

2017

# Inside the Tent: An In-Depth Analysis on Refugee Camps Through a Science, Technology, and Society Perspective

Sonia Shenoï  
*Scripps College*

---

## Recommended Citation

Shenoï, Sonia, "Inside the Tent: An In-Depth Analysis on Refugee Camps Through a Science, Technology, and Society Perspective" (2017). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1056.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps\\_theses/1056](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1056)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scripps Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scripps Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**INSIDE THE TENT: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS ON REFUGEE CAMPS  
THROUGH A SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE**

by

**SONIA MARIE SHENOI**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR WILLIAMS  
PROFESSOR WORTHINGTON**

**April 21, 2017**

Table of Contents:

Introduction

Fleeing Terror, Finding Refuge

Chapter 1: The Theoretical Framework of Refugee Camps

The Creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Why are Camps a Thing of Society?

UNHCR's Definition of Refugees

UNHCR's Definition of Migrants

What Makes Up a Camp?

What are Considered Basic Human Rights?

Chapter 2: The Intersection of Science, Technology, and Society and Camp Analysis

Two Focal STS Lenses

Four Important Questions

The Stakeholders

The Criteria for a Working Refugee Camp

Autonomy of the Refugees

A Sense of Community

Adequate and Accessible Healthcare

Access to Education

Security and Protection

A Foucauldian Analysis on Security and Protection

Other Motives Behind Keeping Tabs on Refugees

An Application of the Criteria on Healthcare

## Chapter 3: A Historical Look at Analyzing Refugee Camp Policy

Camps Pre-World War II

The Displaced Persons Crisis of 1945-7

The Palestinian-Arab War of 1948

The Balkans Conflicts of 1992

The Great Lakes Refugee Crisis in Rwanda in 1994

The Iraq War of the early 2000's

An Analysis of the 1997 UNHCR Refugee Policy

Criticisms of the Urban Refugee Policy of 1997

Who are the "Irregular" Movers that the 1997 Policy Mentions?

A 1997 Policy Blind Spot

An Analysis of the 2009 UNHCR Refugee Policy

## Chapter 4: A Winnerian Analysis

How Are Camps Technical?

How Are Camps Political?

## Chapter 5: The 2014 UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps

An STS Approach

How the Stakeholder's Goals are Affected

What Weaknesses Still Exist in this Policy?

Conclusion

Acknowledgements

## INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin my thesis by acknowledging the matter of refugees and refugee camps, now, in 2017. Before this thesis was born, I admittedly had numerous ideas of what I wanted to focus on. As a student entering the medical field, I have always fostered an interest in the study of tropical and infectious diseases, in the development of respiratory illnesses, and in the revolutionary studies of vaccinology and immunology. However, from the corner of my eye, I saw there was a matter that was only brushing through the American media outlets at the time, but that garnered my interested and steadily drew me towards it. The quiet discussion of what was going on in Syria and what the refugees were doing was making a move from the side column of the newspaper to the front page. As time passed on, the talk of refugees was swiftly gaining attention. With the greatly heightened attention in the last months to the Syrian refugee crisis, this topic is particularly timely.

Currently, we are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. Over 65 million people around the world have been forced from their homes. Among them are nearly 21 million refugees, over half of which fall under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> The ensuing story of a young boy is loosely based off a real story.<sup>2</sup> It tells the tale of fear, grief, and perseverance. Regretfully, it is just one of the millions.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Figures at a Glance.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> “In Lebanon, One Syrian Boy Forced to Grow Up Fast.” Mercy Corps. Accessed on April 16, 2017.

## **Fleeing Terror, Finding Refuge**

Hassan's deep brown eyes stare out from a boyish face, freckled and tanned from the sun, into the expanse of the dusty refugee camp. At 13 years old, he is a quiet and somber kid with a piercing gaze that insinuates he has seen a lot— too much, in fact, for someone so young. Sitting on the floor of his tent with his fingers folded in his lap, the telltale dirt and grease in his fingernails are markings of the back-breaking job of collecting trash on the outskirts of the camp— a job that prohibits him from attending school within the camp and a job that no 13-year-old should have to do. Barely in his teenage years, Hassan has the hands of a working man. He unfolds them to trail his fingers mindlessly along the crumbly floor and recounts the memory of his family's hurried departure.

Hassan and his family— consisting of his mother, father, and two younger sisters— resolved to travel by sea to flee their home country of Syria after experiencing extreme unrest and daily violence. Now, they have arrived at the most treacherous part of their journey. Hassan describes the seating in the boat: the women and children sit towards the middle while the men, who are stronger and can more often swim, sit on the outside. After several hours on the water, the captain informs them that he is no longer in command of the boat: it has started to sink. Among terrified screams, Hassan, his father, and his 9-year-old sister are hurled overboard by panicking passengers. The currents are so strong and so icy that Hassan can barely swim; there were moments when he thought he would not resurface. It was not until several hours later that an Italian sailboat spots him along with another passenger and they are transferred to safety. When they reach, by a miracle Hassan is reunited with his father and sister. As for his mother and youngest

sister, well, he explains, they are still missing. Hassan's face drops as he says this, but look up sharply as he explains, "But they had very good life jackets, so they *must* have survived!" The pain in his eyes is replaced with a flicker of hope, if only for a moment.

These stories, although distinct in their own ways, tell the recurrent difficulty of fleeing one's home in search for safety. Hassan recounts the car bombs that went off every day in his home in Syria, and the unpredictable airstrikes and chemical attacks that leave children and families broken, burned, and killed on playgrounds and everywhere. Now, in the refugee camp, the battle is not over. Hassan sleeps on the cement floor in a strange place with none of the familiarity of home. A plastic chair sits in the corner next to a bucket and blanket. His sister is extremely malnourished; Hassan himself is painfully thin. Their last meal was yesterday. He ate rice. Still, he is grateful to be away from the violence that has taken over the life that he knew.

The sadness and fear in Hassan's eyes are years beyond his age and reflect the extreme violence and horror he has witnessed— sights and sounds of war that most of the world will only see in movies. As the war goes on, the number of people displaced from their homes increases dramatically. And so it begins: They take a step. They leave one life behind and enter another. They walk through a cut border fence into statelessness, vulnerability, dependency, and invisibility. They become refugees.

## CHAPTER 1: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF REFUGEES

### **The Creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

In 1950, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created to assist millions of Europeans who had fled from their homes during the aftermath of the Second World War. The organization worked to protect and assist these refugees as they embarked upon a new journey and life in a place outside of conflict. With the intention to do only good, UNHCR became a global organization that was dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.

World War II left around 400,000 people strewn around Europe. The new global institution, the United Nations, created UNHCR under a three-year mandate to complete its work assisting refugees. The mandate intended for it to complete its work and then disband. The staff consisted of only 34 members and the first-year budget consisted of merely \$300,000. However, the United Nations quickly realized the immensity of the complication of refugees greatly exceeded the intended resources. After a year, a legal foundation for assisting refugees was created in order to initiate a legal framework under which refugees can claim international rights. In recognition of its humanitarian achievements, UNHCR won the 1954 Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>3</sup>

UNHCR's presence has been valued and has had significant impact on numerous parts of the world. In 1956, when the Soviets put down the Hungarian revolution, a rush of refugees into neighboring countries was declared as a humanitarian emergency. The

---

<sup>3</sup> "History of UNHCR." UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. Accessed on March 19, 2017.



decolonization of Africa in the 1960s and the constant division of sovereign state boundaries produced the first of that continent's several refugee crises needing a UNHCR intervention. Through the 1970s and 1980s, UNHCR advocated and assisted refugees in Asia and Latin America. In 1981, UNHCR again won the Nobel Peace Prize for providing critical assistance to refugees facing political obstacles and boundaries. Continuing the timeline of UNHCR's help, the 1990s brought the refugee emergencies back to Africa and Europe with the wars in the Balkans. Throughout the 21st century, UNHCR has been aiding refugees in the extremely sensitive crises of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Syria and the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past 66 years, UNHCR has expanded its staff, budget, legal framework, NGO network, and geographic scope and expertise. It has also grown to assist internally displaced persons and stateless peoples— a politically divisive issue. Stateless people are often overlooked and denied basic human rights due to lack of citizenship.<sup>5</sup> As the intricacy and complexity of the population movement increases across the globe, so too does the refugee situation. UNHCR has reflected upon this dilemma and has acted in response, creating an agency that has grown in size, breadth, and depth of action. In 2012, UNHCR budgeted \$3.59 billion and maintained a staff of 7,685 based in the Geneva headquarters, 126 countries within which 135 main offices operate, and 279 remote field office locations.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> "History of the UNHCR." The Borgen Project. Accessed on March 19, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> "History of the UNHCR." Accessed on March 19, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## **Why are Camps a Thing of Society?**

Given the formation of UNHCR, it is important to consider what has been done and what is currently being done to assist refugees. Refugee camps have served as a function of society in which large amounts of people displaced from their home are accounted for and taken care of after fleeing life-threatening violence and dangerous conditions. The question is ever so salient: why should we care about camps, and what purpose do they fulfill? Camps for refugees and the internally displaced are meant to provide spaces of security for individuals and communities when they are at their most vulnerable state. The camps exist explicitly to provide for those who are in their greatest need and to protect their survival and wellbeing. Shelter is a critical determinant for survival in the initial stages of a disaster. Beyond survival, shelter is necessary to provide security, personal safety and protection from the climate and to promote resistance to ill health and disease. It is also important for human dignity, to sustain family, and community life and to enable affected populations to recover from the impact of disaster.<sup>7</sup>

Camps are meant to replicate an entire support system. As this suggests, the programs within camps are directed to build, encourage, and foster community. It is helpful to approach this goal, though whole and well intentioned, with a critical eye. Camps have become increasingly normalized and have, in a way, caused society to accept the existence of them without question. The sense of community has become highly instrumentalized, with security mechanisms being installed in and across the camps in order to monitor and regulate the optimization of a state of life. The scripting of

---

<sup>7</sup> “The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, third edition.” Accessed on March 19, 2017.

government through community that is visible in camp spaces produces a range of unintended consequences of community, security, and the camps.<sup>8</sup> Though camps may be built to foster a healthy community, the outcomes are not always as beneficial. It is important to consider whether refugee camps serve the greatest advantage to the refugees. This notion will be further explored in subsequent sections of my thesis.

