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Living
Biner Franziska



DRAFT

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LIVING

... The new kitchens may look good, but with a bit of rain they collapse. I took some photos of destroyed and damaged buildings to show this precariousness ... This is all provisional ... But we will build the kitchens and our houses again, and again and again, if necessary. We have survived thirty years here and we will survive more, because we have the determination ... In fact, the houses and the material stuff is not the most important thing. We're stymied here in the camps. But we're determined to go on. And there is something that no one, no torrential rain, no Moroccan king .. will ever manage to steal from us: the beauty of life and our future. This is why I have taken lots of photos of the stunning sunrises in the desert and on of the youngest baby of my family (my nephew) ... These things will always be ours. (San Martin.P 2010)

Salek, refugee in the camps





If you ever arrive
at a wide white land
coupled with immense black statues
and the passive pace of camels and Bedouins,
remember that there exists a land without master and owner,
mirror and soul of all innocent beings.

Ali Salem Iselmu

PREFACE

Thirty-six years have passed, since the first refugees arrived in Tindouf, Algeria. Ever since, about half of the Western Sahara's native people have been living in these refugee camps. Until the UN negotiated a cease-fire in 1991, they had been fighting for their country's independence.

Organizing a life in a stage where the hope that today is the day when you can go home is present all the time, is difficult. Living with the thought of being in the camp just for a temporary period doesn't help to establish an economic independent society. Every day they live with the contrariness of making their life in the camps comfortable without striking roots.

The second generation who has never seen the Western Sahara has already been born. Some of the people start building houses that are designed and decorated. These houses don't even include tents anymore. Tents are the strongest sign of temporary living.

Is there a generation growing without the aim of going back to the Western Sahara? Do some of the refugees want to settle down in the camps? What happens when the elders are passed away and no one remembers the life in the Western Sahara anymore? Do the camps become permanent? Aren't they permanent already?

These are general questions that are of interest when going to the camps. All of them have an affect on the way of living in the camps. The aim of the research is to find answers, not general ones, but also answers concerning the urban development. These people live in tents and brick houses. What is the reason of the existence of both? What kind of living space is being developed? Are there 'neighbourhoods' which are more or less preferred? How do the refugees claim land and how do they build on it? Is there something like a market?

The camps are autonomic. That is unique amongst all refugee camps in the world. Does this mean that these camps can be considered a model for other camps?

Time keeps on, always keeps on
leaving calluses in the hands
of history.
Years plummet
like the beads of a rosary
over the long-lived memory
of exile.
Providence carves
our footsteps of tomorrow
in a path without limbs,
without flowers in the edges,
and without you on the horizon.

Time keeps on, always keeps on
dragging the scars of the universe
towards a splendid north.
Days fly over, silently,
like birds of prey,
the roof of this rootless home,
the nest of our children's dream.

Time keeps on, always keeps on.

Luali Lesham

SPANISH SAHARA

Spanish Sahara, Africa's last colony.

A country, which has seen lots of wars. For the last one it is still waiting to see its end.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the Spanish came for the first time to the Western Sahara. Back then, they had only little interest in this area, as they had discovered America. In the nineteenth century when Europe was scrambling Africa, also the interest of the Spanish raised. They were already governing some parts of Morocco. In the year 1884 they established Villa Cisneros. From that time on Spain expanded their controlled territory. The interest of the Spanish was concentrated on the coast. In the year 1969 they had to give their Moroccan parts back. Due to that they held on to the Sahara as long as possible. They invested in the territory and its population. In the year 1974 Spain claimed that about half of the population lived in or close to the cities they founded.

The UN Special Committee on Decolonization declared the Western Sahara as a 'non-self-governing territory to be decolonized. Ever since then the UN has been pushing for the independence of Western Sahara.

During the colonial years the native Saharawi tried several times to make the Spanish leave. In the year 1973 the Saharawi founded the Frente Polisario, a liberation movement for the Spanish Sahara. Only three years later the official Spanish withdrawal took place. The colonial time had lasted for 92 years. This happened after Franco died. The Spanish established the cities and benefited from the phosphate sources and the fishing. The Spanish who lived in the Spanish Sahara left the country by the invasion of Morocco and Mauritania.

Africa's last colony became finally decolonized to be invaded and occupied again.



OVERVIEW

At first the country looks as if it was completely covered by sand. But when taking a closer look a a divers topography appears. The oases are green and there are different areas of hills. The native population are nomads. The existing cities were founded by the Spanish. The territory measures 266'000 square kilometres. This is slightly larger than Great Britain. It is one of the world least populated countries. Originally it had a diverse fauna and flora.

With the foundation of the cities also the nomads started to settle around them. But during the colonial time the cities grew very little. The Saharawi are very small in number and not many Spanish came to live here. The cities began growing with the invasion of the Moroccans.



Villa Cisneros, today Dakhla (photo: www.lasonet.com)



Western Sahara

Western Sahara

Western Sahara is located in the west of the Sahara. It has a long coast. The water are very rich in fish. Most cities are located along the coast. The cities were found by the Spanish. The inland is mostly the land of the berber, which live as nomades. Especially the north is very rich in phosphate. 70% of the recourses world wide are located in Western Sahara. The neighbour countries are Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania. Since the war with Morocco

the country is divided by a wall, called the *berm*. The berm was constructed by the Moroccans to protect their territory from the Sahrawis. The eastern part is controlled by Polisario and they call it the liberated territory.



satellite image of Western Sahara 2011 (www.googlemaps.com)



Western Sahara 2010 (photos: www.sahara-mili.net , José Manuel, Barrós)

Western Sahara

The landscape is surprisingly divers. It reaches from mountains of black granit and silizium, to large green zones, to the dry, only consisting of sand. Most plants growing in Western Sahara are very resistant to dry periods. The most popular animal is the bird. The ostrich is the most common. Today he is seen very little. Fox, hunting-leopard, fenec, hyena amongst others live in the country. Due to uncontrolled hunting and the war,

only a few of them are left. Smaller animals like the fox, snakes, hedgehog still occure. In the area of the coast live some turtles. People from the refugee camps reported, that Sahrawis, who were still living a nomadic life in the liberated territory, are moving to the camps now, because the temperature is augmenting and the diversity of fauna and flora becoming smaller.

HISTORY

In 1884 the Spanish founded Villa Cisneros. That was the starting point of the official colonial time in the Western Sahara. During that period the Spain expanded the fishing industry on the Western Sahara's coast. In 1919 only 460 Europeans lived in that region. Slowly they started to move further inland and erected a few garrisons. In 1945 the largest high-grade phosphate deposit of the world was discovered. In 1969 the amount of fishing reached 1'282'500t in the Western Sahara waters. The inauguration of the above-ground mining of Bou Craa took place in 1972. A 92kilometre long conveyor belt to the coast was established.

Although some native nomads settled in the area of the cities, most of them kept living a partly live of nomads. The native population is strictly divided into different clans and casts and fights amongst these groups happened. The structured society was even holding slaves. The whole tribe was considered family and it was very important to whom you belong. They all led a nomadic life. In a nomadic life the place where you live has no big importance as it is only temporary. The much more important thing is the family. They moved around together with all their relatives. They were only allowed to marry someone from the same tribe. Starting to settle in the camps, the big family structures started to disappear. The Polisario wanted to build a Saharawi nation. Therefore they had to eliminate the tribal thinking in order to form a union to fight the enemy and no longer their landmen.



settlement El Aaiún 1974/75 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, Jorge)

1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000

1912

The borders of the colonies have been clarified and set by a Franco-Spanish convention. Spain started to establish some minimal garrisons along the coast.

1946

In the year 1946 Spain created an independent entity for Spanish Sahara. El Aaiún became the regional headquarters. In the inland they had a few garrisons. In Samra was a large post.

1975

The withdraw of the Spanish. Morocco and Mauritania invaded the country. They attacked civilians. So the Sahrawis had to fly. They took refuge in Algeria.

1884

Villa Cisneros was established by the Compañía Comercial Hispano-Africana. The Spanish government declared a protectorate over the region „Rio de Oro“. From that time on Spain expanded its territory control over the rest of the country.

1938

El Aaiún has been founded.

1934

France pressured Spain to become more active in its colony. They claimed, that in Spanish Sahara were anticolonial forces based. The Spanish started to invade the interior of the colony.

1958

During the colonial time native Saharan always rebelled against the government. In the year 1958 Spain decided together with France to start a military offensive against the rebellion. Thousands of Sahrawis fled to the surrounding countries. Already then Sahrawis flew to the city of Tindouf in Algeria

1971

Polisario was founded in the year 1971 to fight against the Spanish government

1991

In the year 1991 both sides agreed on a cease-fire. Due to that the men, who were fighting, joined their families in the refugee camps.



The Sahrawis



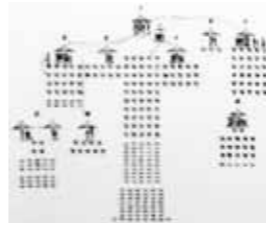
tribes

The Sahrawis were a strictly organized society. They were structured in three main tribes. Each tribe had his own relationships. The first tribe, the tribo hasania, were the fighters and the power of the military. The second, the tribo zuaia, had the ambit of the religion. The other the group was responsible for the breeding. They had to pay tribute to the others.



castes

Additionally to the division into different tribes, the society was subdivided into different castes. There were the artisans and the musicians who offered their goods in exchange for food. The slaves were used as herdsmen and for the hardest domestic work.



familystructure

The traditional Saharwifamily consisted of the father, the mother and their children. They lived in one khayma. Every family held their own animals, mostly coats, sheeps and camels. But one family usually didn't live alone. They were always congregated with other relatives and tribe members. In times of war, there were up to 250 khayma assembled. In nomadic life, the place, where they live is temporary, the family has a more important role, because it is the only permanent thing. Normally they call every member of the same tribe family.

rural & urban life

With the establishment of the cities the traditional familystructures of the Sahrawis started to change. The families, who started to live in the cities were mostly still living with their relatives, but not with all of them. Before in the nomadic life they all moved around together and now some live in the cities and some are still nomadic.

in the refugee camps

The traditional form to cohabit became impossible. Not also because they had to leave everything behind, but also because Polisario realized, that they have to become one nation to be strong enough for the fighting. In the refugee camps they have to live in permanent form. There has been some kind of a shift to a nuclear-familystructure. With the time going on and living next to neighbours who are not only relatives, they start to construct residential compounds and enclose themselves.



nomadic life

The Sahrawis lived a nomadic life. For water and food for the animals, they moved from one site to another. Due to that it was important to live in a construction, which made it easy to break it down and put it up very quickly. The tent is a good solution. It is also a good protector against the heat and the sandstorms. The original khayma was made out of goat hair. Every family possessed its own tent. The tents were always open, so every one was welcomed to enter.



rural & urban life

With the Spanish establishing the cities there was a new way of housing introduced to the Sahrawis. Some Sahrawis started to give up on their nomadic life and settled in the surroundings of the cities. Most of them kept living in khaymas. They started to built shacks out of wood or other things they found. Many of them spend some time in the „city“ and for some they went back to their nomadic lifes.



refugee camps

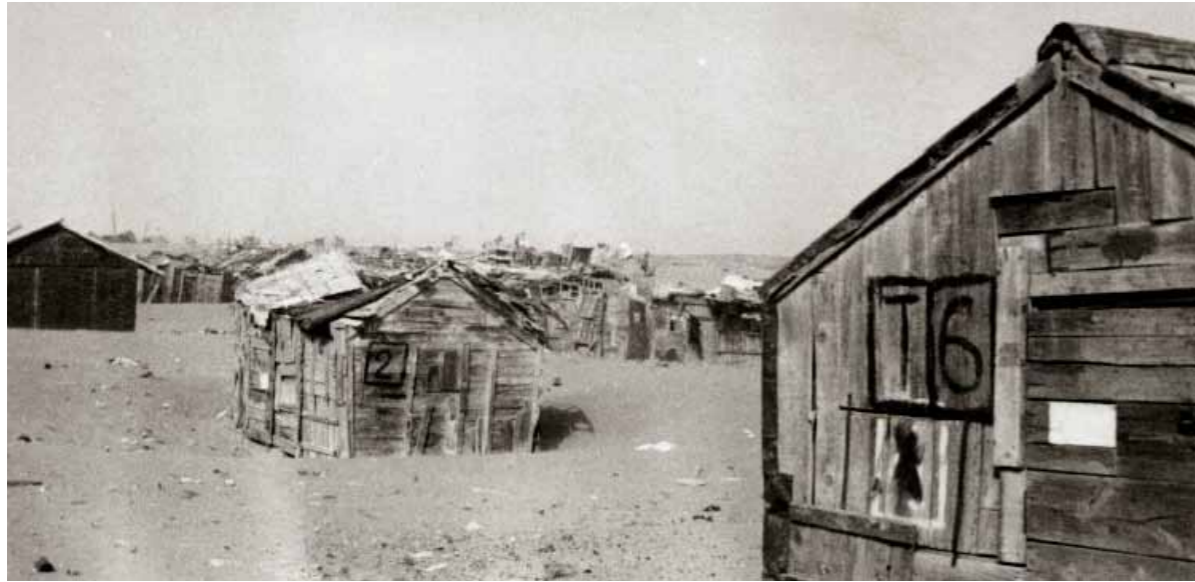
In the beginning of the time in the refugee camps, the people were offered tents from the Algerians. Polisario organized the from. They were put in a strict order and every family had his own tent. As the war kept going on they started to construct little houses out of sand to have some additional space. So they were not living in their original coathearts anymore and with the mud-houses a new form of living developed.



refugee camps after the cease-fire

In the year 1991 most men came home from the war with the illusion of moving to free Western Sahara very soon. But that didn't happen, so they started to built larger adobe houses. They built houses for different uses. These houses form a compound today. But in most of these compounds is still a khayma integrated.

