Instant City

Urban/Rural

Sama
El Saket
Refugee camps are a direct translation of politics into space. If we were to reverse that logic, we would find that the way a space is articulated can be directly translated into politics, therefore highlighting our ability to shape politics through the design of space.

Refugee camps are stuck in a state of suspension between topography of hospitality and topography of undesirability, between rural and urban, between city and ghetto. The refugee camp is seen by some as an unwarranted place to which populations with uncertain futures are sent. Due to its hostile context, the shelters created which later take the form of permanence lead to the formation of a "ghetto". The ghetto was once a rest area by the side of the road for merchants, migrants and travelers who stayed there without giving up the possibility of leaving (Simmel 1908/1984). However, in the case of the refugee camp in the 21st century, the ghetto is surrounded by risks of destruction, expulsion and violence leading to a permanent tension in the camp. Instead of presenting itself as a rest area, it instead becomes about seclusion and isolation. Physical space becomes a separator that hardens the thresholds between the refugee camp and the world around it. Dealing with mitigating the harsh boundaries between scales within a landscape of inequity requires an architecture that accepts the present realities and constraints of our environment and aims to work with them to soften the boundaries.

"Hospitality favors sharing the city as common space, refuge is a shelter that one creates for oneself in the absence of hospitality." – Michel Agier.

The refugee camp can be found in between two conflictual topographies, the topography of hospitality and the topography of the foreigner/unwanted. The suspended temporality and uncertainty about their existence leads to ongoing tension, unease and conflict. In order to evaluate whether the refugee camp is a ghetto one must examine its relationship to the city and its distance from the state. Observing the urban logic of refugee camps and the evolution of places of refuge over time highlights the need for decentralizing - analytically, geographically and epistemologically- opening up the possibility of allowing disorder to happen within the transformation.

One can compare the refugee camp to Foucault's heterotopia. A space with a presupposed system of opening and closing that isolates the area and at the same time makes it penetrable. A heterotopia is a space that is neither here or there. A space put into heterotopia removes, delays and suspends any recognition of political equality. When entering a heterotopia, the individual needs to submit to rites or purifications, similar to when entering a prison. The site differs from a public space in that it is not freely accessible.

The refugee camp as a heterotopia is made possible by the condition of extraterritoriality. Extraterritoriality is the state of being exempted from the jurisdiction of law. Despite seeming like it is placed in the middle of a void, the heterotopia in the case of the refugee camp is on the border of a social or national order. Similar heterotopias described by Foucault are psychiatric clinics, retirement homes and prisons which turn the occupants into lasting pariahs. The exclusion from the social structure is due to political and legal exemption. The extraterritoriality leads to certain decisions pertaining to the organization of spaces and borders. Characterized by an “inaccessible inside” extraterritoriality leaves the refugee camp outside of all places despite being able to indicate its location. Refugees are cast out inside a state, making them the first to be confined outside. The absence of territorial citizenship among the
Introduction
Theorizing the refugee camp

refugees is due to their state of abandonment. They are stuck in limbo, neither their original country nor the one they have left to guarantees them the space to exercise citizenship. The refugees are sent to a confined area where they start by justifying why they are there, followed by consolidation and then adaptation.

"The differentiation between refugees and non-refugees diminishes as we see the important ways in which we are all refugees" - Daniel Warner. Searching for a home in a refugee language usually refers to searching for a physical shelter, whereas the search for a home in a profound sense is not always tied to a specific location or place. The difference lies in the feeling of being at home versus the physical home. Everyone has the urge to find a home and in the modern world the search for community may be a nostalgic search with no solution. The easiest assumption to make is that there is a disjuncture between normal life and the refugee situation. Second, is the assumption that the refugees returning to their place of origin through repatriation will lead to their fulfillment through integration. The third assumption is that integration and adaptation serve the same function after exile. Connolly through Nietzsche is saying that even though the refugee has been disjoined from his or her traditional place, the disjuncture between self and home existed before flight and will exist after.

Warner sees community as the place where the desire for self-knowledge can be integrated and fulfilled. According to Nietzsche, even if we are able to remain within the premodern understanding of community we would still be strangers to ourselves. Therefore, one can question the radical split between refugees and non-refugees since we all have a homesickness that cannot be fulfilled. The individual today is longing for a politics of place, despite there being certain physical solutions that are preferable. Categorizing others as refugees allows us to ignore the dynamics of our own existence. Warner believes that since we are all and will always be strangers to ourselves, then we are all refugees. The category of refugee has important legal implications which on the one hand provides international protection yet also creates a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders. If homesickness exists in all of us, then what is there aside from that? Health, safety, amenities, food, music, family.

