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REFUGEE  
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WORKING PAPER SERIES NO. 96

***Civitas, polis, and urbs***  
Reimagining the refugee camp as the city

Peter Grbac  
[pgrbac@post.harvard.edu](mailto:pgrbac@post.harvard.edu)

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Refugee Studies Centre  
Oxford Department of International Development  
University of Oxford

# Working Paper Series

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# Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Conceptualizing the camp	6
3	Ordering and organizing camp space	13
4	Camps, cities, and citizenship	20
5	Conclusion	26
6	References	28
7	Appendix	35

## List of abbreviations

Handbook	<i>UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies</i>
Intertect	Intertect Relief and Reconstruction Corporation
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## Glossary

<i>Reconcentrados</i> (Spanish)	People “reconcentrated”, or forcibly removed to a different area
<i>Reconcentración</i> (Spanish)	Forcible “reconcentration” of a population
<i>Magalo</i> (Somali)	The town

“From now on, I’ll describe the cities to you,” the Khan had said, “in your journeys you will see if they exist.” But the cities visited by Marco Polo were always different from those thought of by the emperor.

Calvino 1997:69

# 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The refugee camp, positioned between formality and informality, mobility and immobility, permanence and impermanence, is a space of paradox. On the one hand, the camp can be understood as an exceptional site situated on the margins of society that confines, controls, and filters (Diken 2005:5). On the other hand, the camp can be viewed as a space in which identity is actively formed, empowerment is encouraged, and resistance is practiced. Scholarly literature attempts to contextualize this paradox by focusing on the camp as a space of exception (Agamben 1995, 1998, 2008; Redfield 2005; Turner 2005; Diken 2010), hospitality (Ramadan 2008), identity formation and negotiation (Malkki 1992, 1996; Napier-Moore 2005), insecurity and violence (Loescher and Milner 2004), economic relations (De Montclos 2000), and discipline and governmentality (Hyndman 2000).

In the process of contextualizing this paradox, the literature often juxtaposes the “camp (as exception) and the city (as norm) in contradiction with one another” (Sanyal 2010:879). As these tent cities develop into urban environments, there is a need to evaluate the urbanity of the camp space by considering the ways in which refugee spaces come to take on a hybrid nature where “refugeeness and agency have worked simultaneously to create ‘spaces of exception’ that are able to transgress the boundaries of place and non-place” (880). This paper seeks to connect a critical discussion of urbanization with the discourse on rights within the context of the refugee camp space. Conceptualizing the urban not simply as physical space (*urbs*) but also as a particular form of human political community (*polis*) and the exercise of citizenship rights (*civitas*) (Jennings 2001:89), I ask: How does the reimagining of the refugee camp as an urban space contribute to a new and better understanding of the built environment of the camp and the practices this environment engenders?

My response to this question begins in the Paris of 1967. Against the backdrop of a growing feminist movement, a rising black movement, and an explosion of student radicalism (Saunders 1986:152), Henri Lefebvre, the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, wrote his seminal essay *The Right to the City*. Responding to the existential crisis that was gripping Paris at that time, Lefebvre articulated his vision for a new city and a radical right that would guarantee this city. His vision was a “practice and argument for claiming rights and appropriating social and physical spaces of the city” (Gilbert 2008:252). For Lefebvre, the right to the city was both a “cry and a demand” (Lefebvre 1996:158). The cry was a “response to the existential pain of a withering crisis of everyday life in the city” (Harvey 2012:x). The demand was a “command to look that crisis clearly in the eye and to create an alternative urban life, [one that is] less alienated, more meaningful, and playful but... conflictual and dialectical” (x).

Like Lefebvre’s essay, this paper serves as both a cry and a demand. The cry is a response to the existential pain that dominates the everyday life experiences in the refugee camp setting. The demand is a command to engage conceptually with the crisis the camp engenders while considering the possibility of an alternative camp life, one that is more meaningful and ultimately more just. This paper, in sum, seeks to establish an analytical approach to the

refugee camp within Lefebvre's theory of social space, one "in which the city [is] a political space for claiming rights for social groups" (Isin 2000:13). In this paper, I will argue that reimagining the refugee camp as an urban space allows for the possibility of thinking of it as a space in which particular rights, namely the right to the city, can be conceived and realized.

### **Defining space**

Inherent in Lefebvre's formulation of the city is the recognition that spatiality is not simply a reflection of social relations but also a constitutive and formative force (Iveson 2011:408). Integrating an understanding of space into his vision for a more just city, Lefebvre maintains that any "attempts to address injustice and inequality would have to change space" (408). For Lefebvre, space is understood to be a social product, one that is both political and strategic in nature (Lefebvre 1976:341). It is neither a product nor a thing but rather includes the production of these products and things, encompasses their interrelationships, and discerns (relative) order from (relative) disorder (Lefebvre 1996:73).

In this paper, I draw on Lefebvre's interpretation and understanding of spatiality to define the abstract term 'space' as the interplay between the geographic and the social. By geographic, I refer to physical structures that can be localized, mapped, and perceived. In the context of this paper, an example of geographic space includes the architectural system of the refugee camp, which is comprised of built structures such as tents and health clinics in addition to the relationship (distance, proximity, structural commonalities and differences) between these structures. By social, I refer to the practices that position individuals relative to objects (Faist 2005:761). These practices, according to Giddens, reconcile agency and structure in a way that may simultaneously enable or restrict social actors (761). In the context of this paper, an example of social space includes understanding how the positioning of a health clinic relative to the residences of the camp affects notions of access, gendered experiences of health, and perceptions of healthcare.

This discourse of space first emerged in the 1960s as a central issue for social theorists and those interested in incorporating a critical geography of space into their work. Complementing the work of Lefebvre were writings by French social theorists such as Gaston Bachelard (1969) and Michel Foucault (1977, 1980, 1986, 1998). Since then, this discourse has been taken up by geographers (Thrift 1983, 1996; Massey 1984, 1994, 2005; Gregory and Urry 1985; Harvey 1973, 1989, 2012; Soja 1989, 1996, 2010; Cooke 1989; Shields 1991; Zukin 1991; Keith and Pile 1993; Gregory 1994; Pile and Thrift 1995; Jackson 2004), feminist scholars (Rose 1993; Hyndman 2000), cultural studies analysts (Wilson 1992; Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993; Bhabha 1994) and sociologists (Hetherington 1997; Diken and Lausten 2005).

As Soja articulates in the form of spatial principles, this broad body of literature makes three central claims. The first claim, the ontological spatiality of being, maintains that all individuals are not only social and temporal beings but also spatial ones (Soja 2008:3). The second claim, the social production of spatiality, asserts that space is socially produced and can thus be socially modified (3). The third claim, the socio-spatial dialectic, contends that the spatial and social are mutually shaping forces (3).

### **Method**

In order to establish an analytical approach to the refugee camp within Lefebvre's theory of social space, I ground my method in critical urban theory. Critical urban theory is, at its core, a "critique of ideology (including social-scientific ideologies) and the critique of power,

inequality, injustice, and exploitation, at once within and among cities” (Brenner 2009:198). Developed in contrast to the bureaucratic rationality and economic efficiency which structure the contemporary city, critical urban theory “emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space” (198). It does so by interrogating how this space is continually (re)constructed as “a site, medium, and outcome of historically specific relations of social power” (198). Inspired by post-Enlightenment social philosophy, including the work of Hegel, Marx, and Western Marxists (199), critical urban theory developed under the Frankfurt School, a school of neo-Marxist interdisciplinary social theory, and was ultimately popularized by theorists such as Manuel Castells, David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Herbert Marcuse.

Despite the diversity of epistemological, political, and substantive positions that characterize the work of critical urban theorists, Brenner proposes four mutually constitutive elements that underlie critical urban theory. When considered together, these elements prove helpful for clarifying what critical theory is and is not. First, critical urban theory is theory (201). As theory, it draws on epistemological and philosophical reflections, develops formal concepts, and proposes generalizations concerning historical trends (201). While this theory may draw from an evidentiary basis, it remains “unapologetically abstract” (201). As a result, instead of serving as a formula or strategic map “for any particular course of social change,” it informs the “strategic perspective of... social and political actors” (202). Second, critical urban theory is reflexive (202). In this context, reflexivity refers to the enabling by and orientation towards specific historical conditions and contexts (202). Third, critical urban theory entails a critique of instrumental reason (202). By demanding an “interrogation of the ends of knowledge” rather than simply operating within a discourse of efficiency, effectiveness, and manipulation, critical urban theory actively engages with normative questions while rejecting those modes of knowledge that simply “bolster current forms of power” (202). Fourth, critical urban theory attempts to better understand the divide between the actual and the possible (203). This understanding entails affirming the “possibilities for human liberation that are opened up by [a] social formation while also criticizing its systemic exclusions, oppressions, and injustices” (203). In sum, critical urban theory comes to represent what Postone describes as “the search for emancipatory alternatives latent within the present, due to the contradictions of existing social relations” (201).

### **Paper outline**

This paper proceeds in three sections. In the first section, “Conceptualizing the camp”, I explore the spatial constitution of the camp while grounding the camp’s functions within a larger geopolitical, historical, and philosophical ordering. Drawing on historical, philosophical, and typological approaches, I discuss current theories concerning refugee camp space while highlighting key limitations inherent in each approach.

