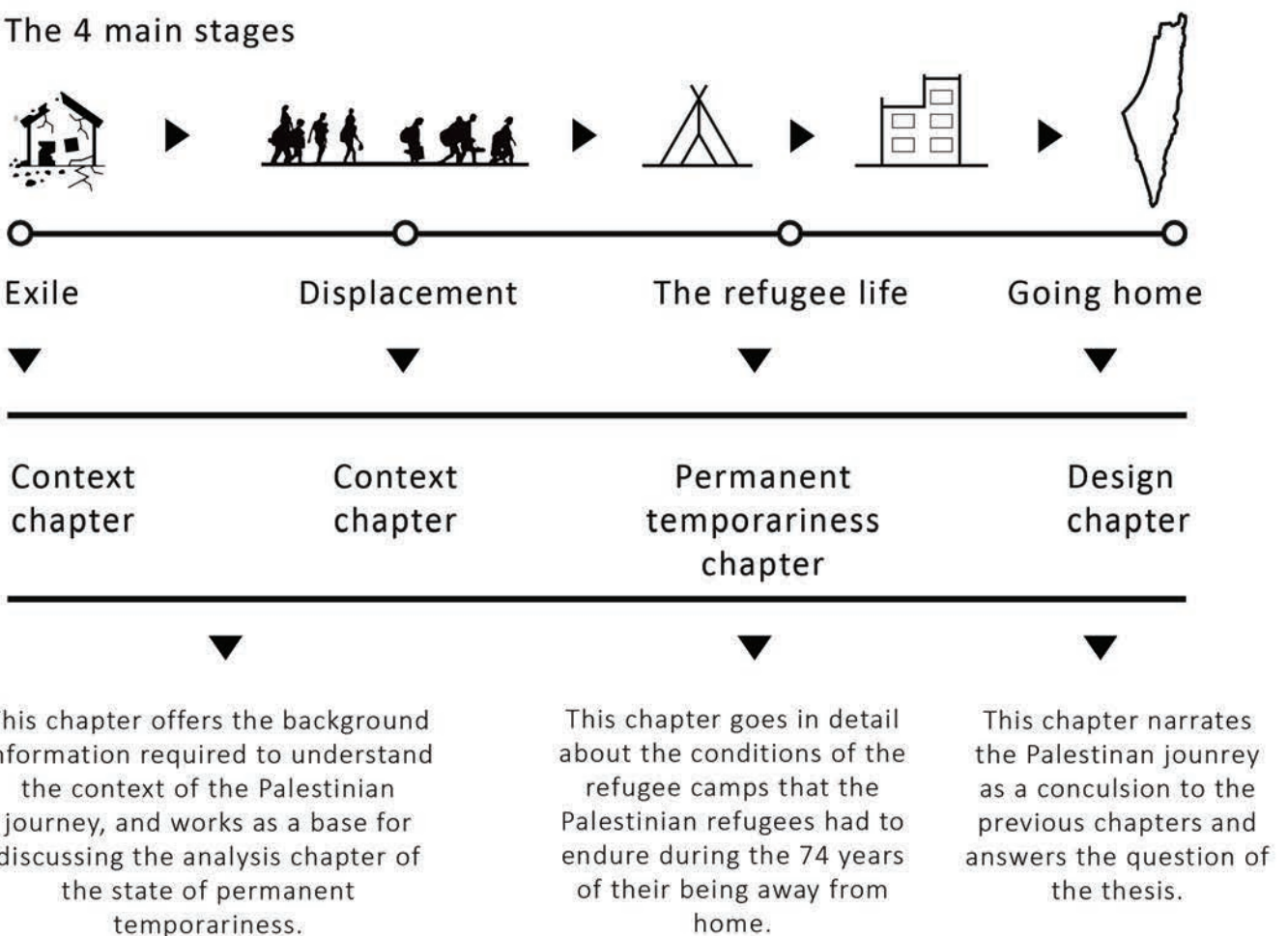
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## Thesis guide

# THE PALESTINIAN JOURNEY

The 4 main stages



## NOTE:

The colored text and the ripped paper pattern, highlight the reflections behind the facts.

# I. FRAMEWORK

- BACKGROUND
- PURPOSE
- THESIS QUESTION
- DELIMITATIONS
- METHODOLOGY

# BACKGROUND

“There are about 7.2 million Palestinian refugees worldwide. More than 4.3 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants displaced in 1948 are registered for humanitarian assistance with the United Nations.” (Grey, & Clegg. 2012).

In 2016, Jordan was named the largest refugee-hosting country per capita in the world, and in 2021 Jordan became the second-highest country with approximately three million refugees out of its 11 million population. (Worldbank, 2022).

# PURPOSE

This thesis intends to document the refugee living conditions in Al-Talibieh camp in Jordan, and question the role of temporary architecture within the refugee camp while demonstrating the impact of design on people’s identity through their built environment.

# THESIS QUESTION

How can architecture help to preserve identity within the context of permanent temporariness?



# DELIMITATIONS

## WILL

- This thesis will showcase the Palestinian refugee Journey in Jordan
- This thesis will highlight the political conflict that led to the displacement of the Palestinians
- This thesis will discuss the evolution of one Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan
- This thesis will discuss temporary architecture of refugee camps
- This thesis will highlight the Palestinian heritage

## WON'T

- This thesis won't discuss the economic impact of the refugees on Jordan
- This thesis won't discuss Palestinian refugee camps outside of Jordan
- This thesis won't propose a solution for the residential unit
- The outcomes of this thesis won't propose a solution within the refugee camp



# METHODOLOGY

This thesis is performed through multiple stages of research, analysis, and design.

Developed through research for design methodology to understand the relationship between architecture and politics in regards to the Palestinian refugee camps and the Palestinian Journey in Jordan.

## RESEARCH

The research is a combination of collected historical information regarding the Palestinian/ Israeli political conflict, and the stages of the Palestinian forced displacement since year 1948 until today, including the topics

of exile, refugee camps, and the right of return.

The information was acquired through research papers, books, videos, historical maps, and interviews.

## ANALYSIS

Al Talbieh camp was analyzed to show case the evolution of the refugee camp from a historical and an architectural point of view. Through an intersection study between observations of historical documents and personal accounts from interviews, aiming to materialize the Palestinian refugee journey in Jordan, following the evolution of the urban fabric, typology and stories from the camp.

## DESIGN

This stage is a conclusion of the collected data and analysis from the previous stages.

It explores the possibilities of preserving identity within the context of permanent temporariness.



Figure 1 (The location of Jordan and Palestine, Author)

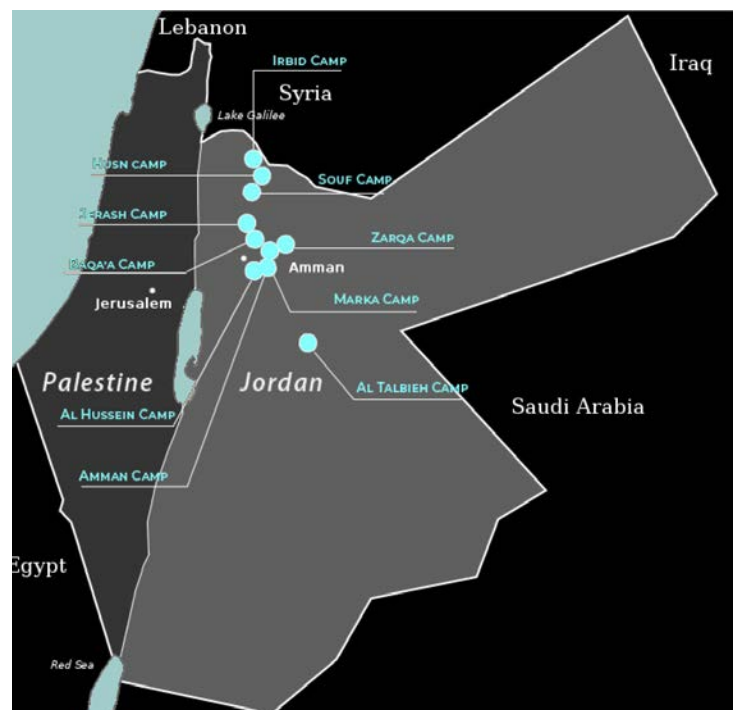


Figure 2 (Palestinian refugee camps - Jordan Author)

## II. CONTEXT

- LOCATION: JORDAN & PALESTINE
- PALESTINIAN REFUGEES
- THE RIGHT OF RETURN
- INTRODUCTION INTO REFUGEE CAMPS
- THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CAMPS



# LOCATION: JORDAN & PALESTINE

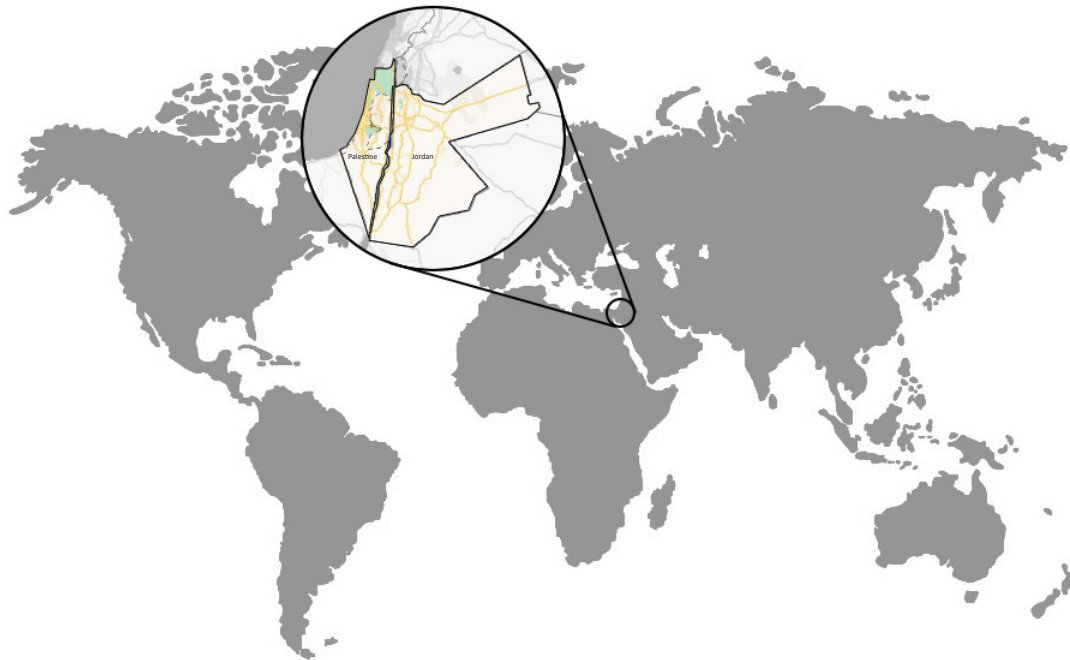


Figure 3, (The location of Jordan and Palestine- Author)

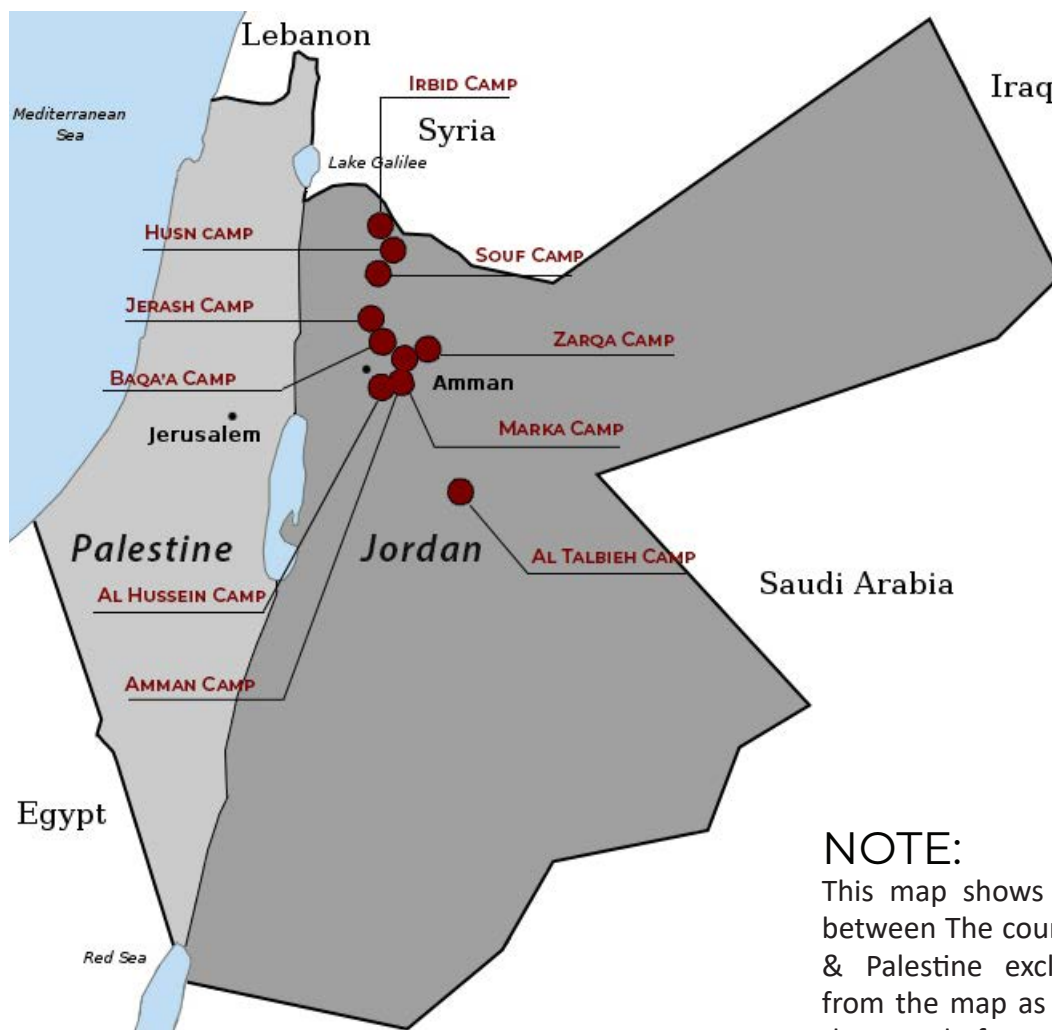


Figure 4, (The location of Jordan and Palestine- Author)

## NOTE:

This map shows the relation between The countries Jordan & Palestine excluding Israel from the map as it resembles the state before 1948.

## PALESTINE SHRINKING | ISRAEL EXPANDING

1918

1947

1960

2017

# PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

## INTRODUCTION

Following the commencement of the first Arab-Israeli conflict (the Palestinian Nakba) in 1948, almost 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their land and country due to Israeli authorities' forced displacement operations.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan reached 2.4 million in 2020, accounting for about 42 percent of all Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in its five operational zones. (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza Strip)

Another wave of displacement occurred in Palestine in 1967, this time as a result of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The number of displaced people was projected at around 250 thousand at the time, about half of whom were refugees living in West Bank or Gaza Strip camps, and they were forced to seek refuge again in less than twenty years, moving from camps in Palestine to Jordan and other bordering countries.

Displacements to Jordan persisted in the years after Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, owing to the Israeli occupation's policies and actions.

Thousands of Palestinians have been displaced to Jordan as a result of military expulsion orders, demolition of Palestinian houses and towns, and other military and economic activities. (Department of Palestinian affairs in Jordan, 2004)

## 1948

*was the year of the  
Palestinian (Catastrophe),  
the Nakba During the  
nineteen month  
1948, about two-thirds of  
the Arab Palestinian people  
fled in terror and  
desperation.*

*When Israel closed its  
borders, no one was  
permitted to return to Arab  
Palestine (UNRWA)*

## 1967

*The year of Naksa was  
1967.  
(setback) In June 1967,  
Israel began an attack  
against Egypt, Jordan,  
Iraq, and Syria, which  
border Palestine.  
it invaded & conquered  
the remaining  
22% of Palestine's land  
it had failed to gain in  
1948.*



Figure 6, (Al Nakba, Public domain, 1948)

An estimated 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled, comprising around 80% of the Palestinian Arab inhabitants of what became Israel. (Masalha, N., 1992) *"Six decades after their expulsion, Palestinian refugees in the Middle East (about 90% of all Palestinian refugees globally) are still classified as temporary stateless exiles struggling for a return to their homeland of Palestine"* (Masalha, N.,2012).

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Many refugees sought refuge in abandoned buildings, old military barracks, schools, mosques, churches, or with friends and family in the early stages. Many waited at the border in tented camps before moving on to reunite with family, find a job, and get relief, medical care, and education. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) offered tents, food rations, tented schools, and medical support during the immediate crisis. (El Abed, 2014).

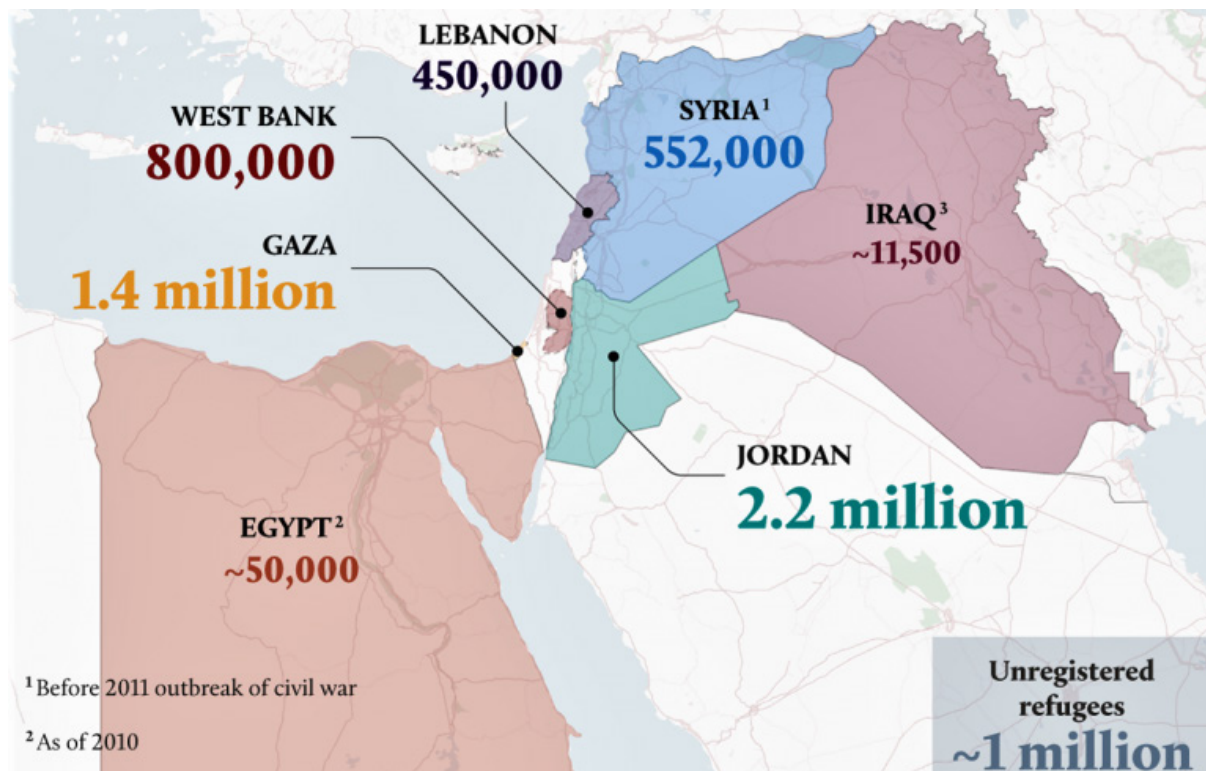


Figure 7, (Palestinian refugees, Where are they now?, UNRWA 2010)

## PALESTINIANS In Jordan

The position of Palestinian refugees in Jordan is different from the other neighboring countries. Jordan has provided Palestinian refugees with official citizenship without limiting their right of return to Palestine, unlike other Arab host countries that have kept them stateless.

In 1949, the Palestinian refugees were granted full citizenship in Jordan, with the same rights and responsibilities as any other Jordanian citizen, awaiting the day when they would be given the option of returning to Palestine or settling permanently in Jordan or abroad (Al Hussein, J., 2010).

Unfortunately, this right of citizenship didn't apply to everyone. 60,000 stateless Palestinians that originally came from Gaza were denied civil rights because they hold Egyptian documents, they were offered the chance to live in Jordan but not the full civil rights (Shiblak, A., 2006).

## PALESTINIANS In Jordan

UNRWAofficiallyclassifiesPalestinianrefugees as having “temporary status,” and their living conditions have remained unchanged for the past sixty years. Congestion, a lack of public spaces, humidity, and structural defects are all key sources of housing discomfort for camp migrants.(Rueff, H. , Viaro, A. 2010)

The difficulty or reluctance of larger city governments to incorporate refugee camps in their master plans, as well as the constraints imposed by Jordan, are among the most important hurdles to the refugees’ housing expansion.

Despite having citizenship rights, Palestinians in Jordan have encountered discrimination in employment and education, particularly among those who are socially and economically disadvantaged and a large percentage live below the national poverty line.

