"Happy" in Za'atari:
Difference and Global Belonging in the Refugee Camp Imaginary

Emily Bauman*
eb88@nyu.edu

* PhD. Clinical
  Associate Professor,
  NYU Liberal
  Studies, United
  States of America.

Abstract This article analyzes two video remakes of Pharrell Williams's hit song "Happy" portraying Za'atari refugee children. I discuss the role that the "Happy" tribute video trend had in developing a global imaginary that lends itself to current conversations around humanitarian happiness and "de-exceptionalizing" migration and humanitarian space. I look at the videos in relationship to this trend and to the media construction of Za'atari camp as "city." In the context of this debate and reading the videos through the paradigm of global urbanness such as we also see in the "Happy" craze, I argue that in fact the videos show the limits of the ideology of global belonging when it comes to the refugee camp and of the incommensurability of contemporary humanitarian and global imaginaries, even in an age defined by the sway of new media.

Keywords:
Za'atari refugee camp, Pharrell Williams, YouTube, global humanitarianism.

"Happy" en Zaatari: Desigualdad y pertenencia global en el imaginario del campo de refugiados

Resumen Este artículo analiza dos nuevas versiones en video de la exitosa canción "Happy" de Pharrell Williams, donde se representa a niños refugiados de Zaatari. Se debatirá el rol que tuvo la tendencia del video tributo "Happy" en el desarrollo de un imaginario global que se presta a discusión actualmente respecto a la felicidad altruista y el hecho de no dar un trato de excepción a la migración y al espacio humanitario. Observo videos en relación con esta tendencia y de la construcción de los medios del campo Zaatari como una "ciudad". En el

contexto de esta discusión e interpretación de los videos a través del paradigma de la urbanidad global, tal como vemos en el popular video "Happy", sostengo que, de hecho, los videos muestran los límites de la ideología de pertenencia global cuando se trata de un campo de refugiados, y de la inconmensurabilidad de los imaginarios humanitarios y globales contemporáneos, incluso en una era definida por la influencia de los nuevos medios.

Humanitarian happiness would seem to be an oxymoron, a denial of suffering as the real precondition of humanitarian action and primary affective impulse to aid. Within humanitarian imaging, a focus on "happiness" appears to flout the industry's emphasis on suffering as the *raison d'etre* of solidarity action. Yet there has also been room for happiness in humanitarian representational systems. Especially since the widespread critique of "poverty porn" and of the exploitation of suffering faces and bodies – usually decontextualized and rendered as helpless victims,[1] positive images of smiling beneficiaries have become a staple in fundraising appeals. The reception of this trend has generally been ambivalent. The 2014 Dóchas Code of Conduct identifies the "smiling happy child" image as a "new stereotype" that threatens to obscure the negative realities which so many aid recipients inhabit (2014, p. 14), harming their dignity and simplifying the viewer's understanding of context and situation. Others critique the lack of agency and action inherent in this stereotype (Kennedy, 2009; Plewes & Stuart, 2007, p. 29). Underlying these responses is a well-founded suspicion of humanitarian happiness as yet another mechanism of infantilizing beneficiary communities and reducing those who suffer to spectacle. Instead of "starving babies" one sees smiling children radiantly occupying the foreground, the pain of their lived experiences flattened into backdrop and setting. Here the humanitarian other is presented as happy *despite* circumstances of trauma and deprivation: a model of "resilience" in distress. The viewer is given a spectacle of innocence in adversity which presumes a differential standard that

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[1]   For a powerful genesis of this by now standard critique see Malkki (1996).

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is "good enough" for the other, while at the same time idealizing humanity's capacity to find happiness through the give-and-take of humanitarian aid.

In a forced migration context one would predict the ambivalence about humanitarian happiness would be even more pronounced, given the heightened vulnerability of populations in refugee and IDP camps and urban communities. Yet the question is complicated by an emerging focus in migration studies on "de-exceptionalizing" displacement and displaced people (Cabot, 2019). As the editors of a recent special issue on the topic in the journal *Humanity* explain, "deexceptionalizing displacement" is an overdue reckoning with the way in which the lived experiences of apparently non-mobile populations may be understood within displacement paradigms. The "existential shifts," instability, fragmentation of communities, and "overwhelming forms of dispossession and alienation" characteristic of contemporary social life -revealed and accentuated but not exclusively caused by COVID-19-, suggest that migrant communities are not as exceptional within the global order as is usually thought (Cabot & Ramsay, 2022, pp. 286-288). In an age of persistent crises, social, economic, and political as well as geographic structures of displacement have become the norm, not the exception. Alongside this project of recognizing displacement within "diverse categories of belonging" (2022, p. 287) is the contrapuntal project of analyzing forces of *em*placement within migrant populations and communities; at the same time that we "'migrantize' citizens" we should also seek to "'demigrantize' migration" (p. 290). This means stepping outside of the migrant/non-migrant binary in order to de-essentialize and de-naturalize "migration-related difference" (Dahinden, 2016, p. 2208). Just as deexceptionalizing displacement means identifying migration-related difference within non-migrant lives and societies, so could it also mean extending categories of (emplaced) belonging to migrants, unforced and forced alike.