In the second section, “Ordering and organizing camp space”, I make the case for conceptualizing the refugee camp through an alternative approach, the urban approach, by focusing on the logic of camp planning, its architectural origins, and the evolution of refugee camp design. I introduce the principal field manual, the *UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies* (Handbook), which guides the construction and development of refugee camps around the world. While the available scholarship in architecture, geography, and urban planning offers some commentary on the Handbook (Cuny 1977; Herz 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013; Stevenson 2012), little has been written about the relationship between the Handbook, the built

environment of the camp, and the practices this environment engenders. I assess this relationship by drawing on the Handbook itself and examples from refugee camps.

In the third section, “Camps, cities, and citizenship”, I consider the possibilities that emerge from conceptualizing the refugee camp as an urban space. By introducing social theory to the urban question, I reevaluate the camp space in light of what Lefebvre identifies as the right to the city or the “right to change ourselves by changing the city” (Harvey 2008:23). This section is structured around three distinct yet related questions. First, I ask from a rights perspective why it is analytically useful to conceptualize the camp as city. Second, I draw on the writings of Lefebvre to inquire what the “right to the city” is, and what it entails. Third, I ask what this right means in the context of the refugee camp. I assess this right in light of the theory and practice of urban life, consisting of its constitutive elements – *urbs* (physical space), *polis* (political community), and *civitas* (the exercise of citizenship rights).

## 2 Conceptualizing the camp

In this section, I situate the refugee camp within a larger geopolitical ordering for the purpose of considering how the camp is spatially constituted. I explore this constitution through three approaches: a historical approach, a philosophical approach, and a typological approach.

### The camp as a concept

Originating from the Latin word *campus* meaning “level ground,” the term ‘camp’ originally referred to the Campus Martius of ancient Rome (Hailey 2009:3). This site served a variety of purposes including athletic practice, military drills, and the accommodation of the Tiber River’s unexpected floods (3). Today, the camp space extends beyond these recreational and strategic needs to meet a different set of societal demands and desires. Broadly understood, the camp space isolates detainees, processes refugees, harbors pilgrims, welcomes tourists, inspires activists, and conceals hedonists (2). Rapidly deployed and temporal in nature, the camp comes to embody both a range of problems and an array of possibilities. In light of the fact that its purpose evolves and its manifestation shifts in response to the spatial and temporal forces affecting society, the term “camp” lacks a fixed definition. In this paper, I focus on one specific type of camp – the refugee camp. I define the refugee camp, at its most basic level, as a temporary settlement for those individuals forced to leave their country in order to escape persecution as outlined in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

The refugee camp is a significant and multifaceted material and human operation, one that is situated within a larger geopolitical context. According to the 2011 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook<sup>1</sup>, of the 10.4<sup>2</sup> million recognized refugees, the type of accommodation in which they live is known for 7.7 million of them (UNHCR 2013:47). The data reveals that 34% live in camps and 56% live in individual accommodation, while the rest live either in collective centers (6%) or in settlements (4%) (47). There are more than 1, 000 refugee camps spread

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, released on April 8, 2013, is UNHCR’s most recent annual statistical publication.

<sup>2</sup> This figure does not include the 4.8 million Palestinian refugees who are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNHCR 2013:6).

over 60 different countries (Herz 2008:281), with an overwhelming majority of the refugees residing in camps located in sub-Saharan Africa (UNHCR 2013:47). Children constitute more than half of the refugee populations living in camps with the rest of the population split fairly evenly between adult men and women (47).

Regardless of where the refugee camp is located, it exists as a terrain of competing interests “profoundly shaped by and referenced to places of origin and residence, multiple boundaries, and routes of travel between them” (Petee 2005:25). As UNHCR, host countries, local communities, humanitarian actors, and refugees respond in different ways to displacement, the camp space reflects “uneven geographies of power and status” (Hyndman 2000:27). These uneven geographies, in turn, transform the duration, nature, size, and scope of the camp space. Rich ethnographic writing from Petee’s experience in the Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon and Agier’s experience in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya reflect these constraints and offer different accounts of how they manifest themselves in the built environment of the camp.

Petee describes her experiences in the Shatila camp, a small physically isolated area carved out of a vibrant postwar urban center (Petee 2005:13):

*Donkeys pulled carts through what remained of the few narrow roads once used by cars and trucks. Chickens roamed the alleys and pecked aimlessly in the dirt. Bombed and burned out buildings in a state of perpetual suspension gave the impression that any forceful movement could bring the whole pile tumbling down (13).*

Her account is telling for a number of reasons. First, the camp’s population is relatively small, with only 500 inhabitants. This size not only permits closer interaction among residents, it also facilitates a “vibrant infrastructure of social services and facilities” including clinics, vocational training centers, and resistance offices (14). Second, the camp space is organized in a way that does not conform to typical modular refugee camp designs proposed by international humanitarian actors. Spatially organized to “reproduce the spaces Palestinians left behind and to which they were organizing to return” (31), the majority of Palestinian camps, including the Shatila camp, resemble medieval mazes (29). Third, the camp exists in an intensely urban environment, a reality that generates both social and spatial marginalization. Socially, the local Lebanese population views the Palestinian camp residents as “troublemakers and the prime cause of Lebanon’s woes, and thus a presence to be managed, quarantined, and moved at will” (14). Spatially, the local population confines the residents “through the ever-present threat of violence in tightly bounded and surrounded camps” (14). What is most striking about Petee’s account is the way in which she conveys the tension between the fragile nature of the camp environment and its status as a perpetually suspended space. Whereas the average lifespan of a refugee camp is approximately seven years (Agier 2011:53), Palestinian camps have existed for over fifty years, having been established following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

Agier offers an account of a camp space located in a remarkably different economic, geographic, political, and social context. His first impressions of the Dadaab refugee camp are marked by images of the fluttering flags of donor countries and the bold branding of various international organizations. Commenting on the physical space of the camp, he writes:

*As the years have gone by, dwellings have become denser and rather more solid: mud huts alternate with more traditional Somali huts made of branches, all covered with the UNHCR canvas; materials used to transport international aid have been recycled, in particular the sheet metal of food canisters and drums, which has been flattened to make tiles, doors, windows, tables, and hen coops (Agier 2002:325).*

Like Peteet's account, Agier's account raises a number of important considerations. First, compared to the Shatila camp, the Dadaab camp is quite large. In fact, this camp is the world's largest refugee camp, sheltering more than 453,000 refugees (UNHCR 2013:8). Second, the camp is organized in a way that conforms to the typical modular refugee camp designs and the organizational logic of humanitarian actors. The camp space is structured into blocks of two to three hectares containing 100 to 150 shelters organized in a clear pattern (Agier 2002:325). In addition to facilitating aid distribution and security maintenance, these artificial blocks organize the refugees according to their place of origin, ethnicity, and clan of origin (325). Third, the camp exists in an intensely rural environment. While this rural situation is different from the urban situation of the Shatila camp, the residents of Dadaab are also marginalized. This marginalization is created and reinforced by fences of thorns and barbed wire erected by UNHCR in order to distinguish Dadaab residents from the local residents (325). While the Dadaab camp has not existed for as long as some of the Palestinian camps, it has been in place since 1991, reflecting a similarly protracted situation. However, unlike Peteet's account, Agier's account reflects an entrenchment or strengthening of the physical nature of the camp with the dwellings becoming denser and more permanent.

In many respects, the Shatila and Dadaab refugee camps stand on opposite ends of a spectrum categorizing refugee camp space. Small against large, urban against rural, organic against planned – their contrasting physical features highlight their particular historical developments, distinctive political situations, and singular social contexts. However, these differences should not limit the utility of approaching the refugee camp as a concept. In the sections that follow, I make the case for conceptualizing the refugee camp by analyzing it through three approaches: a historical approach, a philosophical approach, and a typological approach.

### **Historical approach**

If common consent and history books establish the seventeenth century as the Age of Reason, the eighteenth century as the Age of Enlightenment, and the nineteenth century as the Age of Revolutions, what name best describes the twentieth century? (Bauman 2001:266). In the essay *A Century of Camps?*, Bauman asks whether this past century will go down in history as the Age of Camps, a period in which the “shadows cast by Auschwitz and the Gulag seem by far the longest and likely to dominate any picture we may paint” (267). In a book published under the same title of Bauman's essay, French historians Joël Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot attempt to document the rise of the camp in the twentieth century. Their work carries on from Arendt's abandoned vision of writing a short history of the camps, “from their beginnings in the imperialist countries, passing by their utilization as a temporary measure in wartime, [and] arriving at their institutionalization as a permanent organ of government in regimes of terror” (Friedman 2011:197).

Drawing on accounts of daily life in the camps that stretch back to the late 1800s, Kotek and Rigoulot make the case that while the development and utility of the camp depends on particular national situations, the “phenomenon of the camp also has a multinational history”

(Applebaum 2001:3). Their analysis begins in the year 1895, when Arsenio Martinez Campos, then the commander of the Spanish garrison in Cuba, sought to put an end to a never-ending series of local insurgencies (1). In a confidential letter written to the Spanish government, he outlined a plan to “reconcentrate” the civil inhabitants of the rural districts into camps (1). He argued that such a move would deprive the insurgents of food, shelter, and support in a way that would weaken the inhabitants and ultimately bring an end to the conflicts (1). While he never carried out this plan, his successor, General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, did (1). From 1896 to 1898, thousands of Cuban peasants were removed by force from their homes and relegated to live in “old shacks, abandoned houses, [and] improvised shelters” (1). Accounts highlight an irregular distribution of food, widespread typhus and dysentery, and the prostitution of young girls (1). It is estimated that over 200,000 of these individuals, labeled *reconcentrados*, died in this episode (1).