(MADDI 2011, Museo Nacional 27 February 2001)



El Aaiún 1971 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, Jordi Llistar)



Villa Cisneros 1970 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, Jesús de Álamo)

Villa Cisneros - Dakhla

The Spanish Compañía Comercial Hispano-Africana founded Villa Cisneros in the year 1884. At first there was only the military living in the new town. It developed very slowly. In the beginning their interest was concentrated around Villa Cisneros and the coast to the south. The region became a protectorate called „Rio de Oro“. In first years of colony, the Spanish stay didn't change the Sahrawis. They were mostly living in the inland. Only

the Spanish military went to the inland. They started to establish a few garrisons. With the years the Spanish started to go further north, but mostly along the coast. In 1946 they erected in Smara a large garrison. This was the first „city“ in the inland. As the native population started to revolt, they were obliged to strengthen their military force.



settlement El Aaiún 1974/75 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, Jorge)



El Aaiún (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, B. Álvarez Muñoz)

El Aaiún

El Aaiún was founded in the year 1938. 1946 Spain decided to make the Spanish Sahara an independent region. Before that Spain ruled over all their colonies in Africa from Ifni. 1958 it became the new headquarters. Due to that it gained importance. Some nomads started to live in the cities. They mostly lived in the outskirts of the city in barracks. Most of them kept living in tents, held their own animals and lived close to their relatives. This form

of life gave them the possibility to live the advantages of a city without giving up their traditional way of living. Some of them even went back to their relatives and tribes for a few months, to live the life of the nomads. In the year 1963 the population of the city was 8500 from which 5000 were Sahrawis. 1974 there were already 38'500 people living in the city. Over 10'000 were Europeans and 28'500 Sahrawis. The military presence has always been high, about one soldier on five civilian.



Villa Cisneros (Dakhla) in the years 1960-70 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, Pedraza)



Dakhla 2010 (photo: http://guinness2010records.blogspot.com)

Dakhla

Dakhla is located in the south of the country. It is the main city of the region „Rio de oro“. In the beginning of the war Dakhla was Mauritanian. When Mauritania accepted the RASD they gave their territory back to the Sahrawis. But the King of Morocco invaded also the southern part. So today Dakhla is part of Morocco. It is after El Aaiún the second important city. 1974 Dakhla counted 8500 inhabitants, of which about 5500 were Sahrawis

and the others Europeans. 2010 it had about 85'000 inhabitants. In the year 2010 a huge Moroccan flag has been created. With the size of this flag they hold the Guinness world record. It's a very strong symbolic sign, to do that in an occupied city. What is also striking is, that it has been organized by the „Circle of Young Democrats Moroccan“ as Morocco is a kingdom. According to them they work to promote the culture of human rights and democracy.



El Aaiún 1975 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net)



El Aaiún 2004 (photo: www.panoramio.com, Bommeli Susanne)

El Aaiún

Becoming the new headquarter the city started to grow. From 1963- 1974 the city counted 20'000 new inhabitants. Today it is the most important city in the country. It is close to the phosphate mines. It is also the closest city to Morocco. Today live mostly Moroccans in the city. In the year 2010 live about 200'000 people in the city. The number is varying a lot, due to permanent immigration and emigration in the outskirts. Today live

about 20'000-30'00 Sahrawis in the Moroccan Western Sahara. In October 2010 12'000 Sahrawis put their tents up, next to the city to demonstrate peacefully against the occupation. Most of them came from the outskirts of El Aaiún. Today the city has economic problems and a huge unemployment.

THE REFUGEE CAMPS

[i]n the camps the relaxation has brought the development of petty commerce and some artisan work. Small shops selling basic groceries and household goods have sprouted, as have rudimentary repair sites for private vehicles, the number of which has increased enormously. Jewellery and leatherwork, much aimed at the solidarity and NGO market, is made and sold locally. There are some basic restaurants. Families own livestock. An estimated 4000 young men have left the camps for migrant work in Spain. Their remittances, pensions from those employed by Spain before 1975 (and donations from Spanish families and organizations), allow many of the mud-brick houses that supplement or replace the tents to have electricity generated by solar panels. (San Martín.P 2010)

Toby Shelley, journalist, observed in 2004



OVERVIEW

The camps are located in Algeria near the city of Tindouf. The refugees are divided in different camps. They are spread out, so that if Morocco attacks them, it is harder to attack all at the same time.

The environment is very harsh. Nothing grows there and the people are often exposed to strong sandstorms. A severe problem is the temperature. During the summer it can reach over 50 degrees Celsius.

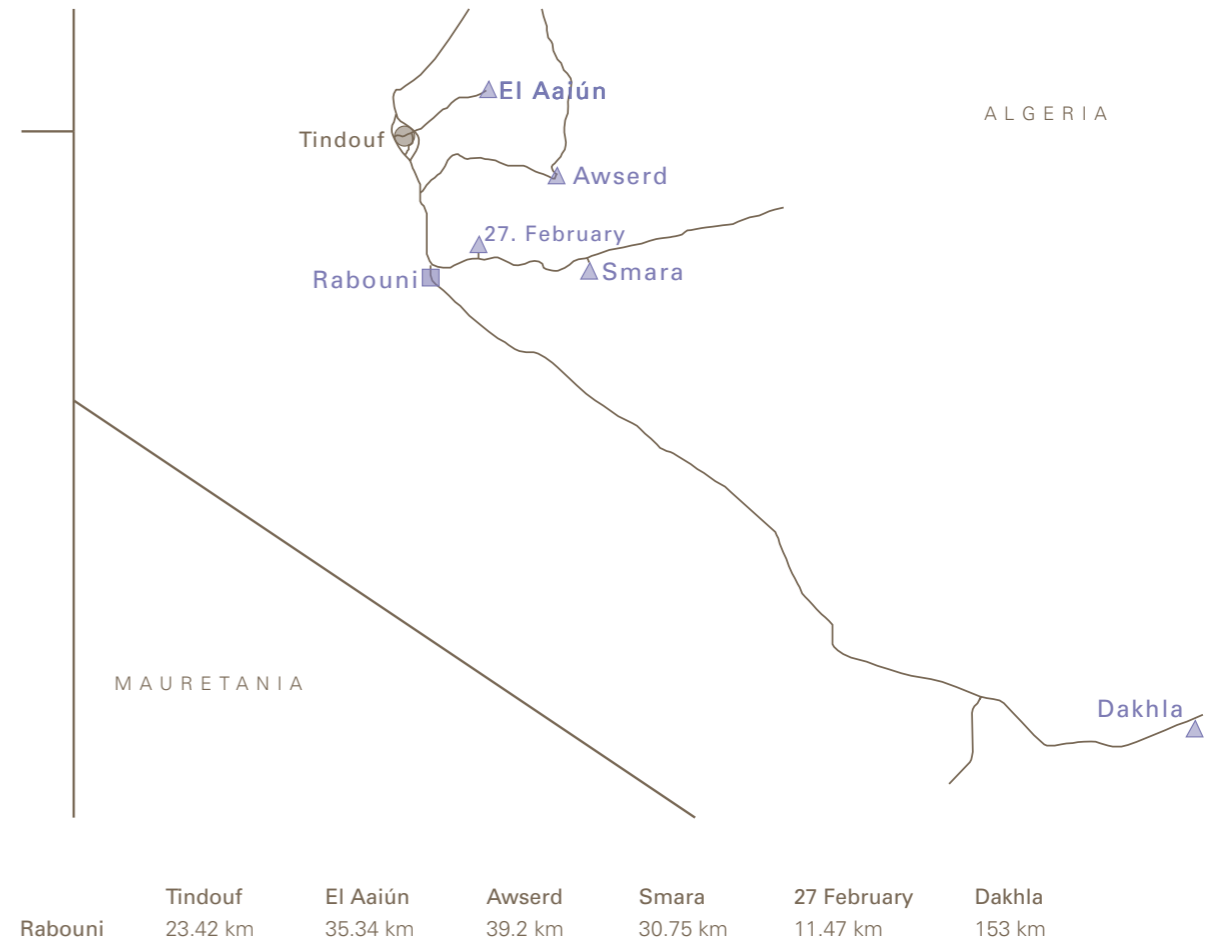
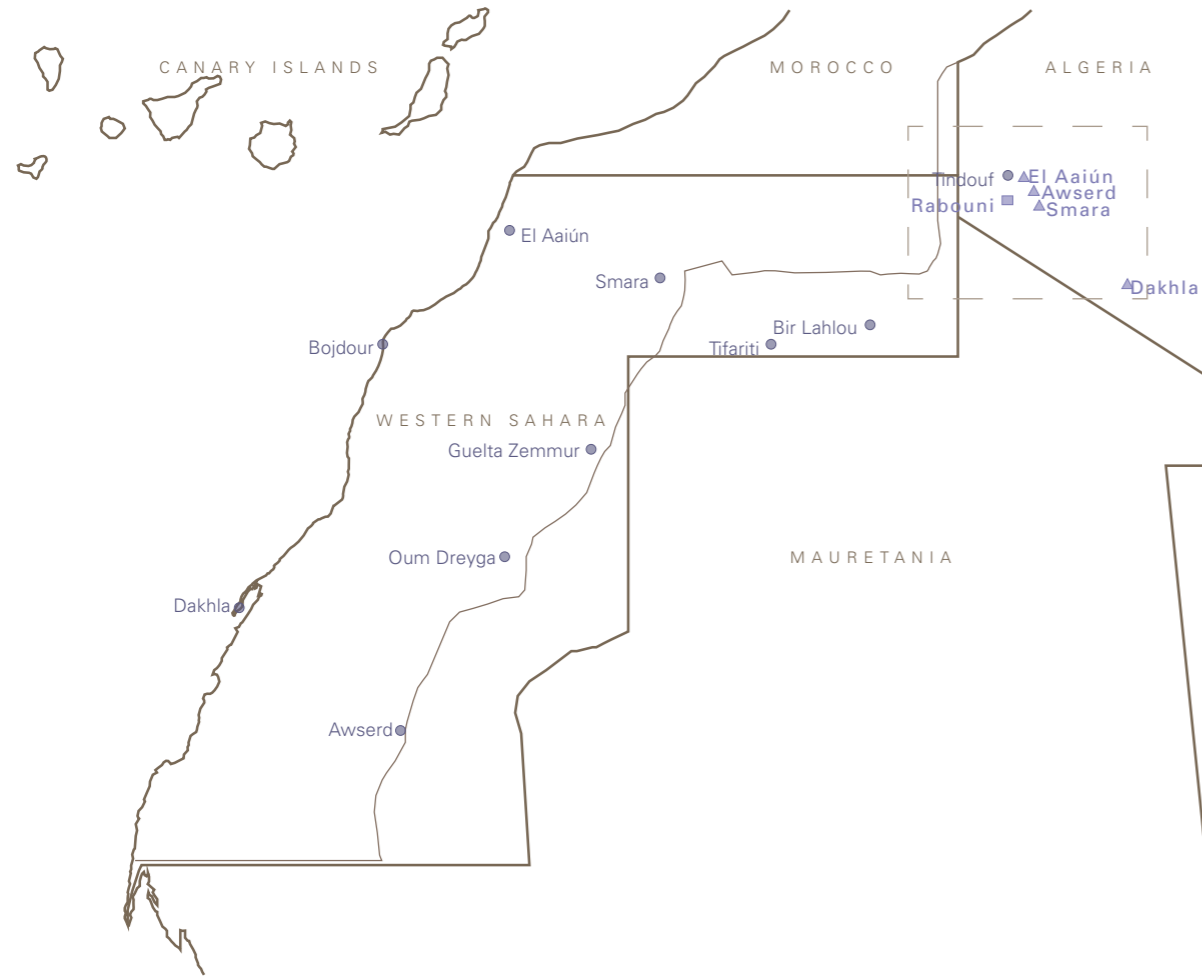
With the lasting of their stay in the camps, the refugees developed their way of housing. In the beginning there were only tents. Today the image of a camp is different. Houses of mud-bricks are giving the impression of an urban development. With the sources of sand and water they constructed houses. One would think that they are permanent and remind of a form of urbanity. But this image can quickly change. Heavy rains completely destroy the mud-houses. Within a few hours the work of many years can disappear. So the most fatal environmental issue is the water. It's very striking that in a desert rain can be hated.