The fact that Palestinians have Jordanian passports has not diminished their feeling of Palestinian identity, however this varies depending on a variety of factors. (Brand, L., 1995)

Palestinians in Jordan have been placed in unusual position because of their citizen/refugee status. It has put them in a network of legal and informal inclusion/exclusion balancing mechanisms designed to ensure their integration into Jordanian society while retaining their right to still return to Palestine.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

*As a Jordanian citizen with Palestinian roots, I’ve noticed that the balance of inclusion and exclusion for Palestinians within Jordan has played a role for later refugee generations; in some cases, inclusion has reached a point of full Jordanization, resulting in the loss of Palestinian identity -*

*based on my own personal observation.*

This part is part of my father’s personal journey;

*“We woke up to the sound of bombing when I was 7 years old, I heard all of my aunts and uncles gathered in our house panicking, they were calling me and my siblings to grab clothes and run to the bus” Natsheh, N.*



## THE RIGHT OF RETURN

The United Nations General Assembly adopts resolution 194 (III) in the fall of 1947, resolving that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.” (Resolution 194. UNRWA, 1948)

## HOWEVER!

The Israeli government does not recognize Palestinian refugees’ right to return and continues to say that Palestinian refugees and their descendants cannot be allowed to return to the homes and communities from which they were displaced because their return would be a threat to the maintenance of a Jewish demographic majority in Israel. (Khalidi, R., 1992).

## THE EFFECT ON CAMPS

Refugee camps are fundamentally a political issue, despite humanitarian motives to explain their existence. Ultimately it’s not the humanitarian organizations’ responsibility to regulate them, it’s the political conflict that determines whether they function just temporarily or become more permanent. The refugee camps’ unusually lengthy duration may pave the way for their transformation from strictly humanitarian places to active political spaces

## THE KEY OF RETURN

*The key is a widely used symbol of the Nakba, as many Palestinians kept the keys to their homes when they were forced into exile in 1948*

Figure 8, (The key, IMEU, 2012)



## IN JORDAN

Camps were excluded from Jordan's national and local urban development programs since they were to remain transitory spaces enshrined in the symbolism of the right of return. Camp residents were also opposed to any infrastructure improvements that may be perceived as an endorsement of permanent relocation outside of Palestine. (Hussien, R., 2001)

The "right of return" has become a rallying point across Palestinian culture and the Arab world as a whole, as well as an operational rule that has profoundly altered the camps' development patterns and Jordan's urban landscape.

**Within refugee communities, there is a fear that any improvements to the refugee camps would result in the community's full integration into the local environment, diminishing the political reason for the right to return. This attitude also claimed that as long as refugees were living in deplorable conditions, the international community would get pressured to fulfill their right to return. As a result, any changes to the camp's infrastructure or housing were considered a clear infringement of the right to return. (Petti, Architecture of Exile, 2015).**

This restriction is gradually being questioned, with some arguing that better living conditions in refugee camps are not always incompatible with the right to return.



Figure 9, (Balloon girl, Banksy, The septation wall - Palestine)

Refugees are no longer seen as passive recipients of humanitarian support, but as active political subjects, due to their participation in the creation and operation of the camps. However, this advancement mustn't normalize political exile. (Campus in camps, Architecture of exile, 2015).



# **INTRODUCTION INTO REFUGEE CAMPS**

Wars and conflicts continue to force tens of millions of people around the world to flee their homes and live as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or as refugees in asylum countries over the past century, more than 263 wars have broken out, many of which are still ongoing. This has led to the creation of hundreds of refugee camps, the majority located in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa (UNHCR, 2016). When a conflict occurs and a refugee situation initially arises, it is impossible to predict accurately the lifespan of a camp. According to UNHCR, the current average is seventeen years. However, some camps exist for much longer than this, for example, the Palestinian camps in Jordan were established around 70 years ago.

## **WHAT ARE REFUGEE CAMPS?**

Refugee camps are temporary shelters established to help and protect individuals who have been forced to leave their homes due to war, conflict, or persecution. Refugee camps are intended to be a temporary solution to keep people safe throughout emergencies, however, emergencies can last for years or even decades, leading to people staying in camps for decades or longer. (UNHCR, 2021)

## **HOW DO REFUGEE CAMPS WORK?**

People who have crossed international borders in search of safety are housed in refugee camps. Water, food, shelter, emergency relief materials (such as blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, clothing, and personal hygiene kits), healthcare, registration services, and legal aid are among the first services supplied during a disaster. In instances when individuals have been displaced for a long time, these services are expanded to include educational and livelihood possibilities, as well as materials to assist people to reconstruct their lives and attain self-sufficiency. Many of the services provided in refugee camps are also available to host communities.

People should be able to form connections with their host towns and have access to the local economy, infrastructure, and services in a well-designed camp. It should also give quick access to water, healthcare, and sanitation facilities, as well as weather protection and disease outbreak protection. (UNHCR, 2021)

## THE LIVING CONDITIONS



Figure 10, (The living conditions Jarash camp - Jordan, UNRWA)

# PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN JORDAN

Approximately one-third of Palestinian refugees have been forced to live in refugee camps because of financial circumstances. Today, there are fifty-nine recognized refugee camps, as well as unofficial camps formed without the aid or sanction of the local government, more than seventy years later.

Jordan has 10 Palestinian refugee camps and five refugee camps for Syrians. As of February 2019, 412,054 refugees live in Palestinian refugee camps — 17.3 percent of the 2,242,579 total registered Palestinian refugees. (Anera 2019)

Jordan has the biggest number of registered Palestine refugees of all UNRWA domains, with over 2 million registered Palestine refugees. While many of these refugees are housed in Jordan's ten official and three unauthorized camps, most of them live in Jordan's cities, towns, and villages amongst Jordanians.

Citizenship is granted to the majority, but not all. Around 18% of the 10 million population live in one of the 10 recognized Palestine refugee camps scattered around the nation.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees from Syria have turned to UNRWA in Jordan for help. Most of them are said to be living in abysmal poverty and in risky legal situations.

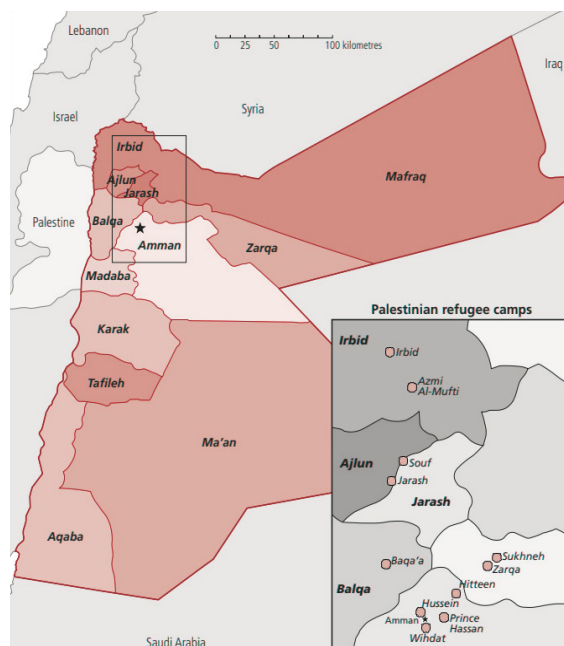


Figure 11, (Palestinian refugee camps - Jordan, UNRWA)

In Jordan, Palestinian refugees are classified in five categories. Jordanian categorization system, which has been utilized by Jordan's Department of Statistics in various surveys (DoS). The poll asked that all members of the household to be divided into the following categories:

1. Refugee from 1948
  2. Displaced from 1967
  3. Refugee from 1948, & displaced in 1967
  4. From the Gaza Strip
  5. Non-refugee
- (Tiltne, Å., & Zhang, H., 2018)



## THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CAMPS

Initially, several tented camps run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were set up in remote locations near borders, where migrants congregated. (Figure 12).

Jordanian governments relocated migrants to other camps distant from the country's borders.

UNRWA emphasized the need to avoid the construction of refugee camps with limited economic prospects. Small, dispersed camps were more difficult for UNRWA to access, maintain and operate than big, centrally placed camps.

Refugees were beginning to enter camps, according to UNRWA, and the number of refugees living in camps expanded rapidly. At the same time, numerous refugees were "squatting" in Jordan, posing a health and security concern to authorities.

UNRWA began constructing huts in 1951, believing that they would provide better lodging than tents and would be less expensive to build and maintain because they did not need to be replaced on a regular basis. In the Jordan Valley and Gaza, UNRWA encouraged refugees to build modest buildings out of mud bricks and stone in Arab Palestine's highlands, (Figure 14).



Figure 12, (The displacement, Khaldi, 1992)



Figure 13, (Stage 1; tents, 1950, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 14, (Stage 2; huts, undated, UNRWA Archive.)

Many camps had been relocated from Amman to Jordan's borders with Palestine by late 1967, presumably as a result of government pressure on Israel to enable the return of some refugees, but Israel refused.

The existence of refugee camps near the battle lines posed a serious danger to Israeli security. In order to avoid the militarization of the camps, UNRWA and the government prepared alternate locations, but their plans were swiftly derailed.

The Israeli army launched an attack on al-Karama and other border sites on February 15, 1968. As a result, the al-Karama camp was evacuated, resulting in the displacement of roughly 54,000 people. Many refugees were now relocating to highland camps, with no formal camps remaining near the fighting lines. The Jordanian government soon decided where the new official camps would be located near the capital.

After the war, the number of refugees has increased and there was a need for better units that didn't get constantly changed, it was decided that prefabricated mobile shelters were going to replace the huts and tents but they were unsustainable and often impractical and UNRWA reported that the new camps quickly deteriorated. (Figure 14)



Figure 15, (Stage 3; prefabricated units, 1969, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 16, (Stage 4; Houses, 1983, UNRWA Archive.)

After prefabricated transportable shelters failed to meet expectations ten years later, The camps, which are overcrowded, are built on small plots of land and are difficult to expand.

As a result, Jordan's government accepted the building of additional floors to the houses for the increasing families accommodations. rules permitted for the construction of concrete dwellings that subsequently evolved into neighborhood housing (Figure 16). (The Institute for Palestine Studies. 1972).

# III. PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS

- PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS
- THESIS DILEMMA
- FROM TEMPORARY TO 70 YEARS
- CASE STUDY (AL TALBIEH CAMP)
- CAMP EVOLUTION AND REFLECTIONS

## PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS

Permanent temporariness is the state of being permanently waiting and living in a place that is supposed to be temporary. In the case of Palestinian refugees, that state has been persistent for the past 70+ years.

The Palestinian refugee camps are complex spaces with many different layers shaping them, from war, exile, and a political conflict, to people and a story that is constantly challenged, this context created a proud community tied to their roots, refusing to be erased and forgotten.

The Palestinians face the state of being both refugees and integrated citizens in Jordan, creating a cycle of being permanently stuck in a state of belonging to a different place than the one that they are in currently.

Not all Palestinians live in refugee camps, but this thesis focuses on the group of Palestinians that live in refugee camps. The camps are seen as physical proof of the right, because they represent the temporary state of being a refugee. As a result, there has always been a fear that development within the camps might lead to their stay in the camp being permanent which would be a threat to the idea of returning to Palestine.

This influenced the evolution of the refugee camps, these temporary locations were not intended to transform into homes and settlements, but when this state of temporariness lasted for more than 70 years, people were obligated to turn the camps into homes.



Figure 17, (The Palestinian exile. 1950, UNRWA Archive.)

A question from here rises on how did this persistent interplay between the political necessity to avoid permanent Palestinian implantation and the everyday requirements for people affect the built environment with this timeline of permanent temporariness?

# THESIS DILEMMA

## WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS IN JORDAN?

**REFUGEES ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TEMPORARY  
PALESTINIAN REFUGEES ARE NOT**

Which challenged the concept of a having a home

**REFUGEE CAMPS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TEMPORARY  
PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS ARE NOT**

Which challenged the concept of a refugee camp

**MOST PALESTINIAN REFUGEES WERE GRANTED  
JORDANIAN CITIZENSHIP**

Which challenged the necessity of having to return to Palestine

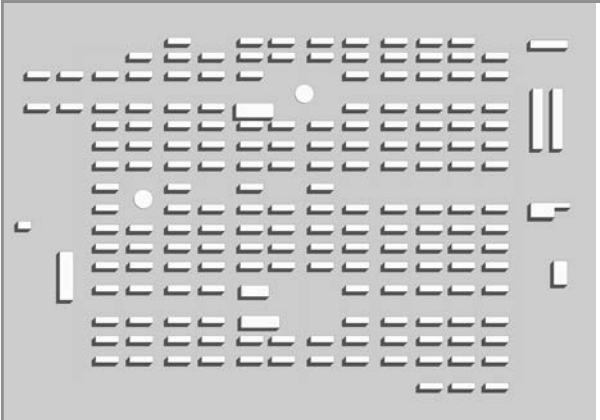



# FROM TEMPORARY TO 74 YEARS

## TABLE OF CHARACTERISTICS

THE GENERAL IDEA OF A REFUGEE CAMP	THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP
Perceived image	Perceived image
	
Figure18, (Zaatari camp 2012, UNHCR.)	Figure 19, (Talbieh camp 2018, Talbieh blog.)
Borders	Borders
	
Figure 20, (Zaatari camp 2015, UNHCR.)	Figure 21, (Talbieh camp 2015, Talbieh blog.)
<b>Who runs the camp?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UNHCR/UNRWA</li> <li>- A government</li> <li>- International organizations</li> </ul>	<b>Who runs the camp?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The refugees, with the land being offered by the government and UNRWA providing services in the camp.</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusion and exclusion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refugee camps are usually built away from the cities for safety reasons. (UNHCR Strategy 2014-2018).</li> <li>- Residents and visitors require legal approval to enter and exit the refugee camps.</li> </ul>	<b>Inclusion and exclusion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Al Talbieh camp is built away from the city center, but the other 9 refugee camps in Jordan are built within the context of the capital.</li> <li>- Residents and visitors do not require legal approval to enter or exit the refugee camp.</li> </ul>

# TABLE OF CHARACTERISTICS

THE GENERAL IDEA OF A REFUGEE CAMP	THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP
<p><b>Urban fabric</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The typical refugee camp consists from residential units, usually tents or shelters. in later stages of camps commercial functions start forming when the access to camp is less restricted.</li> <li>- Refugee camps are planned by the relief organization that run them, with strict grid planning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Urban fabric</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Al Talbieh camp has different layers of functions within its borders, commercial buildings nearby the main street, mixed use buildings which offer an economic boost to its inhabitants.</li> <li>- The it's urban planning the camp is less organized than the usual refugee camp because it evolved in a disorganized way.</li> </ul>
 <p>Figure 22, (Talbieh camp 1968, Author.)</p> <p>This map is for Al talbieh camp when it was established in 1968 showing the lack of diversity within the functions, the grid is residential units with services on the right and left side of the camp.</p>	 <p>Figure 23, (Talbieh camp 2022, Author.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Al Talbieh camp in 2022, the blue and purple layers show the diversity of functions being the commercial and mixed use layers, the white layer is mostly residential units.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State of existence</b></p> <p>Refugee camps are predominantly known for their state of temporariness. A refugee camp is temporary space in most cases, but this case mostly relies on the conditions that led to the construction of the camp, once the conflict is solved then the need for the camp is fulfilled.</p>	<p><b>State of existence</b></p> <p>Al Talbieh camp is in a state of permanency. It existed for 55 years and within these years it transitioned from a state of temporariness to permanency from physical point view. When it comes to its intangible side although it turned into a permanent place but, it's still not the refugees home hence the Permanent temporariness state.</p>

## CASE STUDY (AL TALBIEH CAMP)

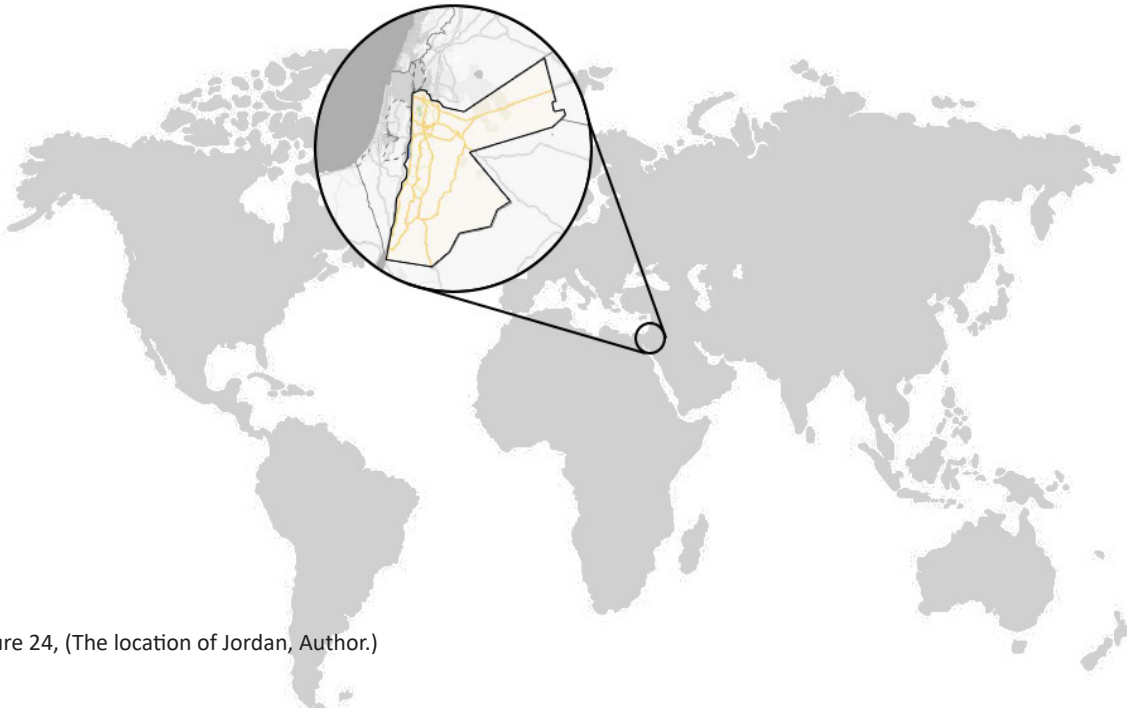


Figure 24, (The location of Jordan, Author.)

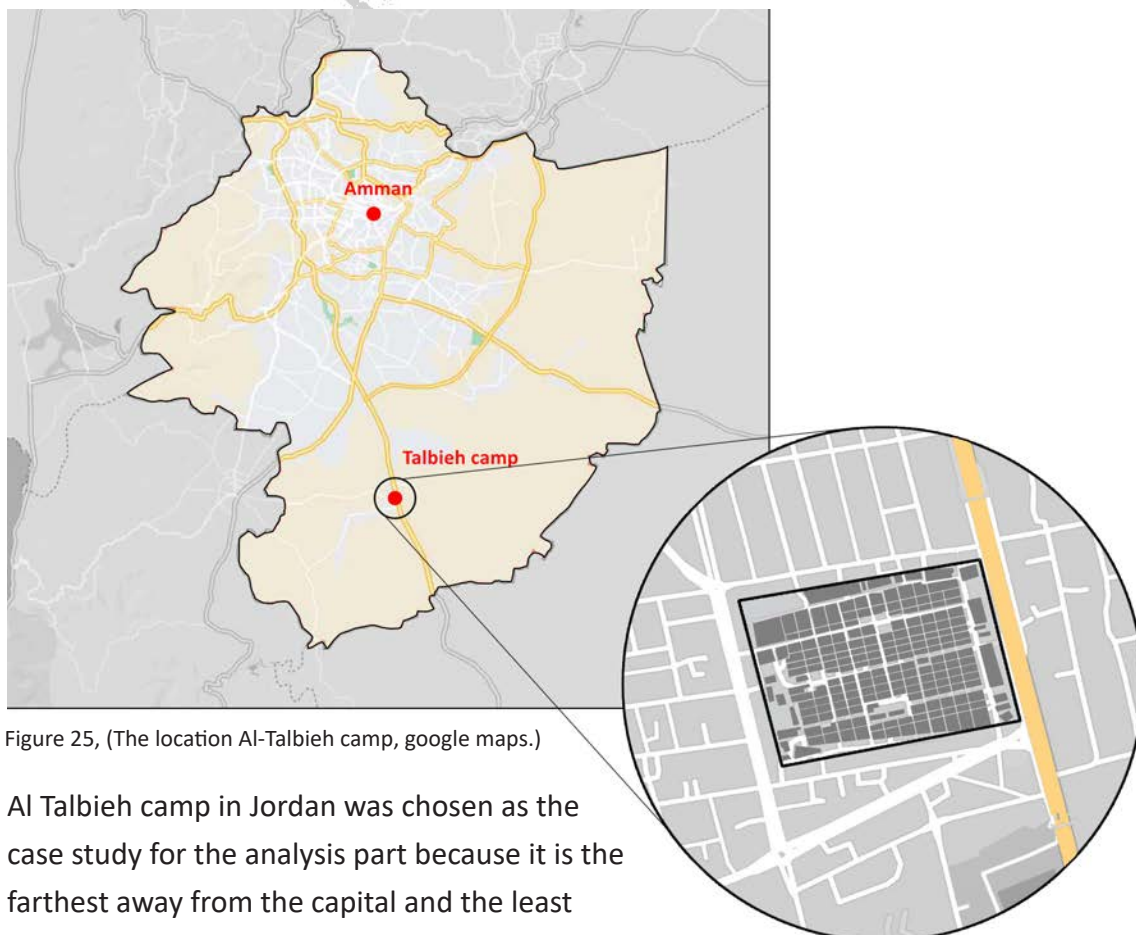


Figure 25, (The location Al-Talbieh camp, google maps.)