Just two years following the shuttering of the Cuban camps in 1900, the Spanish term *reconcentración* was translated into English and used to describe a comparable British project during the Boer War in South Africa (2). To limit the Boer soldiers’ ability to live off their civilian sympathizers, the British “concentrated” these sympathizers into camps (2). Just like the Spanish, the British saw these camps as an effective way to deprive soldiers of food, shelter, and support. Within four years of the British adopting the Spanish policy, the Germans adopted a similar policy of containment in their attempt to rid Deutsche Sud-West Afrika of the Herero tribe (2). While the German colonial policy initially advocated for the mass killings of tribe members, it was quickly replaced with the more “efficient” concentration camps (2). In 1905, over 14,000 Herero were held in captivity, subjected to starvation, and forced to perform heavy physical labor (2). By the end of that same year, half of the tribe members had died (2).

In many respects, today’s refugee camps seem far removed from these camps of containment and cruelty. While it is clear that “methods of organizing camps could be and were exported” (8), explaining the rise of the refugee camp by relying solely on the history of the concentration camp seems implausible. However, conceptualizing the refugee camp through this historical approach offers three important perspectives for thinking about the construction, functions, and nature of the refugee camp. First, many of the camp spaces were created spontaneously (7). At the Nuremberg trial, Hermann Göring, Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe and senior Nazi, commented on how the first Nazi camps arose “simply because, from one day to the next, ‘we found ourselves with several thousand prisoners on our hands’” (7). Second, the camp spaces emerged in the midst of conflict, unrest, and violence (7). In addition to the violent colonial context established earlier, the brutalizing influence of twentieth century warfare “made it suddenly easier to terrorize more people more rapidly” (7). This influence manifested itself in the vast internment camps, prisoner of war camps, brutal experiences in the trenches, and an overall “disregard for human life that was a fundamental component of totalitarianism” (7). Third, the camp spaces reflect a more profound and deeper insight into why there existed “an immediate and spontaneous need to round up large number of prisoners and to treat them as cattle or as cargo” (7). In certain respects, the motivation can be traced to political ideology. However, Kotek and Rigoulot argue that this motivation stems more from a rhetoric of dehumanization and of depersonalization (7).

## Philosophical approach

Conceptualizing the refugee camp through a historical approach is valuable since it allows one to examine how the camp has been defined historically while situating it within a wider narrative. Arendt, however, argues that any historical research on the camps “must be complemented with an analysis of the different juridical aspects of the different types of concentration camps” (Friedman 2011:197). This need for a complementary analysis stems from the fact that the historical approach falls short in answering the fundamental question: What is it about the camp itself that permits such events to occur in the first place? In addition to Arendt, Agamben and Bauman take up this question and offer their own perspectives.

The refugee, according to Arendt, is caught between nativity, embodied by the inalienable rights of man, and nationality, embodied by the rights of the citizen of the state. As a result of this situation, the refugee loses his “place in a community, his political status in the struggle of his time, and the legal personality which makes its actions and part of its destiny a consistent whole” (Arendt 1973:301). Despite being stripped of the qualities that are inherent to citizenship, the refugee is still able to maintain some aspects of his humanity. However, seeing as the world finds “nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human” (299), naked life is rejected, thereby, signaling the lasting crisis of the nation-state’s political system.

Agamben draws on this theme of naked life by arguing that the camp space is born when the political system, established through the fundamental relationship between localization (space), the determinate order (the State), and governance (laws and rules), enters into this lasting crisis (Agamben 1998:174). Due to the tension between these foundational components, the nation-state is no longer able to enforce order in its own territory or national space. According to Agamben, it is at this moment, which is expressed daily in the refugee camp, that the State “assume[s] directly the care of the nation’s biological life as one of its proper tasks” (175). The refugee camp therefore becomes a space of paradox seeing as it reflects the situation of the refugee who is detached from both the rights of man and the rights of the nation-state.

While Agamben affirms Arendt’s position that the camp always remains a possibility in society, he extends his analysis beyond the “different juridical aspects of the different types of concentration camps” (Friedman 2011:197) to construct the phenomenon of the camp as a general and abstract category (196). Agamben defines the essence of the camp as “the materialization of the state of exception” (196). In other words, once an individual loses their civic rights, they become fit for internment and are doomed to death (196). In defining this essence, the camp comes to represent the most potent expression of this state of exception. Seeing as conditions of normality in the camps are consequently suspended, “everything is possible, and everything can and does happen” (Minca 2005:409).

For Bauman, the rise of the camp is fundamentally rooted in modernity. He describes the camp as that “curious and terrifying socially invented modern contraption which permits the separation of action and ethics, of what people do from what people feel or believe, of the nature of collective deed from the motives of individual actors” (Bauman 2001:269). An invention of rationality, technology, and the sciences, the camp “derives its need and usefulness and functionality from the declared ambitions of modern society, a society that views having such ambitions as the foremost mark of its superiority” (268). Contextualizing his argument by drawing on the Holocaust, Bauman asks how the law-abiding, peaceful, and disciplined workers, husbands, and fathers could “commit jointly, or to allow to be permitted,

a crime without equal in human history” (269). He responds by outlining three underlying features of modern society that not only permitted these actions but also guaranteed that these actions would occur.

First, the individual in the modern society acts at a distance (269). Acting at a distance refers to the way in which a personally performed action is, in fact, a mediated action (270). In the horizontal and functional system of relations that characterize modern society, each individual performs a specific, self-contained task (270). This performance does not concern other human beings, but rather deals with “facets, features, [and] statistically represented traits” (270). Second, moral constraints of action are neutralized (269). Instead of generating feelings of hostility and cruelty within individuals, the structures of modern society create a “way in which cruel things could be done by non-cruel people” (272). Third, an artificial and rationally designed order is pursued above all else (269). As Bauman writes, “The camps were patterns and blueprints for the totalitarian society, that modern dream of total order, domination and mastery run wild, cleansed of the last vestiges of that wayward and unpredictable human freedom, spontaneity and unpredictability that held it back” (275). Arendt, Agamben, and Bauman engage, in their own ways, with the concept of the refugee camp. In outlining the fundamental breakdown that occurs between the refugee and the state, Arendt is able to articulate how this relationship is manifested in the space of the camp. In commenting on the Holocaust as a test of modernity, Bauman succeeds in demonstrating how the camp becomes the “great modern project of ultimate human order, which the test has shown to be, inevitably, an *inhuman* order” (275). Grounded in history and explored through philosophy, Arendt and Bauman are both able to account for the refugee camp as a space in which action and ethics are ultimately separated (269).

Agamben’s analysis, however, extends too far. His approach carries serious implications for conceptualizing the refugee camp. First, Agamben’s logic suggests that the internment camp, concentration camp, and extermination camp all come to represent a single phenomenon (Friedman 2011:196). Ignoring Arendt’s call to consider the diversity of camp experiences and the fact that not all camps are created equally, he fails to convincingly demonstrate that the space of exception ought to be considered in an absolute sense. Second, Agamben’s construction of the space of exception traps the refugee in a sphere of inaction. Stripped of autonomy and individuality, the refugee becomes a victim unable to resist and respond to the complex situation engendered by the camp.

### **Typological approach**

As the philosophical approach makes clear, the refugee camp is implicated in a complex network of multiple sovereignties. This network also manifests itself on an operational level as international humanitarian organizations and political movements cooperate and interact in the governance of camps within, and often times beyond, the host state’s control (Ramadan 2012:69). To highlight the particularity of different camp spaces in light of this complex network, refugee camps can be typologized or organized according to their ideal type<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Ideal type, according to Weber (the first theorist to design an ideal type methodology), is a “conceptual means for the comparison and measurement of reality” (Zijderveld 2005:389). These conceptual models, natural-scientific in nature, are “in a sense timeless, yet in their confrontation with historical and experienced reality, they yield cultural-scientific knowledge (understanding) of what is particular, unique, and specific” (390).

In the context of refugee camp spaces, the typological approach draws on the general character of camp spaces to highlight particular features of the space, including the politics, people, and practices that form everyday life (70). The typological approach consists of two approaches, the first being assistance-focused and the second being purpose-focused. The assistance-focused approach draws on the work of Schmidt, who organizes camp spaces into three broad types depending on the level of assistance each camp receives (Schmidt 2003:3). These three types include planned rural settlements, unplanned rural settlements (based on various forms of officially-recognized self-reliance), and full-assistance settlements (3). By focusing on levels of assistance, this approach avoids the “politically charged question of durable solutions and instead concentrates on the different forms of assistance *in situ*” (3).

The purpose-focused approach draws on the work of Agier, who roots his conceptualization of the camp in and through the policies and practices of the United Nations, humanitarian organizations, and policing agencies (Agier 2011:39). He offers a “spectrum of contemporary forms of placing in camp” (58). This spectrum is composed of four distinct space types with each type serving a particular function and expressing a specific mode of management (39). The first space type, self-organized refuge, consists of places where people have found refuge (39). Encompassing informal camp grounds, ghettos, and squats, these self-organized refuges act as hiding places, provisional shelters, and “sites of rest or waiting between two border posts, where people stop for a while, always ready to leave” (39). The second space type, sorting centers or transit centers, is implicated in a larger system of ‘flow management’ that includes selection, expulsion, or admission (47). The third space type, spaces of confinement, focuses predominantly on refugee camps. These spaces allow for the policing, feeding, and health maintenance of their occupants while ensuring individuals are grouped sufficiently together to maintain a minimum level of care and protection (2008:44). The fourth space type, unprotected reserves, predominantly covers camps for internally displaced persons. While these spaces might resemble many of the characteristics of refugee camps, the unstable and changing nature of both local and global dynamics that ultimately shape these spaces “makes their situation particularly fragile for their occupants” (56).