Even though they give the impression of an urban settlement the locals deny it intensely. In their eyes urbanity is only possible in a permanent settlement with functioning infrastructure. They claim that the camps are only temporary and are established due to an emergency. It is impossible to claim it an urban settlement.

In the homogeneous settlement the tent are sticking out. They are integrated into the different housing compounds and most of the families wouldn't want to miss that.



El Aaiún 2011



The Camps located close to Western Sahara in Algeria

The camps are located in Algeria close to the frontier of Western Sahara. Western Sahara is divided by a wall. There is existing interchange with the liberated territory and Mauritania. The location is strategic important. Morocco wouldn't attack them there, because they don't want to start a war against the strong Algerians. The refugees can feel safe there and still drive to the close Western Sahara. Infrequently refugees travel to the liberated territories to see relatives who are living as nomads.

Five Camps and a seat of administration

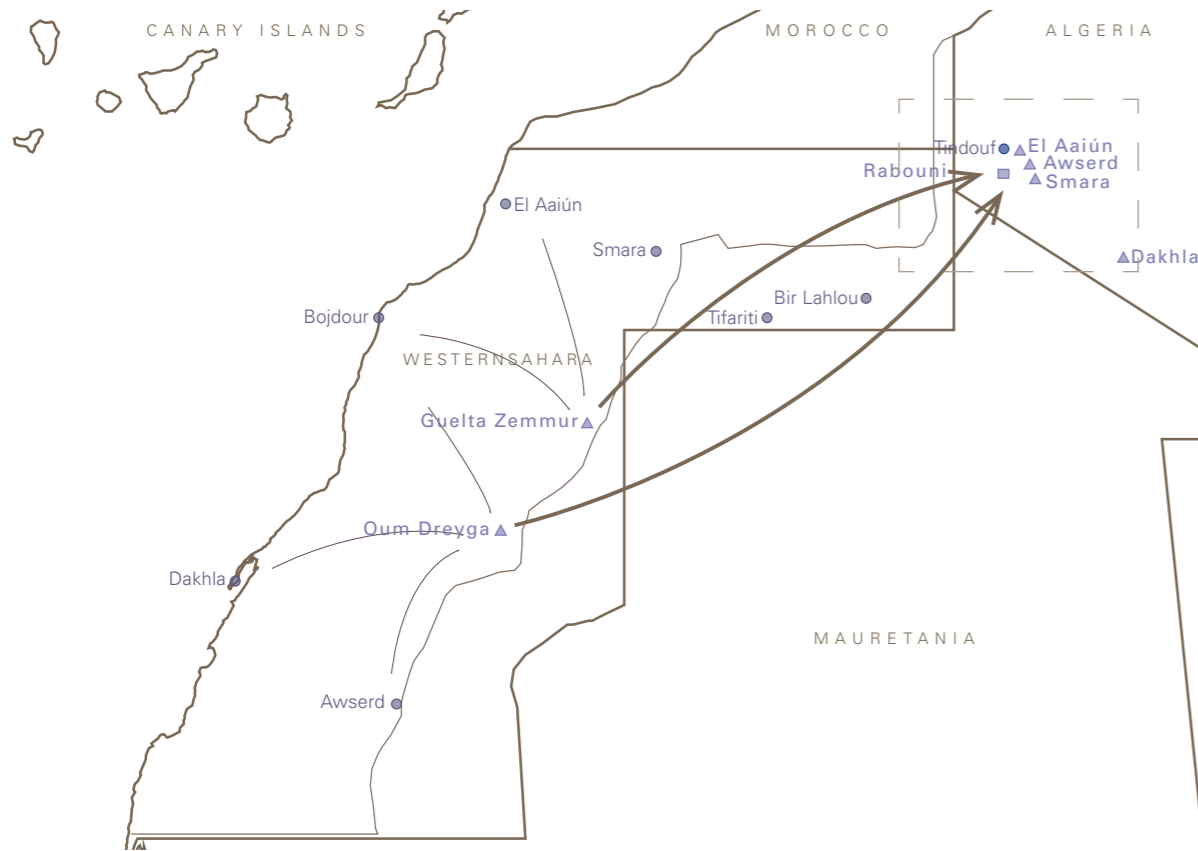
The camps are located close to the city of Tindouf. Tindouf is a military Algerian city with an airport. Refugees buy things in the city. The refugees are sectioned in six different camps. The camps are located within 30 kilometers from Rabouni. Only Dakhla is far away. Dakhla has been established at an oases. In Rabouni, El Aaiún and Dakhla are water sources. Today they are connected by asphalt roads. The Algerians let the Polisario control the land where the camps are standing.

HISTORY

At the beginning there were no mud-brick rooms, but only tents. The kitchens were outside the tent, in a sort of a smaller tent made up of fabric remains, to protect the kitchens from the sand and the wind. But since they were made of fabric, they burned down very easily. They were very dangerous ... it was not unusual to see at night a kitchen-tent that had caught fire. Progressively, the kitchens became more solid, with metal sheets, some wood ... until the current mud-brick rooms with metal roofs evolved, much more secure against fire ... I have taken some pictures of on of the current kitchens, with one of these modern gas cookers where you can cook standing up ... I have also taken a photo of an old style kitchen, with a small cooker on the floor, in a kind of a tent. It's my neighbour's; the rains destroyed their modern kitchen, so now they have to cook provisionally in an old-style kitchen that reminds me of my childhood ... Now kitchens dont burn down; like everything in the camps they are better, more modern and developed ... more practical ... But anyhow, they are still very precarious, because everything is precarious here. The rains have just shown that. The new kitchens may look good, but with a bit of rain they collapse. I took some photos of destroyed and damaged buildings to show this precariousness ... This is all provisional ... But we will build the kitchens and our houses again, and again and again, if necessary. We have survived thirty years hear and we will survive more, because we have the determination ... In fact, the houses and the material stuff is not the most important thing. We're stymied here in the camps. But we're determined to go on. And there is something that no one, no torrential rain, no Moroccan king .. will ever manage to steal from us: the beauty life and our future. This is why I have taken lots of photos of the stunning sunrises in the desert and on of the youngest baby of my family (my nephew) ... These things will always be ours. (San Martin.P 2010)



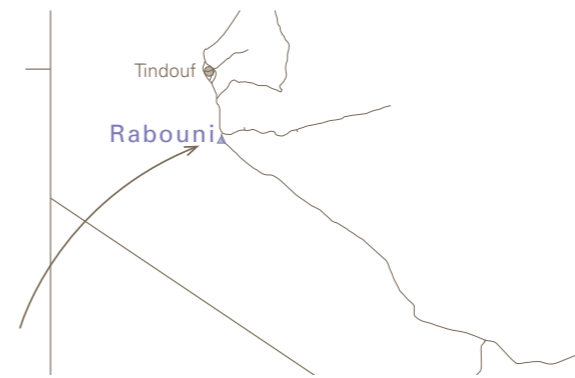
tents of nomadic Sahrawis 1967 (photo: www.lasonet.com)



Guelta Zemmur 1972 (photo: www.sahara-mili.net, Teniente Ezquerro)

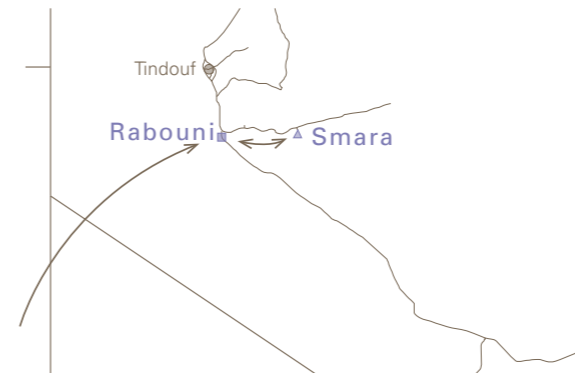
Refuge in Western Sahara

Shortly after the Spain gave up on it's last colony in Novemner 1975, Morroco and Mauritania entered in the country with their military. The Saharwis flew from the city regions on the coast to the inside of the country. Most of them went to the cities of Oum Dreyga and Guelta Zemmur. A thousands of refugees had congregated around this towns. In february 1976 Morrocan air force bombed those civilian reufgee encampments. Due to that the Sahrawis started to take refuge near Tindouf in Algeria.



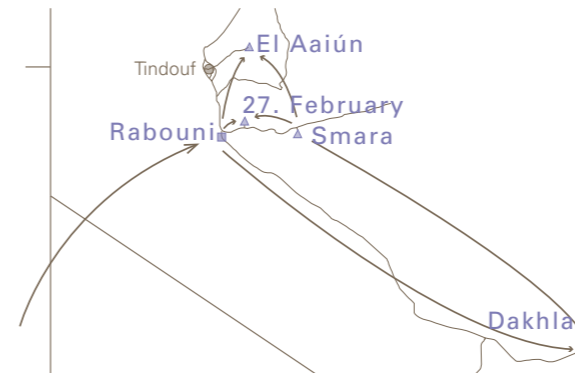
First Refugee Camp: Rabouni

The first place were they took refuge was in Rabouni, due to the existence of a waterfountain of the Algerians. The first refugees arrived in the year 1975 although the big flow started in 1976 when Morocco bombed the civilians who took refuge within the frontier of Western Sahara.



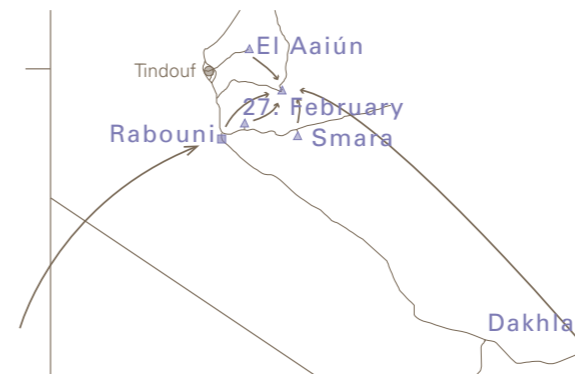
Smara

Shortly after erecting Rabouni Polisario established Smara. The distance between them is about 30km. They were both still considered as one camp. In between of those two settlements Polisario founded the first school. In Smara has been no fountain. Water was trasnported from Rabouni.



Foundation of different camps

With the augmenting number of refugees Polisario founded three new camps, El Aaiún, 27 February and Dakhla. The Refugees could say with which persons they wanted to live. Relatives united and were placed together in a camp. Smara became an own camp. Rabouni was changed into the administration headquarter and no one was living there anymore. 27 Ferbruary was founded as a school of women and initially only the families of the women, who went to the school, were living there.



Awserd

After that still many refugees arrived at the camps. Due to that Polisario was obliged to erect another camp. Awserd was established in the year 1986.

ORGANIZATION

The establishment of the camps has been organized by the Frente Polisario. With tents received from the Algerians they erected the camps. In the beginning there was a clear geometrical structure. The tents were put in line. This made it easier to organize a society. After the first wave of refugees, the Polisario was forced to establish a form of camp that is adequate to the big amount of refugees. They made the decision to raise five different camps. Four of them were meant for to the refugees to live in and Rabouni became the administration centre. After that they added a sixth camp, Awserd. Smara, El Aaiún, Dakhla and Awserd are structured in the same way. One camp, which is called Wilayah is divided into six parts, called Da'irahs. The Da'irahs are divided into four barrios. Every Da'irah has an administration centre, where representatives from the barrios meet. Every Wilayah has an administration centre and a mayor. The different Da'irahs send their representatives to the administration centre of a Wilayah.

The structure of the camp didn't follow the recommendations of the UNHCR, but are quiet similar to that.



one of the camps in its beginning (photo: www.lasonet.com)

Structure of a camp

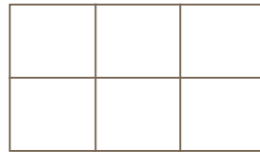
Wilayah

A single camp is called Wilayah. It signifies province. Near the city of Tindouf exist four different Wilayahs. Rabouni is the administration center and 27. February has the same administrative head as Smara.



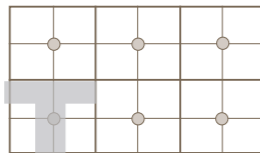
Da'irah

The Wilayahs are divided into different Da'irahs. It signifies administrative division of a wilaya. Initially they were divided into six of them. Smara has been growing lately which resulted in the addition of a seventh Da'irah. 27. February only consists of one Da'irah.