Al Talbieh camp in Jordan was chosen as the case study for the analysis part because it is the farthest away from the capital and the least integrated within the urban fabric of the country, in that sense it kept the qualities of a refugee camp the most out of the other camps in Jordan.

## BACKGROUND OF THE CAMP

The camp occupies an area of about 130,000 square meters at a distance of about 35 kilometers south of Amman. It currently includes around 8,000 inhabitants within its legal boundaries. UNRWA has since then provided the camp residents with education, health and social and relief services through 12 installations operated by 78 UNRWA staff (UNRWA, 2009).

Talbiyeh Refugee Camp is one of thirteen emergency camps in Jordan that were established to house Palestine refugees in the aftermath of the 1967 war with Israel.

The camp was set in the outskirts of the capital on a piece of land of 1.32 km<sup>2</sup>, mostly agricultural land at the time (Department of Palestinian Affairs, n.d.).

The camp is in Al-Jizeh area, a rapidly changing semi-urban area, which is also one of the poverty pockets in the country.

Similar to other camps, the camp suffers overcrowding, poverty, and poor environmental and sheltering conditions. Different development endeavors took place over the life of the camp by varied international and local organizations. However, the urban space was not addressed until the Camp Improvement was initiated.

The unemployment rate was approx. 15% in 2008, and 10% of the shelters housed two to four families, noting that the average family size is 5.6 and the average shelter size is 71.33 square meters (UNRWA, 2009)



Figure 26, (Al-Talbieh camp 2015, Talbieh blog)

In the early stages, the residents were housed in tents donated by the Red Lion and Sun Society of Iran. The tents were later replaced with shelters also donated by that society. These shelters were of concrete masonry units and had asbestos roofing. Each family received one room, except families of more than seven individuals, who received two rooms. Through time, the families added up extra rooms, expanding towards the south. The shelters now appear as blocks, with poor construction and maintenance.

Currently, the average number of residents per shelter is 5.4 individuals, with 10% of the shelters containing more than 2 families (up to four families). Noteworthy, 32% of the population is in absolute poverty and 12 % in relative poverty. Further, only 30% of the shelters have been upgraded to concrete roofing, usually by the refugees themselves. In the last two years, a government package targeted the needy housing offering 30 Square meters for selected families. Still, the majority of residents feel that their shelters are not adequate (AL-Nammari, 2009).



# DOCUMENTING THE EVOLUTION

This is an intersection study between observations of historical documents and personal accounts from interviews, aiming to materialize the Palestinian refugee journey in Jordan, following the evolution of the urban fabric, typology and stories from the camp.

## 1967

Talbieh camp was one of six “emergency” camps set up in 1968 for 5,000 Palestine refugees and displaced persons who left the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

The camp began in a state of emergency as a result of the people’s displacement, necessitating the need for rapid shelter. As a result, the camp started with the first typology of shelter: the tent.

## TENT TYPOLOGY

This stage of the camp represents the initial stage and what people most likely perceive as a refugee camp.

This part is part of my father’s personal journey;

*“once we took the bus we had the entire family staked inside of it trying to flee Palestine at night”*

*“we reached al karama the nearest city in Jordan to Palestine, and I saw thousands of people fleeing with us. there was Jordanian military trucks everywhere trying to help people flee the war” (Natsheh, N., Interview).*



Figure 27, (Marka camp, 1967, UNRWA Archive)



Figure 28, (Marka camp, 1967, UNRWA Archive)

*“The tents were really cold and empty, we only got the bits of furniture we got with us from Palestine before fleeing” (Natsheh, N., Interview).*

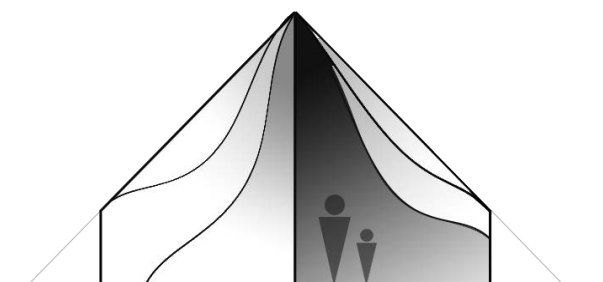


Figure 29, (The tent typology, Author)

## 1968

One year after the camp was established the refugees were offered land plots and built shelters. Camp refugees were initially allotted plots of land not exceeding 80-100 square meters per household, which included a shelter comprising one 12 square meter room for a family of 4-5 members; or two rooms for families of 6-8 persons. (UNRWA).

This part is part of my father's personal journey;

*"before we got the tents, we slept on the ground for a couple of days until the UNRWA reached out for help"* (Natsheh, N., Interview)



Figure 30, (Al-Talbieh camp 1968, UNRWA Archive)

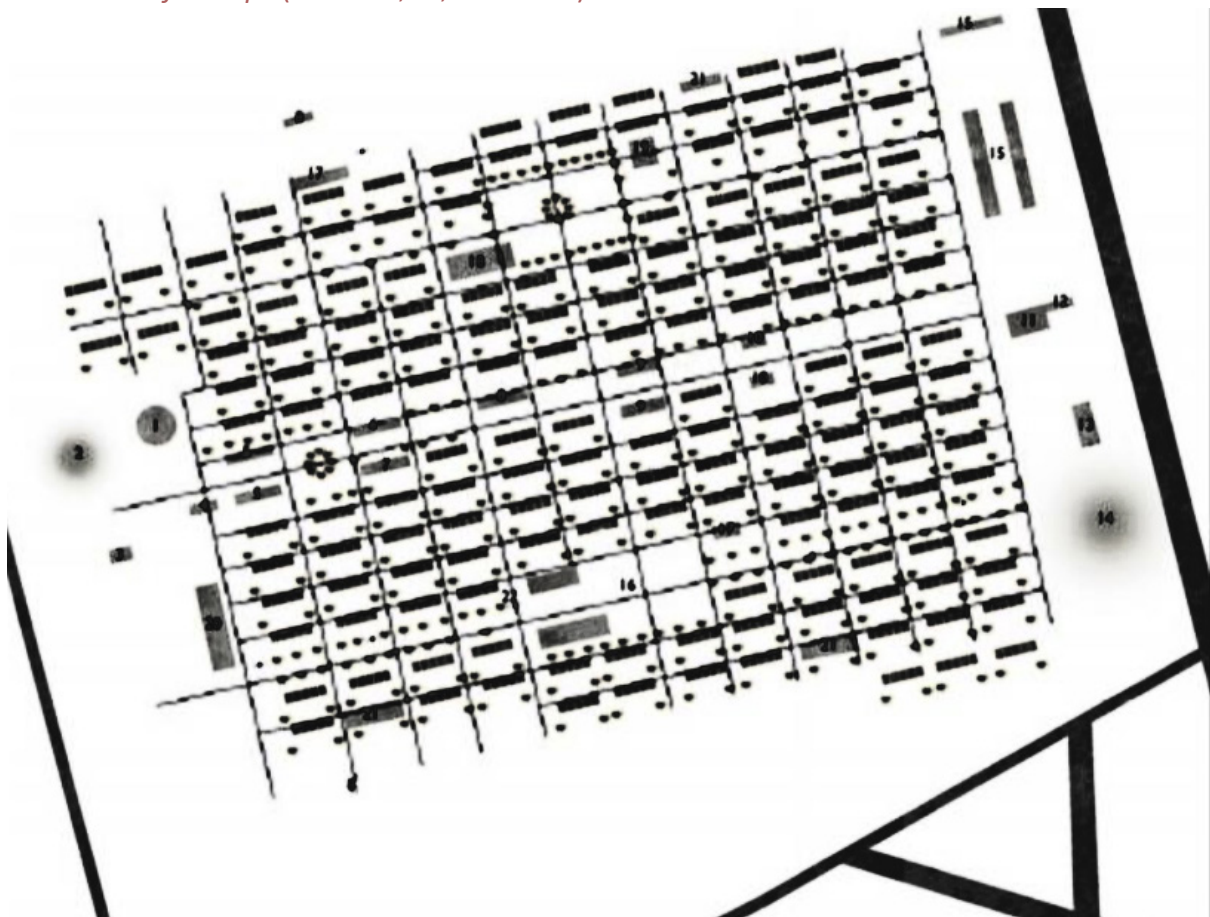


Figure 31, (Al-Talbieh camp 1967 top view, vandermeulen and vangrinsveld, 2012 p 41.)

## PREFABRICATED TYPOLOGY

In this stage of the camp, a transition from the basic tent typology into the prefabricated built shelter has happened, offering better living conditions for the refugees.

This unit has five rooms adjacent to one another and two trees in front of it. Every household was given one of these rooms, with families of ten or more receiving two. There was no room for a kitchen or bathroom because the room was barely 15 square meters (4,5 m to 3,5 m).

Family members had no privacy because they lived and slept in the same room, with only a thin wall separating them from their immediate neighbors.

Total rooms: 810

Total inhabitants: 5000

Density: 1 person/ 2,4 m<sup>2</sup> shelter

This part is part of my father's personal journey;

"Me: what about the shelters dad how would you describe them?.

Well they were still really cold but at least we had a mattress to sleep on"

(Natsheh, N., Interview).



Figure 32, (The living conditions, UNRWA Archive)



Figure 33, (Building the units, 1968, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 34, (Al-Talbieh camp, 1968, UNRWA Archive)

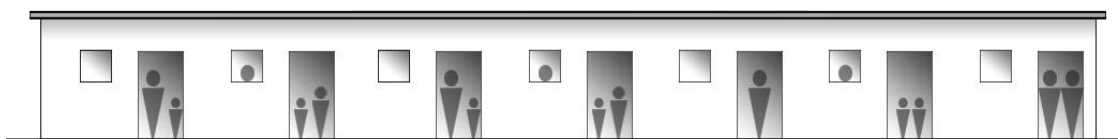


Figure 35, (Prefabricated typology, Author)



## 1968

At the first stage of the camp after the tents were removed, the prefabricated shelters offered better conditions when it came to safety and protection.

The camp started in an organized matter spatially but it didn't have any electricity or plumbing. Specific units were allocated to be the toilets and showers for the refugees.

From an urban point of view, most camps had the same layout as they started, they weren't planned to consider any future expansions as their main goal is to provide immediate emergency to the refugees.

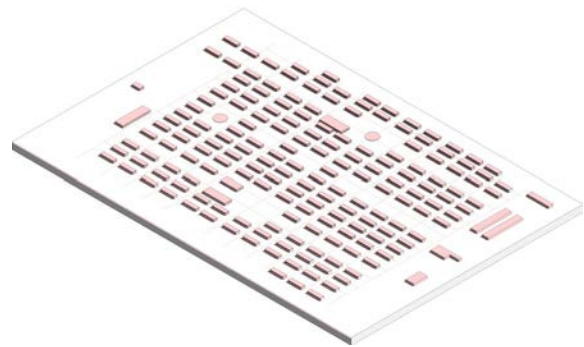


Figure 36, (Talbieh camp 3d 1968, Author.)

This part is part of my father's personal journey;

*"Me: could you tell me about the camp at the early stages?"*

*"Dad well, we had 1 room were we used to sleep and eat, the rest of the functions were in different buildings, we had to wait in line to use the showers" (Natsheh, N., Interview).*

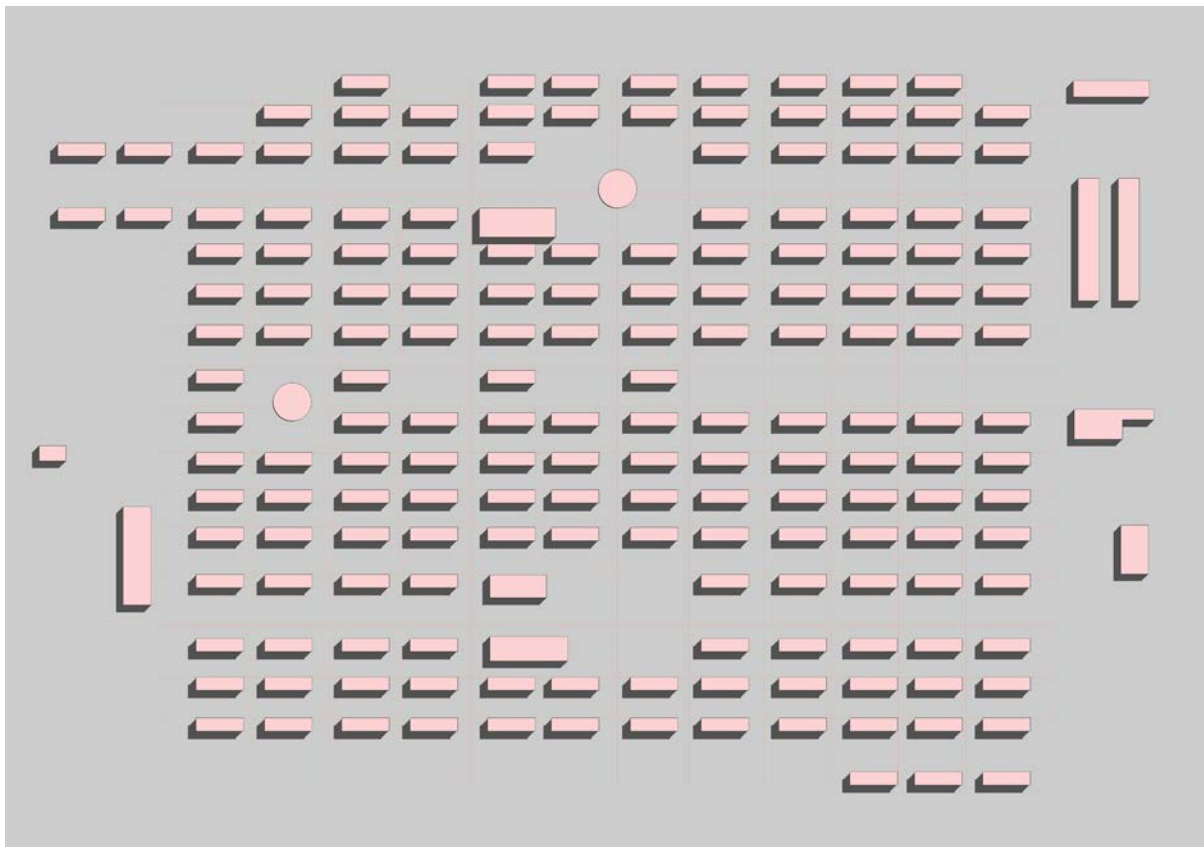


Figure 37, (Talbieh 1968 top view, Author.)



## 1978

Since people were constantly being forcibly removed from Palestine, the refugee population continued to grow.

The need for rooms and shelters was critical; however, the expansions were uncontrolled at first, and they began in chaotic patterns, with refugees building new units next to those of their families.



Figure 38, (Transitioning into brick houses in 1972, UNRWA Archive )



Figure 39, (Talbieh 1978 top view, Royal Jordanian geographic centre)

## 1978

The green units represent the new additions to the camp. at this stage non of them were regulated, people managed to get concrete bricks and built their own houses.

This dynamic created an issue with the infrastructure of the camp, the government couldn't stop the expansions but at the same time, they didn't have any better plans for them.



Figure 40, (Talbieh camp 3d 1978, Author.)

This part is part of my father's personal journey;

*"Me: did you consider brick buildings to be better than the prefabricated shelters?"*

*"Dad at this stage we left the camp but still moved into a concrete house, and it definitely had better conditions, we finally got our own water cycles"*

This part is part of my dad's personal journey;

*"Me: how long have you lived in the camp?"*

*"Dad: we stayed there for around ten years, but my dad managed to get a job as a bus driver and we moved to a small neighborhood near Amman" (Natsheh, N., Interview)*

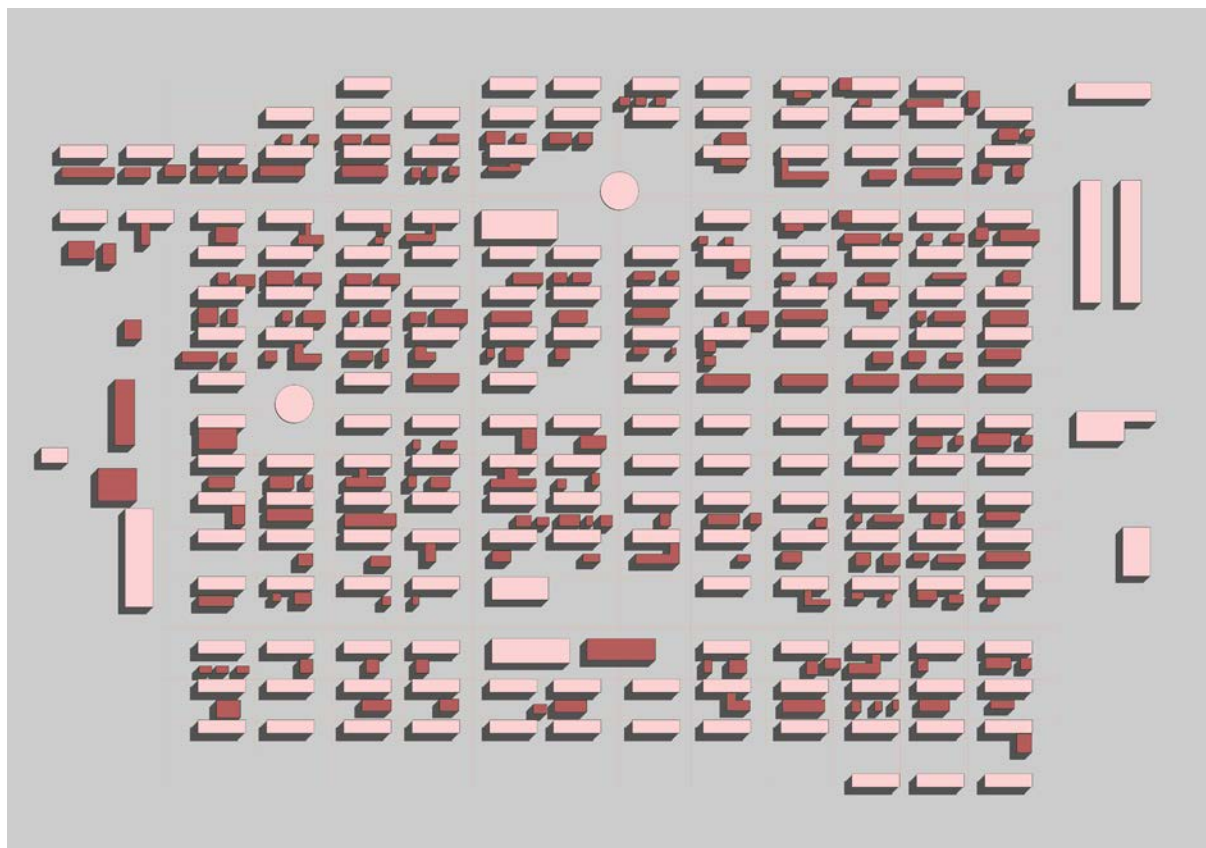


Figure 41, (Talbieh 1978 top view, Author.)



## 1992

This stage shows a complete transition in the camp from the prefabricated units to concrete houses, at this stage most of them were still in the 1-floor stage.

The urban layout of the camp has changed and the units have doubled in number.

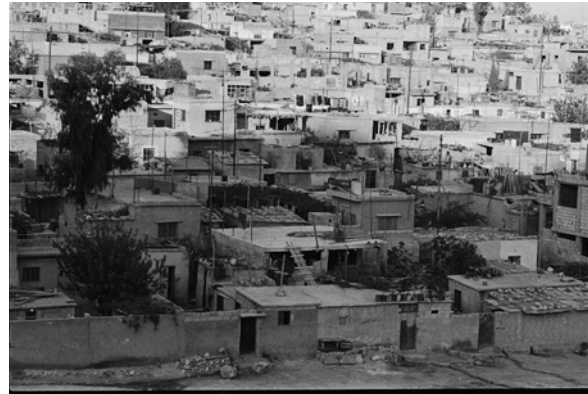


Figure 42, (Refugee camps fabric 1972, UNRWA Archive)



Figure 43, (Talbieh 1992 top view, Royal Jordanian geographic centre)



## PRESENT

“Many shelters are in a bad state of repair with zinc or asbestos sheet roofs, structural problems, and poor natural light and ventilation. According to a 2013 FaFo report, around 28 percent of Palestine refugees in Talbieh camp have an income below the national poverty line of JD 814 and 37 percent are uninsured”.(UNRWA)



Figure 44, (Talbieh camp fabric 2015, Talbieh blog.)



Figure 45, (Talbieh 2022 top view, google maps.)

## PRESENT

The current state of the urban fabric of the camp is chaotic, some streets are too narrow for emergency cars to get in. safety is also an issue within the public spaces in the camp. But development plans and projects are ongoing in the camp to enhance it's current infrastructure.

### Reflection

This state of the camp is directly linked to the camp not being part of the urban plan of the city in Jordan, but that's not the only connection. the other link that caused this unplanned growth in the camp was the fact that this is Temporary, Palestinians especially in the camps still hold on the right of return

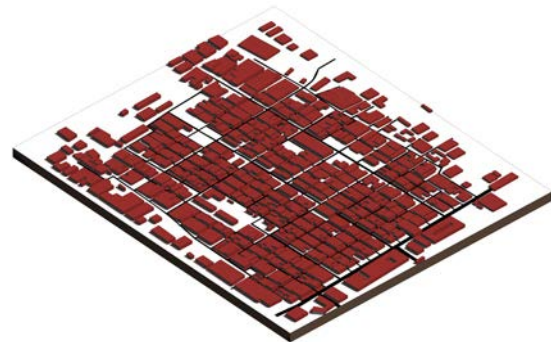


Figure 46, (Talbieh camp 3d 2022, Author.)