Approaching the concept of the refugee camp by organizing the different spaces according to ideal type carries a number of limitations. While both Schmidt and Agier organize their space types along a spectrum, there is a real risk of focusing only on the most extreme sites while neglecting a more nuanced relationship between these extremes. Additionally, the focus on the particularities of specific sites inhibits a fuller understanding of the ways in which different space types fit into a larger system. On a theoretical note, seeing as ideal types are artificial constructions structured by the laws of formal logic, “they can in actual fact neither be verified nor be falsified” (Zijderveld 2005:390). This approach can only be assessed according to its heuristic use or uselessness. In other words, in order to assess the utility of this approach, one must ask whether or not this ideal type matrix yields rational understanding (390).

### **Considering an alternative approach**

When considered independently, each approach offers its own insight into the spatial constitution of the refugee camp. The historical approach presents the refugee camp as an actual place, one that is imbued with narrative, meaning, and memories. The philosophical approach allows for the possibility of thinking about the camp space as a contested site of being and belonging, recognition and encounter, death and destruction. Through the typological approach, the diversity of built and lived experiences is better understood both within and between different camp settings.

There is, however, a need to consider how these distinct approaches can be integrated so as to better present the camp as an assembled space, one in which “a collective entity (thing or meaning) is created from the connection of a range of heterogeneous components” (Bingham 2009:38), and in so doing, offer a more nuanced reflection on the spatial constitution of the camp. In the following section, I make the case for an alternative approach, the urban approach, which accomplishes this need and contributes to this reflection.

### 3 Ordering and organizing camp space

Considered separately, the historical, philosophical, and typological approaches are limited in their ability to conceptualize the camp space as a complete socio-material system of “technology, politics, and actors in diverse configurations that create their own spaces and values” (Ong 2005:338). In this section, I examine the ways in which camp space is both ordered and organized in order to make the case for conceptualizing the refugee camp through an alternative approach – the urban approach. I introduce the *UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies* as the case study. As the principal field manual used around the world to guide the construction and development of refugee camps, its contents and publication history reveal important insights into the architectural evolution of camp design. I then evaluate the viability of conceptualizing the camp as an urban space by assessing the Handbook’s logic of camp planning in light of the scholarly debate on the relationship between the built environment of the camp and the urban practices this environment engenders.

#### **The context**

While UNHCR has called for “concerted international action to resolve the situation of people who have lived in exile for many years” (UNHCR 2008:1), the development and expansion of refugee camps due to protracted refugee situations<sup>4</sup> has expanded (Sanyal 2012:634). As camps increasingly become “continuous state[s] of temporariness” (Boano 2011:46), there is a need to rethink these spaces as “city-like with complex social arrangements and economic activities” while questioning whether camps can be “seen as being cities in their own right” (Sanyal 2012:634).

Despite this emerging debate, there have been no major institutional developments in camp planning since the Handbook was first published in 1981 (Kennedy 2008:80). The most notable attempt in recent years to suggest an urban-based response to refugee shelter and settlement needs was undertaken by Zetter in 1995<sup>5</sup>. In his state of the art review, he describes refugee shelter and settlement issues as a “neglected field,” one that is “poorly documented,

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<sup>4</sup> The United Nations defines protracted refugee situations as those situations where “refugees have been in exile for five years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions” (UNHCR 2009:Preamble). For more information on the nature of these situations, please consult Loescher and Milner 2011.

<sup>5</sup> More recently, Zetter called attention to the urban dimension of forced migration. As the Editor of the 2012 edition of the *World Disasters Report*, he discussed the need to respond to the lack of support for those forced migrants displaced in urban areas (118). For more information on relocating the humanitarian agenda in an urban context, please consult Zetter 2012.

lacks coherence, and is widely diffused” (Zetter 1995:6). In responding to the need for shelter and settlement strategies, he conceptualizes these strategies as “developmental rather than relief oriented” along with emphasizing the impact of planning processes on mass forced migration (30).

While the focus of this section is on camp space, conceptualizing the camp space as urban necessitates some engagement with cities and the practices they engender. This necessity is reinforced by the fact that “more than half the refugees UNHCR serves are urban refugees with the numbers set to increase” (UNCHR 2009). While urban refugees are not a recent phenomenon, their greater presence and visibility in urban environments “make[s] the city an important framework to interrogate the spaces of refugees” (Sanyal 2012:633).

Underlying these contextual factors is the reality that increasing patterns of urbanization are calling into question the relevance of the Handbook’s planning guidelines. When these guidelines were originally developed, the concept of urbanity referred solely to the “distinct, relatively bounded site[s]” that demarcated the geographic space of the city (Brenner 2009:206). While still geographic, the contemporary concept of urbanity has become a generalized, global, and ultimately social phenomenon (206). The refugee camp is now implicated in an urban environment, one characterized by the “accumulation of capital, the regulation of political-economic life, the reproduction of everyday social relations, and the contestation of the earth and humanity’s possible futures” (206).

### **The case study: *UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies***

In light of this context, the refugee camp as a spatial phenomenon represents one of the purest forms of “makeshift architecture, last-ditch living, [and] emergency urbanism” (Lewis 2008:1). As clusters of 16 households form a community, 16 communities form a block, four blocks form a sector, and four sectors form a camp, this sea of blue and white tarps gives rise to a “dense metropolis” (1). Structuring and underlying this transition from tarp to tent to camp is *UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies*. Originally published in 1981 and subsequently edited in 1998 and 2007, the Handbook can be traced back to a 1978 internal report prepared for UNHCR by Frederick Cuny and his team at the Intertect Relief and Reconstruction Corporation (Intertect) (Kennedy 2008:98). Reflecting on the poor conditions of the large-scale refugee camps constructed during the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 (98), Cuny’s team recommended that UNHCR establish a “global emergency operations handbook” while adopting “minimum standards in response” (Intertect 1980; Cuny 1980). While this report gradually evolved into the first edition of the Handbook, much of its content stemmed from a detailed study and analysis of refugee camps conducted between 1971 and 1977 by engineers and planners (Cuny 1977:125). Drawing on case studies undertaken in India (following the Bangladesh civil war of 1971), Nicaragua (following the earthquake in Managua of 1972), and Honduras (following the hurricane of 1974), the technicians offer key considerations to guide a new approach for camp planning and construction.

First, they establish that refugee camps are manageable spaces that can rely on planning and organization to reduce problems (125). Second, they argue that camps, when properly planned, can be cost-effective (125). Encouraging the commitment of adequate resources at the outset of camp construction, they maintain that the “total costs of designing and installing a livable refugee camp are less than the continuing operational costs of a sub-standard camp” (125). Third, they outline the ways in which “good physical layouts or plans can save lives” (125). Design can facilitate sanitation, promote participation, and ultimately contribute to a

sense of self-dependence (125). The Handbook adopts many of these considerations in order to “reinforce a quick, agile, and flexible emergency response capacity” (UNHCR 2007:vii). Organized into four thematic chapters, the Handbook situates UNHCR’s protection mandate within the context of emergency response; outlines the planning, management, and coordination of response efforts; discusses the vital sectors of refugee emergencies such as health, community services, and sanitation; and offers advice on the support of field operations (v).

The ordering and organizing of the refugee camp’s built space is outlined in the Handbook’s chapter titled ‘Site Selection, Planning, and Shelter’. Over the span of 24 pages, UNHCR attempts to establish, as the operational objective for the camp, the provision of “suitable sites and shelter in order to accommodate refugees in emergencies” (206). This operational objective is supported by a series of underlying principles, including the recognition that refugee camps are not always temporary phenomena, the need for technical support, the importance of refugee participation, and the belief that “refugee camps should normally be considered as the last option” (206). Operationally, UNHCR’s framework for the construction and management of camp space is structured by numeric standards that dictate physical dimensions and distances, a vocabulary that hierarchizes spatial elements within the camp, and a separation of functions that distinguish residential spaces from non-residential spaces (Kennedy 2008:139).

This framework is established through nine criteria:

- The first criterion, water, mandates that a sustainable and available water source is a necessary structural consideration for site selection (UNHCR 2007:210).
- The second criterion, size, recommends a minimum surface area of 45m<sup>2</sup> per person (including a kitchen or vegetable gardening space) (210). A bare minimum surface area of 30m<sup>2</sup> would include necessary spaces for “roads, foot paths, educational facilities, sanitation, security, firebreaks, administration, water storage, distribution, markets, relief item storage and, of course, plots for shelter” (210). With regards to population size, camps should be limited to a maximum of 20 000 people (211).
- The third criterion, land use and land rights, codifies the relationship between the host state, UNHCR, and the refugee population. Since UNHCR neither purchases nor rents land for the refugee camp, the use of either public or private land must be based on “legal arrangements through the [host] Government and in accordance with the laws of the country” (211).
- The fourth criterion, topography, drainage, and soil conditions, insists that the site of the camp be located above areas prone to floods, preferably areas with “gentle slopes” (212).
- The fifth criterion, accessibility, recommends that the campsite be situated near and accessible to supplies, including food and shelter material, and national services, such as health care (212). Additionally, it may be in the interest of the camp residents to locate the camp in close proximity to a local town (212).

