Chapter 14
'Urban-itarian' Ecologies after Displacement from Syria

Estella Carpi ⓘ

14.1   Introduction

Over the last decade, and especially after the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul (Türkiye), NGO practitioners, policymakers, and scholars have encouraged humanitarian agencies to recognise the importance of integrating urban infrastructure and resources into humanitarian programming when intervening in crisis-affected settings. Donor investments have increasingly focused on enhancing urban responses to crisis, mostly identifying any kind of built and physical environment outside of camps as 'urban'. With an increasing focus on urban areas (Patel et al., 2017), the humanitarian sector began to develop a more nuanced understanding of urbanity: its infrastructure, service provisions, societal and spatial processes of segregation and fragmentation, (in)formal and community-based networks, and the broader relationship between transient humanitarian actors and the population at large (Landau et al., 2016; Sitko, 2017).

Against this backdrop, Lebanon, Jordan, and Türkiye have become important destinations for international humanitarian actors (e.g. NGOs, UN agencies, and other smaller scale initiatives) during the Syrian humanitarian crisis, which started as a result of an extremely violent governmental repression of a popular uprising in Spring 2011. According to UNHCR data (2022), the three countries have since received the largest number of refugees from Syria, in addition to previous migrations from other parts of the region (e.g. Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan).[1] The need

[1] UNHCR's most recent statistics show that Türkiye hosts approximately 3,980,000 refugees; Lebanon nearly 855,000; Jordan more than 3,000,000 refugees (https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria)

E. Carpi (✉)
Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction, University College London (UCL), London, UK
e-mail: e.carpi@ucl.ac.uk

to discuss the interface between the urban and the humanitarian does not only stem from these refugees predominantly residing in cities but also from the fact that humanitarian actors established their presence in different urban localities and, hence, in their respective (peri)urban histories. In this context, the relationship between humanitarian actors, urban actors, and local authorities has become an object of greater interest for humanitarianism and forced migration scholars.

International research has shown how the political management of refugee arrivals is not homogenous across Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan. While Türkiye's and Jordan's responses to displacement (especially from Syria) tends to develop at a national level, as both are generally characterised by centralised forms of state power, Lebanon's response largely develops through fragmented municipal responses (Boustani et al., 2016; Callet-Ravat & Madoré, 2016: 15; Şahin-Mencütek, 2020). However, even in the case of Jordan and Türkiye, where higher levels of administrative centralisation are expected, local authorities adopted nuanced security and management strategies towards the refugee presence – for instance, towards refugees from Syria – therefore implementing a nuanced response to crisis (Memişoğlu & Yavçan, 2022).

In light of increasingly urban-focused discussions within the humanitarian system, this chapter aims to unravel the concept of 'urban-itarian' (a crasis of 'humanitarian' and 'urban') and its relevance to contemporary humanitarian and urban worlds. First, it is built on some revisited considerations on previous comparative research (Carpi, 2017; Carpi & Boano, 2018a, b) that I conducted during 2016 and 2017 in Halba (the main city in the governorate of Akkar, northern Lebanon, approximately 20 kms from the Syrian border), in Kilis (a border town in southern Türkiye) and, through remote interviews, in ar-Ramtha (a border town in north-western Jordan). Second, it will build on my previous research on the politics of livelihoods and identity politics in Gaziantep in southern Türkiye (Carpi, 2020). Finally, the chapter is also built on my socio-spatial observations and conversations with Syrian refugee residents during summer 2022 in the Istanbul districts of Esenyurt, which today counts thousands of refugees among its own inhabitants, and Beyoğlu, an historical urban district generally identified as Istanbul's 'old town'. I believe both districts are relevant to unravel the idea of the 'urban-itarian' since these host a large number of aid and service providers. In these two districts, as will be evident, aid and service providers emerge as more or less visible in the public space.