This part is part of my father's personal journey;

*"Me: What is your point of view on the right of return?"*

*"Dad: son, you have to know that my generation wasn't able to return and we probably won't in my lifetime, but what I wish for is for you to one day go back and see the place I called home" (Natsheh, N., Interview)*

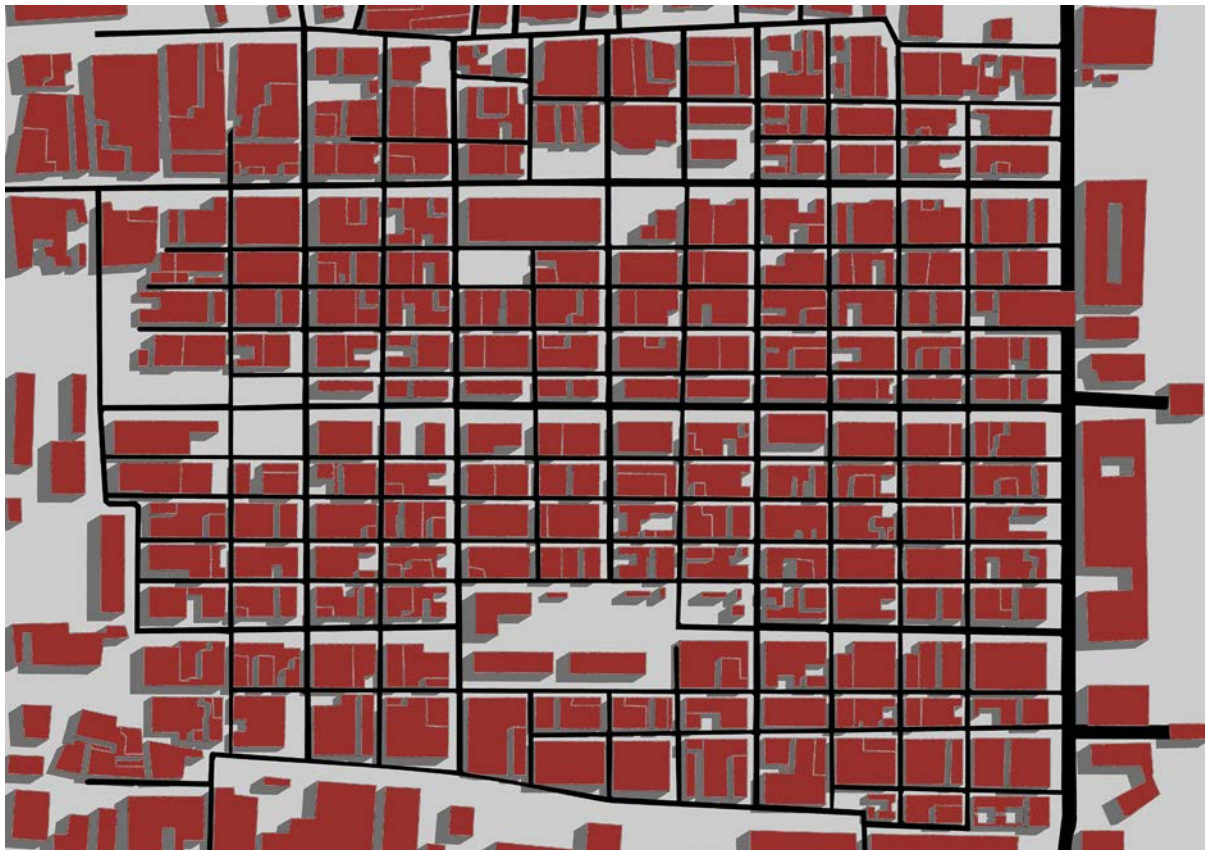


Figure 47, (Talbieh 2022 top view, Author.)



# CONCLUSION

The evolution of the architecture in the refugee camp, from the lightest shade of red being the tent to the darkest shade being the house unit.

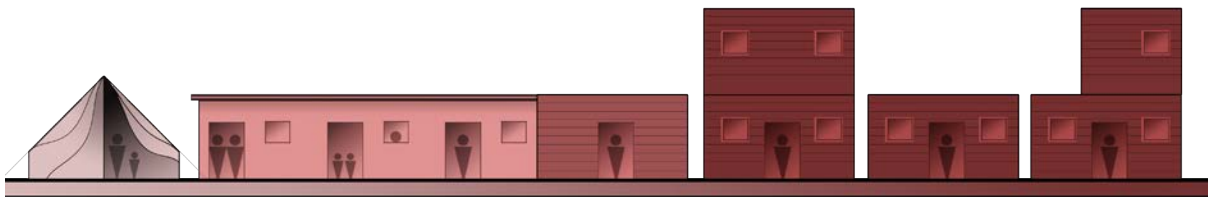


Figure 48, (Talbieh camp 1968 vs 2022, Author.)

The evolution of the organization in the refugee camp, from the lightest shade of red representing the camp in year 1968 and the darker shade being the current state.

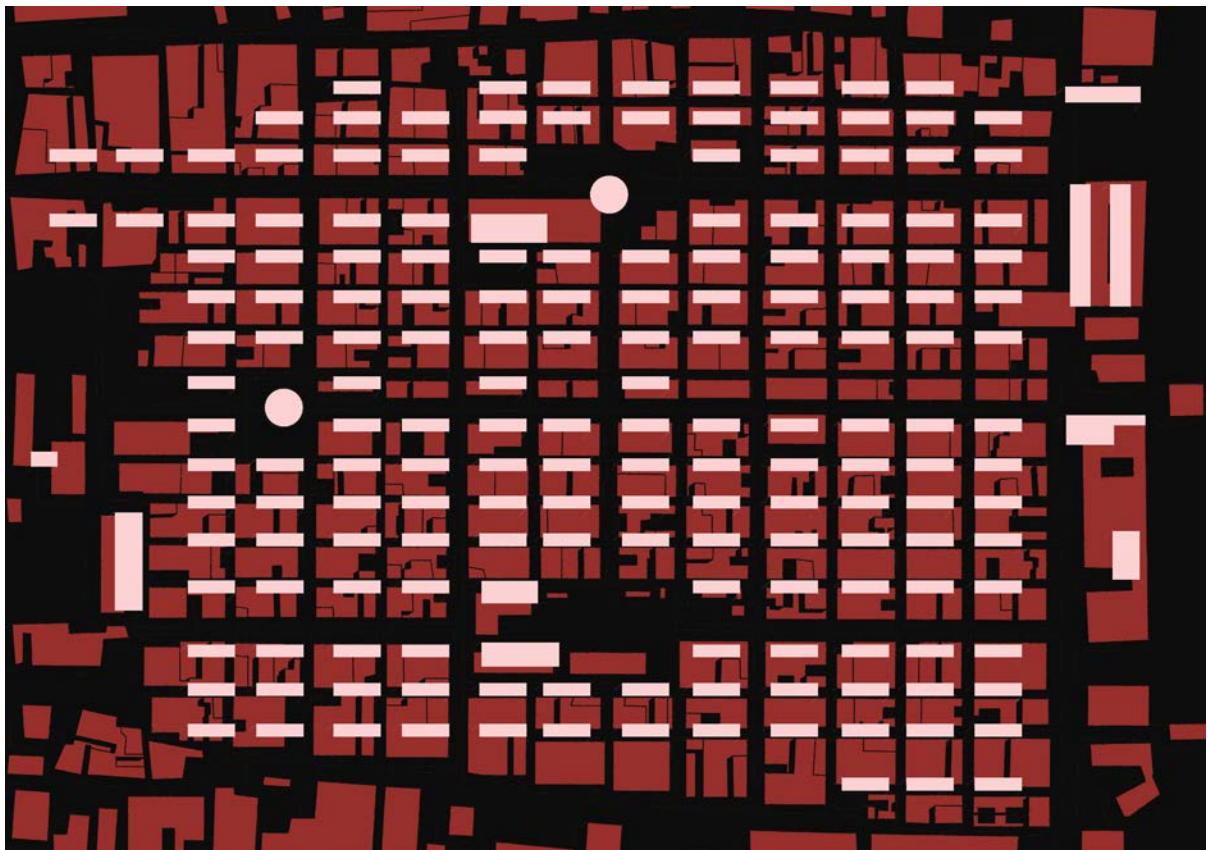
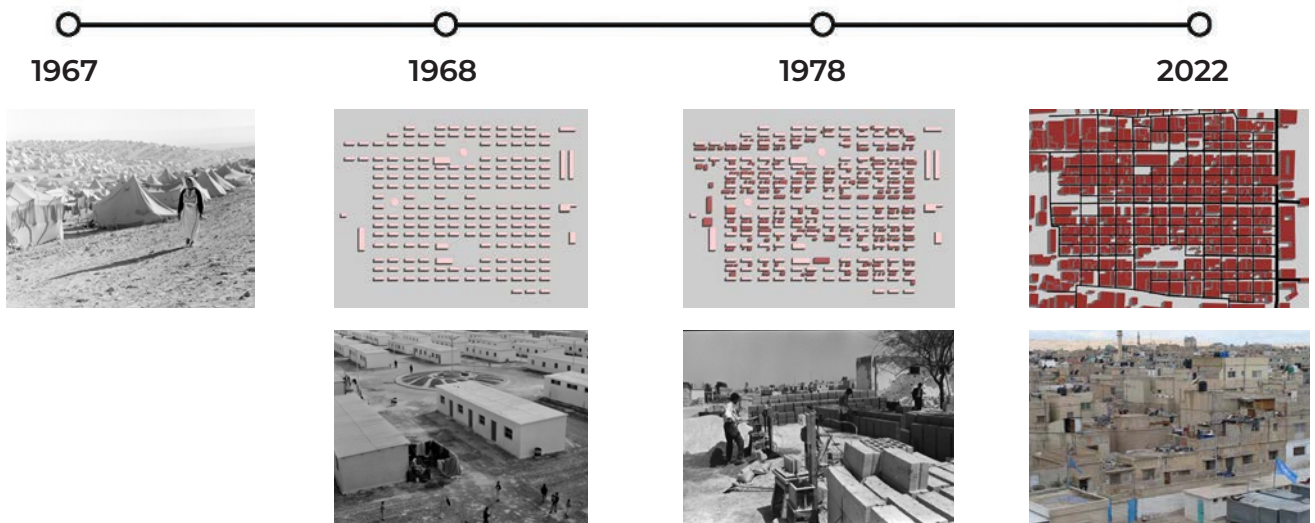


Figure 49, (Talbieh camp 1968 vs 2022, Author.)



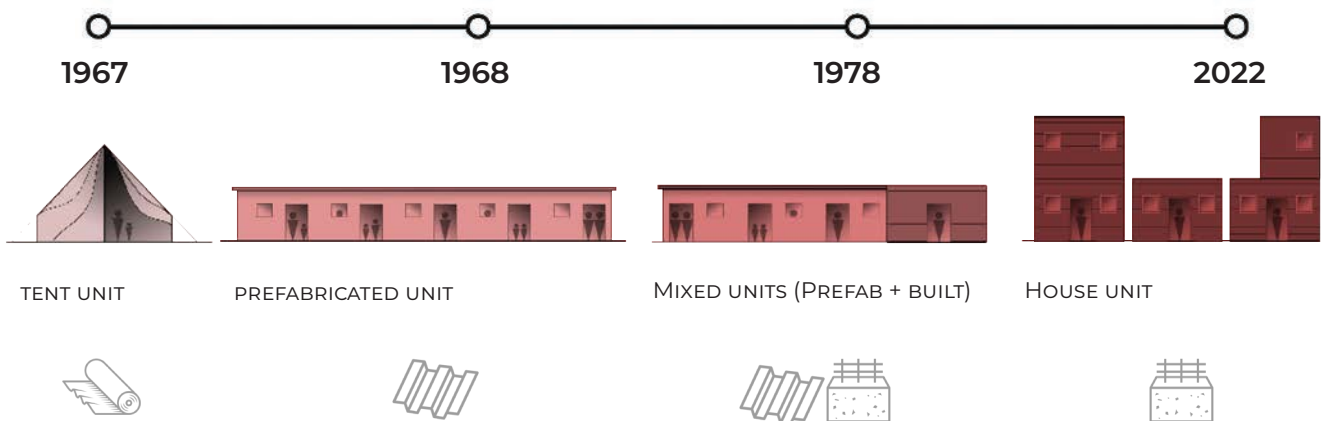
## YEAR - ORGANIZATION



## TEMPORARY TO PERMANENT

This timeline demonstrates how long the camp has been standing, each step shows the increase of the density in the refugee camp as the population started at 5000 refugees and now it is 8000. The boundaries of the camp have remained the same with no plans for future expansions, which led to its chaotic growth of it, another aspect that affected the organization of the refugee camp is the right of return, as refugees considered the evolution of the refugee camp as a direct threat to their right to return to Palestine.

## TPOLOGY - MATERIALS



## TEMPORARY TO PERMANENT

The evolution from a tent in fabric to the house in concrete has affected the state of permanent temporariness as the more solid the units got the more stuck in Jordan the refugees became

## THE STORY

### MY FATHER'S PERSONAL STORY.



---

## TEMPORARY TO PERMANENT

The purpose of analyzing the camp is to find a way to materialize this long state of permanent temporariness that defines the journey of the Palestinian refugees, being in a place away from home, a place where they had to spend more than 70 years but still consider it temporary.

The right of return plays a big role in this state of permanent temporariness as it is the key to unlocking the dilemma of the Palestinian refugees.

The story (Intangible), as well as the refugee camp (tangible), play an important role in translating the Palestinian journey into architecture. After the camp had transitioned into a permanent condition, what remains as a direct link to Palestine is the refugee's journeys and their right to return to Palestine.

From there, I decided to focus on trying to be a part of continuing and preserving the story of Palestinians in Jordan and a way to achieve that would be through a space that translates the different stages of the Palestinian journey to allow people to stay in touch with the journey physically and emotionally.

# IV. DESIGN

- NARRATING THE PALESTINIAN JOURNEY
- DESIGN GUIDE
- THE SITE OF INTERVENTION
- DEVELOPING A CONCEPT

# NARRATING THE PALESTINIAN JOURNEY



Figure 50, (Palestinian Exile, from home, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 51, (Leaving home, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 52, (The displacement, Agence France-Presse — Getty Images.)



Figure 53, (The displacement, UNRWA Archive.)

Summarizing the Palestinian Journey through 4 main stages:

## EXILE

At the start Palestinians were forced to flee their homeland starting from 1948, moving out to find safety in other countries was their only hope.

## DISPLACEMENT

After leaving their homes, Palestinians had to seek alternative countries to live in until the war stops, they mainly fled to, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and other nearby countries.

“Palestinian have been living in their hometown for decades, surrounded by family friends and community

But one day gunfire starts shooting militias show up and people were forced to flee in terror

searching for safety, hoping to soon return but they never did,

they were actually banned from returning, another family already moved into their house.. using their beds and pots.” (IMEU 2022).





Figure 54, (Tent stage of architecture, UNRWA Archive)



Figure 55, (Prefabricated stage of architecture, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 56 (The living conditions in the camp, UNRWA Archive.)

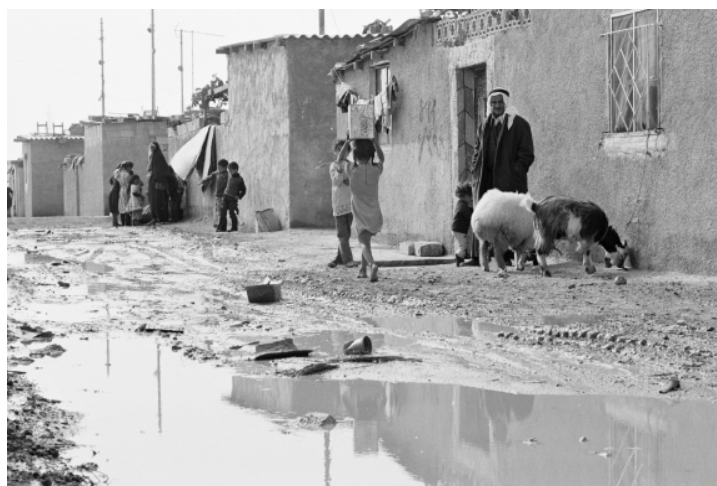


Figure 57, (From temporary to permanent, UNRWA Archive.)

## THE REFUGEE LIFE

After they've reached Jordan (the case study of this thesis), They have gone through years of being refugees from 1948 to this day in 2022, Palestinian were stuck in this state of permanent temporariness. The short stay in Jordan ended up lasting a lifetime, generations have passed and new generations have replaced them.

The architecture of this state was analyzed in the third chapter, showing how the selected refugee camp evolved from its state of temporariness into a state of permanency

The architecture has transitioned from being light and temporary to it being concrete, and permanent. This transition had impacted with it one hand people started formulating a new home, but on the other hand, most people didn't believe in the need to find a new home, since their homes are in Palestine, not Jordan.





Figure 58, (Current living conditions of the camps, UNRWA Archive.)



Figure 59, (The right of return, © Qantara.de 2022.)



Figure 60, (A man holding the Palestinian flag, public domain)



Figure 61, (The olive tree as a symbol of resilience, environmental justice atlas)

## GOING HOME

This is the current stage of the Palestinian journey, after 74 years of exile, displacement, being refugees in Jordan, some Palestinians managed to forge their way out of the refugee camps and live within the cities, others still do stay in the refugee camps but what binds all of them is their roots, story and their legal right of return that they were denied.

15/5 is the memory day of the catastrophe (Alnakba 1948), this day is connected to the start of the Palestinian struggle, and every year on this day Palestinians remember the time they were Exiled and that keeps them connected to their story and right of return.

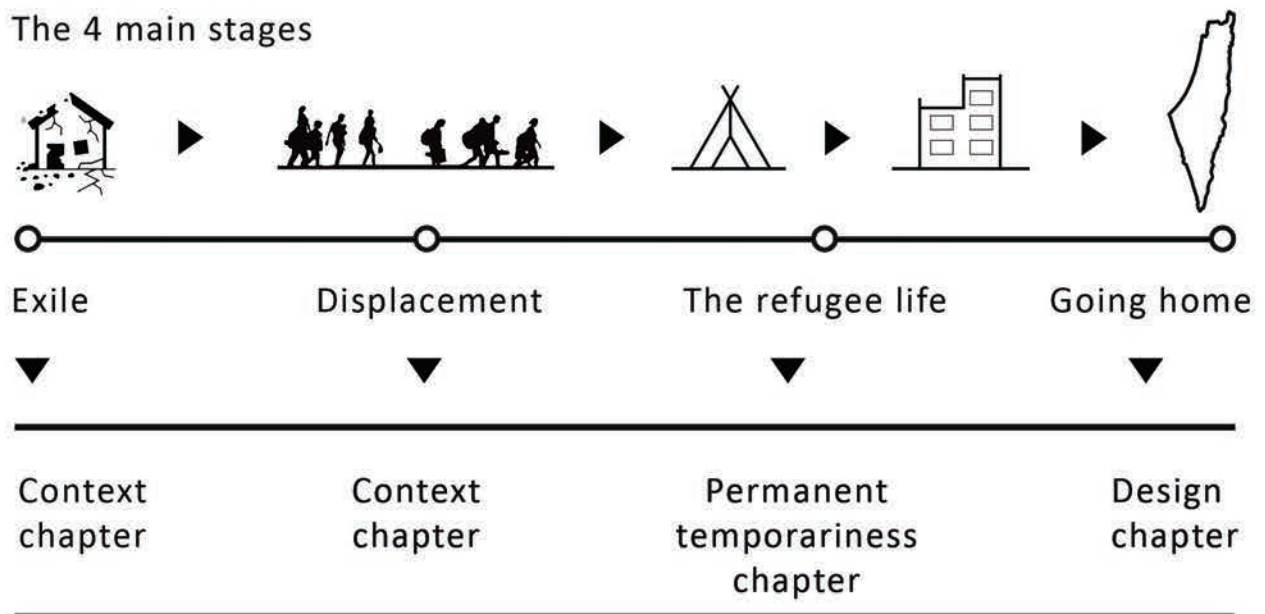
Stories are being told until now, the exiled generation might be gone, but the current generations still hold within them the memories of their ancestors and their right to be back where they went.

After 74 years Palestinians still hold the home keys they march and ask for their rights to be fulfilled.

Social media is currently used to keep the memory alive, people yearly share images from their home cities in Palestine.