Barrio

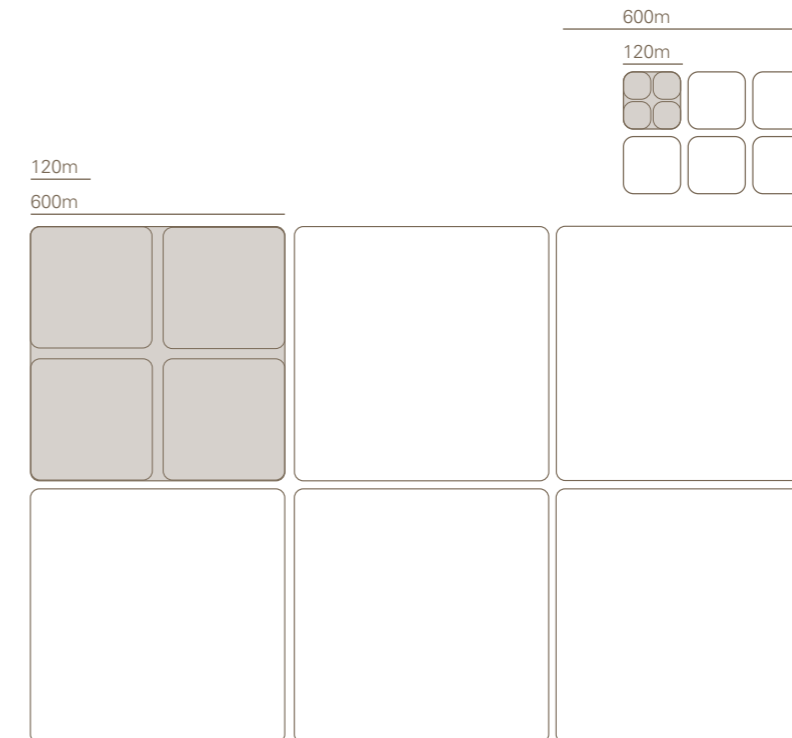
The different Da'irahs are subdivided into four Barrios. It signifies district. In the beginning the Barrios had their center in the middle of each Da'irah. Barrios are even divided into Khaliyahs, which consist of 12-15 persons.



probably Smara (photo: UNHCR)

Beginning

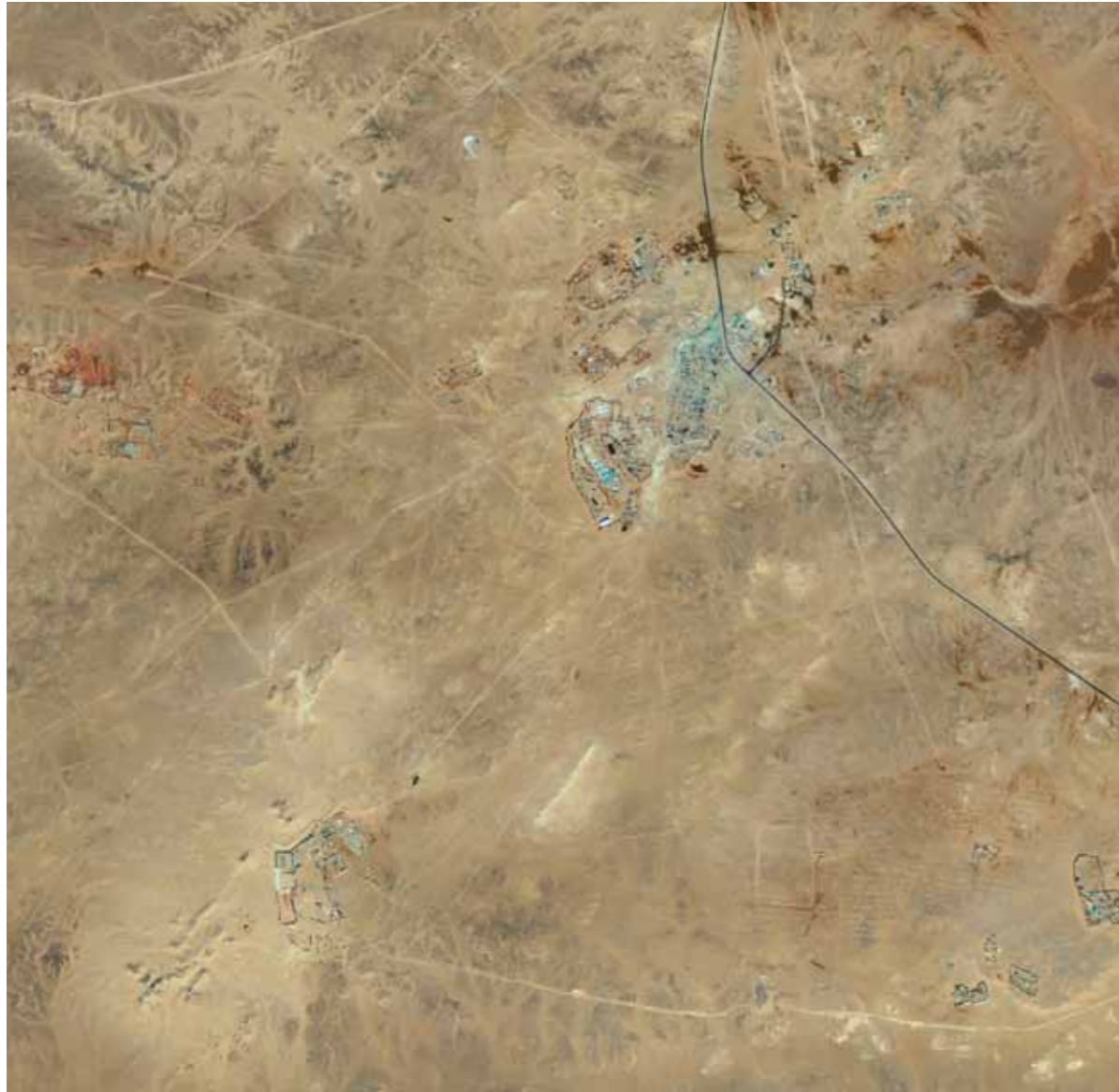
The size of one of the camps in its beginning. The size of one cell was about 15'000m². If there were six of them together, like the structure of the camps today, then the camp had a surface of ca. 90'000m². If in every tent was living a family of six persons, then there were about 4500 people in the camp. This would have given 20m² to each refugee. The UNHCR recommends for each person a surface of 45m². According to them the ideal number of refugees in one camp is 20'000 persons on a surface of 900'000m².



data is adapted and estimated

El Aaiún

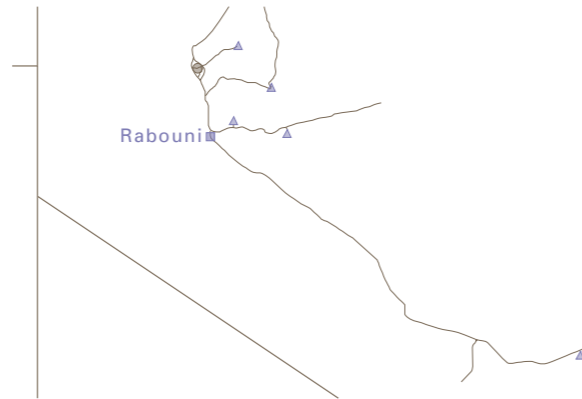
The size of a da'irah in El Aaiún is about 360'000m². As El Aaiún consists of six da'irahs the total surface of the camp is 2'160'00m². The population is estimated 50'000 persons. This would give each person a living surface of 43m². This is almost the size the UNHCR recommends. So the camp corresponds to the recommendations of the UNHCR. But there are more than twice as many persons living in one camp, as the UNHCR describes as ideal.



Rabouni (image: google)

Rabouni

Rabouni lived a change from a refugee camp to an administration headquarter. Today the ministeries and the Polisario are located in the camps. People working here commute every day from their camps of residence. Some started to open shops, which made developing a little market. Workers sometimes sleep in the back of their shops to avoid the everyday commuting. As it is an administration center it is not subdivided into different Da'irahs and Barrios.



27 February (image: google)

27 February

The camp has been established as a school for women. Only the families of the women were allowed to settle in the camp. Due to that it was much smaller in size than the other camps. Today the camp is close to an electricity line of the Algerians. A new phenomena appeared, which is air conditioning. This attracts also refugees from other camps and they move to live here. That makes the camp growing. Now the population is estimated to be 20'000.

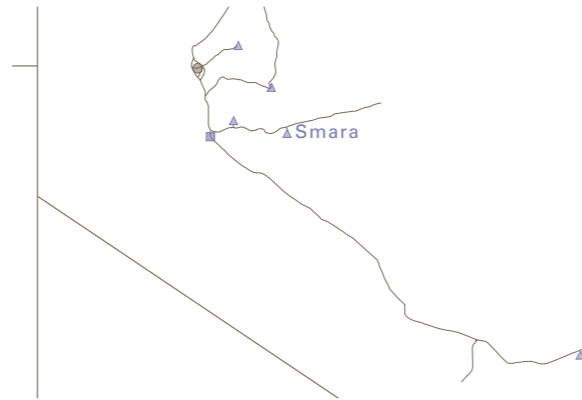




Smara

Smara

At first when Smara was still an administrative community with Rabouni it was divided into four Da'irahs. After the change to a Wilayah, it has been divided into six Da'irahs. Due to refugees who come to live here from other camps (especially from Dakhla) Polisario decided to found a seventh Da'irah, which is located on the Western end of the camp. Not only immigrants move there, but also refugees from other Da'irahs of Smara to have more space. Today Smara is the most 'touristic' camp. It is center of the marathon and most of the NGO's are domiciled here. They bring money to the camp. In the center developed two markets, which are growing rapidly. The population is estimated 50'000-60'000.



El Aaiún

El Aaiún

The camp is divided into six Da'irahs since its beginning. The camp is only about 15 kilometers away from the city Tindouf. To reach Rabouni the refugees have to pass by Tindouf. Still it is only 35 kilometers away from it. The camp has a water source. The population is estimated 45'000-55'000.

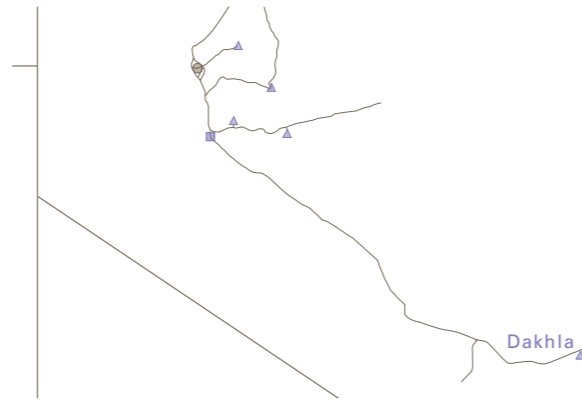




Dakhla (image: google)

Dakhla

The camp is a 150 kilometers from Rabouni away. Before the road was asphalted it took about five hours to get there. Today with an asphalted road it lasts two hours. Dakhla is located there, because there is an oasis. The temperature is usually two or three degrees Celsius higher than in the northern camps. Since the beginning Dakhla is divided into seven Da'irahs. Due to its insularity the population numbers of the camp are shrinking. Most of the refugees moving away move to Smara. There they hope to be able to establish a shop and to gain some money.



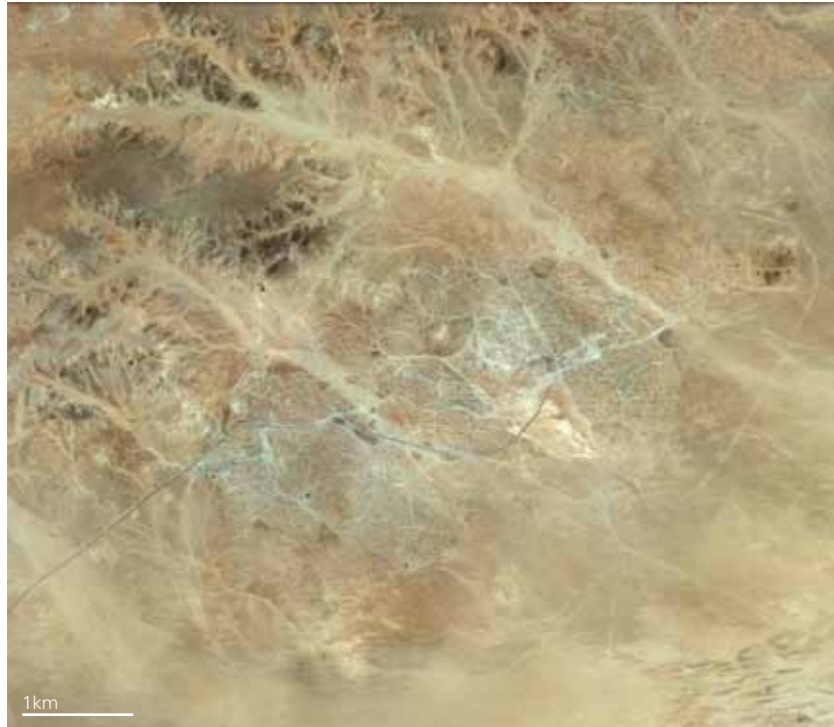
Awserd (image: google)

Awserd

Awserd was the last camp to be established. Its foundation happened in the year 1986. It is about 40 kilometers away from Rabouni. The camp is also subdivided into six different Da'irahs. The population is estimated to be about the same as in El Aaiún.