In the following pages I will analyze representations of "happiness" as just such a category of belonging, projected within the humanitarian space of a refugee camp. It is the projection rather than the lived experience per se that I seek to explore, understanding

it as a simultaneous performing and performance of belonging, both local and global. I take as examples two YouTube videos made by humanitarian aid organizations of children in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan singing and dancing to Pharrell William's hit song "Happy"; both were part of the tribute video trend of local dance performances of Williams' 2013 hit. As I discuss, the "Happy" video trend is especially illuminating of the currency that the idea of happiness as a form of local as well as global belonging has had. Homemade videos celebrating being "Happy from" performed city-based identities that also contributed as such to a larger sense of global collectivity, founded on the idea of globality as a network of cosmopolitan situatedness and place-based collective "voices." In a video series that is ostensibly about place, setting looms larger than it otherwise might, exerting an almost independent power magnified within the "spontaneous" format of YouTube. The Za'atari videos are no exception. Deeply intertwined with their performance of being "Happy in Za'atari" is the representation of Za'atari as a place, especially as a place of belonging. For this reason, I pay close attention to the videos' *mise-en-scène*, which functions as a form of place-making onscreen. Za'atari is a paradigmatic case within the larger debate in humanitarian studies about whether large, long-term refugee camps may be considered cities –a conversation that also raises the specter of difference and exceptionality within humanitarian space. I argue that the Za'atari "Happy" videos engage and illuminate this debate in the ways in which they "emplace" both refugees and the camp itself in their performances of citizenship within the global "Happy" imaginary. Within these celebrations of humanitarian happiness, tensions between Za'atari as city and camp are revealed that reinforce the difficulty of de-exceptionalizing refugee spaces within current paradigms.

Happy/Refugee: it might seem crazy

In 2014 the world was swept by homemade dance tribute videos of Pharrell Williams's hit song "Happy." Starting in Paris and quickly metastasizing, thousands of "We're Happy From X" videos were made

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featuring people celebrating their home cities and countries, creating a large-scale pageant of global belonging grounded in local pride, or what one outlet called a "global ode to joy" (Al Arabiya, 2015). Though grassroots in nature, the global dance party that was the Happy craze was given birth to by global governance. In the spring of 2014 Williams and the United Nations Foundation launched a fundraising campaign to promote the UN's 2014 International Day of Happiness, encouraging fans to "post YouTube videos of themselves 'demonstrating their happiness' to Pharrell's track with the hashtag #HAPPYDAY" to a special website (Newman, 2014). The trend was so popular that it extended well past the March 20th deadline; happiness was danced to from Beijing to Berlin to Budapest and included far-flung as well as metropolitan locations. The Happy remake video craze even included refugee camps. In May of 2014, two different NGOs, one international and one local, released Happy videos of Syrian refugee children in the Za'atari refugee camp area: "Official SYRIA (RESTORE) HAPPY" and "Happy with Syrian Refugees from Za'atari village, Mafraq, Jordan." They were not the first to think of a Happy celebration in a humanitarian setting. In March 2014 UNDP had produced a Happy video of a Philippines recovering from typhoon Haiyan, and a couple of months later an aid worker made a Happy video for Syrian refugees in the Darashakran refugee camp in Iraq, which was covered by the *Washington Post* (Kaphie, 2014).[2] As I discuss below, the inclusion of these exceptional spaces within a mediated global imaginary of self-celebration reflects and tests the extent to which new media forms have changed the landscape and ethos of solidarity spectatorship and the representations of humanitarian happiness that they produce.

The story of the Happy videos is a story of how new media has changed our concepts of place, and with them, our concepts of emplacement. "When the residents of Toliara, Madagascar make their version of 'Happy,' they're making a statement that they're part of the same media environment, part of the same culture, part of the same world as Pharrell's LA" (Zuckerman, 2014). The video format

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[2]   The Darashakran and Za'atari Happy videos were all in fact made within a few weeks of each other in May of 2014.

allows residents to globalize their locations, constructing homologies among built environments across the world that might otherwise appear quite different. Like Williams' own official music video, most Happy remakes are filmed in an urban backdrop, displaying street life, street clothing, street art, and street dancing amid bustling thoroughfares and iconic metropolitan spaces like highway underpasses, bridges, and shopping malls.[3] This generalization of global street culture has not always been happily received. Many Happy videos were denounced by those who saw in them a species of Western hegemony and decadence, at times with severe repercussions for the videos' makers.[4] In such cases the identification with a global quasi-Westernized "us" may have been precisely the point, with the Happy tribute video forming part of a larger youth movement in which the dance of Happy elevated belonging to the song's international, media-based culture over other forms.[5] This move claimed a mirroring identification from the audience as well; as the makers of "Happy British Muslims" put it, "The positive sentiments resonate globally and the world defends it as if they all feature in it" (The Honesty Policy, 2014).