### **UNHCR's Definition of Refugees**

With more than 65 million people displaced globally, the terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' are frequently used interchangeably in public discourse and media outlets.<sup>9</sup> But is there a difference between the two terms; confusing them can lead to problems for both populations. UNHCR states, "Refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution."<sup>10</sup> At the end of 2015, there existed 21.3 million refugees. They come from situations that are often so vulnerable and treacherous that they cross national borders to seek safety in nearby countries and become internationally recognized as "refugees" with access to assistance from States, UNHCR, and other organizations. For these refugees, it is too unsafe for them to return home, so they seek shelter elsewhere and are thus recognized as seeking refuge outside of their home.

---

<sup>8</sup> "Community and government in refugee camps." Security Dialogue. Accessed on March 19, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> "UNHCR Viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'migrant' - Which is right?" UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> "UNHCR Viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'migrant' - Which is right?" Accessed on March 28, 2017.

Refugees are defined and protected in international law as people who have been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence.<sup>11</sup> War and ethnic, tribal, and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.<sup>12</sup>

The 1951 Refugee Convention is the main international instrument of refugee law; it spells out who is a refugee and the kind of legal protection, other assistance, and social rights they should receive from the countries who have signed the document.<sup>13</sup> The Convention was limited to protecting mainly European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, but another document, the 1967 Protocol, expanded the scope of the Convention as a problem of displacement spread on a global level.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in concurrence with other legal documents such as the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, remains the cornerstone of modern refugee protection.<sup>15</sup> The legal principles they have defined and secured have pervaded through several other practices on an international, national, and regional level. The 1951 Convention defines who is a refugee and outlines the basic rights, which States should afford to refugees. It discusses a main focal point of protecting refugees: one of the most fundamental principles laid down in international law is that refugees should not

---

<sup>11</sup> “UNHCR Viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘migrant’ - Which is right?” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> “What is a refugee?” USA for UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> “What is a refugee?” Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “UNHCR Viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘migrant’ - Which is right?” Accessed on March 28, 2017.

be expelled or returned to situations where their lives and freedoms would be under threat.<sup>16</sup>

The protection of refugees has many aspects. These include safety from being returned to the exact perils they have fled, access to asylum procedures that are both just and efficient, and measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected to allow them to live with dignity and safety while assisting them find a long-term solution. As States bear the primary responsibility for this protection, UNHCR works closely with governments, advising and supporting them as needed in order to successfully implement these responsibilities.

### **UNHCR's Definition of Migrants**

UNHCR defines migrants as individuals who choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, education, family reunion, or other reasons. They are not facing the imminent danger in their original homes that refugees face. Thus, unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants do not face any impediment to return. They have the choice to return home; in this case, they will continue to receive the protection of their government.

For individual governments, it is important to distinguish the difference between refugees and migrants. Countries deal with migrants under their own immigration laws and processes. Countries deal with refugees through norms of refugee protection and

---

<sup>16</sup> “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

asylum that are defined in both national and international law.<sup>17</sup> Countries have specific responsibilities towards anyone seeking asylum in their land, space, or via their borders. UNHCR assists countries in dealing with their asylum and refugee protection responsibilities.

Confusing refugees and migrants can have deleterious effects for refugees and their safety. Integrating the two terms diverts attention from the specific legal protections that refugees need. It can also undermine public support for refugees and the institution of asylum at a time when more refugees need protection than ever before. All humans should be treated with respect and dignity; ensuring the rights of migrants is an important focal point. At the same time, appropriate legal response and measure should be provided for refugees because of their particular predicament of imminent harm.

In keeping with defining important terms UNHCR uses, an internally displaced person is a person who has been forced to flee his or her home for the same reason as a refugee, but remains in his or her own country and has not crossed any international border. Internally displaced persons are neither protected by international law nor are they eligible to receive various types of aid.<sup>18</sup> As the nature of war has evolved in the past few decades with more internal conflicts replacing wars between countries, the number of internally displaced persons has significantly increased.

---

<sup>17</sup> “UNHCR Viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘migrant’ - Which is right?” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> “What is a refugee?” USA for UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

A stateless person is someone who is not a citizen of any country.<sup>19</sup> Citizenship is the legal bond between a government and an individual, and allows for certain political, economic, social and other rights of the individual, as well as their responsibilities of both government and citizen.<sup>20</sup>

### **What Makes Up a Camp?**

UNHCR states that a camp is any purpose-built, planned, and managed location or spontaneous settlement where refugees are accommodated and receive assistance and services from government and humanitarian agencies.<sup>21</sup> The defining characteristic of a camp is some degree of limitation on the rights and freedoms of refugees, such as their ability to move freely, choose where to live, work or open a business, cultivate land, or access protection and services.<sup>22</sup>

Refugee camps come in a variety of forms; each is a diverse construction that differs from the next. Refugee camps are locations where refugees reside and where, in most cases, host governments and humanitarian organizations provide assistance in an organized manner. However, as already mentioned, the defining factor constitutes some

---

<sup>19</sup> “What is a refugee?” USA for UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> “What is a refugee?” Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> “A Summary of the UNHCR Alternatives to Camps Policy.” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> “A Summary of the UNHCR Alternatives to Camps Policy.” Accessed on March 28, 2017.

degree of limitation on the rights and freedoms of refugees and their ability to make meaningful choices about their lives.<sup>23</sup>

### **What are Considered Basic Human Rights?**

The 1951 Convention contains a number of rights that are considered to be basic and fundamental that refugees should receive. In addition to drawing attention to the principle of non-refoulement in which a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom (Article 33), other rights contained in the 1951 Convention include the right to housing (Article 21), the right to access the courts (Article 16), the right to education (Article 22), the right to freedom of movement within a territory (Article 26), the right to freedom of religion (Article 4), the right to work (Articles 17 to 19), the right not to be expelled except under strictly defined conditions (Article 32), the right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting State (Article 31), the right to be issued identity and travel documents (Article 27 and 28), and the right to public relief and assistance (Article 23).<sup>24</sup>

A person may no longer be considered a refugee or receive these benefits when the basis for his or her refugee status ceases to exist. This may occur due to, for example, refugees voluntarily repatriating their home countries once (and if) the situation there permits such return. It also may occur when refugees integrate or become naturalized in

---

<sup>23</sup> “A Summary of the UNHCR Alternatives to Camps Policy.” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> “A Summary of the UNHCR Alternatives to Camps Policy.” Accessed on March 28, 2017.



their host countries and stay permanently.<sup>25</sup> Under these conditions and in order to receive these basic human rights, refugees are required to abide by the laws and regulations of their country of asylum and respect measures taken for the maintenance of public order.

---

<sup>25</sup> “The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

## CHAPTER 2: THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY AND CAMP ANALYSIS

In this thesis, a focal point that is particular and unique to my point of view is the notion of refugee autonomy. Approaching this conundrum is delicate; too much autonomy prohibits UNHCR from efficiently carrying out its work, whereas too little autonomy can give UNHCR too much power. Autonomy confounds the conventional wisdom that addresses it.

### **Two Focal STS Lenses**

How can our thinking of Science, Technology, and Society (STS) inform analysis of camp policy? And what can STS teach us about better camp policy? With this thesis' highly interdisciplinary emphasis, an STS perspective will allow an approach to each perspective with a comprehensive background of information and will help piece together the information in an integral, comprehensible manner in terms of analyzing both the refugee camps and the policies that enact them.

Moreover, a comparison between the 2009 and 2014 policies and analysis on their respective efficacies require an STS approach. Much like STS itself, this issue of refugee camps and autonomy is an interwoven one that includes an intersection between historical significance and present-day enactment of the policy. This policy analysis will explore how refugee camps are a technology and how their purpose has shifted in society. More specifically, it will discuss how the violation of autonomy is recognized and responded to by UNHCR. Subsequently, through the viewpoint of STS political theorist Langdon Winner, I will analyze whether it is feasible and reasonable to have refugee

camps that give refugees their appropriate autonomy or whether refugee camps are inherently structured in a way that latently neglects the refugees' rights.

The discipline of STS relies on the historical past shaping what is to come. It explores the character and cultural significance of science and technology through studies in which methods from the humanities and social sciences are applied to developments and structures such as refugee camps. This topic is unique in STS compared to the objects more typically studied, such as energy systems, laboratories, and technological innovations. This approach is noteworthy and different because it includes the investigation of cultural changes, policy issues and philosophical questions. Using STS is critical in looking at whether camps elicit positive or negative consequences.

On a more direct and specific lens, STS is imperative to this specific thesis for the two STS lenses at work. The first STS lens includes looking at refugee camps as a technology. The camp serves a simple purpose: it serves as a machine that takes in an input, digests it in the formula that incorporates a complex array of interests and objectives and spits out an output. The refugee camp functions as a technology that serves a purpose to society.