Comparison to other settlements



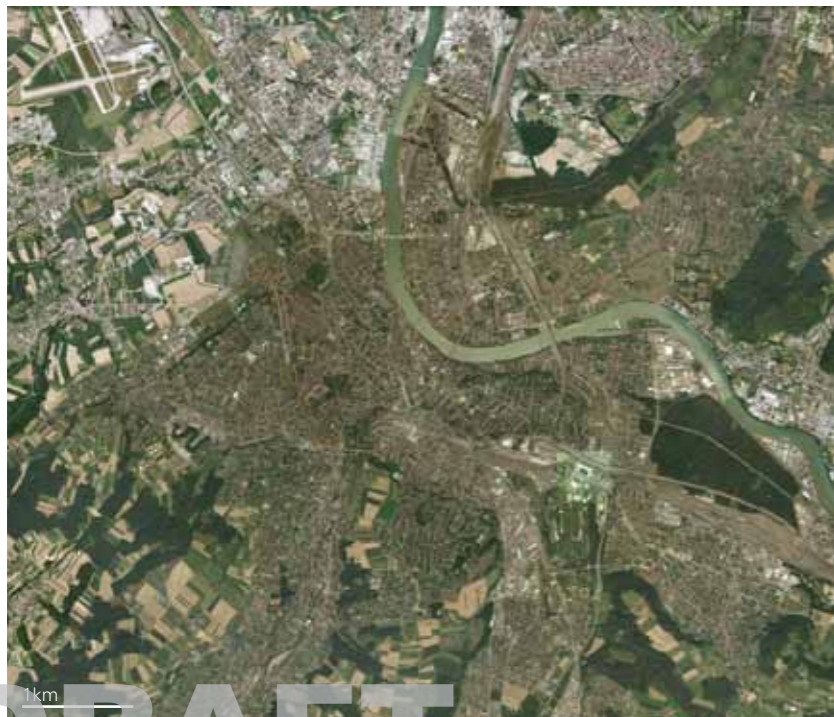
El Aaiún, Algeria, refugee camp

inhabitants: ca. 50'000
area: ca. 9km²
density: ca. 5500/km²



Treguine, Chad, refugee camp

inhabitants: ca. 18'000
area: ca. 0.84km²
density: ca. 21'400/km²



Basel, Switzerland

inhabitants: 169'000
area: 22.75 km²
density: ca. 7428/km²



Tindouf, Algeria

inhabitants: 47'000
area: ca. 9km²
density: ca. 5200/km²



data is adapted and estimated

EL AAIÚN

When standing on a hill and looking over El Aaiún, the settlement lies peacefully in the plain. Even though the population is estimated about 45'000-55'000 it doesn't seem that large. Brown adobe houses and green tents show a homogeneous image. The density and size of the camp reflects a certain urbanity. In between the different Da'irahs appear the animal stables. The stables have a bizarre form. The Saharawi mostly hold goats. Some have camels or sheep and a donkey. The 'refugee camp tourism' has not yet reached El Aaiún, although the camp is developing and changing its appearance.



DEVELOPMENT

During a time span of thirty-six years a settlement can change its appearance a lot. That was the case in El Aaiún. Not only the development of new housing typologies or the growing population, are the reasons for that. Another reason is the impact of the environment, in particular of the rain. The rain destroys the houses and floods entire Da'irahs.

Apart from that, there are three main developments in the camps. This is firstly, the change of the housing typologies, secondly, the changes of form and density within the camp and thirdly the growth of the whole camp. In all these years the refugees kept optimizing their living conditions. This made them invent new ways of construction with the little money and materials they had. The camp has become denser because the young built their houses next to their parent housing compounds. If there is no space left, they have to construct on the edge of the Da'irah. Due to that the camp is also growing in size.

All the development happens on a background of an unchanged matter. Ever since the refugees arrived in the camps they are waiting to go back to the Western Sahara. A lot of development happened out of boredom of the citizens.



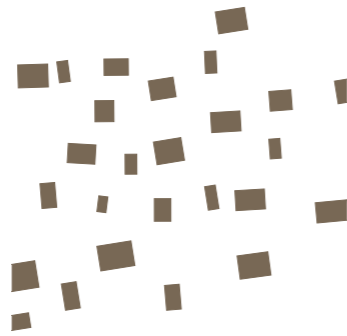
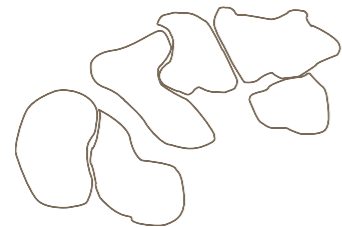
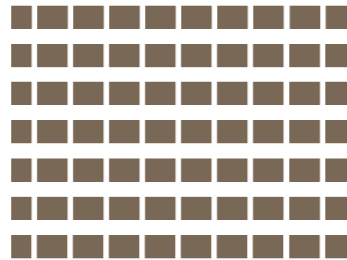
men passing the time, El Aaiún 2011

The camp growing in size

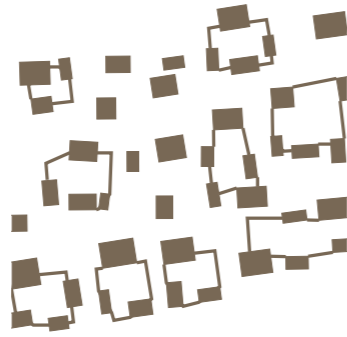
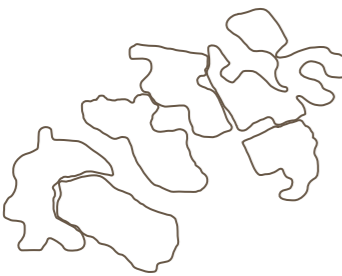
Development of the compound

Housing Typology

1975



2011



The whole camp has been structured. With the growing population and the desire of more space the camp started to grow. Actually the original grids are hardly visible any more. They say that there exist development plans. These plans concern the infrastructure, but not the living constructions.

In the beginning the camps were organized in a military structure. With the years passing by and changing from just tents also to brick houses the grid developed. Today the families built more houses for themselves. This makes it impossible to see the old structures of the camps. In the last few years some started to enclose their different houses with a wall.

The refugees live now for 36 years in the refugee camps in Algeria. During that period the camps have developed in different senses. Not only have the Sahrawis left behind their traditional tents, but also started to built brick houses. One would say this is a big step towards a permanent stay.



El Aaiún before the flood in 1994



El Aaiún after the flood in 1994



El Aaiún 2003



El Aaiún 2005



El Aaiún 2011

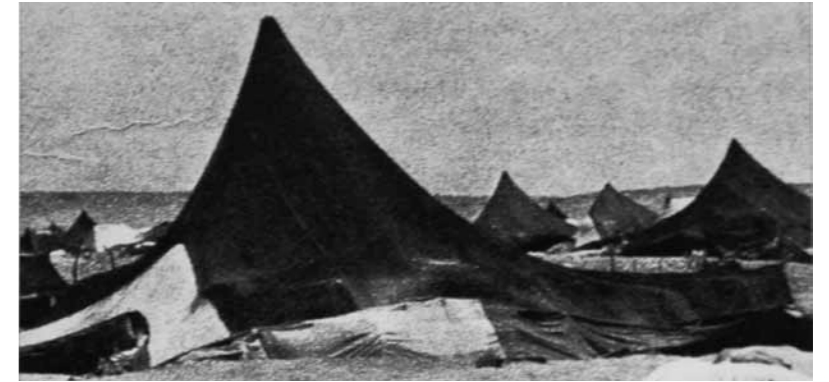
The camp growing in size

El Aaiún has extremely changed its appearance since the foundation. The camp is expanding by reason of the increasing population. Usually children want to built close to their parents, but space is getting small. So they have to move to the edge of the Da'irah. Some poeple want more space for living and also move from the inside to the outside of the Da'irahs.

But the biggest change happened due to heavy rainfalls in the year 1994. The rain flooded large areas and entire Da'irahs had to relocate.

Development of the compound

With the UNHCR putting the referendum on indefinte hold in th year 2000, new many new hosues were constructed. The families realized that they would have to stay for longer. In the last ten years conglomerated houses have been combined by a wall. The wall protects them from sandstorms, trash and robbery. Even though robbery is very seldom. The last few years developed a wide range of residential compounds.



Development of the housing typologies

The development of the housing typologies goes from the traditional nomadic tent to the brick house. As nomades they prefered a typ of housing which makes it easy to change the place of living. In the beginning of the camps the refugees were given tents by the Algerian government. During the period of staying in the camps they started to establish houses made out of water and sand, which is taken from the ground.

PHYSICAL GRAIN

The refugees are denying that the camps are a city. Taking a closer look at the physical grain of El Aaiún urban phenomena can be observed. As the camps have kept developing for thirty-six years now the structure of the strict geometric form is gone. Due to different kinds of development there are differences from one Da'irah to another. Even within the same Da'irah more and less dense parts can be observed. Usually the Da'irahs are denser in the centre than on the edge.

The differences cannot only be found in density, but also in the housing compounds. In some Da'irahs much more houses are combined with walls than in others. This observation makes one think that there are Da'irahs which the people prefer living in. But this cannot be proved right. The people insist that the only importance for the new construction site is that it is as near as possible to their family. Especially the daughters build their houses next to the house of their parents. The daughter is responsible for the parent's household and the parents help with the education of the children. When a family has only one daughter and she doesn't have space to build her house next to theirs, she can force the whole family to move to a new place.

Especially the Da'irah's El Guelta and Boucra are less dense than the others. The main reason for that is, that they were built after the flood in 1994. In El Guelta the new market is located. Normally people are attracted by that, but this is not the case in the camp. The people prefer to live close to their relatives instead of moving closer to the market.



probably Smara (photo: UNHCR)



satellite image of a part of El Aaiún showing the zoom-in



satellite image of a part of Amgala



physical grid of a part of Amgala

Da'irah Amgala

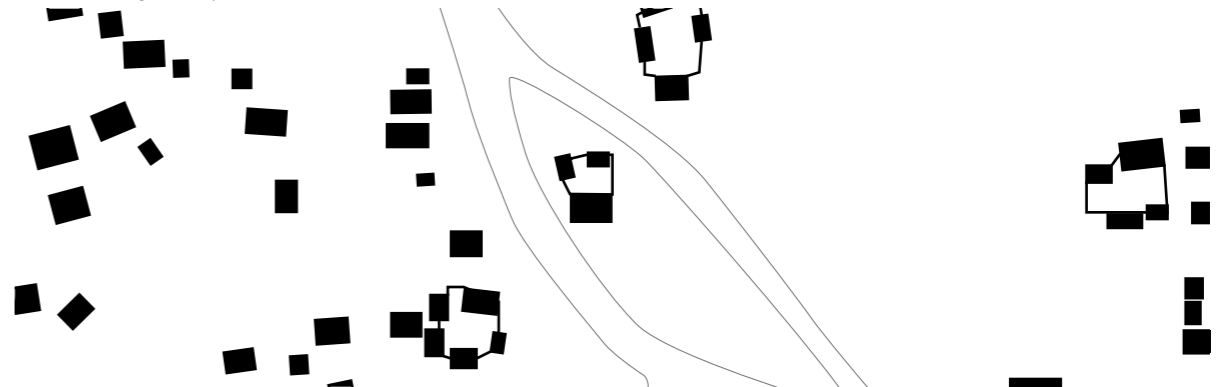
The Da'irah Amgala was not as much demolished by the heavy rainfalls in the year 1994 as El Guelta and Boucra. The Da'irah is very densely settled. As it has never been relocated it developed completely from the old structure. Especially the centric part is very dense. Many houses are comined to residential compounds. It seems that the people have a bigger desiteratum for privacy and protect themselves when they live so close to the others. Not all of the neighbours are relatives or from the same tribe.



satellite image of a part of El Aaiún showing the zoom-in



satellite image of a part of El Guelta



physical grid of a part of El Guelta

Da'irah El Guelta

After the flood in 1994 the entire Da'irah has been relocated. The new location is the closest to the city Tindouf. Due to that the new market developed on its Western end. The new market isn't working as an urban catalyzer. Directly behind the shops is a very low density. The houses are constructed far apart. It seems that with the relocation the Refugees took the chance to built their houses away from others. In this Da'irah only a few

families combined their houses by a wall. It seems that the Sahrawis that if they have the possibility, they prefer to live in the wideness.

TYOLOGIES

The camps arose out of an emergency. The Saharawi had to flee from their homeland. They weren't able to bring anything with them. At the start of the refugee camps they were given tents by the Algerians. As time passed; they developed new forms of housing. As they didn't possess anything, they used everything available to live in.

The picture shows a container in Rabouni. The man made himself a comfortable home. Although, he only uses it for nights when he can't go home to the family. In the camps one can also see containers that are integrated into the residential compounds.

Another striking typology is the sheethouse. The inside of those houses is decorated with colourful fabrics and they are very cosy. In summer they heat up extremely and cannot be used. The sheets are resistant to water and not as expensive as the cement bricks.