The quote above acknowledges the Happy video as a privileged site of global belonging, able to de-exceptionalize diverse communities by virtue of their participation within the form. Acknowledging the complicated politics of this globalist stance, *World Policy* concluded

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[3]   Williams also released a 24 hour long celebrity-laden video of "Happy" paying homage to Los Angeles, merging city and song through the medium (and conceit) of a day in the life in real time.

[4]   In Iran six dancers (three men and three women) in the "Happy We are from Tehran" video were sentenced to 91 lashes and up to a year in prison, though the prison sentences were later suspended (Dehghan, 2014). In the UK, the "Happy British Muslims" video, produced by the group The Honesty Policy, received blowback for reinforcing "dominant, secular liberal notions of normalcy and happiness" (Al Arabiya, 2014). A variety of Happy videos from different cities in Tunisia were assailed as "debauchery and moral decay" (Crossan, 2014), and the "Happy Yemen" video discussed below was also criticized for portraying (veiled) women dancing in the street and for assimilating Yemeni identity to an American song (Echelman, 2014).

[5]   Echelman quotes Ameen Alghabri, the director of "Happy Yemen," describing his video as a "display of defiance" (2014). On their website The Honesty Policy explains their motivation for making the "Happy British Muslims" video as wanting "to rethink the rulebook" outside of traditional Muslim institutional norms, and they celebrate their having gotten half a million views in two days after publishing the video as an expression of "global community." (2014).

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that "what seems like mindless pop has quickly become a vehicle to discuss greater issues of modernization and human rights" (Echelman, 2014). Indeed, Happy's inclusion of marginal communities extended to many unlikely places, including those imprisoned by war or the state. These formed a sub-category of Happy video in which vulnerable groups contributed their version to the global trend. The use of *mise-en-scène* as a form of storytelling in all these examples highlights the centrality of the built environment to the entire Happy genre, but especially to the fraught question of humanitarian difference. In some cases, the tribute video is presented as an embrace and normalization of daily life in the given locale "despite" challenging and even traumatic circumstances, an act of self-celebration within depressing conditions. For example, "HAPPY WE ARE FROM GOMA" includes among its urban backdrop repeated shots of the "Life is a Dream" café, functioning as the imagistic chorus of the song; "The Official Happy Yemen video," which opens with a shot of the Sana'a cityscape at night, concludes its montages of parking lots, skating rinks, markets and restaurants with a statement written in English and Arabic: "Despite the difficulties our happiness will never cease." Other videos appropriated the song satirically in order to expose political incompetence or poor social conditions. For instance, in their "Porto (un)Happy" remake, Brazilian students in Porto Alegre mocked the city's lack of readiness to host the upcoming World Cup by cutting to various halted building project sites across the city flanked by piles of unused construction materials, and in "'Happy'/ We are Rio" locals critiqued economic inequality, racism, and crime in a montage showing high gas prices, street theft, and a naked Black man dancing while chained to a street pole, with the video at the end bursting into flames. A third category chose an indeterminate middle ground between parody and pathos, using the Happy form for social commentary while simultaneously asserting the "humanness" and rights of marginalized, frequently stereotyped groups.[6] We see

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[6]   The point was made directly by Anas Hamra, the producer of the "Happy" video about Gaza, when asked in interview what the message of his video was: "Showing the happiness that we still - humans, we feel happy, although the tough times we're living at. And the second message, that we deserve to live" (Harris, 2014).

this in the empatho-comic portrayal of "Happy" Gazans dancing and embracing life in a dysfunctional urban landscape where, amidst a years-long economic blockade, everything is literally out of order, or in the Smart Life Foundation's Happy video of workers from Asia and Africa in the UAE dancing during their workday, a celebration undercut by the introduction's silent establishing shots displaying their unequal and restrictive living conditions. Equally layered and polyvocal from an editing perspective is "Happy Dentro (Inside)," a video of the Casa Circondariale Luigi Bodenza prison in Sicily directed by activist Paolo Andolina, whose images of prisoners and staff dancing to "Happy" in cells and offices climaxes in a parallel montage of prison authorities moving down the corridors to confront a group of prisoners, only to smile and wave them on after discovering that their collectivizing is just in the form of dancing.

The various categories of humanitarian Happy video above project different stances on the relationship between humanitarian happiness, exceptionality, and place. Where the first group of videos act as a tribute to the people and locations they represent, these last two groups adopt an ironic stance toward the global celebration of emplacement within the very trend they are a part of. These assume what Lilie Chouliaraki calls a "post-humanitarian" attitude in which solidarity is offered via an "ethics of irony" and self-reflexivity (2013, p. 13). New media have been instrumental in promoting this shift from humanitarianism as "theater" to humanitarianism as "mirror," she argues, facilitated by digital platforms that generate and mine a "spectacle of others like us" (2013, p. 20).[7] The spectacle of being "others like us" is evident in all three groups of humanitarian Happy videos, even the satirical ones. While they use the Happy imaginary

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[7]   It is helpful to compare YouTube's promotion of humanitarian global belonging with the humanitarian "transnational belonging" discussed by Bornstein (2003), in relationship to World Vision's child sponsorship programs. Bornstein's analysis would suggest that the use of media to create humanitarian connections predates new media, as in this case letters and photos are used to create connections between donor and recipient, real and imagined. The difference between old and new media for the donor-participant might then be understood in terms of the difference between "transnational" and "global," with new media creating mirroring practices based on cultural consensus and even uniformity rather than the theatrics of cultural exchange, along the lines that Chouliaraki suggests.