The second lens that is specific to this thesis and to STS is the lens that uses the Actor-Network Theory. In this theory, multiple stakeholders, such as host the item of technology itself affects nations and administrators, which in this case is the refugee camp. STS is critical here to look at a narrowed focus of study in how a refugee camp functions as a technology as well as how it affects and is affected by those that surround it.

## **Four Important Questions**

### **Question 1: Who determines if a person is a refugee? How is this done?**

According to the 1951 Convention, protecting refugees is primarily the responsibility of the States.<sup>26</sup> Either an individual or group assessment must be done in order to ensure that the Convention's rules are upheld in the right manner. Although the 1951 Convention does not suggest a procedure for determining whether a person is a refugee or not, it clearly states all assessments must be fair and efficient.<sup>27</sup> This would require that States designate a central authority with the relevant knowledge and expertise to assess applications, ensure safeguards are available at all stages, and permit appeals or reviews of initial decisions. UNHCR assists States in establishing these procedures in order to maintain justice and productivity at the highest level possible.

### **Question 2: What does a camp consist of to make it function?**

A camp relies on a working infrastructure to make it work efficiently. Camps have the risk of severe overcrowding which can make it difficult for each refugee to receive access to the basic facilities and health care services. A larger the displacement of refugees requires a larger camp, which results in an increase in difficulty in organizing very large populations. Health risks are a huge factor, as a decrease in sanitation and

---

<sup>26</sup> "The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol." UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> "The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol." Accessed on March 28, 2017.

clean water access can allow for disease and illnesses to run rampant in a closed space. Further discussion of how a camp runs will be apparent in the progression of this thesis.

**Question 3: What are the goals and purposes of using camps and in setting up camp policy?**

In order to protect and prioritize the safety of refugees, a major goal of a refugee camp is to ensure that respect is given to the refugees. Legitimate security issues can be addressed effectively through engagement and compromise. When the host nation understands the rights, responsibilities, and obligations that come with hosting refugees, the refugee camp functions as a protective coating and attempts to maintain the respect for refugees.<sup>28</sup> Camps often come about in time of need and when the situation is urgent. Camp policy is necessary in order to create a type of fundamental basis and to dissuade serious deviations in structure and infrastructure from one camp to the next.

**Question 4: Given that UNHCR creates these goals, who is affected by them?**

A common STS approach is the actor-network theory. The distinguishing aim of an actor-network theory is to explore how networks are created, assembled, and maintained in order to execute a certain objective, while taking into account the factors and individuals who are affected by the network itself. Developed by STS scholars Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, it can be used to map out the relationships that both shape and are shaped by the factors of which the network consists.

---

<sup>28</sup> “A Summary of the UNHCR Alternatives to Camps Policy.” UNHCR. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

In placing the refugee camp in an actor-network theory analysis, the refugee camp itself can be seen as a factor that affects not only the refugees but also the host nation, the camp administrators, the neighbors of the camp, the designers of the camp, as well as other various groups.

### **The Stakeholders**

The goals of a refugee camp may prove to be limiting, may violate individual agency, and may affect a wide gamut of stakeholders as discussed in the 2014 Alternatives to Camps policy. Stakeholders are the refugees and the network is the web that surrounds them, such as their neighbors outside of the camp and host nation administrators, institutions, and direct environments affected by refugee camps. The refugees are not the only ones affected by camps and by policy changes; neighbors of camps, administrators, host nation governments, and third parties such as nonprofits or other organizations that seek to provide assistance have their assets at stake. From an economic perspective, refugee camps involve significant investments in infrastructure and delivery of basic services.<sup>29</sup> The running costs for maintaining and operating these facilities are considerable and must be sustained for years to come. These investments are typically lost when refugees go home or seek permanent residence in another country. Certainly, these economic considerations also affect the stakeholders.

While the makers of the camp may have initially intended to build camps for the safety of the refugees, the camps can simultaneously keep refugees closed off from the rest of society. It is important to explore the motives in the desire to build refugee camps.

---

<sup>29</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

A critical perspective is necessary to understand why a form of authority or nation would want to have a camp filled with an extremely vulnerable population, thus giving that nation a surprising amount of power. Perhaps the host nation seeks dominance both physically and economically; if such ill intentions are suspected, UNHCR steps in.

### **The Criteria for a Working Refugee Camp**

What are the goals that we set out in using camps and in setting camp policy, and what is it we are trying to do? First I will give the definitions of many key factors in determining the criteria of refugee camps. Then, I will discuss the criteria, apart from the policies, that stand alone. I will discuss the positive and negative aspects of refugee camps in the criteria and then apply it to an analysis of the three policies.

For a camp to be at its highest level of functionality, it must adhere to a list of criteria. This list consists of both UNHCR critical points as well as those listed in society. They include, but are certainly not limited to, the following: refugees deserve to have autonomy, a high sense of community, access to adequate health care, access to education, and a sense of security and protection. Each of the subsequent three policies stresses different aspects of these criteria.

### **Autonomy of the Refugees**

There were several previous attempts at protecting the rights of refugees through policy enactments such as in 1997 and 2009 that were not as sufficient and encompassing as the current 2014 policy. Camp policies thus have both positive and negative elements. Society deeply values the level of autonomy individuals have in this world. Given this

and assuming we want camps to mimic reality as closely as possible, we would therefore want refugees to have high levels of autonomy as well.

Thus, what does autonomy mean and what does it provide? Autonomy in a refugee camp means having the right to make one's own decisions and exercise freedom in making meaningful choices about the refugees' own lives. Autonomy in a camp setting is not an easy feature to provide. It requires the hard work of the host nation, administrators, and refugees, along with the flowing cooperation of all parties involved. Though autonomy in camp settings is desired, its execution is not always a reality.

### **A Sense of Community**

UNHCR states refugees to have a high sense of community and to maintain their cultures. So, what does this entail and how is this provided? Refugees come from a world in which their culture and community is stable to a world in which they are holding onto the bare threads of both. Suddenly, their focus shifts from daily life endeavors to the critical question of survival. More often than not, individuals have others to look out for— family members, neighbors, friends, and children. Maintaining culture is merely an afterthought when one's survival is on the line. Once inside the refugee camp, the focus is on finding clean water, enough food, and shelter from elements, as well as privacy from others. Slowly, as the refugee camp builds and grows, culture reappears. It is evident that within a refugee camp, the same level of community as a real-life situation cannot be emulated perfectly, for conditions exist within camps that do not always exist in the world outside. However, a certain degree of culture and community does exist within camps; the 2014 UNHCR policy that will be further discussed touches upon how this community is impacted.



## **Adequate and Accessible Healthcare**

We want refugees to have a high level of healthcare. Thus, what does this mean they are provided? Populations of refugees tend to have poorer health indicators than the communities from which they came.<sup>30</sup> Immediately after reaching their country of asylum, refugees have the highest risk of mortality, as they frequently arrive in poor health and are completely dependent on the aid that is provided to them. During this vulnerable period of time, the most common causes of death include diarrheal diseases, measles, acute respiratory infections, malaria, malnutrition and other infectious diseases. There are also higher rates of STIs and HIV transmission found in refugee camps because men often engage with sex workers, rape of women is not uncommon, and there is typically insufficient access to reproductive health services.<sup>31</sup>

Refugee camps present even greater barriers than other settings to receiving health care because they tend to be in more remote regions, are poorly accessible by the road, and are not close to outlets of basic resources such as food and water.<sup>32</sup> The high mobility of the refugee setting and the constant inflow and outflow of people presents a

---

<sup>30</sup> “Module 1: Healthcare in Refugee Camps and Settlements.” Unite for Sight. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> “Module 1: Healthcare in Refugee Camps and Settlements.” Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

unique challenge, as it is difficult to provide the same standard and quality of care over a long period of time, especially as resources diminish.<sup>33</sup>

All of these factors must be taken into account when stating that we want refugees to have access to resources such as healthcare. As UNHCR states, access to healthcare is a basic right. It should not be denied from anyone, but the reality of a refugee camp can prohibit the ease of such attainment. It is necessary to look at whether or not these values can be truly and fully upheld in a system such as a refugee camp, or if they are just lofty, unattainable goals.

### **Access to Education**

We want refugees to have access to education. However, is this goal even feasible? Most refugee camps consist of an ebb and flow of refugees, including families and children. Seeing as these families are either constantly on the go or unsure about the temporary measures of the camp, it is difficult to enroll the children in schools. To make matters more complicated, school or classes are not always offered within the camp. Different age groups that would typically be learning different lessons at different paces are often lumped together, if a class is held. Furthermore, the refugees have larger battles to fight, such as maintaining their personal safety and obtaining resources. While such high levels of stress and commotion have proven to be detrimental to the health of children, they are left with no option but to forgo the classes that are offered in order to help their family or not attend for other reasons.