The diversity of the typologies is limited by the little money and materials they have.



living in a container, Rabouni 2011



nomadic tents 1967 (photo: www.lasonet.com)

Berber Khayma

As nomades the Sahrawis lived in Khaymas. This was the only form of living they developed.



Algerian tent

In the camps the first tents they received were from Algerians. They gave them the fabric and the metallic frame.



UNHCR tent

Later on also the UNHCR started to dispense tents. They still do today. The fabric and the wooden frame is given. The women still have to sew the fabric. With the time they developed a new form.



adobe house covered with fabric

Time passing by the refugees started to construct brick houses out of sand and water next to their Khaymas. In the beginning they covered them with fabric.

adobe residential compounds

After the cease-fire more adobe houses were built. Now they are covered with zinc panels. To protect them from sandstorms, trash and robbery they started to combine them with a wall adobe brick wall.



cement brick house

To have a better protection against rain some started to built houses out of cement bricks.



sheet house

The sheet house is constructed out of sheets that are taken from barrels. The house is waterresistant and cheaper than the cement brick house. It gets heated up in summer, what makes it impossible to use it in that period.



cement plastered adobe house

Cement bricks are expensive and not as good in heat isolation as adobe bricks. The protection against the rain is made by a cement pluster.





Khayma with one peak like the old berber tents



Khayma received in the beginning from the Algerians



Khayma sew by the women out of fabric from UNHCR



Khayma for festivities like weddings

Khayma

Within the camp exist different types of Khaymas. The form of the Khayma with one peak is similar to the old berber tents.

The ones with the saddle roof were given by the Algerians. As they are from the beginning time of the camps they are patched with fabrics to repair them.

The Khayma with the rectangle on the roof is the most common one. The frame and the fabric is given by the UNHCR. The women sew the fabric to make it a tent.

The rectangle on the roof is only decoration, but almost everyone makes it the same way.

The Khayma with the open sides has its form from berber times. In the camps it is used for weddings. It is possible to open it completely on the sides. So everyone can enter to join them. This aspect reflects the pristine attitude of the nomadic Sahrawis.



Adobe house



Adobe house with decorated window frames



Ruins of an adobe house left on site

Adobe house

The first brick houses the refugees built were the adobe houses. They are still the most common ones. As the bricks are made out of sand and water, everyone can make them himself or buy them for little money. Additionally to that, they are a good heatisolation. Today the different houses of a family are often combined by a wall. The thermic advantage and advantage of not being expensive is destroyed by one single impact, the rain. As the bricks are made out of water and sand they get

destroyed by the rain. Heavy rain brings the mud houses back to mud. The home of the refugees is demolished within a few hours and they have to restart building up new houses. If there is enough space, then the ruins are left standing and the new house is constructed next to it.



Cement plastered house



Cement brick house

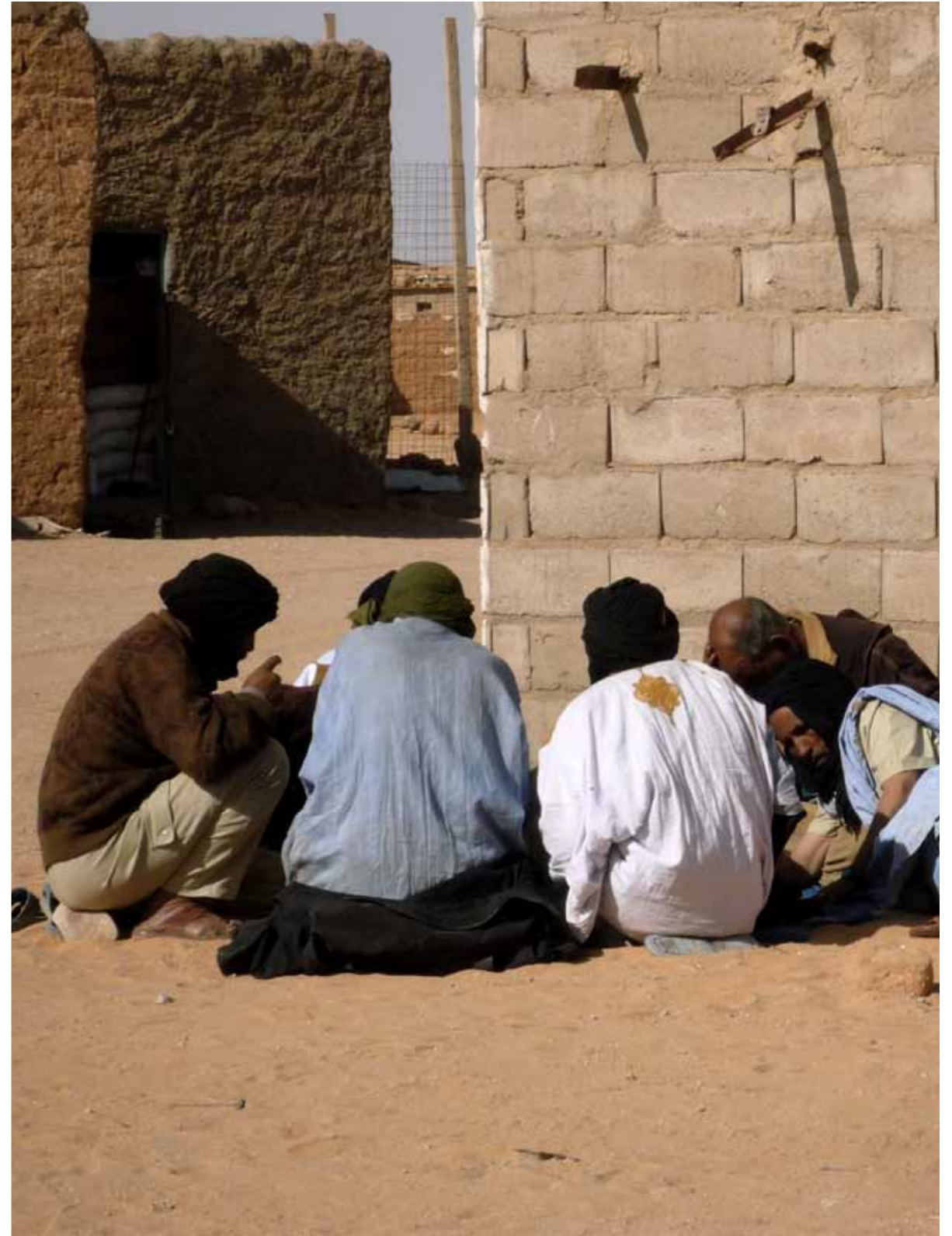


The cement plaster dropping off

Cement house

The cement houses are a quiet new phenomena. The stones can not be produced by themselves. So they buy them in Tindouf. The bricks are very expensive and only a few refugees have the money for it. The big advantage of the cement bricks is that they don't get destroyed in the rain. The disadvantage is that they are expensive and not as good in heatisolation as the mud bricks. Since the rain of 2006 poeple started to construct adobe houses plaseterd with cement. So everything can

be done by themselves and it is not as expensiv as the cement bricks. They put on a 3cm thick plaster and hope that it helps against the rain. On one photo is an adobe house plastered with cement. The house is only about three years old and the plaster is already dropping of. It is questionable if plaster is really protecting the house of being demolished by heavy rainfalls.



El Aaiún 2011, men passinf the time in the center of the Da'irah Edchede

CONSTRUCTION METHODS

As the adobe brick house is still the most common house, men started to produce and sell them. Several men work outside of the camps and produce the stones. They have water on the field. Everyone can start to produce bricks and sell them. The bricks are actually the only product in the camp that is produced and sold there. The brick producer gets the work from families who don't have the time or the helpers to produce them themselves.

When a family has enough helpers they produce the bricks next to the construction site. As the residential compounds are becoming larger and the population is growing many houses are constructed in the camps.

The production of the bricks is a tough job, as the men stay out in the sun the whole day doing physical work. There is something like a high season of constructing. It lasts from March till May. In that time the temperature is the most comfortable for staying and working outside. But all year round houses are built.

The new houses that are designed, are sometimes built by men who are employed as construction workers. With the appearance of this kind of residential compounds and more 'rich' persons a new genre of working type is coming into being.



brick drying on the field, El Aaiún 2011 (photo: Diana Zenklusen)

comercial brick production

brick construction

The bricks are made out of sand. The sand from the lower layers is better. So they dig a hole and mix the sand with water. The mud is filled in a form. After a few minutes the form is put away and the bricks stay to dry in the sun. In winter it takes about five days and in summer about two till they are dry and ready to be used. He can produce 50-60 bricks a day. If there is a higher demand, a man with a tractor digs the hole. Then he can produce 100 bricks a day.



brick price
100 bricks ~ 1000 dinar
1000 dinar ~ 14 USD

transportation

When poeple buy bricks they can bring them to the construction site with their own car. Another possibility is the man offering a transport with his carriage. If there would be a lot of bricks, there is also the way to transport them with a truck.



selfmade brick production

brick construction

The method is the same as on the field. People dig a hole just next to the construction site and produce their own bricks. This is a lot of extra work and can only be done, if many can help. The helper are usually relatives. With this method one can save the money for the bricks and the transportation. When finished the work the holes in the ground are just left the way they are.



drying
When producing the own bricks, one has to calculate a few days in advance, as the bricks need a time for drying. Producing next to the construction site needs enough space to let them dry.



bought materials

Most of the materials can be bought in one shop. There are building shops in the camps. Since about the year 2000 they use corrugated iron to cover the house. Since the heavy rain of 2006 they started to pluster the outside walls with cement.

corrugated iron
for the roof of a regular house ~ 850 USD



land marking

Before starting the construction of the house, some people mark the plot. It's mostly done with bricks indicating the house's ground plan. Some plots are marked for a long time, whilst others just start to built without marking.

the house

The most important thing for the construction are the bricks. Today they need more materials which have to be bought. They are mostly bought in local building stores.

housing
for a regular house ~ 2400 USD
the corrugated iron costs a third of the hole construction
design house ~ 5600 USD

construction

As there is no reglement for the construction, they construct the houses every time of the year. There is something like a cosntruction season from march till mai. People prefer that period because of the temperature. The size of the buildings has become larger over the years. Today the materials are bought in local shops. The shop owners buy them in Tindouf. Big families try to built everything with the help from relatives. This saves a lot of money. When the family can not count on help from outside their are forced to buy the bricks and if necessary to hire someone to do the work. Two construction worker cost for one month about 640 USD and the stay of that time in your home. Two construction builders should be able to finish a regular house in that time. To construct a design house it takes about three month, not including the special decorations.

Construction of a Khayma



The fabric has to be attached to the ground. Strong sandstorms might demolish the Khayma.



Every Khayma has an inner frame. The frame holds the fabric, which is put over.



When the frame is erected and the fabric put over the tent has to be weight down. Many built a fence around the tent, to keep the goats away from eating the fabric.



The tent put together and ready to move it to another place. Sometimes the refugees go for a while in the desert to live as nomades or they give the tents to their relatives who live as nomads in the liberated territory.

Construction of an adobe house



For the construction of a brick house they first built a base. They don't level the ground as it is already almost flat. The bricks are put on the sand ground. In the end the floor is covered with mats and carpets.



After building a base they start to put up the walls. They always start on the eckpoints and go from there to the middle of the wall. With cords they try to built straight walls.



After the walls are finished the roofs are covered. Wooden slats are used as carrier. On top of the slats they put the corrugated iron. The iron is weight down by stones. Some hang fabrics on the inside of the roof to built a buffer for the heat. A new thecnic is to cover the roof with a mixture of cement and gypsum.



When the bare brickwork is finished they put in the metallic doors and a wire gauze for the window. To protect the inside from sandstorms they put on metallic window shutter. If the family has enough money they plaster the inside walls with gypsum.