- The sixth criterion, climatic conditions, local health, and other risks, cautions against building camps in areas prone to dust clouds and major environmental health hazards such as malaria or tsetse fly (212).
- The seventh criterion, vegetation, suggests the need for sufficient ground cover including grass, bushes, and trees (212). This vegetation not only provides shade but also reduces erosion and dust clouds (212).
- The eighth criterion, social life, establishes that the social and cultural backgrounds of refugees serve as “important determinants in site selection, physical planning, and shelter” (210). This social life is facilitated through modular planning, decentralization, and the “bottom-up” approach. These three planning methods place the individual refugee household at the center of refugee camp design (216). The planner first takes into account the needs of the individual family (including distance to water and the relationships between members of the community) before considering the layout of the larger site (216).
- The ninth and final criterion, security and protection, suggests that the refugee camp be placed at a “reasonable distance” from international borders and sensitive areas such as military installations (211).

In practice, these criteria inform the planning and construction of the camp’s built space. For UNHCR, this space takes the form of a 50m by 40m “square-shaped” master plan, labeled as the sub-block modular design concept (214)<sup>6</sup>. The longer sides of the camp are dedicated to shelter provision with eight shelters (one family per shelter) placed in a row (214). A garbage collection area, consisting of two refuse drums per sub-block of 80 persons, is located along one of the smaller sides (214). Male and female latrine and shower facilities are positioned along the opposite side (214). According to the master plan, these facilities are to be lit and the two gendered areas are to be clearly separated by a partition made of sticks/leaves or plastic sheets (214). At the center of the sub-block is a common area that measures 41m by 15m (214). Apart from some vegetation, its most prominent feature is the communal water point (214).

### **The analysis**

The Handbook’s sub-block modular design concept, along with the underlying guiding principles and criteria, greatly reflect the planning and construction approach proposed by Cuny’s team. However, there is one lesson learned by Cuny’s team that makes no appearance in the Handbook. In reflecting on the operational needs of the Barasat Camp of West Bengal, constructed during the Bangladesh civil war in 1971, the technicians advocated for camps planned and constructed as settlements rather than “simply... area[s] of emergency shelter” (Cuny 1977:133). According to Cuny:

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<sup>6</sup> For a graphic representation of the sub-block modular design concept, please consult the appendix.

*This was the realization that when large numbers of people are concentrated in a small geographic area, in effect a camp ceases to be a camp; in actuality it becomes a town or a small city with all the accompanying problems. A refugee camp must have housing, water, sewers, roads, clinics, fire protection, garbage disposal, parks, schools – everything found in a town. Thus, development plans for refugee camps should be considered with the same detail as a master plan for a town (127).*

This planning and construction vision of “city as camp” was further reinforced by the technicians’ study of the lived experience of camp life in Honduras (130). Three months following the construction of the Choloma camp by a consortium of agencies (129), Cuny’s team examined both how the camp residents altered the built space and how these alterations affected the overall layout of the camp (130). They were able to identify three distinct stages of development or periods of transition within the camp environment. The first stage, initial occupancy, consisted of refugees simply following the orders of the humanitarian aid organizations and taking what was provided to them (130). There was minimal (if any) involvement of refugee participation (130). The second stage, re-organization, was characterized by adjustments to the camp layout (130). The refugees re-positioned their tents, re-grouped their units, centralized their services, and established organizations (130). Socially, new friendships were made and old friendships were rekindled (130). The third and final stage, tenure, represents the transition from temporary facilities to the installation of permanent facilities (130). According to Cuny, the refugee mindset could be described as “[we] are already on the land, so it seems ‘logical’ that [we] rebuild here. After all, why move again?” (130).

Contrasting this “camp as city” vision, informed by both the operational needs and lived experiences of the camp space, with the vision of the Handbook offers several key insights. First, the Handbook is highly reflective of urban planning theories of the 1920s (Stevenson 2012:141). These theories advocated for structured organization, low density, and a clear separation of functions and uses (141). Instead of reflecting on how individuals use and relate to different spaces, the Handbook imposes a spatialized identity in the form of districts, blocks, and clusters. Additionally, the perspective one uses to understand and visualize the camp is always from above (141). This aerial perspective can be understood both literally – UNHCR’s sub-block modular design concept is best understood from above – and figuratively – despite a discourse of community participation, the design encourages and reinforces a top-down administrative approach (141). The “camp as city” vision, however, recognizes that refugees adapt, change, and structure their built spaces to suit their own demands, desires, and needs. In India, for example, camp residents re-grouped within the grid structure in order to differentiate community spaces (Cuny 1977:127). Through these organic and inevitable practices, refugees reorganize and restructure their built environments in concrete and meaningful ways.

Second, the Handbook makes very little reference, either in text or in graphics, to the relationship between the camp and its surroundings (Kennedy 2008:106). While some camps may indeed be isolated, the lack of reference portrays the camp setting as fixed, immutable, and temporally isolated. Third, the smallest and most important unit of planning is not the individual but rather the family unit (Stevenson 2012:141). This planning approach alienates those individuals who do not fit the family model while also overlooking how the “camp design might be judged to perform for the entire camp population as a whole” (Kennedy 2008:140).

Fourth, the Handbook's insistence on minimization, effectiveness, and efficiency reinforce the notion that the camp ought to be a temporal phenomenon. According to the Handbook, camp design should "minimize the need for difficult, corrective measures later" (UNHCR 2007:207), "make the provision of services easier and more cost-effective" (207), and "ensure [the] most efficient use of land, resources, and time" (207). The "camp as city" vision, however, acknowledges that a situation perceived to be temporal might very well give rise to a situation of non-temporality. While this non-temporality does not imply an increase in spending, ineffectiveness, and inefficiency, it does allow for a shifting of the economics to self-sufficiency. As Kennedy argues:

*There is no logical contradiction between a camp being something which is not permanent, and nevertheless being something which needs to have as great a degree of self-sufficiency as possible, and which should, for its undetermined but non-permanent lifespan still be seen as deeply connected with its surroundings, spatially and economically (Kennedy 2008:112).*

This contrast between the vision of the "camp as city" and the vision of the Handbook reflects a disjuncture between the operational needs of the camp and the lived experiences of the refugees on the one hand and the theories and practices of camp design on the other hand. Over 25 years following the publication of Intertect's research work and design recommendations, the debate on the conceptualization of the camp as city reemerged as Agier, Malkki, and Bauman took to the pages of the journal *Ethnography* in order to engage with the more general elements of this disjuncture.

Presenting the Dadaab refugee camp as an urban ethnographic case, Agier argues that the refugee camp ought to be understood as a "novel socio-spatial form, [one]... in which new identities crystallize and subjectivation takes root" (Agier 2002:318). In addition to being a space of identity formation and navigation, the refugee camp is the "site[] of an enduring organization of space, social life, and system of power that exist[s] nowhere else" (322). Agier conceptualizes the "camp as city" by drawing on three features, which he believes define urban life (324). The first feature is the camp's ability to produce and reproduce spatial symbolics (329). By spatial symbolics, Agier refers to the ways in which the refugees project their everyday desires, goals, and needs onto space (329). For example, in the Hagadera camp, refugees give names to anonymous spaces. One such space, the market area, has been named "the town" or *magalo* in Somali (329). The second feature is the camp's ability to generate social stratification (324). Despite the limited economic activity and controlled labor market in the camp, Agier is still able to clearly identify four levels of a social hierarchy. These levels include – from the perceived highest to lowest – the notables (traders and pastoralists), voluntary community workers (those who work with humanitarian organizations), small traders and unofficial employees, and finally, the recipients of basic minimum aid (331). The third feature concerns the camp's ability to allow for the construction and negotiation of identity (324). In addition to creating both ethnic and non-ethnic identity, the camp setting contributes to the strengthening of particularisms, anti-ethnic behaviors, and inter-ethnic exchanges (334).

Agier's conceptualization of the "camp as city" is insightful insofar as it highlights the hybrid nature that characterizes refugee camp space, responds to refugee shelter and settlement needs through an alternative lens, and positions the camp in light of the "self-constituting form of human cohabitation" that is the city (Bauman 2002:344). In considering the concerns raised

by Malkki, however, it is clear that Agier's formulation of the "camp as city" does carry certain limitations. Her concerns are twofold.

The first concern centers on the need to historicize the phenomenon of refugee camps. Despite Agier's claim that the camp as city (with a particular focus on its organizing capacity) offers a "new setting *sui generis*" (Agier 2002:336), Malkki maintains that the camp "as a generalizable technology of power [and] as standard equipment for dealing with mass displacement" is not a new but rather an established phenomenon (Malkki 2002:353). As has been discussed in the first section, the use of camps to order displaced persons can be traced back to the late 1800s. Additionally, to suggest that the camp as city concept is *sui generis*, or independent in its social existence, is to ignore the fact that "colonial settlements and forced displacements of previous centuries... have become the metropolis of today" (Gans 2004:83). The African cities of Ibadan, Nigeria and Mbuhi-Mbayi, Congo, for example, originated in the mass displacements of individuals caught in the wars between indigenous populations (83).