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as a foil to criticize environments that run directly counter to it, the subjects claim their right to it and to contribute to it and shape its identity, even from within a state of exception.

The refugee camp Happy videos share elements with the above sub-genre, but the question of how humanitarian happiness plays out within technologies of global belonging is more complicated in a context of forced migration. The interaction of diverse paradigmatic narratives, Happy and Refugee, prompts a collision between almost binary formulations. The Happy narrative celebrates a simultaneous and carefree belonging to place and world. The implication is that not only are all places and identities -all "homes"- welcome in the global community, but that in fact belonging to and celebrating one's home provides the very vehicle through which global citizenship may be enacted and performed. By contrast the Refugee narrative, established through myriad humanitarian advertisements, social media sites, and news reports, stresses refugees' belonging to neither home nor world. Stateless and stranded, often denied the legal opportunity to work, refugees who are waiting (sometimes interminably) for resettlement or repatriation are seen to occupy a "space" absent of place-making sociality (Aburamadan *et al.*, 2020) and in this exilic limbo are denied real global citizenship. Giorgio Agamben's often-cited characterization of the refugee as a figure of "bare life" (Agamben, 1998) highlights what is not only an absence of recognition, participation and power but more deeply an absence of the ability to be recognized, the ability to take part, and the ability to be empowered. This bareness produces the protracted suffering that is so paradigmatic of the humanitarian and especially the refugee "condition."[8] By contrast we might think of "Happy" as an expression of *excess* life –the joyful expenditure of energy outside of labor and production whose sole purpose is expression itself. Happy videos perform life that can hardly contain itself: so full that it becomes contagious, viral.

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[8] Here I draw from Ilana Feldman's formulation of the "humanitarian condition" as "long-term displacement need," as opposed to the "humanitarian situation," the actual emergency that originally created the condition (Feldman, 2018, p. 15). The "life lived in relief" of the Palestinian refugees in Feldman's ethnography is an exemplary case of the humanitarian condition defined in this way.

Given the ineluctability of stateless "bare life" we might consider refugee Happy videos to be a potential limit point or test case for the genre. This is all the more true in relation to a feature of Za'atari camp that catapulted it into the news around the same time that Pharrell Williams' hit was being remade across the world: its status as pseudo-city. The larger debate about whether in fact a refugee camp *can* count as a city dovetails with the question of how to interpret the Za'atari Happy videos. On the face of it these representations of refugee life are pulled easily into the energetic cosmopolitanism of the video trend. The world that we see in the backdrop of "Official SYRIA (RESTORE) HAPPY" and "Happy with Syrian Refugees from Za'atari village, Mafraq, Jordan" has much to tell us about life there, about how the humanitarian video-makers saw and represented life there, and about how the video-makers saw their own contributions to that life.[9] Through their depiction of Za'atari's contested urbanness, they can help us to assess the role that "happiness" plays within humanitarian narrative, especially those narratives that strive to normalize humanitarian difference while at the same time preserving it.

But before analyzing the videos' representation of and relationship to their setting, we need to understand that setting and its history on its own terms: as a city-camp in which discourses of social and economic thriving for a moment superseded the discourse of exception that had dominated and defined camp policy and life, waving the flag of humanitarian happiness as they declared victory.

City-as-camp: here come bad news talking this and that

The Champs-Elysees is the name, or really nickname, of the central street in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, home of close to 80,000 Syrian refugees as of 2021 (UNHCR, 2021). Accounts differ as to the naming. Some attribute it to staff of the UNHCR, which runs

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9   Notably both videos feature children, thus avoiding any potential collision between different norms around women dancing.

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the camp, while others suggest its origin is more grassroots, pointing to a pun on "al Sham," an Arabic name for Syria. The Champs Elysees is one of the most photographed areas of Za'atari, showcasing the apparent homegrown urbanism that has emerged in this camp, as in many. As such the street is an emblem and movable marker of the camp's status *as* a city, raising the specter of urban possibility and fulfillment within the confines of a humanitarian zone.

The debate about whether a camp can be a city is not an isolated or academic question within humanitarian discourse. Rather, it brings forward the larger issue of humanitarian exceptionalism, the condition of difference under which certain human beings are both aided and viewed by the international community and its humanitarian regime. As an indeterminate structure, the camp-city -or camp-town- illustrates humanitarian difference, and none more than Za'atari. It is one of the most photographed and media-covered refugee camps, spurred in part by global attention to the staggering humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian civil war, augmented by Za'atari's continued status as the largest camp for Syrian refugees and by its former status as the second largest refugee camp in the world, concurrent with the time of the Happy craze. Like Dadaab, Za'atari has been frequently covered in relationship to its status as urban settlement. Journalists have been impressed by the camp's thriving grey economy and by its size, making it during its peak of around 150 000 from 2013-2014 the fourth largest "city" in Jordan.