Construction of a cement house

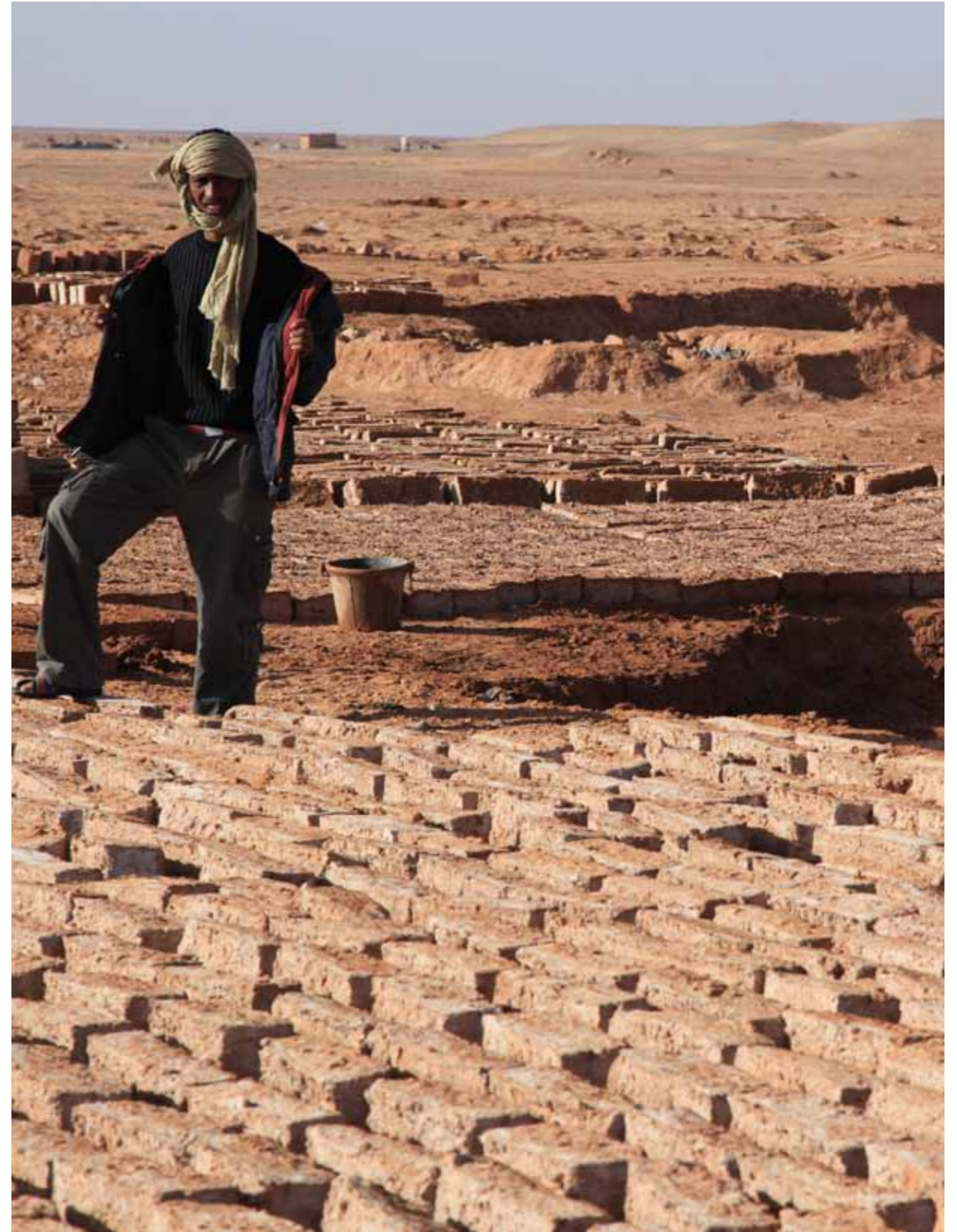


The cement bricks are bought in Tindouf. They way of constructing the house is the same as with the adobe house.

The cement brick houses are rarely plastered on the outside. They are already enough protection against the rain.

This newly erected building has orange colored gypsum walls. Both, the leveled and cement covered floor and the walls are very unique compared to other houses in the camps. It is not ment for living but to become a shop. Usually the inside of a cement brick house and an adobe house are the same.

Construction workers plastering a cement wall. This building is in Rabouni and constructed by Polisario. Probably they will paint the walls afterwards. Normally the people don't need a scaffold, because the residential houses are only one story high.



brick construction worker on the field, El Aaiún 2011 (photo: Manuel Herz)

RESIDENTIAL COMPOUNDS

During the time the Saharawi lived in the refugee camps, they developed their way of housing from living just in a Khayma to designed residential compounds without Khayma. With the implementation of money, differences in housing started to appear. The ‘richness’ of some families is not the only reason for the difference. As the second generation is already born, a generation who has never lived in the Western Sahara, some people start to install themselves for a longer temporary living situation than others. Especially newly married, young couples with money build design houses. On the other side, there are still many families with very little money and no possibility to construct houses that are more than just the necessary shelter.

The contrast can also be seen in the equipment. There are compounds that have washing machines, gas ovens and refrigerators, whilst others don’t have any of it.

The difference between ‘rich and poor’ is not determined by the size of the compounds. It is visible by design, decoration and equipment. The ground is free. Therefore, even poor families can build large housing compounds. All this counts especially for El Aaiún.

In Smara everything is larger and even more decorated. In Smara there are many more designed and decorated houses than in El Aaiún. Particularly in the new Da’irah the compounds are of a large size. The size of the houses remain about the same, but what changes is that more houses are integrated and share large sized court areas.



residential compound of a rich family, El Aaiún 2011, (photo: Charlotte von Moos)



Family of Lala



building area: ca. 110 m²

court area: ca. 90 m²

residential compound surface: ca. 200 m²

adobe brick construction

teahouse: khayma

refrigerator, toilet outside the compound

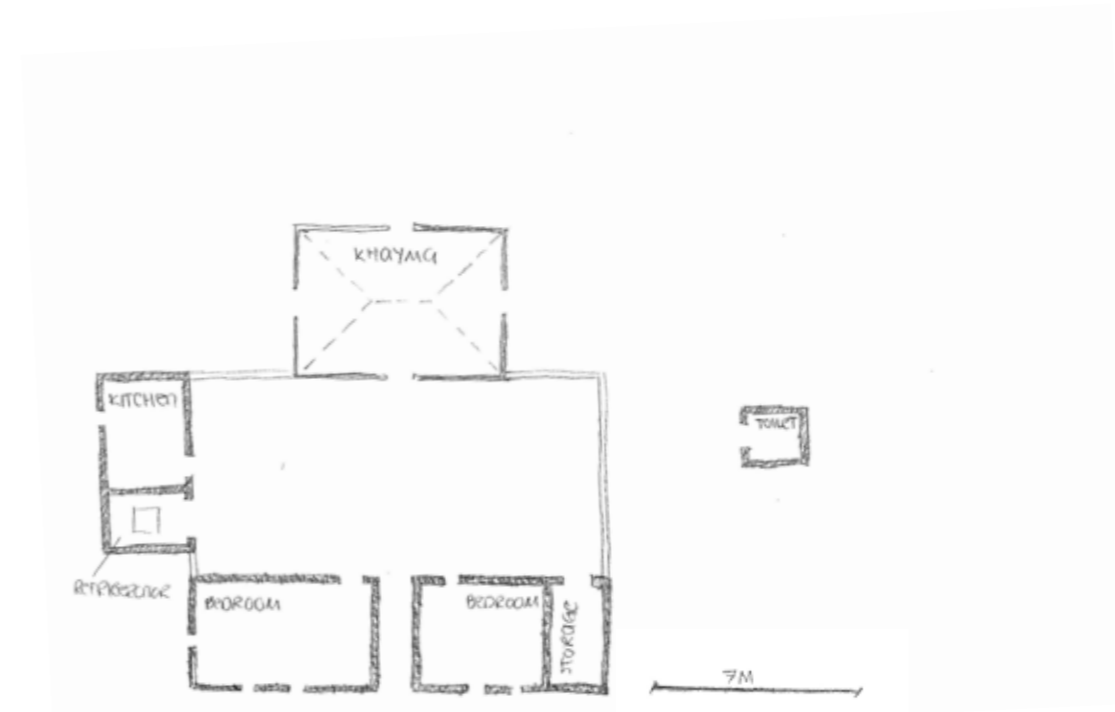
After the cease-fire Lala's father left the family to go to live on the Canary Islands. He left her mother alone with six little children. Lala has three sisters and two brothers. Live has been very hard for them. The sister and cousins of the mother live next to them and they helped. Back in Spanish Sahara her mother lived a nomadic live. In the camp she still prefers living in the Khayma. She almost never enters the brick houses. The hole family sleeps together in the Khayma. The Khayma is still the central room of the compound. The older brothers of Lala are working and gaining some money. Lala once spented the summer in Spain. That family is still helping them. Recently they were able to buy a refrigerator. They built an extra house for it. The houses are in adobe brick. The equipment of the kitchen is primitive. The toilet is a single house outside the compound.



Lala, age 21 years



location: daira of Edchede



floor plan



inside of the khayma, the women having tea



inside of the kitchen, no plastered walls



room for refrigerator



Family of Jamila



- building area: ca. 220 m²
- court area: ca. 500 m²
- residential compound surface: ca. 720 m²
- adobe brick construction and cement plaster
- teahouse: brick house
- family compound, no wall

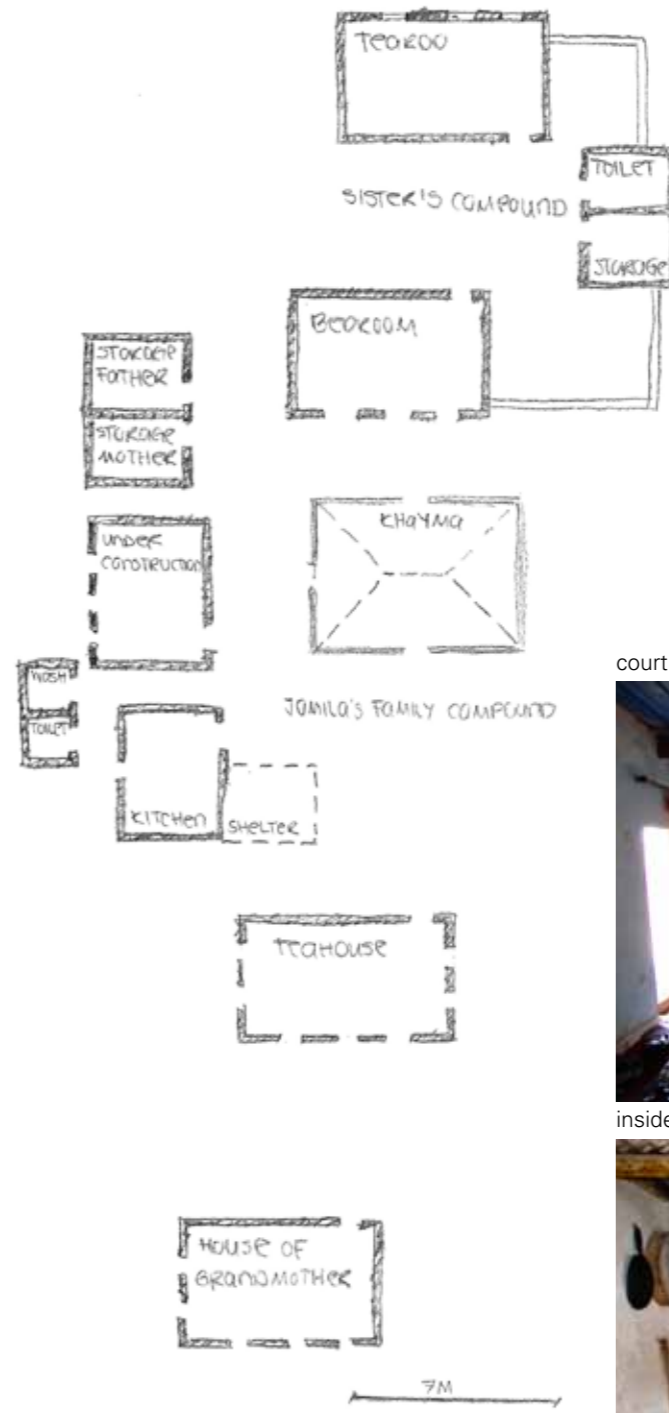


the mother of Jamila



location: दौरا of amgala

Jamila's family lives on a large housing compound. There are four generations living together. The housing compounds includes the houses of the grandmother, her family and the family of her older sister. The compound is not combined by a wall. As the family receives sometimes 'tourists' to live in their home, they gain some money. Compared to other families the family belongs to the 'middle class'. They have no washing machine and no furniture. But they have plastered walls on the inside and they have 'framed' windows. The new buildings are plastered with cement. There is a Khayma integrated in the compound. Jamila, her father, her mother and the daughter of her sister sleep in the Khayma. In front of the kitchen they built a shelter where the social functions of the former nomadic life happen. The tearoom were the 'tourists' stay is well decorated with carpets.



floorplan



court area, special construction for shade



inside of the tearoom



inside of the 'middle class' kitchen



Family of Fatima



building area: ca. 80 m²

court area: ca. 50 m²

residential compound surface: ca. 130 m²

adobe brick construction

teahouse: sheethouse

sheethouse

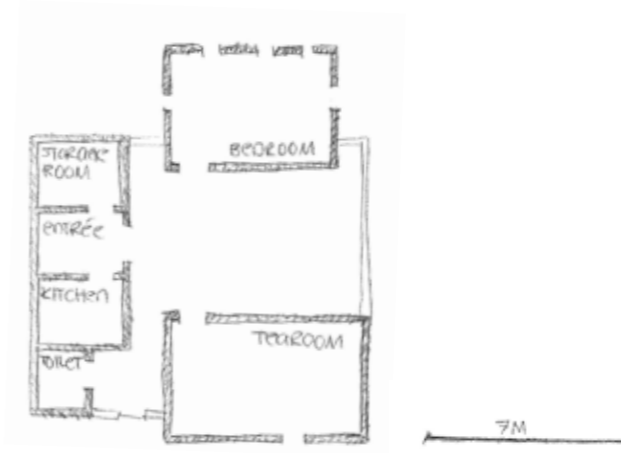


Fatima, with her children and some of the neighbourhood

Fatima is mother of three little children. She lives in a housing compound with here family. Next to her compound lives her mother in another compound. Her mother is the cousin of the mother of Lala. In the compound is a sheethouse integrated. It is resistant agianst water. It has the function of the teashouse. The inside of the sheethouse is surprisingly cosy. Fatima covered the walls with colored fabrics. The floor is covered with mats and carpets like in brick houses. In summer the sheethouse gets heated up. The buffer of the fabric is not helping anymore and they can't use the room. Then the bedroom becomes also tearoom. The housing compound is about five years old. It is a small compound, but it has furniture. The houses are made out of adobe bricks.