# DESIGN GUIDE

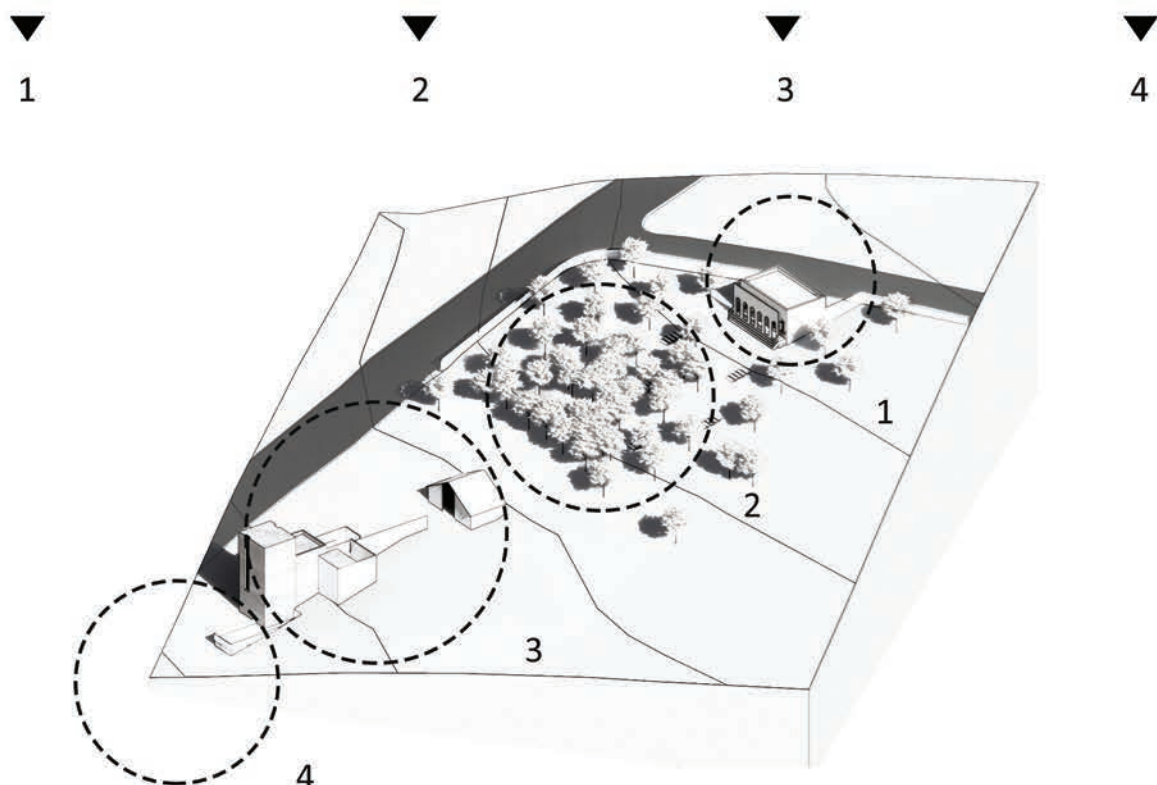
The 4 main stages



## Narrating the Palestinian journey

Site of intervention : The site is nearby Amman on a hill that overlooks Palestine, which works as a link between the user and the journey.

Translation into architecture





# THE SITE OF INTERVENTION

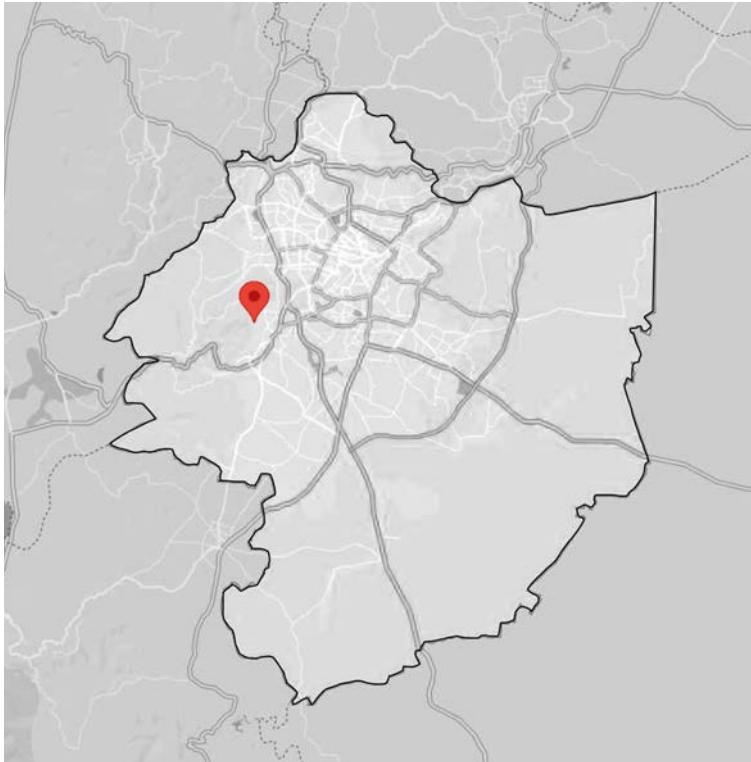


Figure 62, (Amman - Jordan, google maps.)

Choosing a site to represent  
The Palestinian Journey.

The site is near Amman the  
capital of Jordan, it is an easy to  
access hill that overlooks  
Palestine.

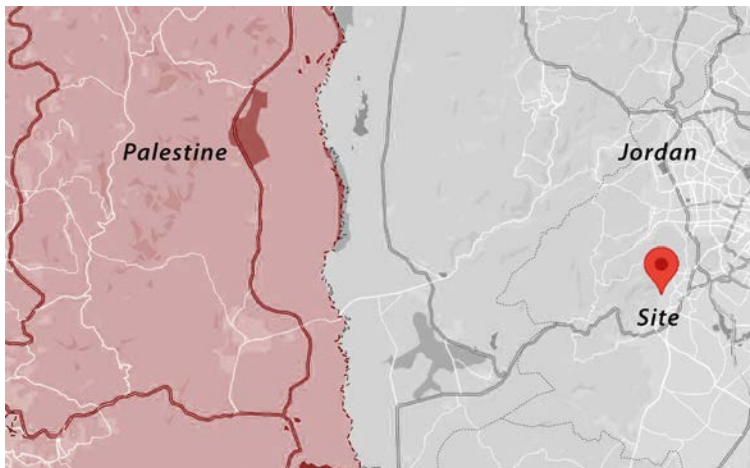


Figure 63, (Amman - Jordan, google maps, edited by Author.)

The site in relation to Palestine.



Figure 64, (Amman - Jordan, google Earth, edited by Author.)

The visual connection between  
the site and Palestine, which  
plays a role in trying to connect  
the people to Palestine.



Figure 65, (View from the site to Palestine, Omar Dajani)



Figure 66, (The site, 2022)



Figure 67, (The site showing the Palestinian cities, Omar Dajani.)

# DEVELOPING A CONCEPT

## THE PALESTINIAN JOURNEY

A conclusion of the journey and the analysis; The Journey of exile and struggle highlighted within the context of being a refugee.

**THE JOURNEY IS DIVIDED INTO 4 MAIN STAGES:**

**1) EXILE 2) DISPLACEMENT 3) THE REFUGEE LIFE 4) GOING HOME**

Each stage is represented through a different architectural element, a Palestinian symbol and an emotion reflecting the full story that the Palestinian refugees went through from 1948 until today

**THE LAYERS OF THE DESIGN FOR EACH STAGE:**

### **1) EXILE:**

is the first stage of the Palestinian story, people were forced to flee their homes.

**A) Architecture:** the main entrance

**B) Palestinian symbol:** the traditional Palestinian house

**C) Emotion:** Transition from being safe in home to the unknown.

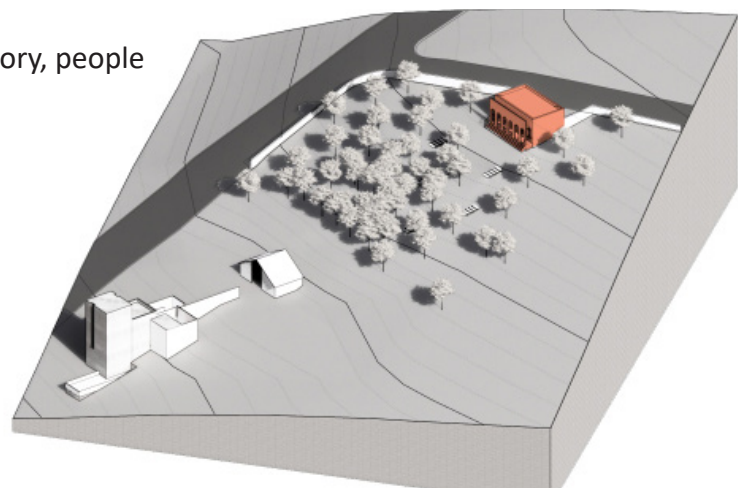


Figure 68, (Exile stage, Author.)

### **2) DISPLACEMENT:**

After Palestinians were exiled and scattered between the bordering countries.

**A) Architecture:** site stairs/ the garden.

**B) Palestinian symbol:** the olive trees

**C) Emotion:** at this point, they're lost in between the fields of olive trying to find what is next.

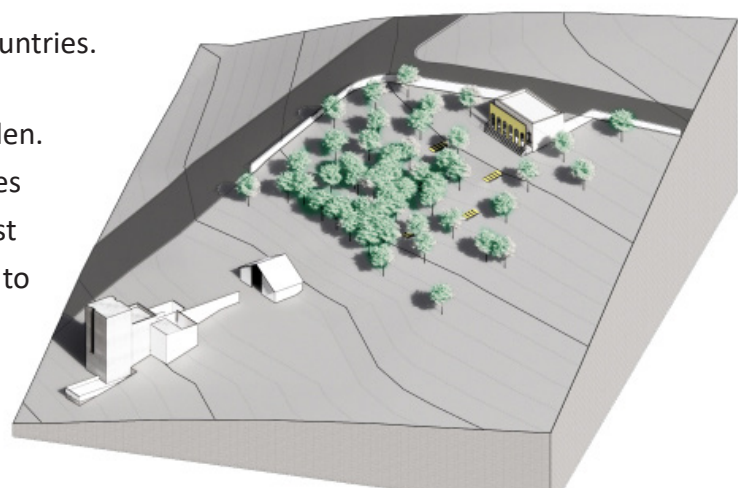


Figure 69, (Displacement stage, Author.)



### 3) THE REFUGEE LIFE:

This stage is based on the analysis of the camp, it describes the materiality and evolution of the camps (Permanent temporariness):  
From Tents -> Shelters -> Houses

**A) Architecture:** Tent, gallery.

**B) Palestinian symbol:** temporary stage of the refugee camps.

**C) Emotion:** the first stop after displacement, refugees were exhausted after their long journey of trying to find a safe place, the tents serve as the first resting place, and visitors get to share their stories in this space.

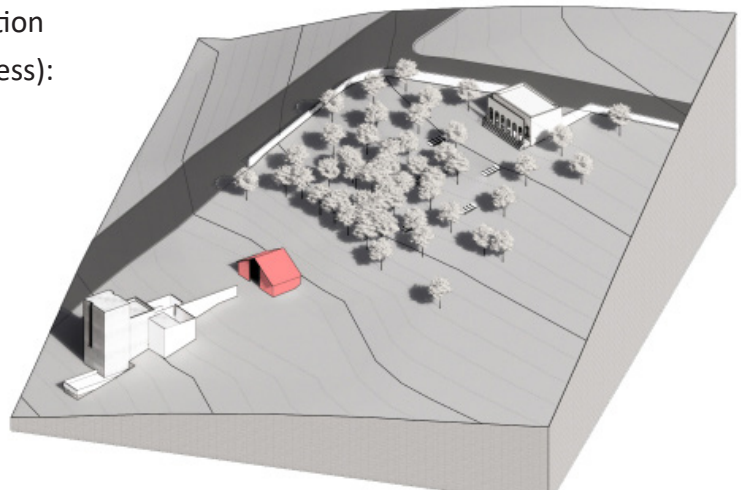


Figure 70, (Tent stage, Author.)

**A) Architecture:** Shelters, a house.

**B) Palestinian symbol:** permanent stage of the refugee camps.

**C) Emotion:** a transition of the materiality of the camps, from fabric to metal to concrete.

The space starts light and open in the metal shelter stage then transition into dark concrete spaces resembling the feelings of being stuck within the camps and unable to go home

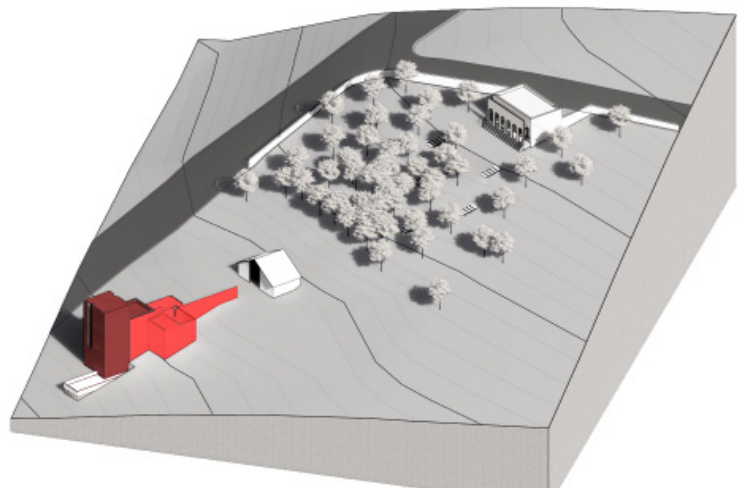


Figure 71, (Refugee camps stage, Author.)

### 4) GOING HOME:

This stage resembles the right of return and the inability to do so.

**A) Architecture:** a balcony.

**B) Palestinian symbol:** the view of Palestine from the balcony.

**C) Emotion:** the final stop where people get to set down after that long journey and discuss their stories of Palestine.

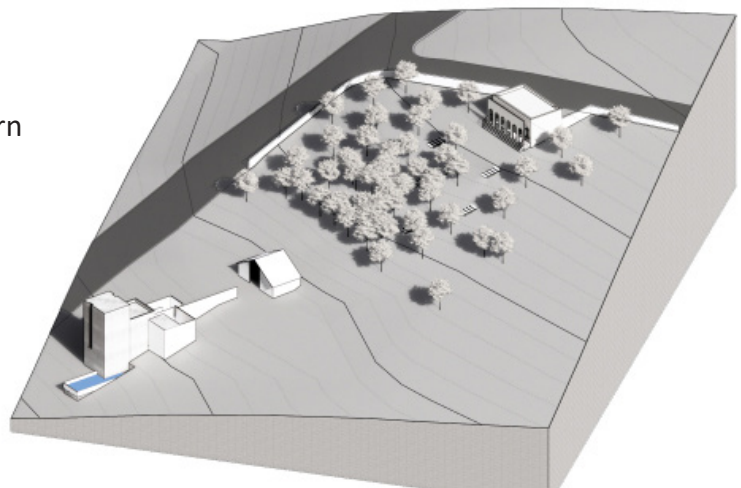


Figure 72, (Going home stage, Author.)

# NARRATING THE PALESTINIAN JOURNEY

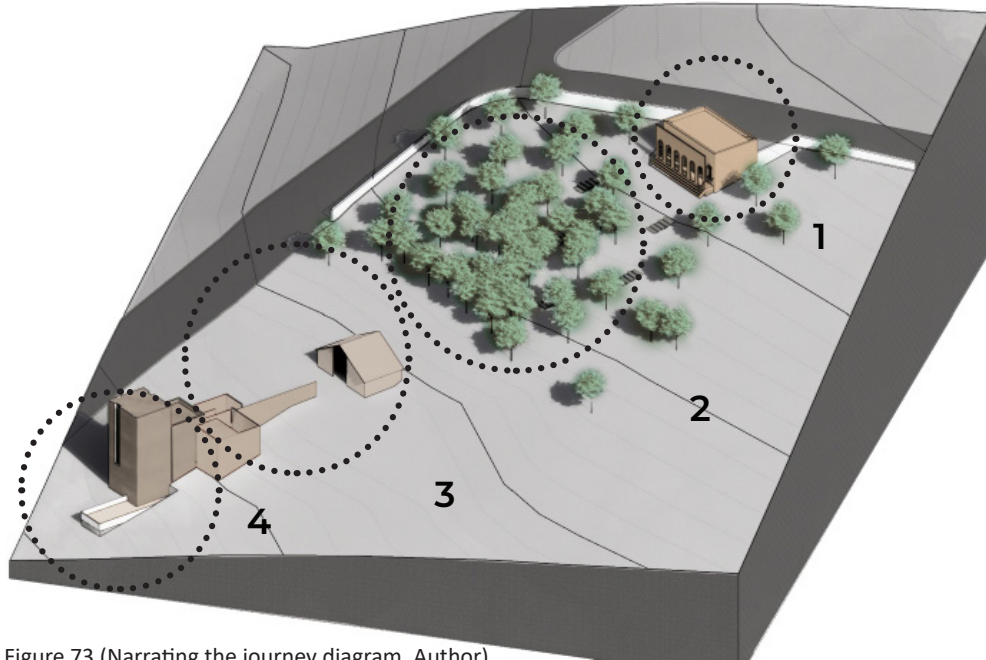


Figure 73 (Narrating the journey diagram, Author)

## 3. THE REFUGEE LIFE 1. EXILE



## 2. DISPLACEMENT



## 4. GOING HOME





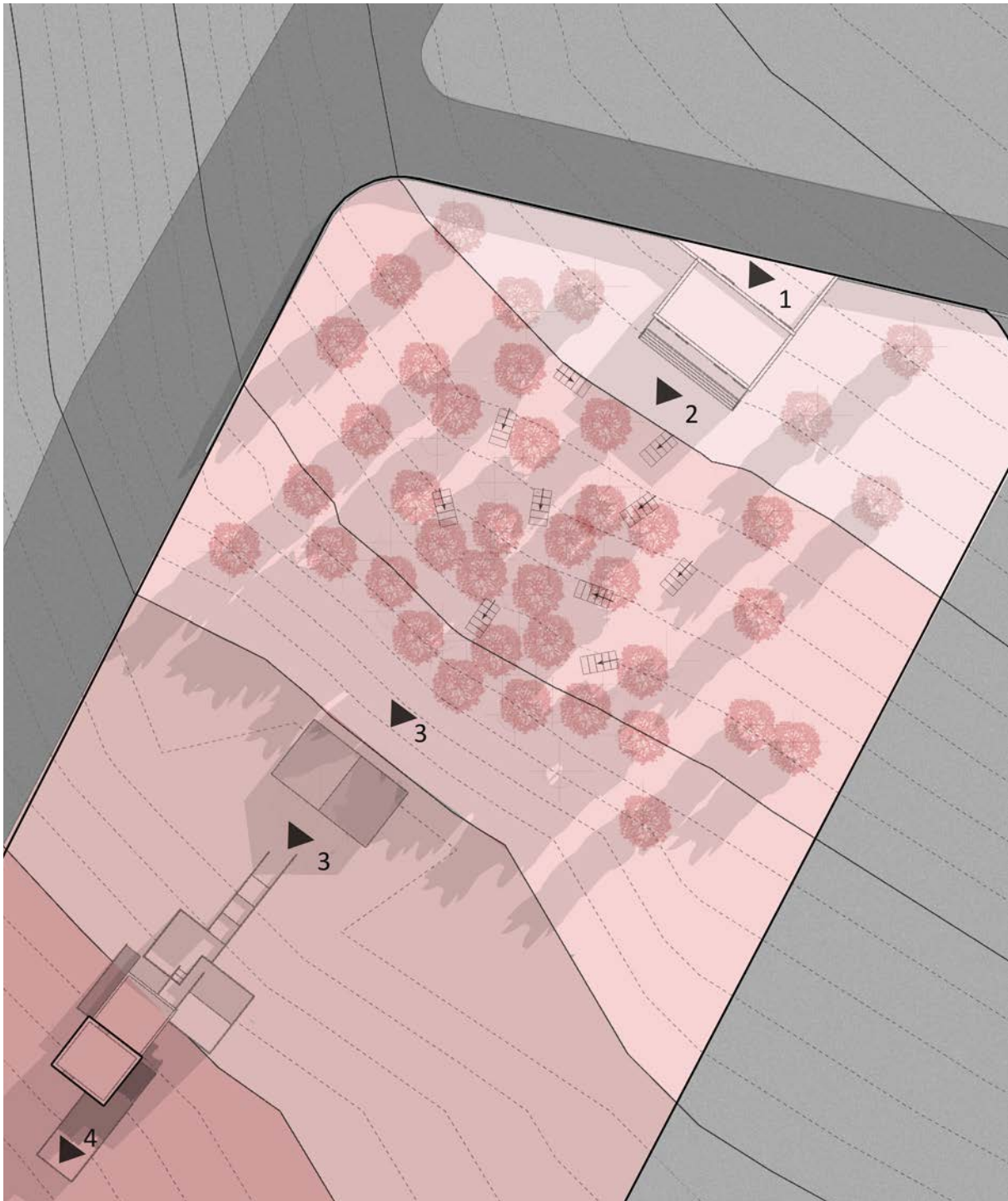
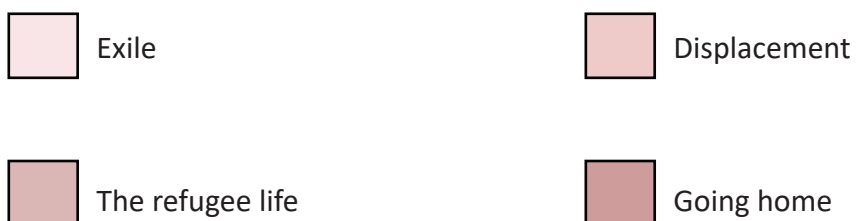


Figure 74 (Site plan, Author)

The colors on the site represent the four different stages of the Palestinian journey, led by the arrows which represent the transitions between the stages.