1831, Jules Michelet - “the city begins with asylum”

The process of the formation of a refugee camp usually takes the following projection- primarily the tent is set up, soon afterwards portions of the city start to be constructed using scraps of materials found around the camp, the third step is turning the shelters into shacks which is when the housing becomes denser. Dense housing at that point equals city. The physicality of the urban environment is highly influenced and shaped by the social, political and cultural aspects. However, the planning discourse remains technical despite the highly conflictual context.

Clear separation of functions and structured organization define the suggested model. It appears to resemble early modernism models of idealized cities from the 1920s. Technical planners and architects working for the UNHCR are usually responsible for planning refugee camps. The model offered by the emergency handbook, considered the standard model, is constructed on the belief that human rights and needs are the same all over the world. Therefore, one can categorize the model as neutral. Rather than customizing the city to fit its' people, the model is only concerned with order and hygiene. The aim is to create a space that forms a community away from home, however it ends up
creating a space of segregation.

When refugee camps are set as the foundation of refugee policy, the operational energy is automatically directed towards the logistics. However, when refugees settle outside of camps the energy is focused on what the refugees can do for themselves verses how will we provide for them. Not all refugee camps are closed off, nor does leaving the camp ensure integration. It all comes down to the right to work, education, marriages and divorces and police protection. The camp can be compared to a city yet it will never reach it. The economy in the camp suggests that people are willing to work, the social division adapts to plurality of constraints, the occupation of space gives meaning to a once meaningless land – all potentials that meet constraints in their development. The refugee camp is a stunted city, the shift from managing it in the name of emergency towards the political recognition of the reality of the space never takes place. The city in the camp is in the form of potentials that are perpetually aborted. The perpetual abortion makes the camp a space of waiting without a subject. The present is empty, the future is uncertain, they can only hold on to the past and so the refugees live in a state of suspension.


This research looks into 7 examples from the 50 largest refugee camps in the world, presented in an order based on the camp’s population size. The refugee camps are presented though an examination of the origin of the refugees living in it, the camp’s area, population, jobs, education, land type, distance from city, distance from border, date initiated and governance.

The aerial photograph shows the general landscape of the location of the refugee camp. The zoomed in images show the urban fabric in the camp, nearby towns and cities, and hometown/origin. These images are used to determine how the move from one condition to another informs the way the urban fabric in the camp is shaped.
(1) Zaatari
Jordan

Country of origin: Syria
Area: 6 km$^2$
Population: 79,900
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Rural
Origin: Urban
Available jobs: yes
Available education: yes
Land type: Arable
Distance to closest city: 3km
Distance to border: 16km
Date initiated: 2004
Governance: UNHCR

(2) Nyarugusu
Tanzania

Country of origin: Congo
(South Kivu, Katanga & North Kivu province)
Area: 8 km$^2$
Population: 67,817
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Rural
Origin: Urban
Available jobs: no
Available Education: no
Land type: Semi Arid
Distance to closest city: 25 km
Distance to border: 100 km
Date initiated: 1996/7
Governance: UNHCR
(3) Breidjing
Chad

Country of origin: Sudan
Area: 37,494
Population: 37,494
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Urban
Origin: Rural
Available jobs: none
Available education: none
Land type: Semi arid
Distance to closest city: 100 km
Distance to border: 50 km
Date initiated: 2004
Governance: UNHCR

(4) Beldangi
Nepal

Country of origin: Bhutan
Area: 4 km²
Population: 31,741
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Rural
Origin: Rural
Available jobs: yes
Available education: yes
Land type: Arable
Distance to closest city: 6 km
Distance to border: 124 km
Date initiated: 1990
Governance: Initiated by government of Nepal, taken over by UNHCR and Red Cross
(5) Mae La
Thailand

Country of origin: Myanmar
(Karen National Union)
Area:
Population: 26,333
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Rural
Origin: Rural
Available jobs: none
Available education: none
Land type: Arable
Distance to closest city: 57 km
Distance to border: 8 km
Date initiated: 1984
Governance: Thai Authorities TBBC

(6) Girdi Jungle
Pakistan

Country of origin: Afghanistan
Area: 4 km²
Population: 22,340
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Rural
Origin: Urban
Available jobs: no
Available education: no
Land type: Arid, rocky
Distance to closest city: 270 km
Distance to border: 70 km
Date initiated: 1981, Closed in 2006, refugees returned home
Governance: UNHCR
Comparing conditions
Origin/Nearby/Camp

When moving from urban to rural conditions refugees tend to have more of a hand in shaping the urban fabric of the camp. The camp's fabric in this camp tends to resemble that of their hometown.