The second concern centers on the analytical utility of conceptualizing the refugee camp as a city (Malkki 2002:355). Malkki's skepticism concerning this concept actually stems from Agier's own admission that the refugee camp will always remain an "incomplete, unfinished, form of urbanity" (Agier 2002:337). It remains so principally because "the shift from the management of camps in the name of emergency towards the political recognition of their enduring reality does not take place" (337). In other words, "everything is potential but nothing develops" (336). If Agier formulates his conceptual framework so that it inevitably leads to failure, Malkki's concern about the analytical utility of this approach seems warranted. Her skepticism concerning the concept is further supported by her belief that Agier's framework fails to acknowledge the fact that cities entail expectations of citizenship, whereas the refugee camp does not encourage these expectations (355). In reflecting on both Agier and Malkki's positions concerning the utility of this conceptual approach, I maintain that both of their positions are underdeveloped.

In many respects, Agier's discussion on the lack of political recognition regarding the lasting state of the camps as a serious limitation is valid. The discussion above concerning the Handbook's lack of language concerning the notion of non-temporality is proof of this. However, to suggest that "nothing develops" (336) is flawed. Ramadan's ethnographic research of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon demonstrates how such an approach loses sight of the fact that the camps are, in fact, distinctive political spaces where meaning is derived from their particular time-space (Ramadan 2012:65). Rejecting the notion that the camp is simply a humanitarian space dominated by the discourse of relief and welfare, Ramadan draws on the spatial practices of the camp to demonstrate how the camps become arenas in which the "geopolitical and the everyday are intertwined, shape, and manifest each other" (74). Active and engaged political and social identities are expressed in tangible ways in and through space. Families are organized based on villages of origin, sections of the camp have taken on the original names of Palestinian villages, and libraries serve as repositories of archived material on Palestine (73). While Ramadan does not describe the "assemblage of buildings, homes, people, institutions, social relations, and practices that have grown up from a gathering of destitute refugees sheltering in tents" as a city per se, he does acknowledge that this "diverse, dynamic, and at times divided assemblage in constant motion" (70) still "belongs and is part of the story of the city" (74). In other words, "everything is potential" (Agier 2002:336) and some things develop.

In many respects, Malkki's concern about the camp's limitations as a space of citizenship and political engagement is also valid. The discussion above concerning the ways in which the Handbook encourages and reinforces a top-down administrative approach (UNHCR 2007:141) is proof of this. However, her analysis fails to consider the possibility that reconceptualizing the camp as a city can potentially liberate the refugee from the dominant discourses of victimization and humanitarianism by "restor[ing] to the refugees their status of *auctori* – the authors of their life-trajectories" (Bauman 2002:343). Drawing from a sociological perspective, Bauman points out that by exploring the camp through the lens of the urban, refugees are extricated from the discourses of victimization and humanitarianism (343). Instead, they become individuals with their own motives, capable of engaging or declining interaction, establishing or destroying social networks, and, "thereby construing, in the course of all that, their own routines, doxa, and webs of relationships" (344).

When considered together, Agier, Malkki, and Bauman critically engage the possibilities and limitations that accompany a reconceptualization of the camp as a city. The scholarly debate, contextualized by a discussion on the Handbook and the work of Cuny and his team, raises a number of limitations that are indeed valid. However, there is also a need to recognize that the operational needs and lived experiences of the camp space call for a transformed space "in which the ranges of options are designated and the strategies of action [are] conceived" (344). In the following section, I engage with the idea of a transformed space by considering the possibilities that emerge from conceptualizing the refugee camp as an urban space.

## 4 Camps, cities, and citizenship

Conceptualizing the camp as city allows for the possibility of considering the extent to which the refugee camp is capable of fostering a space of citizenship. For Malkki, the camp's inability to promote the same expectations of citizenship as the city proves problematic (Malkki 2002:355). For Bauman, however, the conceptualization actually holds the potential to liberate the refugee from the dominant discourse of victimization and humanitarianism (Bauman 2002:343). Bauman and Malkki's discussion on citizenship rights, as presented in the last section, left unresolved a question I now turn to – how and why does conceptualizing the camp as city hold the potential to foster a space of citizenship? In this third and final section, I respond to this question by drawing on critical urban theory to explore the possibilities and limitations of accomplishing what Lefebvre identifies as the right to the city or the "right to change ourselves by changing the city" (Harvey 2008:23). In essence, I incorporate the refugee camp into a new conceptual framework, one that focuses on the urban built environment as a space that reconceptualizes the way in which politics, people, and practices intersect and interact.

This section is structured around three distinct yet related questions. First, I return to Malkki's criticism of the "camp as city" concept by asking, from a rights perspective, why it is analytically useful to conceptualize the camp as city. Second, I draw on the writings of Lefebvre to inquire what the right to the city is and entails. Third, I ask what this right means in the context of the refugee camp. I assess the right in light of the theory and practice of urban life, consisting of its constitutive elements – *urbs* (physical space), *polis* (political community), and *civitas* (the exercise of citizenship rights).

### **Citizenship as “being of the city”**

Defined at the most basic level, citizenship refers to the “rights, duties, and membership in a political community of some kind” (Brown 1994:874). When theorized, citizenship is reflective of the philosophical concept of liberal democracy and the political concept of Westphalian governance. Understood through the perspective of liberal democracy, citizenship frames the individual as a political actor that engages in a social contract with the state (Purcell 2003:565). This social contract refers to certain privileges and protections the individual acquires in exchange for consenting to be ruled by the particular state (565). Understood through the perspective of Westphalian governance, citizenship frames the individual’s primary political community as belonging to the nation-state (565). The nation-state, sovereign within its own territory, exists in an international system consisting of other nation-states (565). Having evolved from the classical age of the European nation-state, membership, as defined in and through the nation-state, is understood to be “egalitarian, sacred, national, democratic, unique, and socially consequential” (Brubaker 1990:380). Of these norms, equality serves one of the more prominent roles in structuring much of the international discourse surrounding citizenship rights. The norm of equality, derived most immediately from the French Revolution, asserts that one, and only one, status of full membership exists (380). Any form of membership predicated on “basic and enduring gradations” would be a violation of this norm (380).

When lived, citizenship is not solely a political concept that entails rights and responsibilities. It is also a social concept that demands the fulfillment of social obligations (Isin 2008:11). As a social concept, citizenship can be characterized by content, extent, and depth (11). Content refers to the ways in which the boundaries within a polity and between polities are defined (11). In other words, content relates to the rights and responsibilities themselves. Extent refers to the ways in which rights and obligations of membership are allocated (11). For example, in France, membership is allocated expansively and structured through a territorial community, whereas in Germany, membership is allocated restrictively and framed by a community of descent (Brubaker 1990:379). Depth refers to the strength belonging members express and recognize among themselves (Isin 2008:11).

In light of both the theoretical and lived dimensions that give meaning to citizenship, I define citizenship as the rights, responsibilities, and social obligations that are associated with membership in a political or social community. This definition not only incorporates the traditional elements of rights and responsibilities but also highlights the increasingly important role of participatory action rooted in a discourse of identity and social relations. If citizenship entails notions of rights, responsibilities, and social obligations, Malkki seems justified in arguing that the built, political, and social elements of the camp space do, in fact, limit the discourse and practice of citizenship. Through an examination of the citizenship discourse as articulated in the Handbook and the practices it engenders, it is clear that instead of the camp space being organized according to a citizenship and rights-based discourse, it is instead organized by a humanitarian discourse characterized by exclusion, humanitarian actor abuse, and disempowerment (Hyndman 2000:112). On the ground, this shift in discourse manifests itself in the framing of refugees not as rights bearing and “active agents in their emancipation,” but rather as passive objects of relief (Tabar 2012:45). As Malkki writes, the refugee is transformed into a social category situated in the “national order of things, an exception made familiar through the media and through humanitarian appeals on behalf of their ‘bare humanity’” (Malkki 2002:356). This humanitarian discourse is manifested both conceptually and operationally.

On a conceptual level, the Handbook makes no mention of citizenship. Instead, notions of belonging, rights, responsibilities, and social obligations are framed by a community-based approach and structured around community services. UNHCR defines the community-based approach as “an inclusive partnership strategy, a process, and a way of working with persons of concern that recognizes [the refugees’] individual and collective capacities and resources and builds on these to ensure their protection” (UNHCR 2007:182). This approach seems promising in that it recognizes the importance of empowerment and genuine participation (Stevenson 2012:140). However, the language used in the Handbook to describe the actors involved in this approach seems incompatible with the vision and aims of the approach (140). Labels such as “persons of concern”, “refugee community members”, and “displaced population” (140) engender an alienation that not only hinders genuine community engagement but also presents the space of the camp in a purely utilitarian manner. On an operational level, any possibility of empowerment and participation is eroded through administrative processing, head counting, and bureaucratic documentation (Malkki 1995:235). In addition to these bureaucratic measures, techniques of control, including Leave Passes, refugee identity cards, tours by District officials, and project evaluations, further this erosion (235). In the context of Malkki’s work in the Mishamo refugee camp in Tanzania, she describes how these techniques have the “effect of helping to constitute and produce the Hutu as refugees and, hence, as a categorical object of interventions” (235).

If citizenship continues to be understood in the camp context through the liberal democratic and Westphalian traditions, it is clear that the camp holds very little promise in fostering any sense of citizenship. This reality stems from the fact that even though rights may be made equally available in theory, they may not always be exercised equally in practice due to structural factors and unequal power relations (Young 1991:36). To account for these structural factors and unequal power relations, there is a need to shift the traditional foundational element of equality to a new and more promising foundational element: difference (Purcell 2003:573).