## THE EXILE

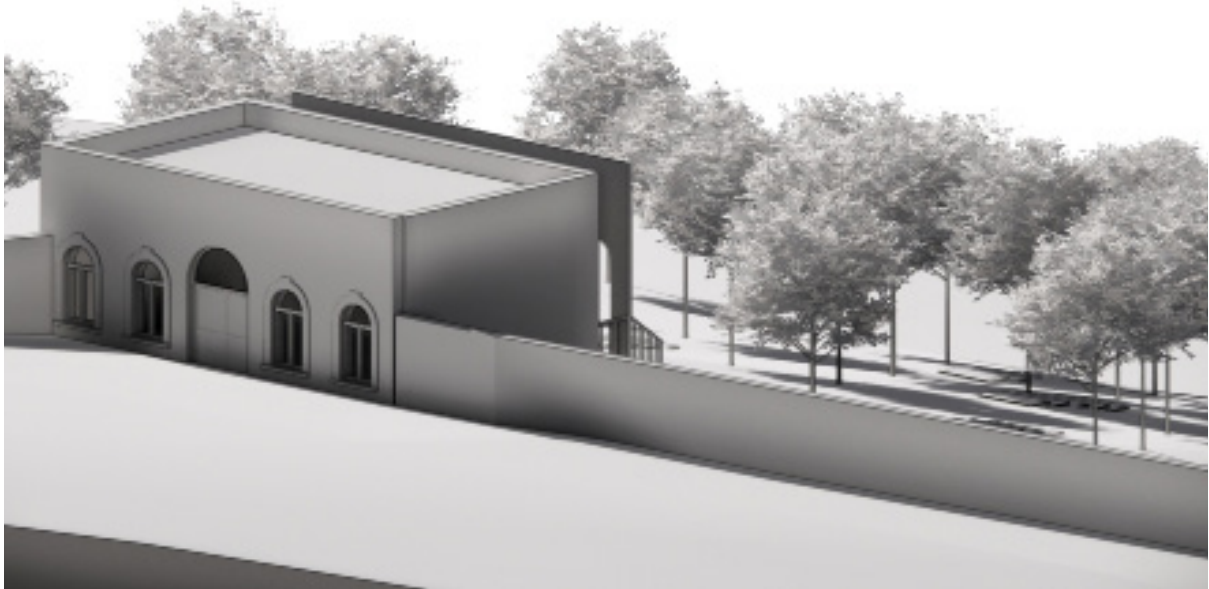


Figure 75 (The entrance, Author)

## DISPLACEMENT

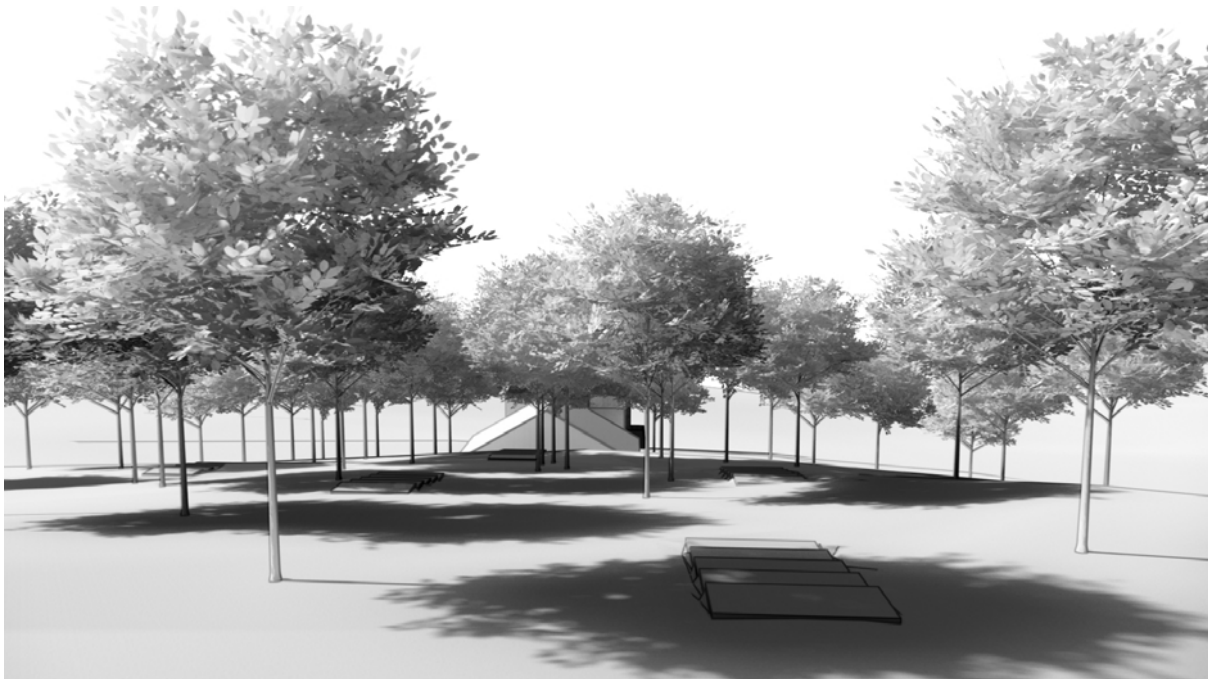


Figure 76 (The way down, Author)

## THE REFUGEE JOURNEY

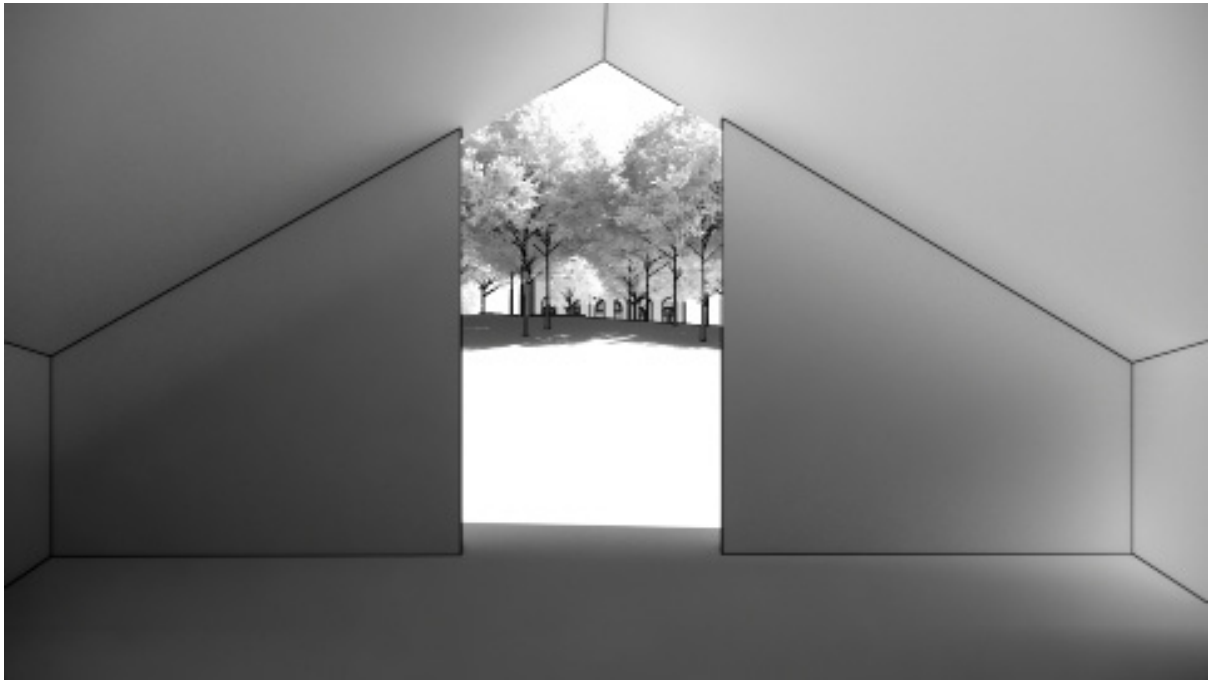


Figure 77 (The first pause, Author)

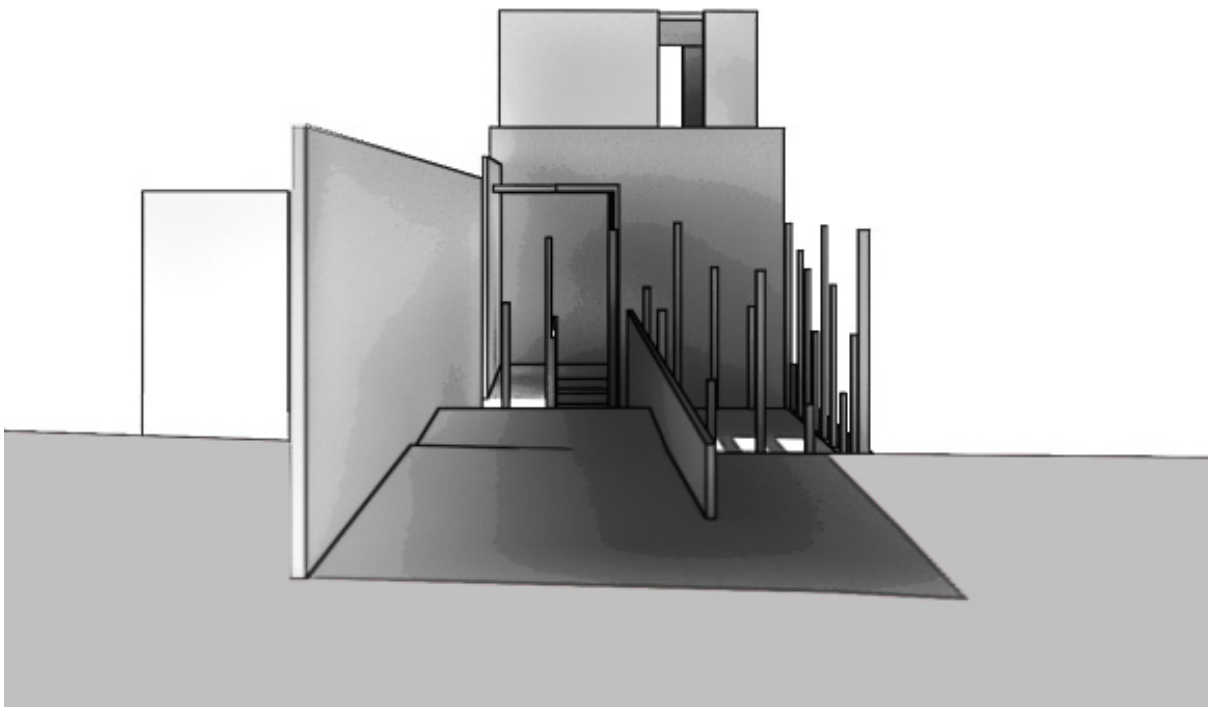


Figure 78 (The Refugee camps 3d, Author)



## THE RIGHT OF RETURN WHILE STUCK IN JORDAN

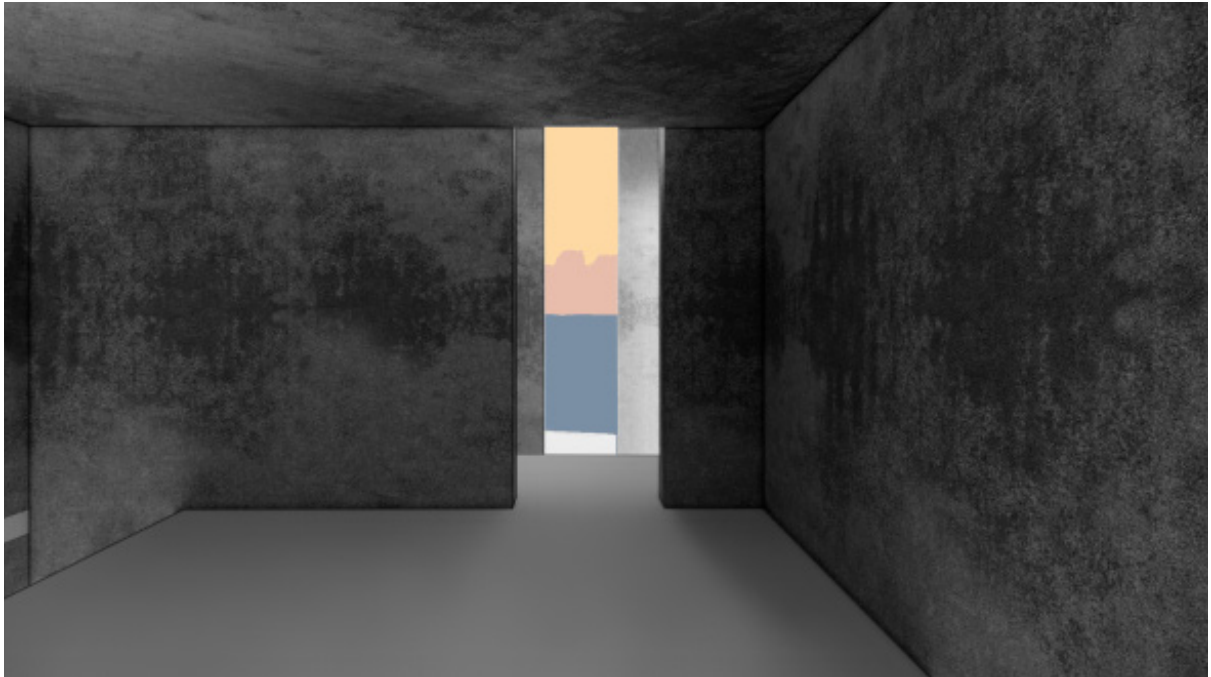


Figure 79 (A glimpse of home, Author)

## GOING HOME

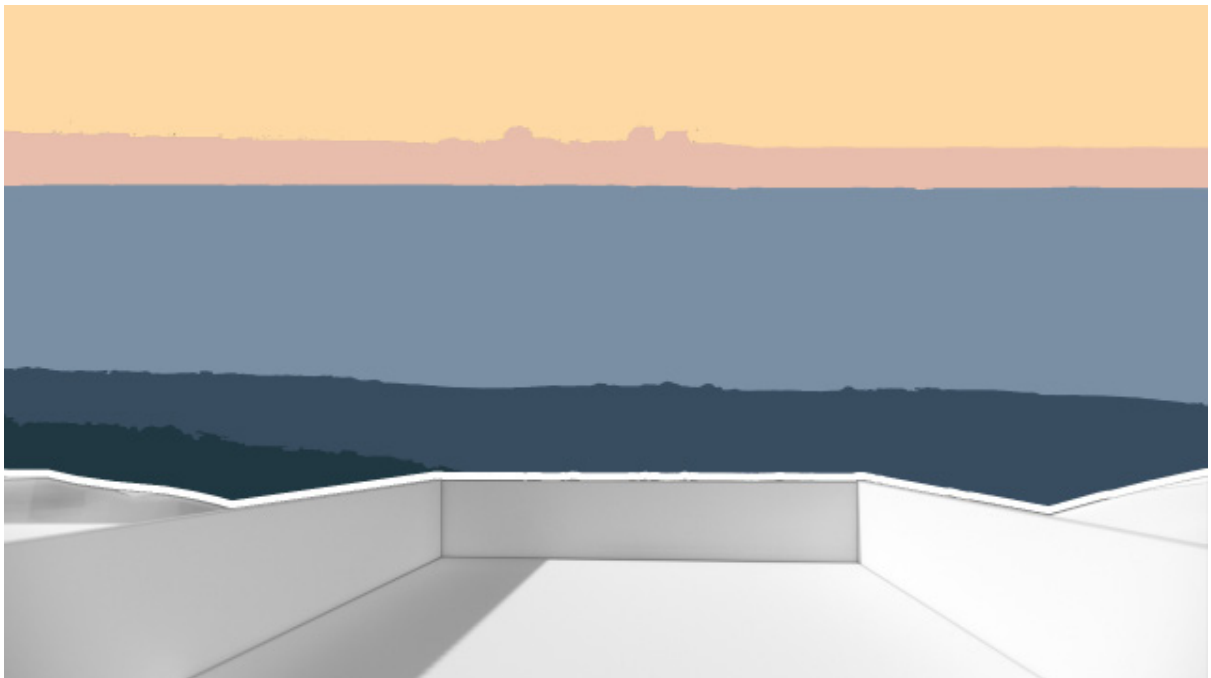


Figure 80 (Back home, Author)

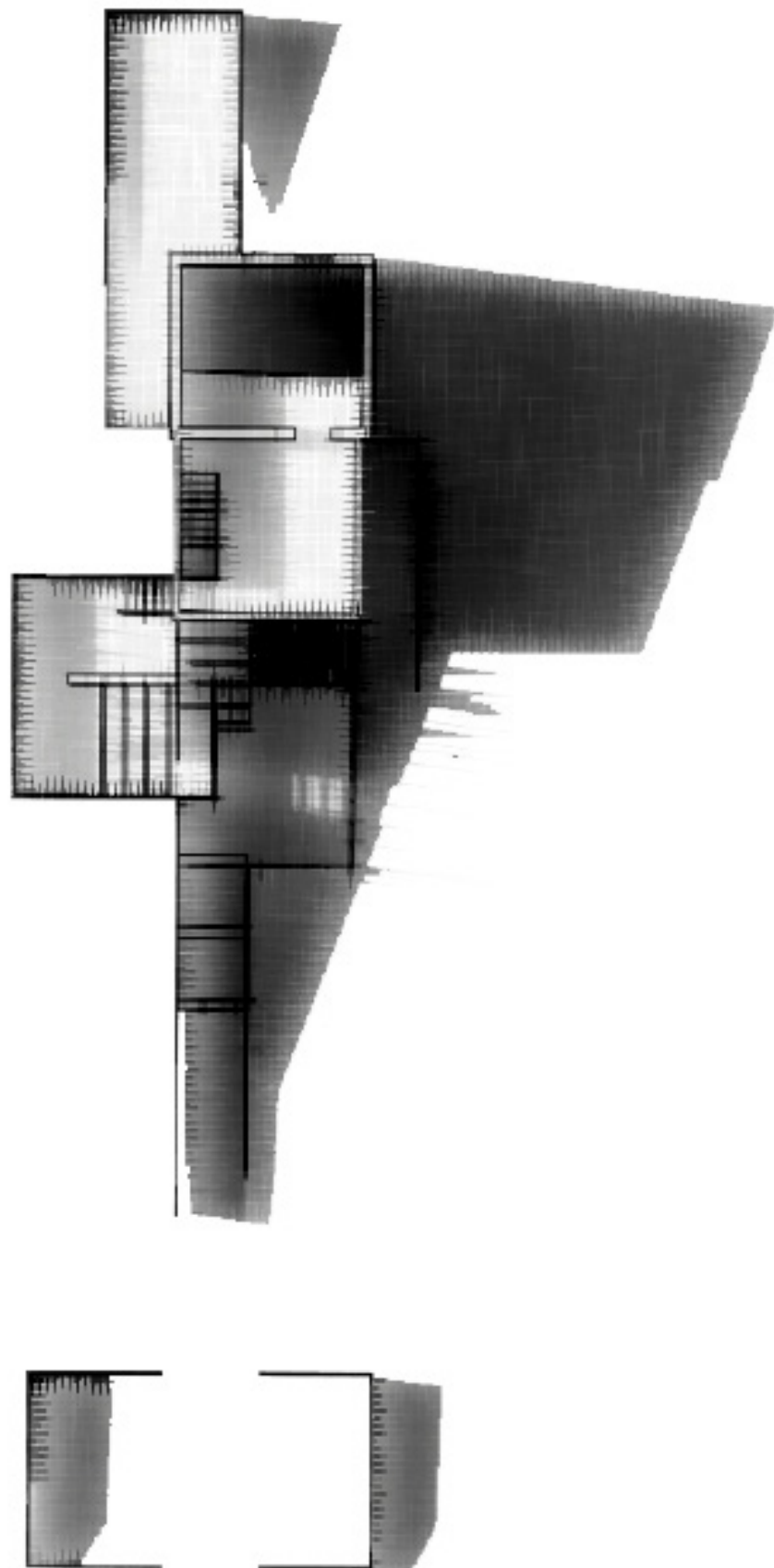


Figure 81 (Gallery collage, Author)