---

<sup>33</sup> “Module 1: Healthcare in Refugee Camps and Settlements.” Unite for Sight. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

“I have told other girls my age that they should go to school in the camp, otherwise they will lose a year. Some have registered at the school, but they are not going to class anymore. They tell me that they will go back to school when they return to Syria. But I say: What if we stay here a long time? You would be wasting your life. They can’t answer me. They are not taking my advice.” These are the words of Kholoud, a 13-year-old Syrian girl in Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan.<sup>34</sup> In principle, all girls and boys in Za’atari camp have access to school. The Global Partnership for Education states that the Jordanian Ministry of Education and UNICEF provide formal education in the two temporary schools with a capacity of 5,000 students each, covering all grades except the final year of high school. In reality, though, 76% of girls and 80% of boys between the ages of 6 and 18 years do not attend school.<sup>35</sup> Roughly 66% of all children in Za’atari camp lost about three months of schooling already before arriving in Jordan while 23% lost more than a year. Boys have generally been out of school longer than girls. The consequence is significant: only 7% of the children who lost more than a year are currently in school.<sup>36</sup>

This is a specific refugee camp analysis on Za’atari. But as Kholoud said, some families have the mentality in which they expect to return home after a period of time in the camp. This can potentially serve as a disincentive for parents to send their kids to school. Despite this setback, UNICEF reports that the majority of primary and secondary

---

<sup>34</sup> “Education in the Second Largest Refugee Camp in the World.” Global Partnership for Education. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> “Education in the Second Largest Refugee Camp in the World.” Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

school-aged children say they *want* to go to school. They say the main reasons for not going to school (or dropping out) are violence and harassment on the way to and from school and between students at school (especially among boys), verbal abuse and corporal punishment in the classroom by Jordanian teachers and Syrian assistant teachers, insecurity about having to leave their families alone even if it's for a few hours, having to help or work at home to earn money, and the distance to school and lack of appropriate restroom facilities. Many children come to school hungry, which affects their ability to concentrate and focus. Furthermore, large class sizes are difficult for teachers to manage and prevent follow-ups with individual students if and when they fall behind. Without access to the internet, the children are unable to do the research required by the Jordanian curriculum.<sup>37</sup>

The situation of teachers varies in each camp, but the politics of the nations almost always play a role. In the Middle East for example, fully trained Syrian teachers are only allowed to be assistants in the camps, leading to frustration. Jordanian teachers have a crucial role to play but many face constraints: Some report they do not feel safe working in Za'atari camp and that transportation to the camp is expensive and strenuous. These teachers are often inexperienced in teaching, as most of them have only recently graduated.<sup>38</sup>

It has been recognized internationally that education is a right that must be upheld in emergency conditions. Education can provide a sense of stability, structure, normalcy,

---

<sup>37</sup> "Education in the Second Largest Refugee Camp in the World." Global Partnership for Education. Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> "Education in the Second Largest Refugee Camp in the World." Accessed on March 28, 2017.

and hope in a child's day-to-day life during a crisis situation, which can last for months and years. The conflict in Syria is in its sixth year. Many Syrian refugee children in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq have already missed out on their education. Providing suitable, stable education for them in a permanent state of emergency is as difficult as the statistics show. It is even more demanding if developing countries which struggle themselves to provide quality education for their children, are suddenly confronted with the need to provide regular schooling for refugee children of other countries.

Thus, the right to education is a fundamental one, as backed by UNHCR, but is it entirely feasible to provide in such a permanent state of emergency? To the level at which the children should be receiving it, the short answer is no. Given the difficult constraints and arduous situation that a refugee camp exists in, and given the necessity for accurate and quality providence in fundamental factors such as education and healthcare, it is difficult to merge the two.

### **Security and Protection**

The concept of security and protection is a pivotal one in the discussion of refugee and refugee camps. One of the criteria to a working, effective refugee camp is security for refugees. This includes security from outside forces such as robbers or kidnappers as well as from others inhabiting the camp. A sense of protection is essential to feeling safe within a region; refugees have often traveled extensive, grueling distances that have no doubt increased their burdens of distress. Thus, fretting over protection is yet another concept that only adds pressure and strain the refugees already face.

The camp is organized with the intention to increase security. This security goes both ways; the security of the refugees within the camp is important, as is the security of

the neighboring communities and neighborhoods within the host nation. Most typically, there exists a segregation of units that are set apart from each other, consisting of family units as well as other units for refugees traveling alone or lost, separated into units for the men and units for the women.<sup>39</sup> This mapping of individuals and limitation to certain locations based on aspects of the refugees' identities can be attributed to the general Islamic religion in which men and women do not share quarters, but is perhaps equally attributed to the administrators' organizational methods in maintaining security, reducing conflict, and preventing theft and other destructive acts. At another level, camps may be latently intended to contain the perceived threat of refugees by political leaders and many citizens in the lands where they have arrived. These are a couple of aspects of the camp that, given a Winnerian approach, show how it is a manifestation of a certain, calculating political order.

### **A Foucauldian Analysis on Security and Protection**

In analyzing the importance of security and protection, I will bring in Michel Foucault's analysis of security. Despite his cynical point of view in which the persons being surveyed are subservient to the surveyor, he touches upon why the political aspect of refugee camps is not entirely upstanding. Obligations to refugees are hard to fulfill when you don't have a logical structure to hold them in place. Thus, the logistics may not be wholly good. For example, it may be easier to provide healthcare to a large population of people because they exist in the same region and location, such as a refugee camp, but the quality of healthcare might not be the best possible care. The health care received in a

---

<sup>39</sup> "The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, third edition." Accessed on March 19, 2017.

camp is different from health care received by, for example, Syrian refugees who are newly resettled in more developed cities.

Foucault brings up the important question of why the political aspect is not wholly good. That is, why do we want to watch the refugees? To further investigate these questions and whether there exists a shift between refugee camps being a necessity to being a point of suspicion, I will draw on Foucault's theory of panopticism. Foucault presents the panopticon as a tower located at the center of a prison that induces a sense of permanent vigilance and facilitates the functioning of power. The panopticon both "automatizes and deindividualizes power."<sup>40</sup> Foucault uses this panopticon as a prime example of something that enables the use of discipline. He argues that more sophisticated societies are able to control and observe such discipline and are seen as more modern and advanced. The development of a disciplinary society involves socio-economic factors, particularly in economic growth and development. The panopticon classifies individuals and tries to make them conform to what is normal by having a constant watch— or appearance of such vigilance— over the prison.<sup>41</sup> Here, it is crucial to put this analysis in the context of the refugee camps. While the panopticon seems to repress the full actions of the inmates in the prison, a refugee camp may seem to do the same to its inhabitants. Foucauldian supporters who believe a person's rights are repressed when constantly and completely monitored in camps would scrutinize the fact that camps take into account a person's dignity. These Foucauldian supporters would

---

<sup>40</sup> "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison." Accessed on March 28, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

question the reasoning behind a secluded, controlled camp having the ability to give full dignity to refugees.

Foucault continues his discussion by exploring the reason as to why a form of authority would want to maintain such power. Perhaps the nation that hosts the refugees seeks to obtain and maintain the ability to be in charge of another population. Within the camp, technology such as guards or security cameras may provide refugees with a sense of comfort, but they also serve a dual purpose of a watchful lens. The refugees may latently feel like they are under observation and examination as they go about trying to continue their lives in their temporary makeshift homes. The host nation may potentially seek dominance, which gives the nation great leverage and could perhaps be what the host nation is subliminally looking for: unspoken control of a population that is more or less defenseless. Foucault's work insinuates such power could have ulterior motives of future economic or political development. In this case, the motives could be masked in the desire to built refugee camps.

As always, the situation on the ground is more complicated than in theory. Gaps exist within policies, creating a space for complications to arise. The question lies here within: do we believe refugee camps serve the purpose of not only providing safety for refugees but also providing them with the basic rights and access to healthcare, education, and autonomy?

### **Other Motives Behind Keeping Tabs on Refugees**

Aside from Foucault's reasoning, there exist many other political reasons for why we want to keep tabs on refugees. In the United States, for example, xenophobia and islamophobia are prevalent. Refugees are viewed as inherently dangerous, or the "other."



In the United States, rising xenophobia against minorities, refugees, and Muslims is a pressing human rights challenge. After the 9/11 attacks, Muslim Americans suffered a tremendous impact.<sup>42</sup> Not only were many of them traumatized by the attacks themselves, but they were also pained by the violent backlash towards their communities that ensued. The misplaced retaliation against anybody who remotely resembled the terrorists displayed on TV, whether in feature, dress, or accent, became targets of retaliation.<sup>43</sup> That stereotyping exists to this day. The media constantly portrays them as inherently dangerous and has lumped them into the category of “other,” or non-fitting. In a society where immigration is a boon and contributes beneficially to multiple aspects of society both economically and socially, such xenophobic outlooks pose serious and detrimental effects.

The United States is not alone in having xenophobic tendencies and notions. Other neighboring countries have fears that the refugees will corrupt their racial purity. Allowing in such a large mass of people can change a country’s image, whether it be through religion, cultural differences, or other factors. In the current conflict in Syria, surrounding countries are conflicted between preserving their country and relieving suffering of their neighbors. For example, although Jordanians are not in favor of sealing their borders to their suffering neighbors, they are clearly frustrated with the situation. At

---

<sup>42</sup> “How Being Muslim in America Has Changed Since 9/11.” Huffington Post. Accessed on April 5, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> “How Being Muslim in America Has Changed Since 9/11.” Accessed on April 5, 2017.

the end of 2015, unemployment among the roughly seven million citizens was at 13%.<sup>44</sup> With more than one million Syrians living there, in addition to the large numbers of Palestinian refugees who arrived in the 1950s and Iraqis who arrived since the 1990s, the ongoing Syrian crisis is a source of tension. Refugees affect local and state government, as well as its populace. Thus, there is a huge demographic impact on Jordan with the refugee crisis and them not wanting to be taken over and defined by refugees.

### **An Application of the Criteria on Healthcare**

Evidently, the focus on autonomy of refugees is a leading issue. It seems to be the relationship between the autonomy of refugees and other criterion is an inverse one—when the autonomy increases, another aspect suffers. Thus, an important question remains: where does the autonomy clash with criteria, host country, or UNHCR’s goals? Here, I will focus on one relationship between autonomy and health care and will analyze its similarities with the criteria as well as the effect on UNHCR’s goals.