This alternative vision of citizenship comes at a critical time when, under the pressures of post-modernization and globalization, the nation-state is no longer the sole source of authority with regards to citizenship and democracy (Isin 2000:5). According to Purcell, this contemporary shift in citizenship discourse and practice is characterized in three ways. First, citizenship is being rescaled as different communities challenge the dominant model of the national political community (Purcell 2003:566). Second, citizenship is being re-territorialized as the connection between the nation-state’s territorial sovereignty and political obedience is questioned and challenged (566). Third, citizenship is being reoriented with a shift away from the nation towards other communities and identities (566). The key implication with this rescaling, re-territorializing, and reorienting is that the organizational influence of nationality is shifting towards the organizational influence of inhabitation (566). In other words, the space one occupies is increasingly becoming the organizational element that defines and structures rights, responsibilities, and social obligations.

The notion of inhabitation, however, does not suggest that any space may serve as the backdrop for this rescaling, re-territorializing, and reorienting. These processes emerge in a particular form of inhabitation, namely the city. The city is, according to Isin, the “space of politics in which new rights-claims are made, and in which new ways of being political/being a citizen are forged, experimented with, and enacted” (Isin 2000:13). To understand how and why the city adopts this role and responsibility, it is necessary to understand the concept of

the city itself. Much of the modern discourse surrounding the city derives from the writings of Coulanges and Weber. These writings are centered predominantly on the theoretical distinction between the city as *civitas* (virtual) and the city as *urbs* (actual) (Isin 2008:263).

Coulanges writes that the distinction between *civitas* and *urbs* can be traced back to Greek and Roman thought (263). *Civitas* was understood to be the religious and political association of familial and tribal units, whereas *urbs* was perceived to be an actual place of assembly, dwelling, or sanctuary (263). According to Coulanges, these two elements were always approached as being distinct, with the virtual nature of the city never reducible to the actual nature (263). In other words, Greek and Roman thought allowed for the possibility of the city as association even if this association lacked a concrete spatial form (263). Coulanges's principal contribution to the urban debate is his insistence that the city cannot be understood solely based on its spatial characteristics (263). According to this view, it is difficult, if not impossible, to define the city if one "reduce[s] various properties of the city to its definition or deduce[s] its definition from those various properties" (263). The key limitation with this perspective, however, is its inability to make sense of any disagreement over the interpretation of the city (264). As Isin asks, "What do we do when we disagree with an interpretation of the city and yet agree that it cannot be revealed merely by properties of various cities?" (264).

Responding to this limitation, Weber draws on his formulation of the ideal type, a heuristic device, in order to "identify and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from that of the other" (264). While this approach allows Weber to typologize the city, including the "consumer city" and the "producer city", his understanding of the city ultimately centers on Coulanges's distinction between *civitas* and *urbs*. For Weber, the city is not only an association but also a space that has "developed a collective identity represented and embodied by citizenship" (264). Weber's principal contribution to the urban debate is the way in which he frames the city as the space that gives rise to the "legal and political status of belonging, that is, citizenship" (264). He maintains that it is only in the city that both the individual is capable of developing associational dispositions of solidarity and the government is capable of transforming the city into an association (267). In essence, the city engenders and fosters citizenship, that "special status of being *of the city*" (268).

### **Right, to, and city**

Approaching the city as a space that gives rise to citizenship and shapes it in multiple ways prompts a "radical rethinking of the purpose, definition, and content of political community" (Purcell 2003:577). It also suggests a reevaluation of how rights are defined, the form they take, and who has access to them (Attoh 2011:6). For Lefebvre, radical rethinking of political community and reevaluation of the rights discourse can be best addressed through the right to the city. Whereas national citizenship empowers national citizens, the right to the city aims to empower urban inhabitants (Purcell 2002:102). Instead of earning rights and engaging with the community because of nationality, ethnicity, or birth, the urban inhabitant accomplishes these activities by "living out the routines of everyday life in the space of the city" (102). Neither a natural nor a contractual right (Lefebvre 1996:194), the right to the city structures how city spaces can be defined and appropriated to allow for the claiming of rights (Lefebvre 1991:410). Lefebvre defines the right to the city as a superior form of rights including the "right to freedom, to individualization and socialization, to habitat and to inhabit" (Lefebvre 1996:173). As he makes clear, the right to the city

*should modify, concretize, and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the 'marginal' and even for the 'privileged') (34).*

A close reading and analysis of Lefebvre's articulation of the right to the city sheds light on three concerns. First, his articulation points to a need to restructure the framework of citizenship. For Lefebvre, this restructuring takes the form of the right to the city, a right that incorporates both the urban dweller (*citadin*) and the citizen (34). Second, his articulation offers a critique of urban planning and its underlying theory. According to Lefebvre, urban theory presents space as a scientific object rather than an inherently political concept (Saunders 1986:156). Instead of incorporating the political dimension of space into the planning process, urban planning focuses on those technical interventions that can "bring about particular effects on the basis of a scientific understanding of a purely spatial logic" (156). Third, his articulation suggests a growing dichotomy between the center and periphery of the city with the deportation of historic centers "such that those who were deported to the suburbs now return as dispossessed tourists" (Lefebvre 1996:34). As the key-decision making functions are concentrated in the center of the city, everyday life is shifted to the peripheries so that they become "subjugated, exploited, and dependent spaces" (Saunders 1986:160).

In recent years, this right to the city has been conceptualized loosely and applied flexibly (Attoh 2011:7). It has been used to justify the right to occupy (Mitchell 2003), to define public space (Gibson 2005), and to design (Van Deusen 2002). Understood as a socio-economic right, it has been applied to housing (Marcuse 2008), to transportation (Bickl 2005), and to natural resources (Phillips and Gilbert 2005). In order to better understand the concept in light of this widespread application, I define and discuss each of the phrase's constitutive elements – right, to, and city.

The element of 'right' incorporates, yet moves beyond, claims or demands structured in a purely legal sense (Marcuse 2009:193). Instead, right refers to the claims made in a moral sense. In this case, moral refers to a "better system in which ... demands can be fully and entirely met" (193). The right does not refer to one specific right, such as the right to public space or the right to a particular service but rather the right to a "totality, a complexity, in which each of the parts is part of a single whole to which the right is demanded" (193).

The element of 'to' refers to the directionality of the rights discourse. It entails a shift or reorientation of authority away from the state and toward those urban inhabitants who actively engage with the production of urban space (Purcell 2002:101). These inhabitants include those who engage with the urban environment and yet are excluded and alienated from both the material and non-material necessities of life that contribute to a satisfying life (Marcuse 2009:190).

The element of the "city" does not necessarily refer to the conventional sense of the term 'city' but rather to any place in urban society "in which the hierarchical distinction between the city and the country has disappeared" (193). This urban space is incompatible with both the Chicago school, which sees the city as a "reified container of social processes," and orthodox Marxism, which sees the city as being "inconsequential to theories of capitalist development"

(Attoh 2011:6). Instead, the city is an oeuvre or work that is “produced through the labor and the daily actions of those who live in the city” (6).

### **Right to the camp**

The concept of the right to the city seems promising in its potential to incorporate the urban dweller and the citizen in a restructured framework of citizenship. In order for the right to the city to be fully realized in the context of the refugee camp, it must address the ways in which the spaces of the camp are appropriated to allow for the practice of participating in the rights discourse (Isin 2000:15). Appropriation and participation, therefore, form the two principal rights that underlie and structure the inhabitation of the camp. Reflecting on both of these rights, I consider the ways in which they hold the potential to shape the *urbs*, or the built environment of the camp. I then discuss the implications this transformed built environment has on the development of the *polis*, or political community, and the fostering of *civitas*, or citizenship rights. This discussion is not intended to offer a complete model of how the right to the city can be fully realized in the camp context. Rather, it is intended to offer insight into some of the possibilities that would allow for the realization of this right.

The right to participate maintains that the inhabitants of the camp ought to play a central and direct role in any decision that affects the creation and maintenance of the camp space (Purcell 2002:102). This right stems from the recognition that the production of camp space is ultimately an explicit reflection of power relations structured predominantly by those individuals or organizations that make decisions (Stevenson 2012:138). As a result, there is a need to rethink the decision-making process and reconsider how this process can better serve the needs and interests of the refugees. A rethinking of participation in the camp context would contribute to a new “process in which community members have an opportunity to act out their citizenship in decisions relating to the built environment” (138). In the context of the refugee camp, the right to participate encompasses two elements. First, there is a need to explicitly acknowledge that the procedure by which decisions are made matters (139). In order for citizenship to be realized and exercised, the members of the political and social community must be able to shape the fate of their environment (Isin 2000:5). It is through this struggle that the refugee is ultimately able to “engage in claiming, expanding, or losing rights” (5). Second, there is a need to situate the refugee and his or her needs, demands, and desires at the center of the planning process. In concrete terms, this situatedness could entail finding common ground in the planning process and incorporating a diverse array of interests into the discussion (McCann 2002:77).

The right to appropriate refers to the refugees’ right to access and make use of their physical urban space (Purcell 2002:103). For Lefebvre, appropriation is understood in a broader sense to encompass the right to “produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants” (103). As discussed earlier, the urban space is the site that organizes, assembles, and gives meaning to life (Isin 2008:266). As the site of socialization, it is through the urban that refugees are capable of developing their individuality and sociality (266). A critical element of this development is public space, which Sassen identifies as a “key vector into cityness” (Sassen 2008:85). Public space is not defined simply by its open access; it is, more importantly, a created environment structured “through the practices and the usages of people” (85).