Thousands of YouTube videos of the camp exist along with multiple large- and small-scale documentaries and extensive media reports. These reveal the exhaustedness of camp life and experience and with it the potential exhaustion of the humanitarian emergency project in the face of an extended temporality that it cannot control. Yet along with these documentaries and reports another narrative around Za'atari also surfaced, one that highlighted the "resilience" of the camp, represented through its status as burgeoning metropolis. Already by 2014 the global press was featuring dozens of articles large and small commenting on what appeared to be the novelty of the camp's grassroots resourcefulness and entrepreneurialism: the travel agency, the pizza delivery place, the barbers and the hairdressers, as

well as of course the market on the Champs Elysees, all were pointed out with gusto.[10] Prior to 2016 and 2018 respectively Syrian refugees could not apply for work or home business permits in Jordan, and unofficial "volunteer" jobs working for humanitarian organizations would have been few.[11] Local entrepreneurialism quickly became the primary means for many of earning a living. As a result, Za'atari's micro-economy was indeed thriving. Suraina Pasha details how in 2015 the market was grossing $14 million a month in illegal trade (2020, p. 251).

The portrait of Za'atari's quasi-urban, self-driven commercial world does not tell the whole story however, the story of "power over life" (Agier, 2008, p. 63) that constricts even the most vibrant of "closed" refugee camps. Applying Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" to the camp world, Michel Agier concludes that even as camps contain nascent forms of urban sociality, they remain "bare towns," "a space outside of place" quarantined by the humanitarian imperative which defines and manages them (2008, p. 49). Describing the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, Agier (2008) acknowledges the heterotopic potential in the camp's many video shops and coffee shops, the improvised low-paid job economy, the heterogeneity of its population. But without political voice, citizenship, or the legal right to work, he argues, refugee communities remain frozen in the space and time of humanitarian emergency. In a state of thwarted cityness, camp-towns are, he says neither closed nor open, but remain in a state of suspended and partial urbanization that is also a suspended animation. "The town is in the camp, but only in the form of attempts that are constantly aborted. This ambivalence and tension

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[10] *The New Yorker*, which treated Za'atari's status as city as almost a matter of course, included in its list "the shawarma and chicken and pizza joints; coffee and tea houses; appliance stores where you can get a fan, a flat-screen TV, and air conditioner; a beauty salon where you can get your eyebrows threaded or your hair dyed and cut; Abu Mohamad's bridal shop, where, for a few hours, you can rent a wedding gown and a 'limo' for the reception" (Remnick, 2013). *Emirates Woman* commented on the "bicycle shops, hardware stores, furniture shops, shoe stalls, and plethora of fashion outlets" (Garden, 2014). Such grey economy businesses are standard part of many UNHCR-managed camps, especially those that have become long-term.

[11] While Jordan has granted some conditional work and business permits the vast majority remain unemployed or only partially employed (Finn Church Aid, 2019), hampered by a number of barriers including corruption (Tobin & Alahmed, 2019).

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translates into a reality that is ambiguous [and] undetermined" (Agier, 2008, p. 65). "Everything is potential but nothing develops, no promise of life is really fulfilled" (2008, p. 58).[12] In fact, the grassroots economy in Za'atari has become stunted in recent years with the UN's digitization and hence control of grocery custom in the camp, an example of the constant abortedness of the camp as town that Agier describes.[13] And while recent employment stagnation has prompted NGOs and UN agencies to rush in to provide skills training and "sustainable" small projects such as a hydroponic farm (Un & Carlisle, 2019), this is development of and at the margins; without real job opportunity their efforts appear more like the supplemental activities of a nursing home or a nursery school: works that promote individual and communal growth but with no real place to put it.

The distinction Ilana Feldman draws between a "politics of life" and a "politics of living" is useful in thinking about the incomplete urbanization of refugee camps like Za'atari (Feldman, 2018). Against the politics of life of camp governance, which restricts, protects, and neutralizes, "people survive and strive within humanitarian spaces" (2018, p. 4); this is a politics of living that manifests as sociality, visible in grassroots creativity, economic activity, and political engagement. Humanitarian spaces thus exist in a state of constant tension between the limitations imposed by the apparatus and the social and connective momentum of those who live under it. Against this duality it is interesting that the resilience narrative[14] of entrepreneurial urbanism was privileged in the media during what

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[12] See also Rawlence (2016) for an ethnography of Dadaab as city several years later. Rawlence focuses on the permanence of the settlement as a criterion for its status as city, while also developing its condition as a site of extreme restrictiveness and, as a result, inequality.

[13] Once the humanitarian apparatus began to control aid distribution through digital cash transfers the camp's legal supermarkets came to absorb some of the market's custom (Pasha, 2020). Now cash payments are organized and distributed biometrically through iris scans and blockchain technology.