UNHCR’s public health approach is based on a primary health care strategy. Primary health care services are provided by private health care practitioners, local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other such organizations.<sup>45</sup> This is different from the alternative health care, emergency medical assistance. These are two fundamentally different strategies of delivering health care. Primary health care is typically used in overall development, while emergency medical assistance is delivered in cases of emergency situations and disasters. If primary health care is the appropriate

---

<sup>44</sup> “Five Years On, Jordan Grapples with Syrian Crisis.” The Jerusalem Post. Accessed on April 5, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> “Secondary and tertiary health care at a glance.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 5, 2017.

strategy in a society in development, and emergency medical assistance is in the case of emergency, many real-life situations fall somewhere in between the two.<sup>46</sup> An acute intensification of a chronic conflict— which includes the complete collapse of government and public services resulting in mass displacement, epidemics, and high excess mortality— can be easily qualified as an emergency.

In primary health care, temporal, geographical, and financial accessibility are all critical trademarks of a health service that facilitates the delivery of effective, incorporated, and holistic care.<sup>47</sup> Facilities that have a permanent existence with continuous opening hours that concur with people’s activities are mandatory for curative care. There is also a need for immediate access in case of emergency, even outside opening hours. Over the course of the policies, health care providence has increased in terms of primary health care being provided across a wider amount of the camps. However, that does not mean quality has increased as well. The ability for refugees to receive healthcare does not directly mean their healthcare quality has increased. In fact, in a setting that very well may require emergency medical assistance treatment but is receiving primary health care treatment, it may not be enough for the refugees. However, the availability of health care is much more easily provided and accessible when the refugees are located in a similar or near area, such as within a camp. This infringes upon the refugees’ autonomy to move freely, but at some point, the line must be drawn.

---

<sup>46</sup> “Primary health care vs emergency medical assistance: a conceptual framework.” Oxford University Press. Accessed on April 5, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> “Primary health care vs emergency medical assistance: a conceptual framework.” Accessed on April 5, 2017.

Thus, there exist logistical benefits at the expense of human freedom. In this case, the logistical benefits include providing treatment for a large number of people who are in crucial need of treatment. The expense of human freedom is that the autonomy is abridged to fit the goals of UNHCR's ability to provide access to health care. As refugees move into more centralized and urban environments, the providence of health care becomes more challenging to provide on a broad level. When we focus on health care, we lose tabs on the aspect of autonomy. For now, this seems to be an inverse relationship in which one must be prioritized and the other suffers.

## CHAPTER 3: A HISTORICAL LOOK AT ANALYZING REFUGEE CAMP POLICY

### **Camps Pre-World War II**

In analyzing the current refugee camps situation, it is critical to observe the history of refugee camps. Before World War II, what did camps consist of and how did they exist? This question, without a doubt, influenced the United Nations on how to deal with refugees, as the United Nations was founded in this period.

By the end of World War II, there were roughly 40 million refugees in Europe alone. The catastrophe was so large that international law and organizations tasked to deal with refugees were urgently created. These organizations had to quickly evolve and have now become the foundation that is still relied upon today. In turning to a timeline of events, in 1938 the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees was created in order to facilitate a more coordinated approach to the resettlement of refugees. In 1943, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was created to provide humanitarian relief to the massive numbers of potential and existing refugees in areas facing Allied liberation. UNRRA was replaced in 1947 by the International Refugee Organization (IRO), which in turn evolved into UNHCR in 1950. In 1951 a Convention was held to determine the status of refugees in international law.

### **The Displaced Persons Crisis of 1945-7**

Mass evacuation, expulsions from one's home, deportation, and forced displacement of millions of people have taken place across the globe long before the creation of UNHCR. Several factors have determined the ebb and flow of refugees across the globe. For example, in the 1930s, Germany received a large amount of Jewish

immigrants. Until October of 1941, German policy officially encouraged Jewish emigration. However, the Nazis sought to deny Jews fleeing Germany of their own property by levying an increasingly heavy emigration tax and by restricting the amount of money that could be transferred abroad from German banks. In January of 1933, there were approximately half a million Jews in Germany, which was less than 1% of the country's total population. The events of 1938 caused a dramatic increase in Jewish emigration.<sup>48</sup> The German annexation of Austria in March, the rise in assaults on Jews, the nationwide Kristallnacht pogrom in November, and the following capture of Jewish-owned property all caused a flood of visa applications. Although finding a destination was a difficult process, about 36,000 Jews left Germany and Austria in 1938 and 77,000 in 1939.<sup>49</sup> This sudden flood of emigrants created a major refugee crisis. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called for a conference in France in July of 1938. Despite the participation of delegate from 32 countries that included the United States, Great Britain, France, Canada, and Australia, only the Dominican Republic agreed to accept additional refugees. The plight of German-Jewish refugees, persecuted at home and unwanted abroad, led to one of the largest refugee crises.

---

<sup>48</sup> "German Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> "German Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939." Accessed on March 29, 2017.

### **The Palestinian-Arab War of 1948**

In concurrence with demonstrating the formative years of the United Nations, another conflict that sent droves of refugees into a state of emergency was the 1948 Palestinian conflict. An attack by a Zionist military group on an Arab village realized the Palestinians' worst fears. The result was a mass exodus of around 80% of Arabs on the land that was to become Israel. The United Nations set up a special agency, UNRWA, to deal with the enormous numbers of refugees (around 5 million) requiring assistance.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Balkans Conflicts of 1992**

The Bosnian war of 1992-1995 left 200,000 dead and forced 2.7 million more to flee—making it the largest displacement of people in Europe since World War II. In fact, half of Bosnia's entire population was displaced. The United States and Germany took in thousands of refugees. Throughout the Balkans more than 2.5 million people have returned home. But now, more than two decades on, the United Nations is still attempting to provide 620,000 refugees and internally displaced people in the region with the assistance they need.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Great Lakes Refugee Crisis in Rwanda in 1994**

In the aftermath of the annihilation in 1994 of more than half a million Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda, there was a mass exodus of more than 2 million people from Rwanda to neighboring countries. Many settled in large refugee camps that contained thousands

---

<sup>50</sup> "What happened to history's refugees?" The Guardian. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> "What happened to history's refugees?" Accessed on March 29, 2017.

of people and a high mortality rate. The refugee camps became increasingly militarized and contributed to the escalation of further conflict in the region.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Iraq War of the Early 2000's**

Refugees have been a humanitarian issue for Iraq since its war with Iran in the 1980s, but the 2003 invasion resulted in a huge increase in their number. The United Nations estimates that currently, 4.7 million Iraqis have left their homes, more than 2 million of whom left the country altogether. Many have settled in neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, living without the protection of refugee laws and, in the case of Syria, facing renewed conflict. As a result, some have started to return to Iraq and have been joined by Syrians escaping the violence in their own country.<sup>53</sup>

These situations are not the first of the type and will not be the last. People have been forced to leave their home countries since the very notion a country was created. By taking a look at some of the largest movements in history, we can evaluate why people left their homes, where they went, and what became of them. It also draws attention to the severity of the refugee crises that have taken place across the globe.

### **An Analysis of the 1997 UNHCR Refugee Policy**

Now, given the historical background of several refugee crises and conflicts, we turn to an analysis of UNHCR's policy for refugees that was enacted in 1997.

---

<sup>52</sup> "What happened to history's refugees?" The Guardian. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> "What happened to history's refugees?" Accessed on March 29, 2017.



UNHCR has a clear mandate to protect refugees, including those living in urban areas. In December of 1997, UNHCR introduced a policy: Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas. The policy was created based on the general assumption that most refugees should not be moving to or living in urban areas. In many places, UNHCR policy makers at the field level have espoused this presumption. The Urban Refugee Policy makes two misguided assumptions about urban refugees. Firstly, it states that they are too reliant on UNHCR assistance. Secondly, it states that many of them should not be in urban areas because they have moved without authorization from a country where they found protection to another country, thus constituting them as “irregular movers” and creating stress on UNHCR and the host nations.<sup>54</sup> The 1997 version of the policy was understood as condemning urban refugees as “irregular movers,” troublemakers who were making it more difficult for UNHCR and its partners.<sup>55</sup>

The most fundamental problem in the Urban Refugee Policy is its lack of detailed protection recommendations.<sup>56</sup> The policy focuses almost exclusively on assistance and ignores the very real protection of refugees in urban areas. As a result, urban refugees seem to fall into a protection vacuum.

---

<sup>54</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” HRW. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> “Why Do We Still Have Refugee Camps?” Urban Refugees Organization. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” Accessed on March 29, 2017.

## **Criticisms of the Urban Refugee Policy of 1997**

The Urban Refugee Policy begins its discussion of assistance by stating that, “there are many examples of long-standing demands on UNHCR resources as a result of assistance programs in urban areas.”<sup>57</sup> The policy also focuses on means by which assistance programs can avoid long-term dependence and promote self-reliance, which are both understandable goals for any development initiative. However, the policy also states, “UNHCR may, however, limit the location where UNHCR assistance is provided. Where refugees are assisted in settlements or camps outside urban areas, UNHCR should provide assistance in urban areas to refugees from the same country of origin with the agreement of the government and if there are compelling reasons to do so.”<sup>58</sup> The hidden message of this statement is that when refugees from the same country of origin are living in camps and in cities, UNHCR should assist them mainly in camps, particularly if the host government prefers for them to live there. Human Rights Watch believes that this policy runs counter to UNHCR’s core mandate to provide protection to refugees regardless of where they are living.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the proper advocating for the rights of refugees may not be as adamantly pressed as UNHCR claims it to be. Moreover, the Human Rights Watch found that refugees in urban areas had and continue to have chronic assistance needs. They can suffer from unsafe housing, inadequate food, and lack of access to basic medical care. Far from reducing assistance to urban refugees, UNHCR should be increasing assistance to refugees in urban areas who are desperately in need.