location: daira of edchede



floor plan



court area



outside view



inside of sheethouse



floor plan

Family of Hamaa



- building area: ca. 90 m²
- court area: ca. 60 m²
- residential compound surface: ca. 150 m²
- adobe brick construction with cement plaster
- teahouse: brick house
- design house



Hamaa, sister of the proprietor

Hamaa's family is poor. Her older sister studied in Algir. After finishing her studies she came back to the camps and got married. Her husband is from the camp Awserd. There he owns a shop together with his brothers. Due to that he is 'rich'. As the daughter always stays close to the family they built the house in El Aaiún next to her mothers house. They invested all the money they have in the construction of the house. It was designed by an 'architect' and construction wokers built it in three month. The house cost about 5600 USD. It is three years old. It is an adobe house plastered with cement. Her husband spends only one day a week in El Aaiún. The other days the daughter stays at here mother's house. They spent all their money on a house, which signals a certain permanence and to make their life in the camp as comfortable as possible, without using it.



location: daira of edchede



inside of the tearoom



tiled and plasterd toilet



good equiped kitchen



facade decoration



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LAND PLANNING

In the refugee camp land is cost-free. Till today the people don't have to pay for the ground they build on. This is very unique in an urban settlement. Polisario still prohibits paying money for the ground. Like that they want to make sure, that all the people have ground on which they can construct their house. Due to that the differences of 'rich and poor' are not primarily visible in the size of the compound.

This phenomenon has different consequences.

The fact that all people have enough ground for an adequate size of a home is positive.

The result from that is a widely spread settlement. Especially in newer Da'irahs and on the edges of the Da'irahs the urban structure is ample.

In Smara residential compounds are of a large size, not because the houses are larger, but because the court area is huge.

The rain destroys the houses. If there are parts of the walls still standing they are left the way they are. The new house is build next to it. Due to that many ruins can be found in the camps.

Most of the nomadic people have never lived in a society, where they had to pay money for the ground. They mostly prefer the wideness. The ground has no value.

Another aspect of the phenomenon is that everyone can build wherever they want. Especially in the centres of the Da'irahs free space is becoming rare. Some people start to mark the plot they want to build on. This makes some refugees angry. Even if there is no mark on the ground it is sometimes taken, the neighbours know who claims it. If two different parties want to construct on the same plot problems arise. If they can't resolve them on their own then the leaders of the Khaliyah or the barrio look for a solution. If the plot is large enough that both can construct on it they divide it. Otherwise one party has to construct on another plot. Then they are given the nearest plot there is.



ruins, Smara 2011 (photo: Manuel Herz)



marking of a plot, the adobe brick seem to be there already for a longer time



large sized residential compound with a gate



wide spread settlement on the ,outskirts' of a Da'irah



ruins left standing

COMPARISON WITH SMARA

The distance between Smara and El Aaiún on the road is about 60 kilometres. Smara is the most ‘touristic’ of all the camps. Every year it is the headquarter of the Saharamarathon, which is organized to call attention to the refugees and to raise money. Most NGO’s are located in Smara. With all the NGO’s many workers come and these people bring money. That has an impact on the structure of the camp.

In the last few years two little markets emerged. Many refugees own a shop. With the money they earn in the shops and receive from visitors they started to built large sized residential compounds. Compared to El Aaiún there are much larger compounds, mainly towards the newly found Da’irah. These large compounds are often combined by a castle-like wall. They have big gates, so the cars can drive into the wide court area. Culletts were even put on some walls. This is still very rare, but it shows that the way of living is going to be more insular.

On the edge of the new Da’irah the houses are built away from the others. These houses are rarely combined by a wall. This shows like in El Aaiún, that if the people have space, they don’t enclose their houses.

If a family has a little extra money they decorate their house. In Smara houses with extensive decorations can be seen. The people have a lot of passion for the detail and try to make their home special.



large residential compound with wall, Smara 2011



Smara 2011

Linearly developing Smara

In the beginning Smara was divided into six Da'irahs. Smara has no fountain. It has a large garden for the refugees. The camp is densely settle in the centres of the old Da'irahs. Towards the edges they are becoming less dense. No entire Da'irahs were relocated, as they haven't been flooded as much as in El Aaiún. Smara has been growing a lot lately, which had the consequence that they founded a new Da'irah. In the new Da'irah live mostly immigrants, who are coming from the camp Dakhla. But also people from other Da'irahs are moving there, because they want more space to built their compounds. Smara has about 10'000 inhabitants more then El Aaiún.



large residential compound completely plastered with cement



wooden window shutters



culllets put on top of the wall, which is combining the houses to a compound

large sized, enclosed residential compounds

Compared to EL Aaiún in Smara are much larger sized residential compounds. The size is not larger because of the bigger houses, but because they enclose a wider court area. More houses are integrated in the compounds. Some walls are even topped with culllets. More houses are designed and decorated. This doesn't mean, that all the houses in the Wilayah are that way. The majority are still the usual adobe brick house as in

El Aaiún, but there are clearly more larger and designed compounds. In El Aaiún are no walls topped with culllets. Analysing the different houses it is clear that in Smara some people have much more money as the inhabitants in El Aaiún.



TEMPORARY VS PERMANENT

[my] father was a severe man, like the warriors of the old times. But he was especially tough. He did not leave any livestock to the children; he had never cared about those things, it was more important for him to handle the rifle. But the old stories about the warriors of the past times, about their achievements, about the battles in which they participated, about the actions of our relatives in the wars, were told every day in our family. The remarked poverty of our home was compensated for by the emotion that the words we heard from our elders caused in us. It was our food, our university. (San Martin. P 2010)

Bachir, born around 1950 in the Spanish Sahara

This statement reflects the society. In nomadic life, everything children learned was taught by the elders. Story-telling was a big cultural act. So was drinking tea. The traditional berber tents could be opened to all sides. People passing by were welcome to enter and to drink tea. All the family used to sleep in the Khayma. It was the only type of housing they had. Everything happened in the Khayma.

The social life of the Saharawi mostly remained the same. The Khayma is still the meeting point of the whole family. In the camps the Khayma still plays a central role. Even though they started to build brick-houses, they are staying most of the time in the Khaymas.

There is a difference between refugees who lived in the Khayma in the Spanish Sahara and those who didn't. In the camps they prefer the same way of living that they were used to from before. Even if they don't use the Khayma for living anymore, they keep having it as a sign of their nomadic background and the temporary stay in the camps.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE KHAYMA

“The Khayma...a work of women, friends and relatives.”

Achark Awsat

In the nomadic form of life the berbers lived in a Khayma. Nomads moved around to find water and food for their animals. A tent can be brought down and packed to take it to the next place of residence. The tent is a place where the family comes together. They drink tea, play games and sleep in it. In nomadic cultures the family is the most important thing and the family comes together in the Khayma.

The tent is a strong sign of a temporary stay. It shows that any day they can strike down the tent and go back. The existence of the tents is standing for the fact that they don't want the camps to become permanent. Almost every family has still a Khayma integrated in their compounds. In most families the tents are in big use. But even when they don't use it anymore they leave it standing as a political statement. The statement is, that the camps are only a temporary solution. With the political aspect the Khayma gets a new important value.

The frequency of the usage of the Khayma depends on the habits of the elders. If they lived in tents in the Spanish Sahara, they still prefer living in the Khayma. If the parents live in tents, so do the children. There are elders, who already lived in houses in the Spanish Sahara and they prefer houses now. Most still have a tent. They need it when heavy rainfall destroys their adobe houses and because it is a symbol of their nomadic background. It shows where they came from and what their traditions are.

In October 2010 about 12'000 Saharawi congregated their tents ten kilometres outside the city of El Aaiún in the Western Sahara to protest against the occupation of the Moroccans. They use the tent as symbol of their tradition and the temporary stage in which their homeland is.



Khaymas integrated in the housing compounds, also being a political statement, Smara 2011 (photo: Manuel Herz)



settlement for the demonstration outside El Aaiún, Western Sahara (photo: www.taringa.net)

CONCLUSION

In all these years the camps have seen large changes, especially with the men returning to the camps after the cease-fire. As the years passed by and the UN wasn't been able to convince the Moroccan king to leave, frustration among the refugees augmented. Out of boredom they started to build larger adobe houses and to open shops. The people started to lose faith in the UN. In the year 2000 the UN placed the referendum on indefinite hold. This made the economy explode. As long as the refugees had the prospect of going home any day, they just built the most necessary things. Realizing that they will have to stay longer than expected made them starting to invest in their lives in the camps. More shops were opened and people started to build residential compounds. This doesn't help the UN to resolve the problem. The refugees believe that they have a better life in the camps, than in the Western Sahara under the Moroccan king. This fact makes it easier for them to keep waiting for independence. As the situation of life of the Saharawi living in the Western Sahara is precarious, they prefer staying in the camps, instead of going back to a country, in which they would not be free. People still think temporary, but time has learned them, that temporary can be for a very long time. Even after thirty-six years they wake up everyday with the hope of going to their homeland.

Despite the improved living situation in the camps, people's frustration is growing. Especially the youth who are well educated today, are dissatisfied. They study and are highly qualified, but there are no jobs for them. Talking to young persons on the street you get the impression that they start to think, that they will only get their country back by war. These young men have not lived the war. The elders and the Polisario don't want to fight with weapons again. But what happens when they are gone and only the young are left? During their whole life they were always told by the elders and Polisario how great their homeland is, why shouldn't they fight for it when nothing holds them back anymore



HOUSING AND ITS STRATEGIC DIMENSION

“There are two groups of people in the camps: the ones, who don’t want to establish anything that could even look permanent and the others, who want to make their stay in the camps as comfortable as possible”

Taleb Brahim, engineer of agriculture, Smara 2011

Designed houses start to appear in the camps, houses that are erected with a lot of passion for the detail. In El Aaiún there are only a few of them. In Smara many of those houses are built. These housing compounds show some kind of permanent thinking. Why would you invest so much money and time in a house if you wouldn’t think to live in it for a long time? The growing “richness” of the society allows them to build things that are not only necessary for life. Most of these design houses don’t include a tent. They don’t need the tent anymore. They don’t feel more comfortable in them and they don’t have them just as a temporary sign. Additionally to that, most of those houses are plastered with cement. They believe that the rain can not destroy their houses anymore. So they don’t need a tent to live in, in case the house is destroyed by heavy rainfalls.

This new phenomenon starts to divide the inhabitants of the camps. Some are afraid, that if they start to look too comfortable in the camps, international organizations would start to think that moving back to a free Western Sahara is no longer important to the Saharawi and they don’t want to forget their nomadic background. Therefore, most of them keep having a tent.

The people constructing these houses are mostly young. They have never lived a nomadic life and their tradition is only history for them. Because of the length of the stay there a new way of life is appearing, which is a more permanent one.



27. February 2011, design house



Smara 2011



27 February 2011



Smara 2011

Designhouses

With the influx of money after the cease-fire the refugees started to construct lager houses. Today the development has a new dimension. Some families have enough money to build houses, that have a certain kind of design. Especially in Smara start to appear houses that have special designs. This new phenomenon surely happens because the people have the money to afford it, but also it is another way out of the boredom.

As the agricultural scientist says, there are refugees in

the camps that want to make their stay in the camps as homelike as possible. Those people still insist that the camps are only temporary. But as some only know the camps as their homes, they want to make it comfortable. This phenomena indicates a certain permanence, yet the owners still want to go to live in an independent Western Sahara. This is surprising as many have never seen it. But in every day life they are told how beautiful their homeland is.



27 February 2011, facade of a shop



27 February 2011, inside of the house of a restaurant owner (photo: Manuel Herz)



El Aaiún 2011, inside of a Teahouse

Decoration

The Sahrawis have a certain passion for the detail.

Outside walls of shops are covered with swell drawings. This drawings indicate the objects that are sold in the shops.

In Rabouni a restaurant owner decorated the inside walls sumptuous. He did not only paint the walls but also made a relief.

The tearoom is the room were visitors are welcomed. Families make it the most beautiful room and decorate

it. Colored carpets are often used as an instrument of decoration. Decoration gives a certain image of permanence. In the camps it is often done by carpets, which are temporary and easily moved to another place. With the decoration the people give the houses they stay in an importance. This act shows the same aspect of permanence as the design houses. Again the people insist, that they are doing it to make their stay in the camps homelike, but for sure want to go to an independent Western Sahara to establish a permanent life.