## THE MATERIALITY OF THE CAMPS

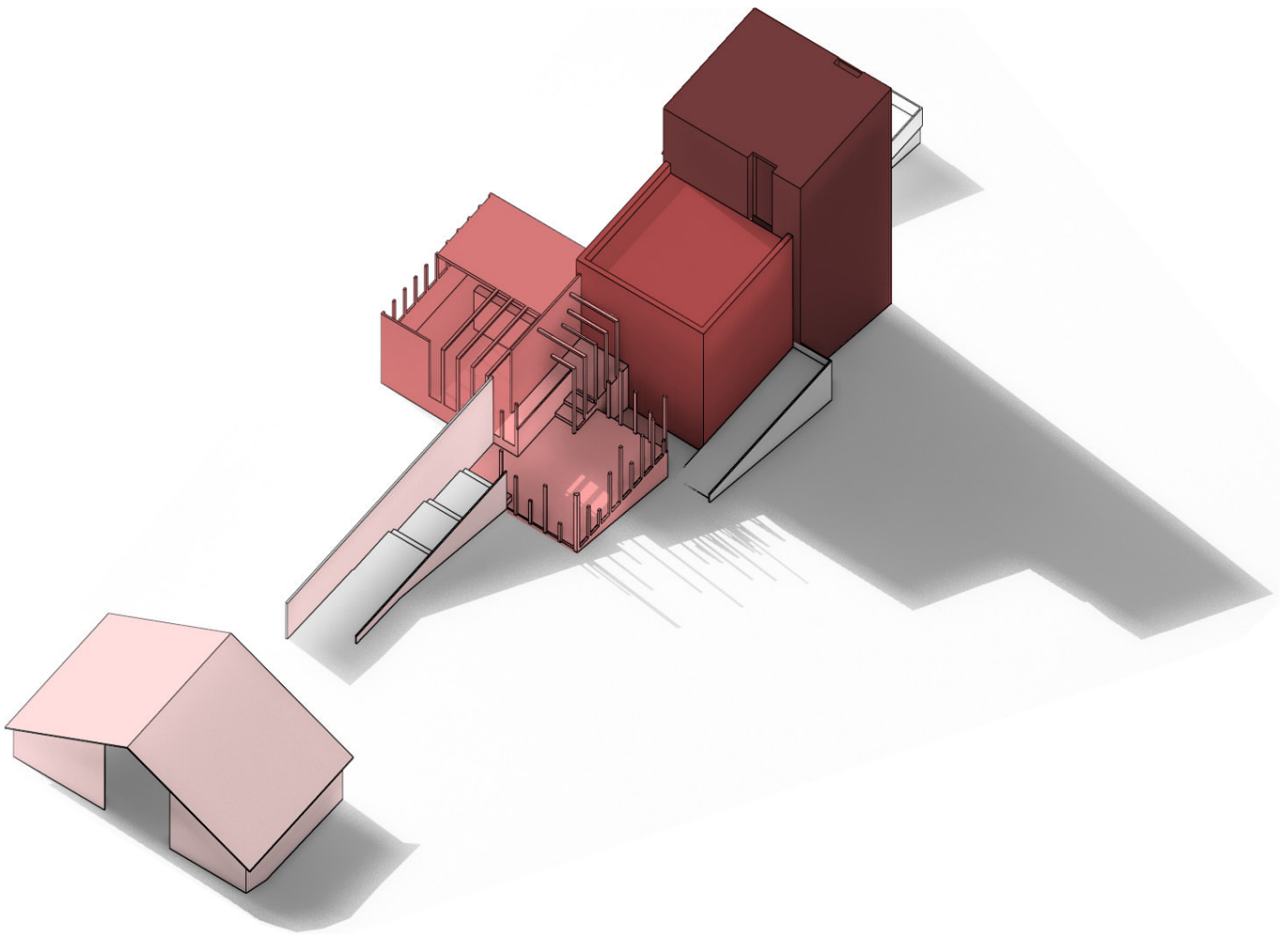
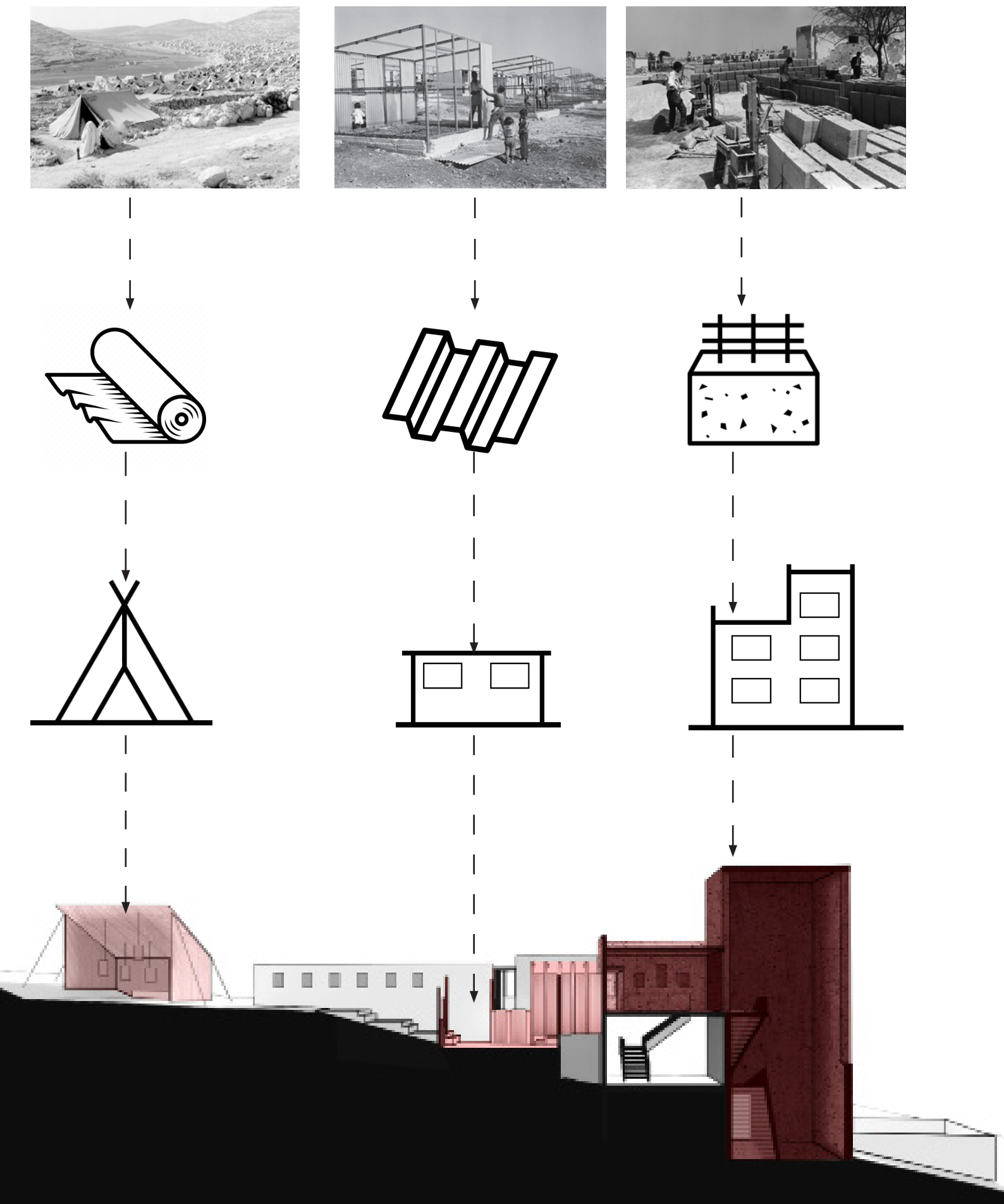


Figure 82 (Materiality diagram, Author)

This diagram represents the temporariness and permanency of the materials in the refugee camps. The darker the color gets more permanent the refugee state gets, reflecting the evolution of the camps over the last 74 years. From light and temporary materials such as fabric to more permanent solid materials such as metal and concrete.

Figure 83 (Reflecting the evolution of materials, Author)



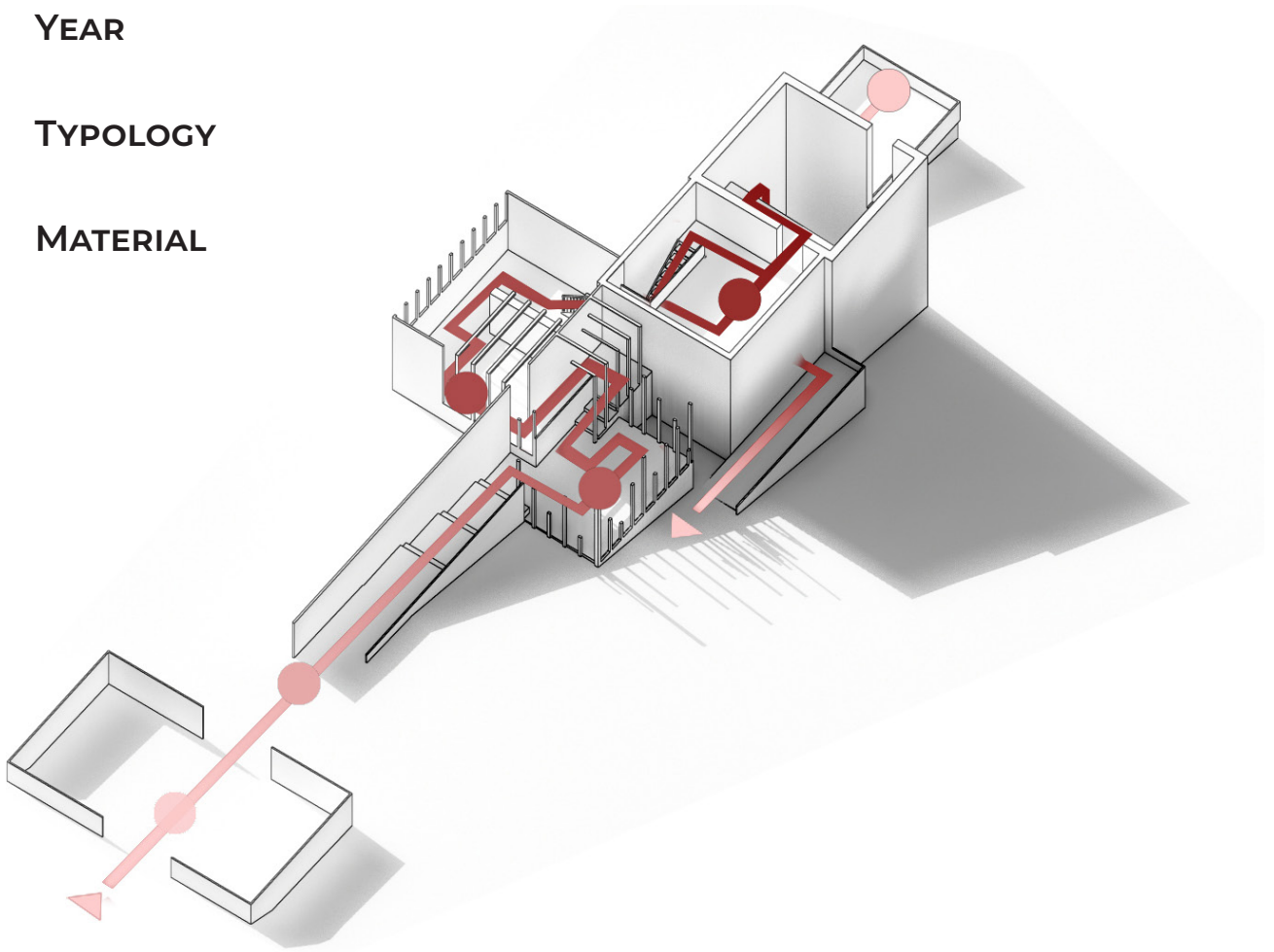


## SPATIAL DIAGRAM

YEAR

TPOLOGY

MATERIAL



Temporary to permanent:

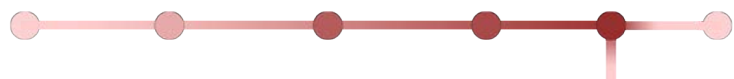


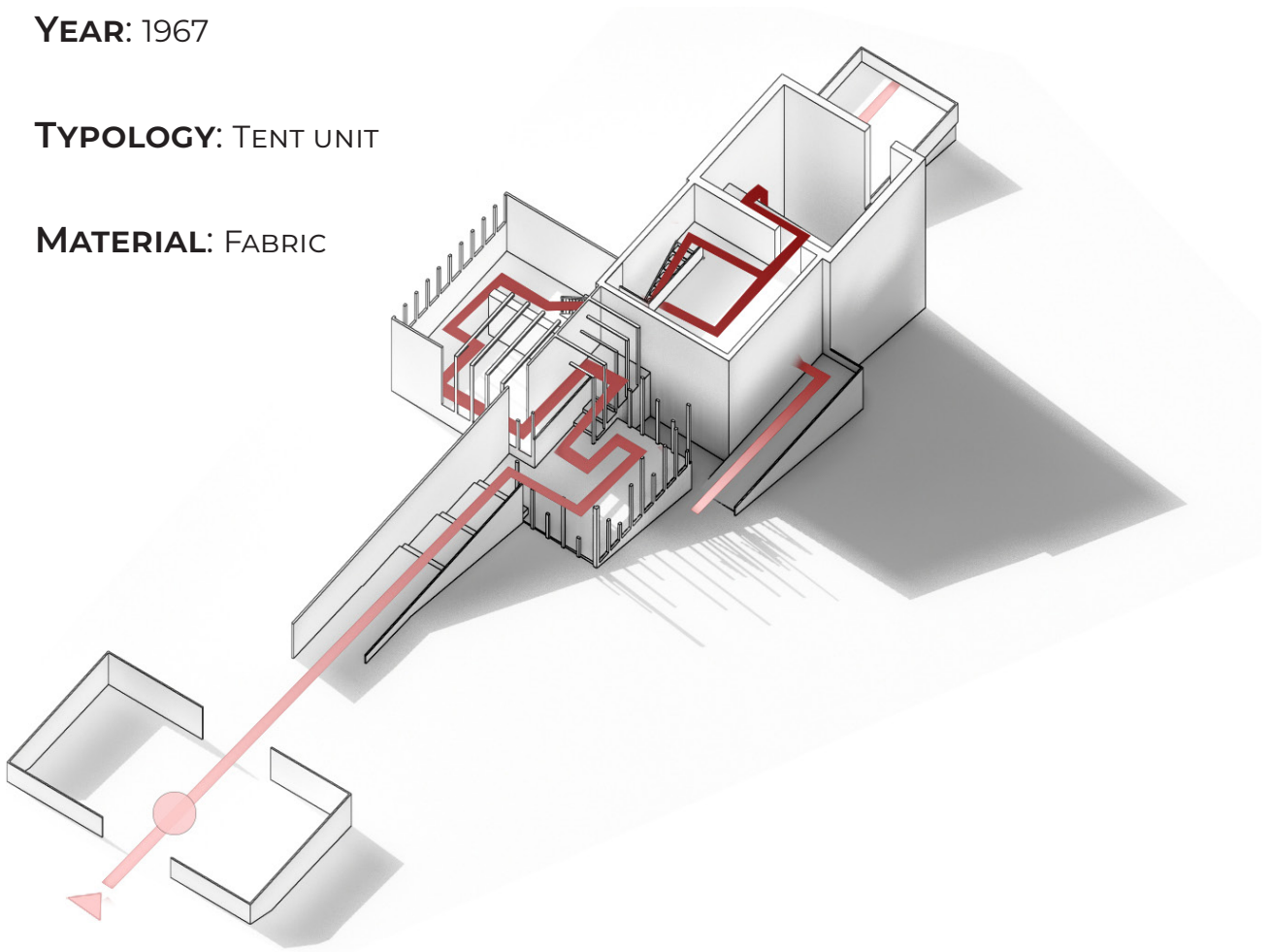
Figure 84 (Movement diagram, Author)

This diagram is for the gallery representing the refugee life and the translation of permanent temporariness. The pink to red color represents the stages of the camp, from being temporary to permanent. The darker the color gets, the more stuck in Jordan the Palestinians are, and the more solid the architecture becomes.

**YEAR:** 1967

**TPOLOGY:** TENT UNIT

**MATERIAL:** FABRIC



**Temporary to permanent:**



Figure 85 (Movement diagram, Author)

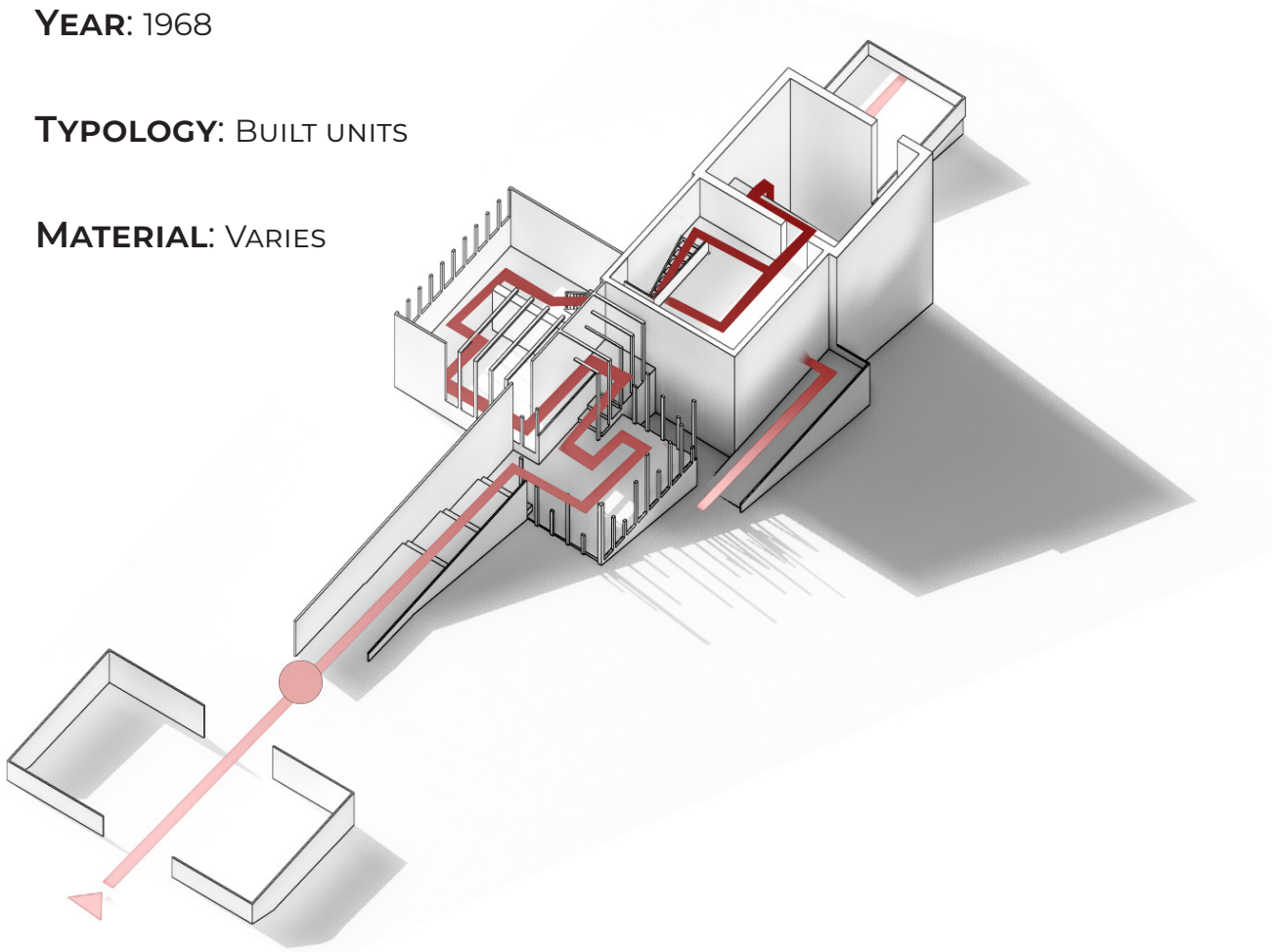


First step is the year 1967, the tent typology represented in fabric.

**YEAR:** 1968

**TPOLOGY:** BUILT UNITS

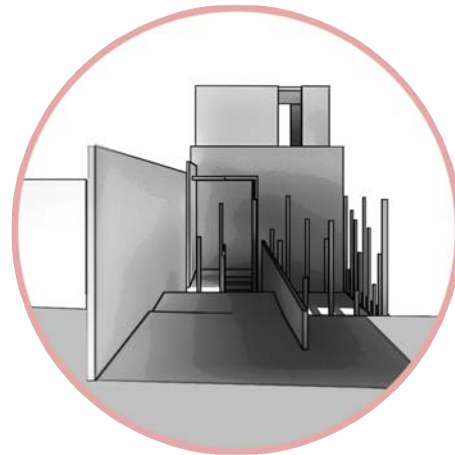
**MATERIAL:** VARIES



**Temporary to permanent:**



Figure 86 (Movement diagram, Author)

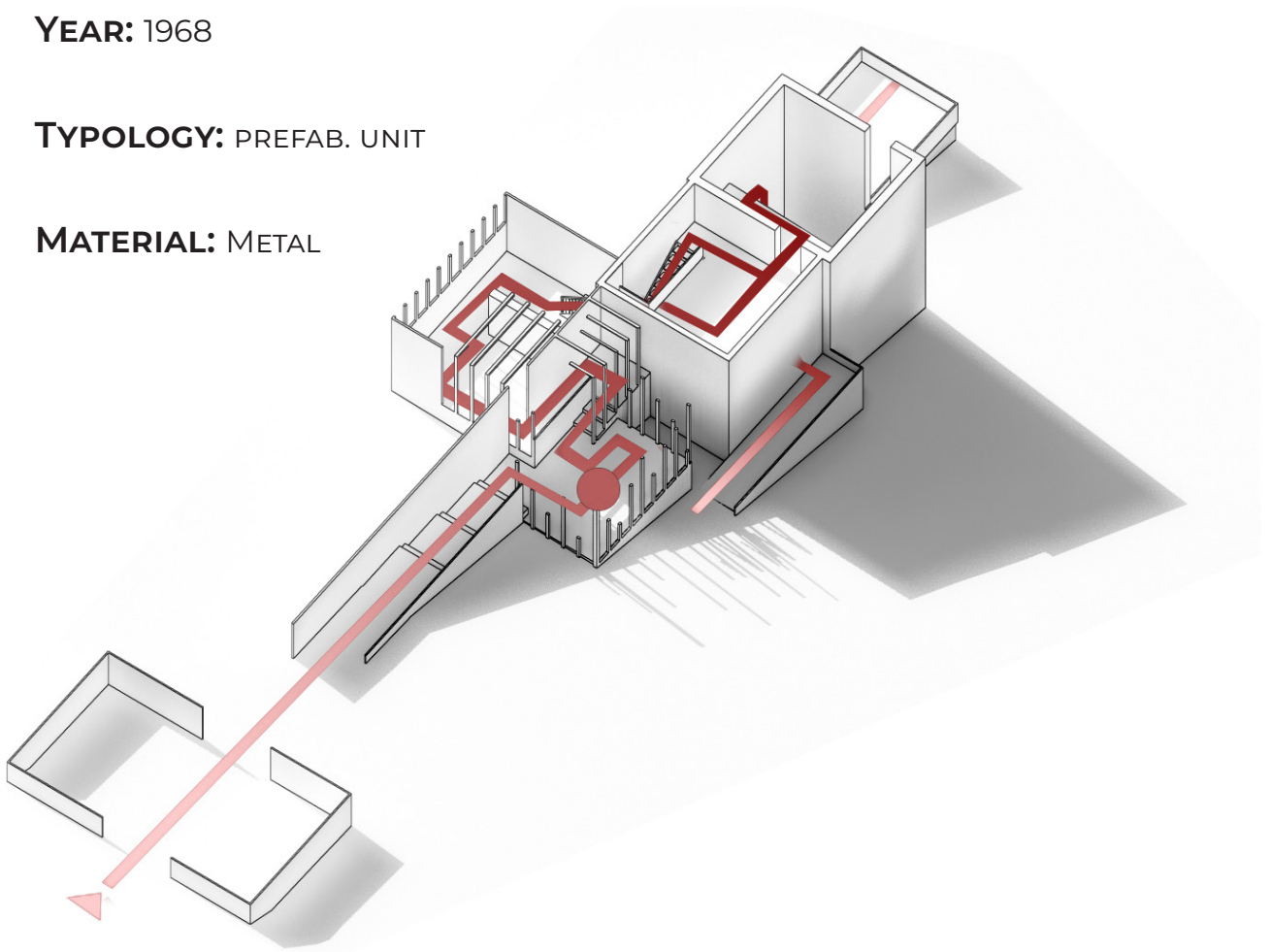


The refugees moved from tents to built units in the camp in the second step, which occurred in 1968, marking the transition from a state of emergency to a point of settlement.