---

<sup>57</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” HRW. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Thus, the 1997 Policy needed major revisions that looked more through the lens of the refugee than the administrator.

### **Who Are the “Irregular” Movers that the 1997 Policy Mentions?**

Over a third of the Urban Refugee Policy focuses on the problem of “irregular” movers, a term that is used to describe the concept of “secondary movement” for reasons not related to protection. The policy begins by stating, “a refugee who is compelled to move because of specific protection or security problems in his or her previous country clearly cannot be considered to have found protection there.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, the remainder of the discussion focuses on the ways in which UNHCR can “discourage” irregular movers.

The overwhelming attention paid in this policy to the impropriety of irregular movement fails to recognize the nature of refugee movements, where the complexity of protection and assistance problems, the strong desire to reunite with family, the harsh realities of transportation methods, and the plethora of security threats all mean that refugees may have compelling reasons to move from one country to another. UNHCR assumes in this policy that the majority of urban refugees are irregular movers, yet this claim is not substantiated anywhere in the policy.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, the policy states that while UNHCR’s protection duties regarding irregular movers remain the same, assistance may be reduced. This belies UNHCR’s own

---

<sup>60</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” HRW. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” Accessed on March 29, 2017.

frequently cited assertion that protection is more effectively provided through assistance.<sup>62</sup>

### **A 1997 Policy Blind Spot**

In addition to the above criticism, there exist a few blind spots in the Urban Refugees Policy. Urban refugees have been neglected in the past. Moreover, policies sometimes contradict other policies on protection protocols, especially for refugee women and children.

For example, UNHCR's Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women make detailed recommendations on planning for the delivery of assistance within the layout of a refugee camp. If the goal of UNHCR is to protect the rights of refugees, it must extend to when the refugees are entering the camps as well, or the period before when the refugees are outside the camp.<sup>63</sup> Physical and sexual abuse of women refugees is not taken into consideration in the 1997 policy, and neither is the fact that women refugees are sleeping on the streets which increases their risk of a sexual assault attacks in general. UNHCR's Guidelines on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence Against Refugees does not incorporate or acknowledge that the lack of housing increases a woman's risk of sexual violence. Moreover, UNHCR's Guidelines on the Protection and Care of Refugee Children fail to make explicit the agency's protection responsibilities for refugee children in urban environments. Unaccompanied refugee children may be seeking asylum and

---

<sup>62</sup> "UNHCR's 1997 Urban Refugee Policy." HRW. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> "UNHCR's 1997 Urban Refugee Policy." Accessed on March 29, 2017.

making decisions on behalf of several other younger siblings, but this is not accounted for in the guidelines.

Finally UNHCR does not compile comprehensive statistics on urban refugees.<sup>64</sup> The focus is on the refugees who are registered with UNHCR and who receive UNHCR assistance, but this number varies in most countries on a regular basis due to the traffic of refugees. By not providing comprehensive statistics, it gives the impression that refugees who are not receiving UNHCR assistance, those who are unable or unwilling to register, and those who are located in other environments within the same country are unnoticed and unseen.<sup>65</sup>

It is both demanding and laborious to implement a policy without the necessary checks and balances that exist within a national government, for example. These checks and balances are not in place in the case of UNHCR and international institutions in general, which poses a toilsome feat to overcome.

### **An Analysis of the 2009 UNHCR Refugee Policy**

To further investigate the 2014 current policy, I will draw on the previous 2009 Urban Refugee Policy enactment, analyses of this 2009 policy, and—perhaps most importantly—its impact. Within the history of refugee advocacy and laws, is not common for such enactments to be called into question so deeply and replaced so frequently. However, this change is warranted and even necessary in order to provide refugees with as much autonomy and respect as possible. The 1997 policy included no mention of the

---

<sup>64</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” HRW. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> “UNHCR’s 1997 Urban Refugee Policy.” Accessed on March 29, 2017.

rights of refugees, but instead focused on the host nation's involvement. This neglect of discussing the refugees' rights led to an onslaught of criticisms from both the public as well as lawmakers that in turn led to the drafting of a new policy in 2009 that acknowledged more of the rights of refugees, but not all. Thus, the 2009 Refugee Policy was born. On paper, it sounded promising. Refugees were reconceived as people with stability and independence instead of as "irregular movers" who might stir up trouble and make it difficult for UNHCR and its partners.<sup>66</sup> The rhetoric involved an acknowledgment of the 'autonomy' of refugees. Without a doubt, this was a key improvement and was vital to moving forward. However, good rhetoric and promises on paper are not strong enough to lead to change; indeed, the 2009 policy failed to outline exactly *how* the refugees would receive this new autonomy. Critics of the 2009 policy did not hold back; their opinions and critical questions about the feasibility— or lack thereof— lay the groundwork of a new policy draft. Without a clear outline of steps to take and precautions to have, the policy was argued to be futile. They pointed out the gap between policy and practice, which was backed by policy makers who also questioned whether the 2009 policy's goals were attainable if they were not clearly outlined. This ultimately led to a change in the form of the current 2014 policy.

---

<sup>66</sup> "2009 UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas." UNHCR. Accessed on March 17, 2017.

## CHAPTER 4: A WINNERIAN ANALYSIS

It is crucial to pause here and ask the following critical STS question: How are refugee camps a technology? This question is pertinent to the analysis of the UNHCR 2014 policy. In the book *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*, author Langdon Winner explores the political, social, and philosophical implications of technology. He demonstrates how choices about the kinds of technical systems we build and use are actually choices about who we want to be and what kind of world we want to create. Winner argues that technical decisions are political decisions, involving profound choices about power, liberty, order, and justice. Technology, Winner argues, inherently has politics embedded in its infrastructure. This can be applied when viewing refugee camps as a technology.

Using the analysis of political theorist Langdon Winner in the context of refugee camps, I will examine the ways in which his discussion of technology and politics shape the discussion of refugee camps. First, I will examine the way Winner's analysis states refugee camps are a technology. This directly relates to an STS perspective on refugee camps, as it shines light on how refugee camps are an atypical and uncharacteristic type of technology.

### **How Are Camps Technical?**

Winner discusses technology as a machinery or equipment that executes a practical purpose. In turning this critical analysis of technology to refugee camps, an important question exists: What are the nuts and bolts of how a refugee camp works? A refugee camp consists of an enclosed area. This can be dictated by high gates, fences, or

walls and are used to ensure draw boundaries between those inside and those outside the camp. They consist of resources such as small, individual shelters for families, restrooms, and food and water supplies, and they fulfill the criteria listed above of what constitutes a refugee camp. The fundamental technology of the camp is that it serves as a device for delivering goals and services. It is there to do a thing and accomplish a mission: Yet it is so politically affected that it cannot do the thing without the intersection of politics. It is a technology in which something is inputted and as a response, an output is received. Refugee camps cannot be thought of anything unless an analysis of both a technology and a political aspect is included; they are technocratic.

Winner states a technology is something that shapes and is shaped by society.<sup>67</sup> In his book, he uses the example of tunnels from Manhattan to Long Island that accommodate cars, but not buses. Thus, the tunnel was built to accommodate vehicles traveling across. It was built with a lower, suppressed height; thus, trucks and larger vehicles cannot navigate across through that main tunnel. As a byproduct, low-income people of color who would get to beaches on Long Island via the buses would not be able to get there because the buses could not get through the tunnels. Winner discusses how this form of technology shapes the way society functions, for in building a tunnel of a specific size, it affects daily life.<sup>68</sup>

Another prime example of a technology that shapes and is shaped by society is the example of the sidewalk. Conventionally, one does not think of a sidewalk— a space to

---

<sup>67</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” University of Chicago Press. Accessed on March 10, 2017.

<sup>68</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” Accessed on March 10, 2017.



walk with a lip that separates the pedestrian area from the car area— as anything atypical or outside the norm. In fact, sidewalks can be seen as mundane. This is precisely the type of technology that Winner seeks to analyze—something that is so wrapped up in society that it is unrecognizable. Winner analyzes this routine form of a technology in an interesting way. The sidewalk certainly provides use for pedestrians who are able to walk on it. It prevents the cars from hitting them to a certain extent, as the sidewalk is typically raised. It allows pedestrian travel in a safer mode. However, this form of technology that shapes society is also shaped by society; the sidewalk also eliminates the ability for anyone who cannot take a step up onto the curb, such as in a wheelchair or other transportation device. Thus, the sidewalk simultaneously enables and prohibits transportation and movement. It serves a practical purpose for only those of the general population that can successfully utilize it.

Winner weds together both the technical and political aspect of technologies. He states that technology is inherently political. However, it is important to first analyze it in terms of a technology. Although it is easier to see how refugee camps are political, this first analysis focuses on how it is a technical device that has an input and an output.