[14] For a critique of resilience in a parallel context (that of pressures on urban planning in the face of climate change) see Dawson (2017). Dawson argues that "it is on the question of cities" that the depoliticizing concept of resilience has "found its most fertile ground" (2017, p. 156). Dawson's lens of the "extreme city," the city living at the edge of precarity, is a provocative one for thinking about the unique urban situation of refugee camps like Za'atari.

was also a time of unrest and protest in the camp. From 2012-2014 demonstrations and riots rocked Za'atari as refugee anger at poor living and security conditions provoked violent conflicts with camp police. The camp governance system, poorly coordinated between UNHCR and the Jordanian government, left many vulnerable and made camp services unevenly distributed. Only towards the end of this period were reforms implemented, including a shift in UNHCR policy led by the new camp director Kilian Kleinschmidt to involve the refugee community more closely in camp governance and decision-making (Clarke, 2018; Remnick, 2013).

By the time Kleinschmidt conducted an interview with the magazine *Emirates Woman* in August 2014 this violence had come to a close, following UN improvements in camp infrastructure and the overhaul of camp governance. Kleinschmidt was asked to comment on the budding "normality" of life in the Za'atari settlement, in particular on the rise of wedding boutique businesses. He contrasted the then-current surge in weddings with the early days of the camp: "We had a problem at the beginning because happy events weren't looked upon well. The attitude was: 'People are dying in Syria, why are you happy?'" (Garden, 2014). Even with the war continuing through 2014, however, weddings began to resume. The article continues: "With the sound of conflict providing a backdrop to everyday life, people felt they needed justification to be happy. 'Weddings became fashionable because it was a moment of fun for the families. Psychologically it's important to have these other moments'" (Garden, 2014). By late 2014 then the expression of happiness had become assimilated to humanitarian space –a change in Za'atari's politics of living in part facilitated by changes to its politics of life.

Remixing Happy-ness: a room without a roof

The Za'atari Happy videos were posted in May 2014 just a few months before Kleinschmidt's interview and just over a month after the last major camp demonstration occurred in early April. The timing leaves open the question of whether at that point the taboo

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on being (visibly) happy was still in place or had already begun to lift. The two Za'atari Happy videos suggest that it had –or at least that the humanitarian organizations working there who made the videos thought that it had. This perception played into the narrative already extant of Za'atari camp as city, evident in the economic expression of its inhabitants framed almost as a form of self-expression, full of culture, color, and life. The Za'atari Happy videos blended well with this narrative of grassroots entrepreneurialism, for like all Happy videos what the viewer sees in them is a particular *kind* of happiness: improvisation. The freestyle dancing and moving around mimics and represents the perception that even a refugee camp can be a place with freedom of movement, creativity, and life lived from the ground up rather than the top down. The line from "Happy," "Sometimes I feel like a room without a roof," expresses this freedom even as, in a humanitarian context, it could also be understood as a parody of life under refugee conditions. At first sight, however, Za'atari's Happy videos appear to represent the "room without a roof" as a symbol of possibility rather than precarity, de-exceptionalizing refugee kids and celebrating their right to live playfully and carefreely.

The first Za'atari Happy, "Happy with Syrian Refugees from Za'atari village" or as it is more simply called in the video itself, "HAPPY In the Zaatari village," was organized by a local humanitarian organization called Dar al Yasmin (DAY) that provided education and arts support to unregistered Syrian refugee children living in Za'atari village not far from the refugee camp. DAY also provided services to underprivileged Jordanian children, who are featured in the Happy video along with the Syrian children. The organization appears to have closed in 2015. The second Za'atari Happy, "SYRIA (RESTORE) HAPPY," was made by the US-based INGO Beats, Rhymes and Relief, which sent a contingent to Jordan with games and books for Syrian refugee children to raise money for education and mental health programs for them. Both follow standard Happy format in featuring lots of dancing, singing, and fooling around with abandon, the children uncoordinated with each other; cuts move us between playgrounds, sports fields and schoolyards as well as streets with plenty of close-ups, perhaps more than is usual for the Happy genre. A

website of over 1600 global Happy videos consisting of an index and a map, *WeAreHappyFrom*, includes on its curated list "Za'atari Kids." It isn't clear which Za'atari video is indicated, though given that "(RESTORE) HAPPY" has 55 581 views to "Happy with Syrian Refugees"' 4996 (as of August 30, 2021), it is likely Beats, Rhymes, and Relief's Happy rather than DAY's. Their video is also more professionally put together, and perhaps the fact that the organization is specifically serving Syrian refugee children in Za'atari refugee camp as opposed to Za'atari town helps put it, literally, on the map. Whichever video was chosen, however, the inclusion is telling as the curators apparently reject videos they deem "overly commercial or connected to political or social causes" (Zuckerman, 2014).