When moving from rural to rural settings, the camp is set up in an urban manner by the UNHCR and tends to remain in a grid.

Therefore the origin of the people in the camp has an influence on the way the camp evolves. The land chosen for the refugee camp is also a crucial decision that has a huge impact on the lives of the refugees.

Comparing conditions takes a closer look at the urban fabric by taking sections as examples from the camp, origin and nearby, and placing them next to each other in order to compare.

Country of origin: Somalia
Area: 5 km²
Population: 18,041
Camp: Urban
Nearby: Rural
Origin: Rural
Available jobs: yes
Available education: yes
Land type: Semi arid
Distance to closest city: 108 km
Distance to border: 100 km
Date initiated: 2011
Governance: UNHCR
Comparing conditions

(1) Instant City

Origin

Nearby

Camp

(2) Instant City

Origin

Nearby

Camp
Comparing conditions

Instant City

Origin

Nearby

Camp

(5)

Comparing conditions

Instant City

Origin

Nearby

Camp

(6)

Comparing conditions

Instant City

Origin

Nearby

Camp
Urban to rural
Comparing camp fabric when moving from urban to rural

(7) Comparing conditions

Origin

Nearby

Camp

(2) Comparing conditions

Instant City

(4) Comparing conditions

(5) Instant City

(7) Comparing conditions
Rural to rural
Comparing camp when moving from rural to rural

Urban/Rural
Comparing conditions

This table shows in red whether the urban fabric of the camp resembles that of the refugees’ homeland, the UNHCR grid or the local grid.

When moving from rural to rural the camps fabric is highly influenced by the UNHCR grid.

When moving from urban to rural the camp tends to resemble the urban fabric of the hometown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Fabric</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>UNHCR</th>
<th>Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mae La</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Mae La Home" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Mae La UNHCR" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Mae La Local" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breidjing</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Breidjing Home" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Breidjing UNHCR" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Breidjing Local" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kambioos</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Kambioos Home" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Kambioos UNHCR" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Kambioos Local" /></td>
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<td>Girdi Jungle</td>
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</table>
When moving from urban to rural conditions, refugees tend to have more of a hand in shaping the urban fabric of the camp. When moving from rural to an urban camp in a rural setting, the camp is set up in an urban manner by the UNHCR and tends to remain in a grid.

The land chosen for the refugee camp is also a crucial decision that has a huge impact on the lives of the refugees.

**Conclusions:**

- All camps are set up as cities
- 60% of camps are located in arid to semi arid locations
- Average distance to border is 67km
- Average distance to closest town in 81.3 km
- The fabric never resembles local fabric
- Camps are mostly located in rural locations

**Missed opportunities:**

- Using local knowledge to shape the camp
- Shaping the camp based on the people in it
- Locating the camp based on the people in it
- Camp does not always need to be set up as an urban space

Refugee camps are usually found suspended between the nearby town/city and the border. Their location highly influences their trajectory. Being close to the nearby town/city means access to jobs, transportation and the ability to rely on an existing infrastructure. Refugee camps however tend to be as close to the border as they can get. That distance is determined by safety. Locating them closer to the border means that new infrastructure needs to be introduced to support the refugee city.

This infrastructure remains in a temporary state therefore placing the refugees in an island city and denying them the amenities that usually come with a city. No jobs and no education seem to be the normal conditions in camps that have been there for more than 20 years.