Given Winner's analysis, it is not absurd to think that perhaps refugee camps are not designed to be in any country. Winner would likely argue that refugee camps, like many highly standardized technological systems that are driven by abstract concepts of efficiency, are designed without attention to the particularities of place. In that sense, they are designed to be constructed anywhere, but the design incorporates little that helps it fit the particularities of the different places where it is implemented. Furthermore, they add strain to the host nation and the refugees, and require extreme compliance and

compromise from all parties, as they exist in that host nation. Placing and building camps in a country and not having them interact with that country or society in a wholesome sense is a recipe for isolation. However, this task is far from feasible, as refugee camps must exist within the boundaries of some country. In an effort to increase the productivity of the camp, decreasing the autonomy allows for such mobility. Perhaps this is an inevitable contradiction in which expanding the efficiency of the camp unavoidably takes away autonomy from the refugees. Furthermore, it is important to consider what moving refugees into more centralized, urban environments entails. Are we not moving them into a more political atmosphere where the political pressure is even greater for them?

One of the claims Winner makes is that technology builds order in society. He states, “The things we call technologies are ways of building order in our world.”<sup>69</sup> Society chooses structures for technologies that, consciously or unconsciously, affect the way people communicate, go to work, travel, consume, and continue through life. In this process, technological systems evolve to better fit the needs of society. He expresses that “the invention, design, or arrangement of a specific technical device or system”<sup>70</sup> can lead to a shift in societal progress. Technology can be built and put to use; significant alterations in patterns of human activity and human institutions can construct a more fluid, efficient society. Here, refugee camps can be seen as a form of technology. They are a social construct that attempts to alleviate the stress of the unstable nation, and assist the displaced people, or the refugees. They were initially brought about as a means of a

---

<sup>69</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” University of Chicago Press. Accessed on March 10, 2017.

<sup>70</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” Accessed on March 10, 2017.

temporary relocation method for a large group of people in a relatively short amount of time. The camps were built to add order to the world and to help control conflict. Refugee camps shape and are shaped by the factors that surround them, such as the host nations, governments, administrators, refugees, and neighbors of the refugee camps. Although they do not fulfill the typical image of a technology, given this definition, refugee camps can indeed be seen as a form of technology.

### **How Are Camps Political?**

Technologies, Winner states, are not built without a political agenda in mind. He argues “technological systems unavoidably bring conditions for human relationships that have a distinctive political cast— for example, centralized or decentralized, egalitarian or inegalitarian, repressive or liberating.”<sup>71</sup> Ulterior motives may be masked in the bringing about of a technology. In applying this to refugee camps, it is important to consider who the camps actually benefit. Do they benefit the host nation and contribute to economic stability? Are they advantageous to the refugees and important factors such as their safety and health? Are the situations within the camps suitable for the refugees’ future as well as that of the host nation? Winner argues, “it is no surprise to learn that technical systems of various kinds are deeply interwoven in the conditions of modern politics”<sup>72</sup> He goes on to state that as these technologies become woven into everyday existence, the technologies

---

<sup>71</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” University of Chicago Press. Accessed on March 10, 2017.

<sup>72</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” Accessed on March 10, 2017.

adopt qualities that allow them to become part of our humanity.<sup>73</sup> Refugee camps in the past have put strain on the refugees as well as the host nation in terms of social and economic stability. They have proven to neglect the rights of the refugees, which include factors such as security, health, and autonomy. As refugees learn to depend on a temporary system that lacks the infrastructure and security of a permanent home, resources can become scarce. These considerations are based off of the past enactments of UNHCR's policies, such as the 2009 policy. It highlights how the lack of emphasis on the refugee can hinder the quality of care provided to them.

Winner further contends that technology has political qualities by introducing the following two points. Firstly, he acknowledges the ways in which specific features in the design or arrangement of a system could “provide a convenient means of establishing patterns of power and authority in a given setting.”<sup>74</sup> UNHCR states that refugee camps have been formulated in a way that gives more power and flexibility to the governing body where the camp is located, thereby creating an uneven balance of authority.<sup>75</sup> The second point Winner makes is similar, in that some technologies have “unextractable properties that are strongly, perhaps unavoidably, linked to particular institutionalized patterns of power and authority.”<sup>76</sup> Refugee camps serve as examples of technologies that require immense planning, authorization, and cohesion. Without these qualities, the

---

<sup>73</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” University of Chicago Press. Accessed on March 10, 2017.

<sup>74</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” Accessed on March 10, 2017.

<sup>75</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> “A Whale and the Reactor.” Accessed on March 10, 2017.

camps cannot function. However, these attributes can be taken advantage of by the administrators who govern the refugee camps and who may place an emphasis on the economic success of the nation.

Winner's analysis sheds light on how the camps are a physical manifestation of the political system. The camp involves the use of physical boundaries such as 10-foot high walls, chain link fences, and entrance and exit doors that are heavily guarded.<sup>77</sup> This is a direct enclosure of the refugees who seem to be trapped from within as if they were inmates. The refugees are not permitted to leave the camp once they are registered and enter it due to tracking issues. This is because administrators have determined that it is easier to maintain knowledge of who is in the camp if they have control of the camp's inhabitants. Additionally, the doors that provide an entrance and exit to the camps are heavily guarded with sentinels to better manage the influx of inhabitants and the rare visitors, record-keeping, and overall security of the camp.

Winner's analysis sheds light on how a political agenda can and might motivate the need for a technology such as refugee camps. Technology is a multi-purpose tool; Winner argues that part of its construction stems from politically driven motives. His analysis is pertinent to the concept of refugee camps because it allows us to draw similarities and differences between the 2009 and 2014 policies.

---

<sup>77</sup> "UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps." UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

## CHAPTER 5: The 2014 UNHCR POLICY ON ALTERNATIVES TO CAMPS

### **An STS Approach**

Given Winner's analysis on the intrinsic political qualities in technology, it is important to analyze the 2014 policy through an STS lens. It is rare to witness a paradigm shift—or a fundamental change in approach of underlying assumptions—in refugee protection; this shift in particular has been long overdue. Nonetheless, the shift has occurred with the release of the new policy from UNHCR on alternatives to refugee camps. The 2014 Policy on Alternatives to Camps applies to all UNHCR operations for refugees and in all phases of displacement from contingency planning and preparedness to emergency response to stable and protracted refugee situations and the pursuit of durable solutions.<sup>78</sup> The policy is directed primarily towards UNHCR staff members engaged in operational planning and fieldwork, such as program and technical policies, standards, guidance, tools, and training. Successful implementation will require the engagement of the host government authorities on all levels, and compliance with this policy is mandatory in order to more adequately address the public problem concerning refugee camps. Unlike its predecessor, this policy carefully lists the rights of refugees and the ways in which UNHCR will go about protecting these rights.

UNHCR is accountable for ensuring that refugees are able to access protection and assistance wherever they are living.<sup>79</sup> Millions of refugees have resettled peacefully

---

<sup>78</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

<sup>79</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” Accessed on April 15, 2017.

outside of camps—occupying both rural and urban environments, living on land or in housing that is rented, owning or occupying informal housing arrangements within accepting communities and/or families. Refugee camps nevertheless remain an important feature of the humanitarian landscape. Roughly 40% of all refugees live in camps, most often because they have no alternatives.<sup>80</sup> The camp itself serves as a form of technology. It contains various methods of technology that include but certainly are not limited to security guards, fences, and now with current advancements, security cameras. It is important to consider camps as a form of technology in this day and age in order to determine if they truly are the best form of technology that exists to serve the same/similar purpose. In other words, we can more easily transport people across large distances, create easy and fast access to digital records, and allow for other means of assistance that can call into question the existence of camps.

I would be remiss not to include the fact that refugee camps are diverse. In having a critical eye, the beneficial aspects can often be overlooked or taken for granted. Many camps are an essential part of an operational response, particularly during emergencies. Camps can facilitate the rapid provision of protection and life-saving assistance in the event of a large-scale refugee influx, and can facilitate the identification of people with specific needs and allow access to asylum. Given this, camps seem to be advantageous. However, it is important to consider to whom it is that camps are advantageous. While camps are an important tool for host governments and for UNHCR in terms of keeping records on the refugees, camps nevertheless represent a compromise that limits the rights and freedoms of refugees and too often remains after the so-called emergency phase and

---

<sup>80</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

the essential reasons for their existence have passed. As stated by UNHCR, living in camps can engender dependency and weaken the ability of refugees to manage their own lives, which perpetuates the trauma of displacement and creates barriers to solutions.<sup>81</sup> Camps can also distort local economies and lead to increase in sexual and gender-based violence, child protection concerns, and human trafficking.<sup>82</sup> Faced with these risks, it is no wonder that many refugees decide to settle outside of camps or designated areas. Where this violates national law and policies, these refugees may face serious consequences, such as risk of detention. Refugees in these circumstances may avoid registering with UNHCR or even making contact altogether, placing them beyond the effective reach of UNHCR's protection. The solution that follows is a step in the direction to try and reach out to refugees and provide them with their full set of rights: enabling refugees to reside in communities lawfully, peacefully and without harassment, supports their ability to take responsibility for their lives. Refugees can better contribute to the communities where they are living when they are supported in achieving self-reliance in a way that is adapted to local conditions. Moreover, community-based protection activities and education programs that involve local people tend to promise social cohesion, reduce xenophobic attitudes, and create a better, more protected environment for all involved.<sup>83</sup>

If refugees could enter the camp stage during the emergency crisis, and then move on to finding more secure, long-term living situations, the detrimental/suspicious natures

---

<sup>81</sup> "UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps." UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> "UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps." Accessed on April 15, 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.



of the camps would be alleviated by a great measure. The problem lies within the process; it is neither simple nor fast.

