

THE SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FORCED MIGRATION

A Multi-Media Educational Tool

Winter 2021

What Makes a Place a Home?: Protracted Refugee Situations and Refugee Camp Design

Target audience: advanced and life-long learners

Keywords: belonging, home, refugee, refugee camp

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In its official literature on “refugee camps” the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines [camps](#) as “temporary facilities” that are “not intended to provide permanent sustainable solutions” to people who have been forcibly displaced. This language of limited temporality, or short-term thinking, fits into common perceptions of refugees as temporary “visitors” in their host countries waiting to return home. However, this temporary framework is not sufficient to describe many refugees’ experiences. According to the UNHCR, the majority of refugees in the world today are in protracted refugee situations (PRS), meaning that they have been in exile for five or more years. As crisis conditions extend, some refugee camps, still open today, have been in operation for up to 70 years (see Cooper’s Camp in India and Zarqa camp in Jordan). This section will encourage high school students to question narratives that portray refugeehood as a necessarily temporary condition. It will use Za’atari camp in Jordan and Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh as case studies of refugee camps and help students consider who is leading camp design- and to what end. These discussions will revolve around the central question: What makes a place a home?

INTRODUCTION (DEFINITIONS AND INTRODUCING TEMPORALITY IN CAMP DESIGN)

Introductory questions (before reading):

- What does the word “home” mean to you?
- Is it important to have a place to call home?
- Who can transform a “house” into a “home”?

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Read: UNHCR, "[Protracted Refugee Situations Explained](#)," January 28, 2020

- How does the concept of "home" appear in the UNHCR's explainer?
- How does this contrast with the way "refugee camps" are referred to?

Read: US State Department, "[Protracted Refugee Situations](#)."

Read: UNHCR, "[What is a Refugee Camp?](#)"

Discussion Questions:

- How do temporal concepts appear in the UNHCR's definition of refugee camps?
- How do you think this temporal framework could influence the way camps are designed and operated?
- Are there benefits to designing camps as temporary spaces? Are there drawbacks?

ZA'ATARI – WHO DESIGNS REFUGEE CAMPS?

Watch: UNHCR, "[Step 2- Shelter at Za'atari Camp](#)," October 23, 2017

- Who do you think is the audience for this video/ what was the UNHCR's goal for the video?

Photo Essay: Maha Yahya, "[A Syrian City in Jordan](#)," May 8, 2017

- Looking at these photos, what elements of design do you see? (Ex. murals, relief agency branding, lots of barbed wire)
- What do you think it would be like to live in a community with these competing elements? (Try to come up with a sense of the camp's lived environment.)
- Who do you think has the biggest impact on the lived environment of the camp?

Read: Alexander Betts, Louise Bloom, and Nina Weaver, "[Jordan: Syrian refugees in Za'atari camp](#)," from "Refugee Innovation: Humanitarian innovation that starts with communities," *Refugee Studies Centre*.

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- Read from page 17 to the end of “Women in Business” on page 23. Pay special attention to the photos included in the report

ADVANCED text: Jason Hart, Natalia Pazkiewicz, and Dima Albadra, [“Shelter as Home? Syrian Homemaking in Jordanian Refugee Camps,” *Humanitarian Organization* \(2018\), 74\(4\)](#)

- Read from page 7 “Where is Home” to the end of “Homemaking in Azraq and Zaatari Defined” on page 22.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think is the temporal difference between a “home” and a “shelter”?
- In a refugee camp, who do you think creates a “shelter” and who creates a “home”?
- What examples do these authors use of refugees in Zaatari turning their “shelters” into “homes”?

KUTUPALONG – HOW DO HOST GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITIES INFLUENCE CAMP DESIGN?

Note: as the Rohingya have only been displaced since the [Rohingya Genocide of 2017](#), they will not technically qualify as a PRS until 2022. Still, Kutupalong is the largest camp in the world and there is no indication that the Rohingya will be able to repatriate any time soon. If you are reading this section before 2022, consider using this as an opportunity to discuss the limitations of the UNHCR’s definition of protracted refugee situations.

Read: Sarah Dingle, [“Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Home to More than 600,000 Rohingya, Faces Daily Challenges,” *ABC News*, November 19, 2019](#)

Read: Rudabeh Shahid, [“Assessing the Treatment of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh,” *Atlantic Council*, September 25, 2019](#)

Read: Victoria Milko and Clare Hammond, [“The World’s Largest Refugee Camp is Becoming a Real City,” *Bloomberg City Lab*, September 27, 2019](#)

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Read and watch: [Kaamil Ahmed, "Regreening a Barren Rohingya Refugee Camp on Myanmar's Border," Mongabay, June 11, 2019](#)

Discussion Questions:

- How has the Bangladeshi government prevented Kutupalong from becoming a permanent settlement? Why do you think the Bangladeshi government is doing this? (Discuss the relationship between temporary infrastructure and ease of repatriation.)
- How have the residents of Kutupalong and humanitarian agencies managed to build more permanent infrastructure anyway?
- Why do you think the Bangladeshi government wants to keep repatriation of the Rohingya as an option? Do you think the residents of Kutupalong can build homes in Bangladesh under these conditions?

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF CAMP DESIGN?

Read: [Marie Doezema, "Rethinking the Refugee Camp," Bloomberg CityLab, September 22, 2016](#)

Read: [Eleanor Gibson, "Humanitarian experts propose turning refugee camps into enterprise zones called 'refugee cities'," Dezeen, December 9, 2016](#)

ADVANCED text: [Dima Albadra et. al., "Participatory design in refugee camps: comparison of different methods and visualization tools," Building Research & Information, March 24, 2020](#)

- Skim pages 1-3 and look at photos on pages 7-11

Concluding Discussion Questions:

- Who are the main stakeholders in refugee camp design?
- How are humanitarian agencies' approaches to camp design evolving?
- In an ideal world, what do you think the future of camp design would look like?
- Now, how would you define a home? A refugee camp?

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VOCABULARY (AIMED AT UPPER-LEVEL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AGED 16-18)

(Most definitions taken from the Oxford English Dictionary via Google)

- **Temporal:** relating to time
- **Prefabricated:** manufactured ahead of time to enable quick or easy assembly on site
- **Lived environment:** the combined social, cultural, and physical conditions that influence the life of an individual or community
- **Infrastructure:** the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities (e.g. buildings, roads, power supplies) needed for the operation of a society or enterprise
- **Repatriation:** the return of someone to their own country
- **Stakeholder:** a person or group with an interest or concern in something
- **Participatory design:** an approach to design attempting to actively involve all stakeholders in the design process to help ensure the result meets their needs and is usable