From the outset then at least one of the Syrian refugee Happy videos has been considered by a "Happy" archive as not "connected to political or social causes." Both are feel-good videos, though each begins with text indicating a humanitarian need. DAY's simply gives a brief description of its humanitarian art-based work, positioning its video as an example of the "arts, sports, and educational programs" being carried out. This association is reinforced throughout the video where we see not only children dancing to "Happy" but Dar Al Yasmin staff as well. But in calling attention to itself as an act of humanitarian production the video also potentially denies itself some of the power of "Happy," which insists on the self-representation of happiness spontaneously performed. In the end, "Happy with Syrian refugees" functions almost like a report to donors, packaged in "Happy" format. "(RESTORE) HAPPY" is a more classic, internet-savvy Happy video. Using the bright yellow screens with black type that became traditional in the Happy video trend, it pulls the viewer in with a series of "shocking" facts, including numbers of Syrian refugees, of Syrian children refugees, of schools and homes destroyed, of loved ones lost, etc.; at the beginning and end it anchors its content with hashtags (#Syria #(RESTORE) HAPPY) and a website (www.love4syria.com); inter-titles spliced in between footage of uniformed children dancing and smiling in schoolyards tell us that "Syria's children are resilient." Throughout the video the organization itself remains invisible until the very end, when inter-

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titles ask us to "Support mental health & eduction [sic] programs for Syria's children" and thank donors and supporters. Through this interplay between word and image bookending the dance sequence, "(RESTORE) HAPPY" effectively harnesses the energy of the Happy video form to make an appeal (one that because it is nonprofit presumably remains outside *WeAreHappyFrom*'s "commercial" barrier).

"(RESTORE)" opens by addressing the conundrum of humanitarian happiness. A series of opening screens tell us: "We know what you are thinking... / Happy?! Syria?!?!" before launching into the statistical facts that will in a moment be overridden by the fact of the children's resilience. But the question remains, how should we interpret the expression of happiness in a humanitarian context? DAY's video assimilates the question to the nature of its work: these children are happy because of our programs, it seems to say, thus maintaining the viewer's awareness of fragility within the communities it is serving. By contrast the "(RESTORE)" video both asks this question and then nullifies it by shunting to the invocation of resilience that produces and justifies humanitarian happiness, self-evident in the children dancing to Williams' song.

And yet if you look closely an uncanny *exception* is suggested within both these presentations of humanitarian happiness, one that troubles the celebration of place and belonging to that place typical of the Happy genre. Like other Happy videos, both Za'atari videos make the place they celebrate just as much a protagonist as the children who dance there. Paying attention to this backdrop a very different story unfolds. Even as their tone and message seem to be one of straightforward affirmation of the happiness-capacity of Syrian refugee children, whether in terms of their responsiveness to help or their ability to bounce back, the *mise-en-scène* creates tensions that this narrative cannot completely absorb. Viewing for urban context, the videos, seemingly grounded in category one of humanitarian Happy videos in their normalizing of refugee kids, start to look more like category three: torn between humanitarian recognition and critical politics, despite their best intentions.

In different and even opposite ways, both "Happy with Syrian refugees" and "(RESTORE) HAPPY" are mixed artifacts, blending camp

and urban refugee scenes in a way that suggests that the urban "outside" of the camp can be integrated with the urban inside of it. In the Dar al Yasmin portrayal this is less evident than in that of Beats, Rhymes and Relief. In "Happy with Syrian Refugees" we are looking at Syrian "urban" refugees living in a village proximate to Za'atari camp and their Jordanian peers; at the time DAY was, in fact, the only NGO serving the 3800 to 4500 Syrian refugees in Za'atari village (Thomas, 2014). Dancing together, Syrian and Jordanian children create an image of community integration within a humanitarian context, merging refugee and local, citizen and non. A Marvel superhero kite, Sponge Bob T-shirt, and plastic red nose (from Red Nose Day?) situate the children in the context of global culture. DAY's work serving the needs of both communities anticipates the recent trend in long-term camp aid distribution toward providing services to locals as well as refugees so as to mitigate local hostility toward refugee presence and ease the services and financial burden on host countries – an essentially developmentalist rather than relief-based approach.[15] The fact that the vulnerable children we see are either locals or refugees outside the camp context is, however, overshadowed by the name power of Za'atari camp. This context together with indeterminate background footage in the video itself makes camp and non-camp contexts as well as development and relief contexts overlap, assimilating one to the other.

Footage in "Happy with Syrian refugees" alternates between four locations: the outdoor entryway to the village school, with its pink-walled arcades; a village street with utility poles and the occasional car; an astroturf soccer field; and a large dirt field. Our first shot of this last field is of a child with a happy face sticker on his forehead dancing in front of large tents with the UNHCR logo on them. Only later does the camera pull back to show us the exact scene: field, tents, wall, and then the buildings of the village itself. Before this there appears to be a strong contrast between a developed small town (conspicuous with both electricity and education, two things

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[15]   In 2016 this approach would be made policy in the Jordan Compact, an agreement between Jordan and the International Community, and more broadly in 2018 in UNHCR's Global Compact on Refugees.