In the next section I have pinpointed the location of the 20 largest refugee camps within each country in order to observe how they are distributed. It is interesting to look at countries such as Chad and Pakistan, which have many refugee camps. All camps are clustered around the border. With barely any exceptions all refugee camps are placed next to the border, therefore making the process of return to the home country easier. However that return sometimes takes more than 60 years to happen and so having that as a priority seems irrational.
Chad
Locating refugee camps

- Oure Cassoni
- Iridimi
- Am Nabak
- Treguine
- Djabal
- Goz Amer

Ethiopia
Locating refugee camps

- Fugnido
- Adi Harush
- Buramino
- Bokolmanyo
- Kobe
Jordan
Locating refugee camps

Kenya
Locating refugee camps

- Al Zaatri
- Hagadera
- IFO
- Kambioos
- Dadaab
Nepal
Locating refugee camps

- Beldangi

Pakistan
Locating refugee camps

- Panian
- Barakai
- Azakhel
- Badaber
- Old Akora
- Gamkol
- Saranan
- Girdi Jungle
**Sudan**
Locating refugee camps

- Wadi Sherife
- Batil

**Tanzania**
Locating refugee camps

- Nyarugusu
Thailand
Locating refugee camps

• Mae La

Uganda
Locating refugee camps

• Kyangwali
• Kayaka
• Rwamanja
• Nakivale
If it needs to be a refugee camp, the choice of location highly influences the life created within the camp. Land needs to be selected wisely using criteria developed in response to the problems that are usually faced in refugee camp. The criteria is similar to those used when determining where to place a development.

The camp can either rely on an existing infrastructure by attaching itself to a nearby town/city or it can set up new infrastructure to support itself.

The following criteria can be used to determine an appropriate location in both scenarios:

- Flood risk
- Drought risk
- Rainfall
- Slope
- Soil type
- Distance from borders
- Distance to road infrastructure & transportation
- Distance to nearby town

The criteria can be combined in order to create better circumstances.

If land is imposed, then the criteria can help determine what type of urban fabric to resort to.

The following are two scenarios with a preferable combination of criteria.
### Scenario (1)  
**Criteria Combination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Scenario 1</th>
<th>Scenario 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flood Risk</td>
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<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall Rate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil Type</td>
<td>Arid</td>
<td>Arable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to border</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to road</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>Not Accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to nearby town</td>
<td>Reliant</td>
<td>Not Reliant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this scenario the high rate of rainfall combined with the arable soil type and a far distance from the existing infrastructure/nearby town helps promote the decision to set the refugee camp up in a rural manner where agriculture is the focus.

Flood risk should always be low and distance to road should always be accessible.

### Scenario (2)  
**Criteria Combination**

<table>
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<th>Scenario 2</th>
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</table>

In this scenario the low rate of rainfall combined with arid lands means the location needs to be close to the nearby town and reliant on its infrastructure. The refugee camp in this case needs to be set up in an urban manner making it accessible by transportation, and allowing the refugees access to jobs and opportunities in the city or nearby town.
Locating refugee camps

Criteria

Three possibilities:

1) Refugee camp - refugee population is brought together and isolated from everything else
2) Refugees are integrated within city but in the form of a cluster
3) Refugees are integrated within city - dispersed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp location</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A) Rural/Rural
Should be set up camp centered around agriculture
*priority is land type, rain fall, slope (New infrastructure)

(B) Rural/Urban
Should be set up close to the city with work opportunities
*priority is proximity to set up infrastructure and transportation (Works best when attached to existing)

(C) Urban/Rural
Should be placed in periphery of city where rural settings can be created
*priority is land type, rainfall, slope

(D) Urban/Urban
Should be assimilated in existing city
*priority is proximity to existing infrastructure and transportation

Conclusion

Urban/Rural

In conclusion refugee camps end up being isolated island cities detached from proper infrastructure and opportunities for several reasons. Other than focusing on the improvement that can happen within the camp, we tend to forget that the geographical placement of the camp has a huge role in shaping the livelihoods of the refugees living in the camp.

By locating the refugee camp wisely some of the problems that usually plague these camps can be addressed.

Refugee camps are set up in a neutral manner which fails to understand the background of the people living in the camp. A refugee population moving from a rural area has different needs than refugees moving from an urban area.

Additionally, isolating the camp from nearby towns and cities denies the refugees any chance at creating a life for themselves. The further the camp gets from work opportunities, the more arable the land needs to be in order to be able to present the refugees with another type of opportunity to make a living and practise activities that structure their day to day life instead of remaining in a suspended state.

The camps also tend to ignore their surroundings. None of the camps resembled nearby towns and cities. Local urban and building knowledge is specific to the location and climate, therefore it tends to be the most effective. Refugee camps tend to remain uninspired by their surroundings.