A more sustainable and efficient approach includes building upon interactions with national development planning by contributing to local in-camp infrastructure as well as bringing refugees into the realm of national structures, such as healthcare and education. This serves as a potentially stronger mechanism for the delivery of services when refugees are incorporated into communities that are not temporary. Governments in many neighboring countries that share similar cultures and religions and that have hosted refugees have concluded that the disadvantages of camps outweigh the advantages, given the current, hierarchical camp dynamic.<sup>84</sup> To implement this plan fully, the policy considers detailed points that include, but are not limited to, consulting with refugees and host communities, developing advocacy strategies, reinforcing contingency planning and emergency preparedness, updating protection and program management, maximizing mobility, and enabling refugees to build sustainable livelihoods.<sup>85</sup> Alternatives to camps exist today as does the ability to refine camps to incorporate the autonomy of the refugee. The purpose of this policy is to build upon and expand such practices that are currently in place.

The 2014 UNHCR Alternatives to Camps policy provides additional ways to shift towards more autonomy for the refugees. It proposes that alternatives to current camps are the ultimate goal in which either the camp and its hierarchy are redefined to be more balanced, or refugees are immediately relocated to other nations that will serve as their

---

<sup>84</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

<sup>85</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” Accessed on April 15, 2017.

permanent residence. However, this requires incredibly close contact with multiple nations as well as advanced preparation for future, potential crises that may arise. Thus, UNHCR states a more feasible solution is to shift the policy to encompass the rights and autonomy of refugees as they stay in camps.

UNHCR recognizes that the previous policies neglected to better address the full stated rights of refugees. In an attempt to amend these oversights, they have included a proposed motion that attempts to involve refugees more directly. As aforementioned, this motion includes a board committee with refugees serving on the board panel jointly, instead of solely UNHCR and host nation administrators. This is an effort to draw in a community consensus within the refugee community.<sup>86</sup> The objective of this is to incorporate a more holistic view that includes one of the most important and affected perspectives. In doing so, it also allows for refugees to voice concerns on behalf of the community as well as hold leadership within the decision-making process. Such intended discussion between all stakeholders allows for the refugee to understand the decisions that are being made for the rest of the refugee population. Moreover, a reconstruction of the hierarchy of administrative power levels the playing field and makes the members of the panel on a more equal standpoint. Involvement of all stakeholders involved, especially the newly included perspective of refugees, is necessary to allow for refugee camps to shift towards including a sufficient level of autonomy on behalf of the refugee. While it may not lead to cohesion on viewpoints, it is a start.

### **How the Stakeholder's Goals Are Affected**

---

<sup>86</sup> “UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps.” UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

In looking at UNHCR as a stakeholder that carries weight in determining the policies that affect refugees, UNHCR's goals carry some weight. Although the best intentions of the refugees are kept in mind, not all criteria are entirely feasible. Understandably, it might be easier for UNHCR stakeholders to control and dictate the spaces in which refugees go.

The 2009 policy followed by the 2014 policy demonstrates a trend in which UNHCR stakeholders' interests were dialed down and those of the refugees were dialed up. The 2014 policy more explicitly states UNHCR should take a backseat to refugees and listen to what they say is most important to them. In other words, it encourages the adherence to more autonomy for refugees. However, more autonomy for refugees might inversely affect or be affected by other variables of the criteria.

In order for UNHCR to be most successful, there is a certain level of autonomy that inherently must be lost. The number of refugees is an incredibly large number; providing resources, security and protection, and health care for such a sizable amount of people is by no means an easy feat. The ardor lies in affected such a tremendous amount of people in an efficient manner. The concept of a refugee camp as executed by UNHCR is not to limit autonomy; however, this may be a result of increasing efficiency. Thus, by having the refugees in one place, it makes the goals of UNHCR more feasible and attainable. The 2014 policy notes how refugees even became partners at the table and were involved in the decision-making that involved their own very lives.<sup>87</sup> On an analytical level, what sparked this change? Why is it that in 2014, these issues were

---

<sup>87</sup> "UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps." UNHCR. Accessed on April 15, 2017.

identified and addressed, whereas prior policies disregarded or turned a blind eye to the autonomy of refugees?

A few hypotheses exist as to why this shift towards the dialogue of increased autonomy for refugees. The first hypothesis states that this shift occurred after massive failures in executing past policies.<sup>88</sup> These past policies discussed encampment in a way that forced it upon the refugees— it gave them no choice. This led to a degradation of forced isolation and an increased in the importance of refugee rights. The past policies were not effective and thus, they presented a welcomed mode of change. These failures included the absence of affecting the majority of refugees, a lack of organizational methods in providing resources such as healthcare, food, and shelter, were so grave that they triggered this change for 2014.

A second hypothesis involves the comparison between the UNHCR policy and UNHCR practice. The only way to try to fill these lacunae is to ask tough questions of UNHCR and to offer tough critique. As with any extensive governing body, when a responsibility so large is fully within UNHCR's authority, it's especially fair to hold UNHCR's feet to the fire. With this in mind, it is always possible to find gaps in policy practice. Given how massive the human institution of UNHCR is, working under fierce constraints in numerous countries to try to accomplish essential tasks that often no one else will do is a highly extolled practice and deserves much respect. UNHCR's staff makes mistakes, but they also accomplish astonishing and incredible feats in assisting

---

<sup>88</sup> "Why Do We Still Have Refugee Camps?" Urban Refugees Organization. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

sweeping numbers of people in an efficient manner. This juxtaposition reflects the complexity and difficulty of the subject matter.

A third hypothesis delves into the strategic planning behind this shift towards more refugee autonomy. One may ask: where exactly does strategic planning stem from? After the 2009 policy enactment, several countries noted gaps and loopholes in the policy. Given this, UNHCR decided to strategically plan for another enactment, but this time incorporating various countries' input. In order to do so, UNHCR mediations and conferences were held worldwide to seek advice and perspectives from multiple countries and to more wholly make a composite of a policy in 2014.<sup>89</sup> In doing so, UNHCR not only fleshed out several parts of refugee autonomy that were planned but not enacted or not fully discussed, but they also brought to the surface the pertinent value of encouraging and embracing the autonomy of refugees.

### **What Weaknesses Still Exist in this Policy?**

The above proposed motion and 2014 policy spark hope that the technology of refugee camps can ultimately better encompass the rights of refugees and not compromise such an important value. However, is this shift enough? The 2014 policy tries to achieve more autonomy for the refugees, but if the very structure of the camp is a manifestation of power over them, then no matter how much UNHCR wants the refugees to have their own autonomy, the camp structure itself might inherently interfere with that. Although this shift is well intentioned, it is worth questioning whether it truly will provide refugees with full autonomy that is not in the least bit compromised. To what

---

<sup>89</sup> “Why Do We Still Have Refugee Camps?” Urban Refugees Organization. Accessed on March 29, 2017.

degree is UNHCR achieving their goals? If not to a high degree, then what is the problem— the policy itself or the resources? If one variable is favored, the other variable seems to suffer. Reflecting on the Winnerian analysis that technology is inherently political, it seems that the camps' structure fundamentally represses the autonomy of refugees themselves. If camps repress the autonomy, then the 2014 policy might just be wishful thinking on UNHCR's part. Alternatively, the determination and drive that UNHCR has to pay attention to the rights of refugees predict and foreshadow a positive, upward trend in which refugees' lives are made better.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a shift towards protecting the rights of refugees across the globe has begun to spark, in main part due to UNHCR's most recent 2014 Alternatives to Camps policy. This change began when the attention rights of refugees was called into question. There has existed an impressive shift in UNHCR's policies from their 1997 policy to their 2009 policy to their 2014 policy. Now, the 2014 Alternatives to Camps policy proposes a far more clear statement of the rights and responsibilities of the refugees, thus granting them the autonomy that all humans deserve and enabling a chance for sustainability and safety through more upstanding terms. Only current and future enactment of this policy will determine its success in truly adhering to full autonomy for refugees.

This analysis has shown that the inherent structure of refugee camps may cause an inverse relationship between the fundamental criteria for how a refugee camp should work and the autonomy of a refugee. For example, an increase in healthcare may require all refugees to be in the same location— as in within a camp— in order for the access to healthcare to be efficient, local, and immediate. This, in turn, applies pressure to the refugees to remain in the camp, thus withholding part of their autonomy. When one factor goes up, the other goes down. This analysis shows that perhaps this is one of the unavoidable features that accompany the intentions of a refugee camp.

Finally, this policy analysis is critical to more fully comprehend how refugee camps have functioned as a technology in society and how they contribute to and engage with public discourse, from an STS and policy perspective. Winner's analysis helps to tease out the technical and political natures of refugee camps in order to determine

whether refugee camps can indeed supply the refugees with adequate autonomy.

Although they do not fulfill the emblematic image of a technology, refugee camps can both be seen as a form of one and function as one.

As aforementioned, the discussion of refugees and refugee camps on a global scale is even more salient given the recent heightened attention to the global crises. This project is necessary for a wide variety of reasons, but the primary purpose is to use an interdisciplinary approach in analyzing this policy, refugee camps, and their implication in the greater society in order to more fully understand refugee crises, refugee camps, and how they can be most assisted.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to recognize the unwavering support of my parents, family, and friends who have provided me with constant encouragement and strength and who have sustained me throughout the past four years of my undergraduate career, which includes the work of this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the researchers behind the detailed statistics and critical facts about the refugees. Their work, along with the brave field workers and UNHCR staff, enable the valuable progression and advocacy of refugee rights to continue. Finally, I would like to thank my readers Professor Williams and Professor Worthington for so kindly and warmly providing me with their time through lengthy meetings, countless edits, and unending confidence and support in my own ideas.