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Syrian refugees in Jordan often lack) and what looks like a camp. They seem like separate worlds, something a conga line along the wall during the middle of the video only underscores. Only later do we see the two worlds brought together within a single shot and perhaps then infer that the tents have somehow showed up along the village as part of non-camp refugee settlements. By the time that the viewer realizes that this is all Za'atari village, camp symbolism has already been assimilated to the images of the town.

In its handling of camp and refugee imaging, "(RESTORE) HAPPY" is the opposite of "Happy with Syrian refugees." Where the first video seems to create humanitarian difference where there is none, only to bring together these artificially created polarities, "(RESTORE)" glosses over humanitarian difference in order to create a false unity between urban and camp contexts. Throughout the Happy video, footage of Syrian refugee children in Za'atari camp is intercut with footage of Syrian urban refugee children in a school in Amman, something that is only indicated in the description on the YouTube page, not in the video itself. The attempt by filmmakers to splice together the worlds of refugee Amman and refugee Za'atari into an apparent unity is largely successful. At first viewing the images of going some ways toward promoting the illusion of cityness for Za'atari camp in its blending of divergent architecture-scapes. The editing switches back and forth between Amman's colorful schoolyard with its blue slide on a sand pit and bright murals, tall apartment buildings in the distance, and proper soccer field on the one hand,[16] and the bare dirt streets of Za'atari, flanked by drab UNHCR tents and metal caravans, kids playing with one lone red ball (at this point the camp does, however, have utility poles). Even the children are dressed differently, the blue uniforms of Amman's schoolchildren (a sign of comparative wealth) made more lively by multi-colored hula hoops. In one memorable edit the screen shifts from a bright scene of squishy rubber chairs in front of a colorful mural of a sleeping god or goddess to a shot of some children making the peace sign

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[16]   Za'atari camp would eventually get a real soccer pitch but only in 2017, well after this video was made.

while holding a cardboard box with baby chicks in it, a caravan and waving NGO worker behind them. The rapid cutting makes the mix of environments seem more like a single place with diverse aspects, much in the style that many non-humanitarian Happy videos represent their cities and hometowns.

In fact, the "(RESTORE)" video itself could be viewed as an attempt at place-making, creating a generic "Syrian refugee kids' world in Jordan," showing that just as in many Happy videos the people are "just like us," whether they hail from Namibia or New York, the kids in Amman and in Za'atari are just like each other. And if in watching this video you focus on all the smiling waving and jumping children, this project is largely successful. With the children in focus, the intercutting between urban and camp refugees suggests the possibility of dissolving the boundaries between these worlds, showing a larger solidarity even as they remain far apart. Watching for the background, however, makes the cuts between the two environments appear jarring, exposing starkly different worlds. This is where humanitarian difference begins to form a crack in the global Happy imaginary. The camp and the city appear as two very different places, irreconcilable even, or at least difficult to harmonize. In these fissures "(RESTORE)" betrays a humanitarian irony it surely does not intend, but which unsettles the viewing experience nonetheless.

In the end both videos attempt to construct visually a synthesis and equivalency between camp and non-camp urban spaces as the basis for their representations of humanitarian happiness. This attempt is valuable, as it highlights how critical are in fact the question of the refugee camp's status as city and the extent of its discontinuity with urban settlements outside of it, even those just miles away. And it only serves to dramatize the instability and ambivalence of these children's belonging to place, straddling two worlds within the videos, a metaphor for the two worlds at odds within the camp itself. In between the splices one perceives Za'atari as indeed a room without a roof: a state of exception to the Happy urban order that cannot be contained.

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Conclusion

If all Happy videos are in a sense acts of participation within the global community as city, then Za'atari camp may be seen to be included as such: a recognizable city that is also a hometown, even if it cannot be found on an official map. Through new media and their virtual networks of identity and belonging, the camp and its residents are acknowledged as part of the global family and are effectively normalized within it. By including the refugee camp within the Happy video trend, spaces of aid are made visible as places of life, affirming the politics of living while -via a humanitarian world comprised almost exclusively of children-[17] they pull us out of the realities of the politics of life. But even as the Za'atari Happy videos present themselves as a recognition of Za'atari's already achieved public status as a global city, "just like us," they also betray how much Za'atari does not share with other global cities. In striving to represent the camp through a collective urban imaginary they show how elusive the camp really is, even within new, seemingly pan-inclusive media modes, and how unrepresentable it remains within de-exceptionalizing systems of representation such as the Happy paradigm.

What does it mean to "restore happy" to Syrian refugee children, to be "happy with Syrian refugees"? How does one speak of humanitarian happiness? Unlike most other Happy videos, the refugee videos are not produced or created by those who appear in them, though as with all videos those appearing in it still to some degree influence the final product. Through this dialectic within the production process Za'atari is unable to escape its humanitarian context; it asserts its politics of life and living alongside the happiness of the children in it. It remains stranded in difference, far afield of the global cosmopolitan world. Just how far afield depends on how much you are willing to see in these videos a reflection of what they are not ℂ

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[17]   Za'atari is in some ways a city *of* children. Those under 18 comprise over half of its population, with recent data showing 20 % under the age of five (UNHCR, 2020).

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