Since public space is integral to the urban space, rethinking and reconceptualizing it in the context of the refugee camp is necessary in order to consider how refugees access and utilize their space. First, public space serves as an organizing structure for citizenship claims and

debates. Public space is both the perceptible representation of local democracy and the ideal site where this democracy is transformed into action (Taipale 2008:146). It is, in other words, the “place for citizenship development” (146). Recent examples illustrating the importance of public space as the organizing structure for citizenship rights include the spatial inhabitation of Turks in Berlin and Frankfurt as well as Latino citizenship in America (Isin 2000:13). Both the Turks and Latinos have relied on urban resources and public spaces in order to “mobilize and articulate their demands for recognition” (13). Second, public space serves as the site of civic education, governance, and practice. It is in the public sphere, made real in and through public space, that the citizen is formed as “both subject and object of conduct” (10). Whether this conduct is voting, attending a rally, or serving as a politician, it is ultimately expressed in relation to the city, not as an idea but rather as a specific place (10). It is also in and through the public space that the individual becomes citizen, as this space orients the individual’s actions “toward[s] others through everyday experience” (10).

Radical and revolutionary, the right to the city seems promising in its ability to transform camp space into a space of citizenship discourse and practice. Through the rights to participation and appropriation, political identity becomes “independent of and prior to nationality with respect to the decisions that produce urban space” (Purcell 2002:103). Framing the urban dimension of camp space through critical urban theory, namely Lefebvre’s formulation of the right to the city, therefore, allows for the rethinking of rights in the context of the refugee camp. Ultimately, this approach gives rise to a new conceptual framework, one that alters how politics, people, and practices intersect and interact.

## 5 Conclusion

When reimagined as an urban space, the refugee camp holds the potential to become a space in which rights, namely the right to the city, can be conceived and realized. This right is at once an imaginative opening and an inspiring challenge (Purcell 2003:565). As an opening, it articulates the argument and structures the practices for claiming rights and appropriating urban spaces (Gilbert 2008:252). As a challenge, it responds to the existential crisis of the city by calling for an alternative urban life, one that is more inclusive, meaningful, and dialectical (Harvey 2012:x).

Despite this potential, the way in which the academic literature conceptualizes and applies the right to the city remains both underexplored and underdeveloped. I have identified two broad limitations in the literature – the first being the conceptual rights challenge and the second being the authenticity challenge. As outlined by Attoh, the concept of the right to the city has been conceptualized loosely and applied flexibly (Attoh 2011:7). As a result, there is a need to be very clear about which rights are being discussed, which form these rights take, and to whom these rights pertain. I have sought to address this limitation by defining and discussing each of the phrase’s constitutive elements – right, to, and city. I have also assessed the application of the concept by framing it within the theory and practice of urban life, consisting of its constitutive elements – *urbs* (physical space), *polis* (political community), and *civitas* (the exercise of citizenship rights).

Relatedly, there is a real risk that the concept of the right to the city may be abused if it simply repackages existing demands using fashionable concepts and language. In order for the right

to the city to be realized, it must critically engage in a theoretical manner with urban processes and “question the efficacy of the procedural and spatial reorganization they entail” (McCann 2002:78). I have sought to address this limitation by reevaluating the camp not simply as a historical, philosophical, and typological concept but also, and more importantly, as an urban concept. Drawing on the Handbook as the principal case study and complementing the discussion with examples from refugee camps, I have focused on the ways in which the logic of camp planning, its architectural origins, and the evolution of refugee camp design reflect a larger discourse on how the Handbook, the built environment of the camp, and the practices this environment engenders intersect and interact.

In light of these limitations and possibilities, this thesis, at its core, seeks to articulate an original ethical and political project, one in which the reimagining of the refugee camp as an urban space ultimately contributes to a new and better understanding of the built environment of the camp and the practices this environment engenders. In one sense, this reimagining enables the refugees themselves to claim ownership over their own geographic and social spaces. Through participation and appropriation, the refugee is able to engage with those decisions that shape their everyday life (Purcell 2003:583). In another sense, this reimagining gives rise to a rights-based discourse defined not by an institutional authority or power but rather “redefined through political action and social relations” (Gilbert 2008:259). As a result, the refugees become active and empowered agents capable of controlling their social lives, which Lefebvre identifies as the “transformation of nature, the production of material goods, and the experience and representation of place” (Lefebvre 1991).

As this ethical and political project seeks to explore the intersection of rights and space within the context of the refugee camp, there remains Bauman’s valid concern that, without action, this century may very well become the Age of the Camps (Bauman 2001:280). After all, the camp, he argues, remains an integral and irremovable element of the modern world (280). The branding of this century, therefore, remains in our hands – either we fall prey to the period of Auschwitz and the Gulag by disregarding the accumulated human misery found in camps or we engage with that experience and propose a new way forward. In this thesis, I have proposed a new way forward, one that reconceptualizes the refugee camp as an urban space, and in so doing, takes up Lefebvre’s revolutionary vision to “change ourselves by changing the city” (Harvey 2008:23).

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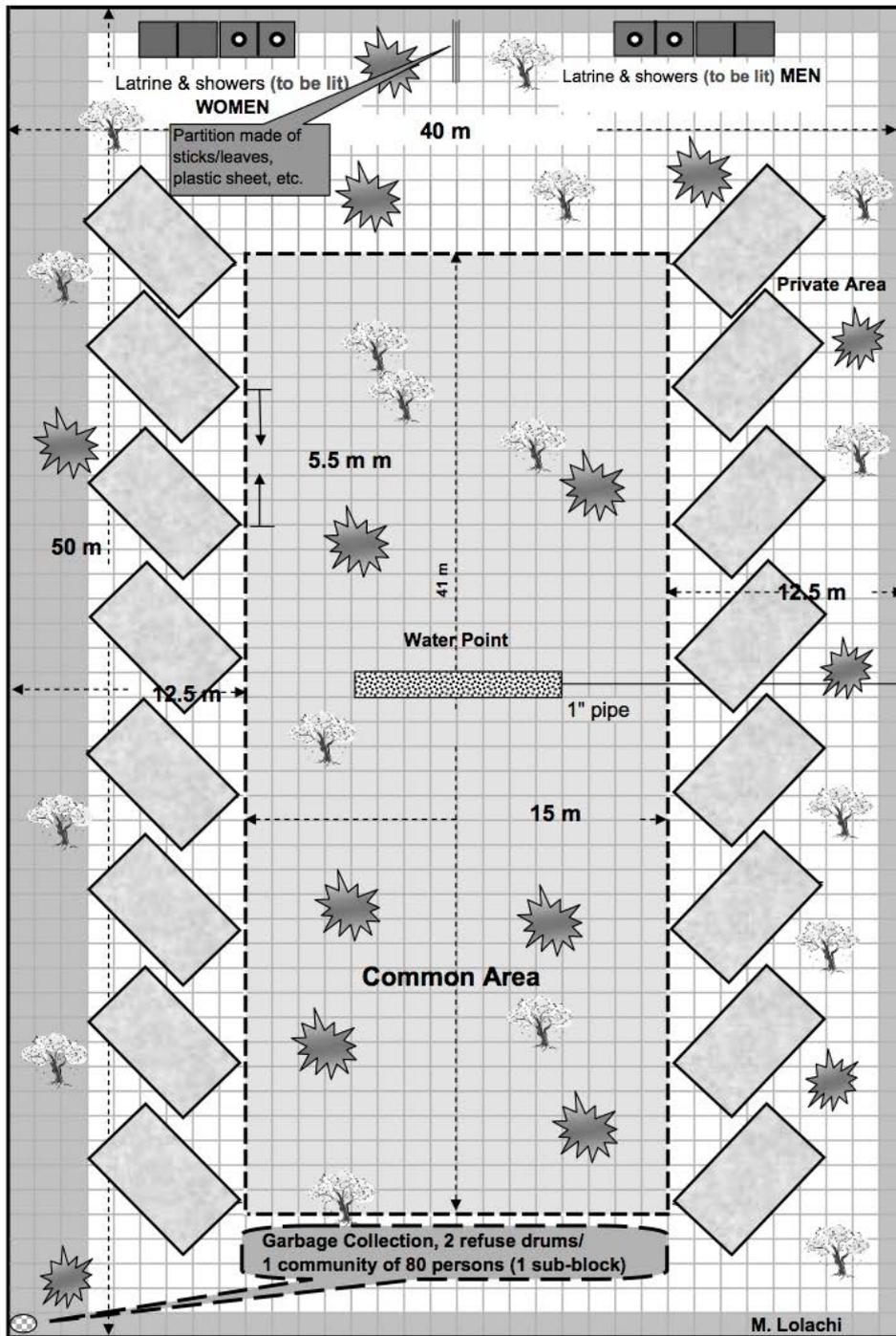
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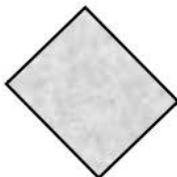
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# 7 Appendix

## Sub-block modular design concept (UNHCR 2007:214)



Sub-Block - Modular Design Concept, NTS



: Shelters, 16/sub-block, 1 shelter/family,  
 16x 5 = 80 refugees/sub-block, each shelter area=3x6=18 m2  
 Gabled (truss) frame/ ridged roof structure and/or tent

Technical Support Section, TSS