**YEAR:** 1968

**TPOLOGY:** PREFAB. UNIT

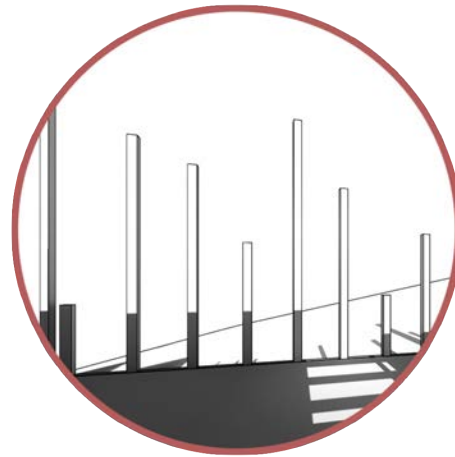
**MATERIAL:** METAL



**Temporary to permanent:**



Figure 87 (Movement diagram, Author)



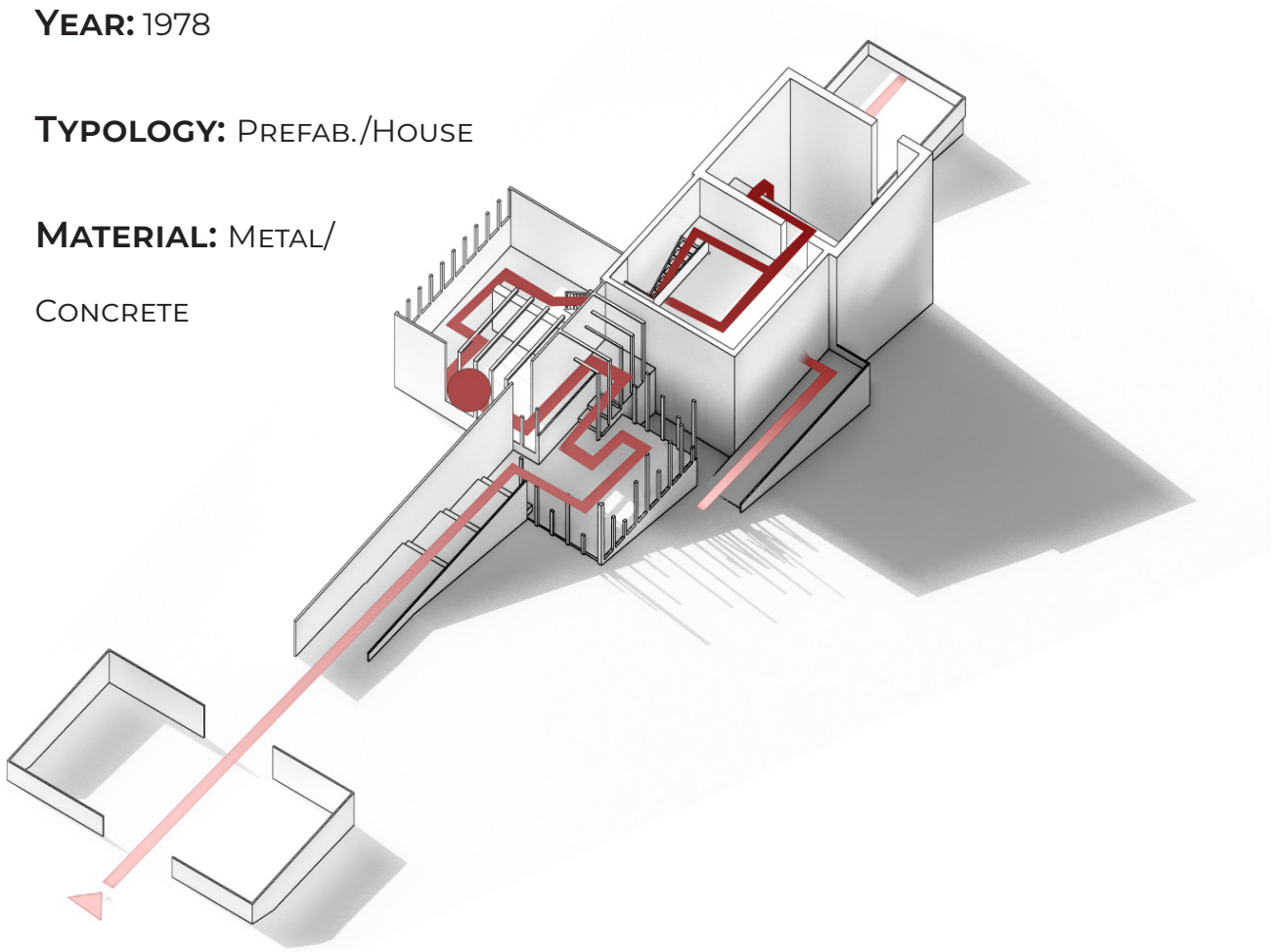
The year 1968, the architecture transitioned into the prefabricated metal units. The space is inspired by the image on top showing the transition from outdoor to an open indoor space.



**YEAR:** 1978

**TPOLOGY:** PREFAB./HOUSE

**MATERIAL:** METAL/  
CONCRETE



**Temporary to permanent:**



Figure 88 (Movement diagram, Author)

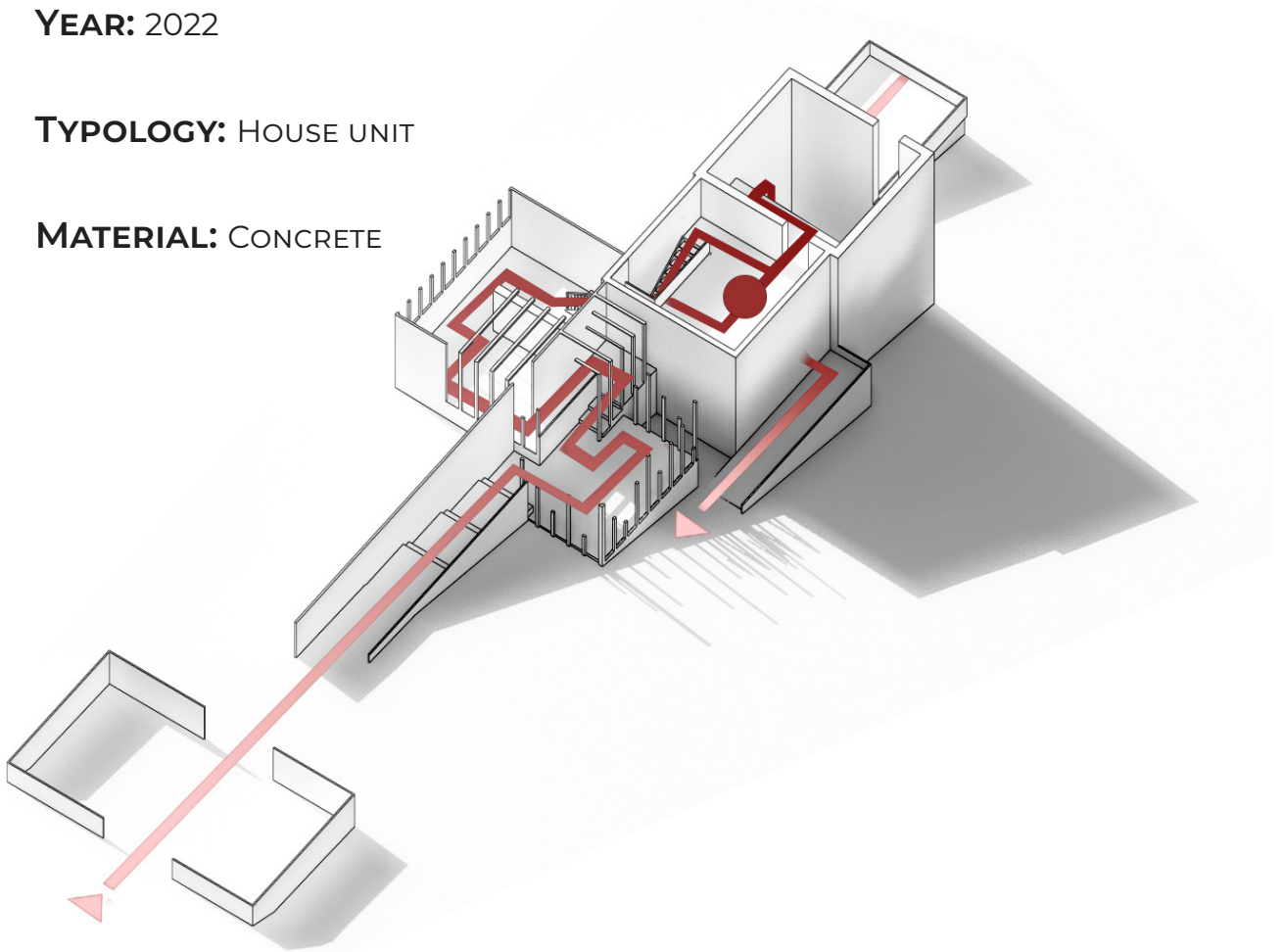


Year 1978, refugees started adding new concrete units to the prefabricated units. The space shows that transition, at this point the space starts to get roofed.

**YEAR:** 2022

**TPOLOGY:** HOUSE UNIT

**MATERIAL:** CONCRETE



**Temporary to permanent:**

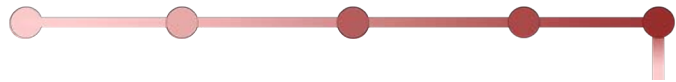
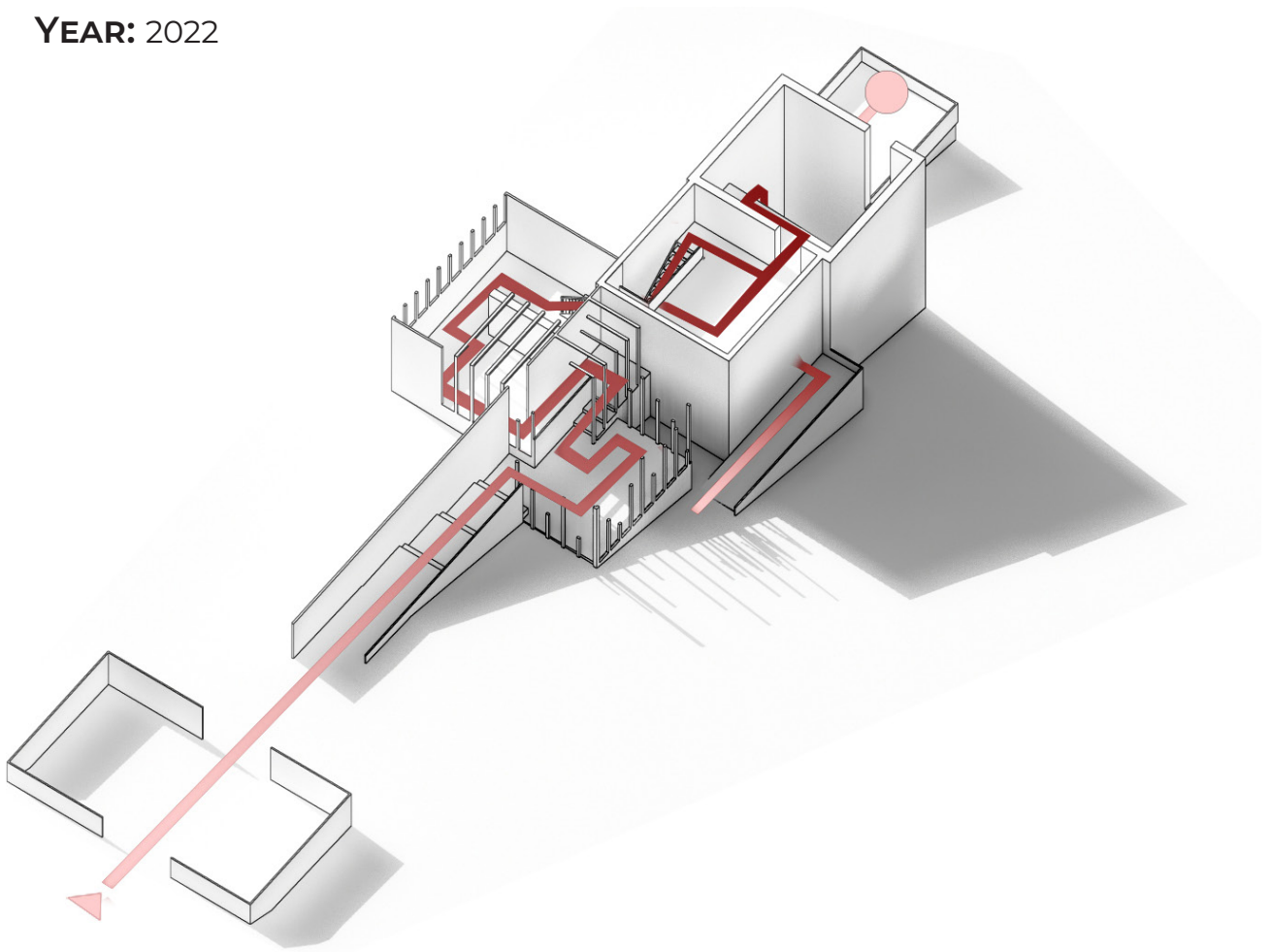


Figure 89 (Movement diagram, Author)



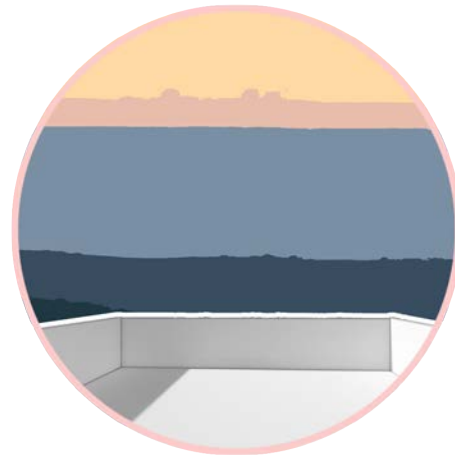
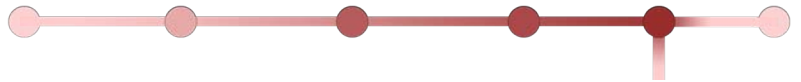
In the present year, after the transition into concrete in the current state of the camps, the camps have turned into settlements and resemble neighborhoods more than emergency refugee camps. The Palestinian refugees are currently stuck in this stage, and their identities and stories are the only things that keep them connected to Palestine.

**YEAR:** 2022



### Temporary to permanent:

Figure 90 (Movement diagram, Author)



The balcony: with the view of Palestine, is the final space where the visitor gets to be as close to Palestine as they can and share the stories of Palestine. The Permanent temporariness bar goes back to light red as it resembles a state of connectedness and acceptance of their current state in Jordan but still having the hope to one day return.



## GALLERY DISPLAY



Figure 91 (A collage of the gallery display images, Author)



# V. DISCUSSION

- PERSONAL REFLECTION
- GRAPHICAL MANIFESTO

# PERSONAL REFLECTION

This thesis is a personal letter of reflection and connection between the author and his roots from a cultural, historical, and spatial perspective, a way of understanding the journey that Palestinian refugees had gone through in the hope of ever returning home.

The THEY and WE were a struggle for me while writing this thesis, as I didn't feel that I am Palestinian enough to be discussing the Palestinian journey while using the word WE. I kept referring to Palestinians as they instead, which was a motive for me to learn more and try to highlight the journey within my thesis and design project.

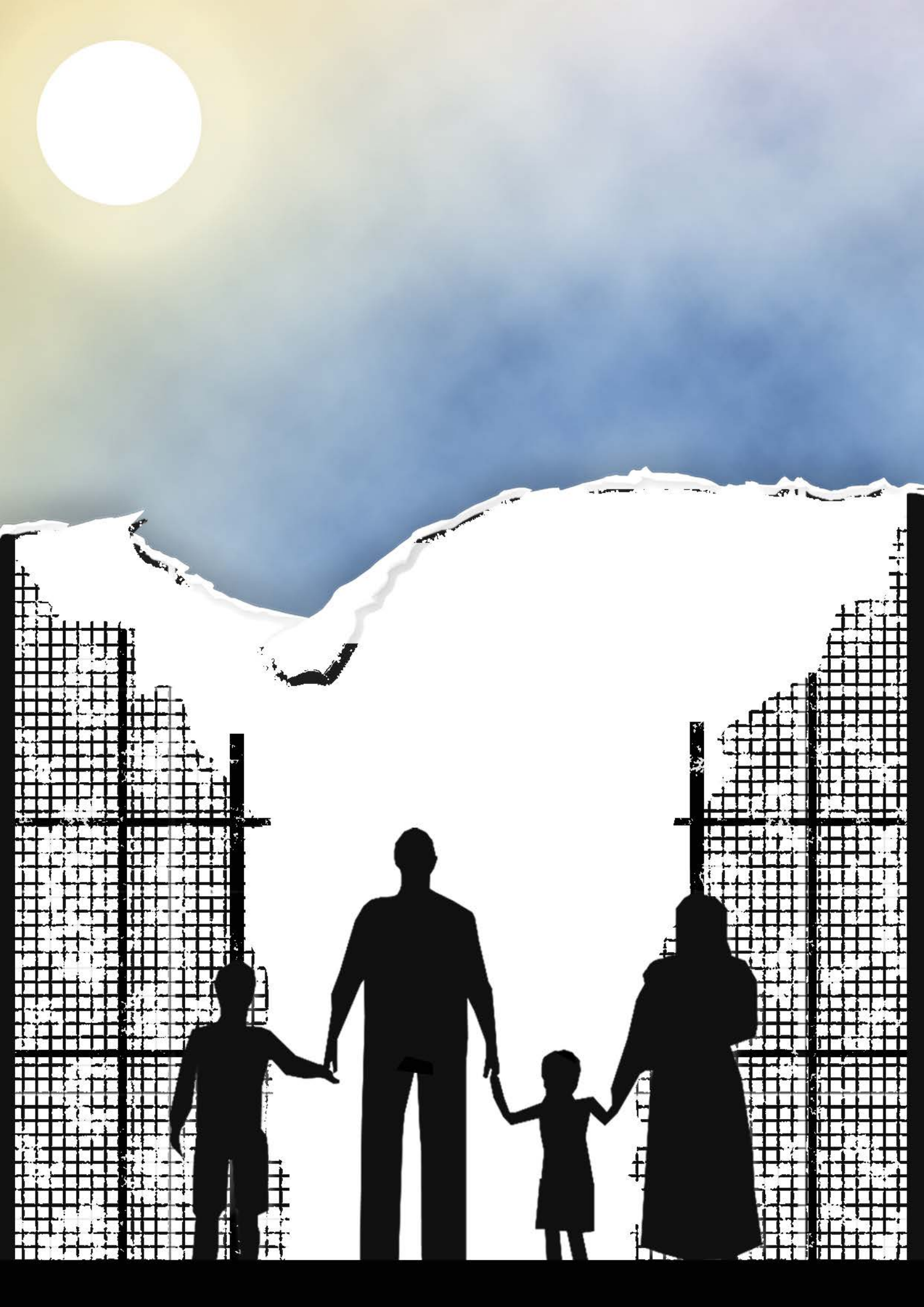
By writing this thesis, I was able to share some personal stories from my family's past in the hopes of sparking a conversation and connecting the reader and myself to the 74-year exile that Palestinian refugees have endured.

One thing I appreciate about writing this thesis is having the chance that I previously took for granted to set-down and interview my father and talk about the journey that he went through.

To end, I would like to share with you (the reader) an image of my dad when it was the last time that he got to see the place he called home.



Figure 92 (My family, Author)



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