I approach the 'urban-itarian' concept as a spatial and relational intersection between the humanitarian and the urban. As such, it can neither be reduced to governance nor to a mere discussion around the built environment. My longstanding reflections on how the urban-itarian concept works in these different field sites led me to value the importance of understanding how humanitarian actors inhabit these different places and how humanitarian assistance becomes diversely (in)visible across Middle Eastern countries receiving refugees. In this vein, both humanitarian and urban actors actively contribute to local urban histories. Their spatial relationship as well as their relational history comprise relational and spatial ecology that I

am interested in investigating. More specifically, this urban-itarian ecology is made up of encounters as well as missed encounters between these two worlds – namely, my multisite-based reflections on this ecology relate to the relational and spatial interplay of humanitarian and urban actors; a vernacular understanding of the urban; and, the urban-humanitarian management of refugee arrivals.

Displacement scholarship has primarily focused on the increasingly urban nature of forced displacement and on the urban future of humanitarian crises (e.g. Archer, 2017). Against the backdrop of such extensive research on 'urban refugees', my endeavour in conceptualising the urban-itarian is instead aimed at understanding the interspace where urban and humanitarian worlds encounter or do not encounter. In fact, both actors and their respective built and physical environments come to give rise to such a complex ecology that I endeavour to investigate. Thereby, urban-itarian encounters involve a discussion about coordination/lack of coordination in aid and service provision, and deliberate or unwilling modalities of co-governance (Boustani et al., 2016; Mourad & Piron, 2016). Importantly, they can also shed light on how development assistance and welfare provision became interrelated with humanitarian assistance (Gabiam, 2016), especially in Türkiye's urban areas (Kubat, 2010, p. 33).

On the one hand, in the longer term capturing urban-itarian encounters can serve the important purpose of evaluating how the refugee and the presence of humanitarian actors have affected the longstanding hardships of urban life (e.g. chronic poverty and lack of decent housing, potable water, work, sanitation, and food security). Scholars have focused on such hardships especially after the 'diversity turn' (Berg and Sigona 2013 in Biehl, 2015), where innumerable national groups co-exist and new variables shape such a co-existence in urban contexts (ibid.; Tsavdaroglou, 2020). On the other hand, the concept of the urban-itarian is largely informed by those segments of displacement scholarship that have discussed how urban actors manage refugee life. However, beyond the focus on urban life and refugee management, it is the dwellers' lived experience and the politics in practice of urban and humanitarian actors that I intend to unpack here rather than their official modes of governance.

In this framework, I intend to advance an understanding of the relational and spatial ecology to which the humanitarian and the urban worlds give birth. By 'worlds' I not only refer to the actors who inhabit it, but also to symbols and other visual forms as well as to the political negotiations and relations between urban and humanitarian actors normally assembled under the broad and less fluid label of 'governance'. In this chapter, I will show how both displaced people and local citizens in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan lead hybrid lifestyles while developing complex livelihood strategies, building their worlds across the urban and the rural. In this scenario, the working concept of 'urban-itarian' does not intend to mark those spaces as *exclusively* or *predominantly* urban, but rather as an interface where humanitarian and urban actors and negotiations end up marginalising or assimilating the rural and the peri-urban (where a place presents both rural and urban characteristics), regardless of environmental complexities.

I conceptualise the urban-itarian through Lefebvre's (1991) social theory of *lived space*. Notably, I do not engage with his conception of *perceived space* – which would imply a space syntax analysis of the study area – but instead with the space perception of residents and humanitarian workers and how they make symbolical use of space and its objects (ibid., p. 39). This means that some symbols and places are not necessarily the official cues that generally make a city; similarly, such symbols and places may not necessarily be marked by humanitarian logos or images (Carpi, 2022). Yet, the lack of visual symbols or images does matter in order to show how humanitarianism is entangled in the different urban fabric of each locality analysed here.

Unlike in the border towns of Halba, Kilis, and ar-Ramtha, in the extremely dense urbanity of the city of Istanbul, the humanitarian presence is less likely to make services publicly visible and to create a clear-cut landscape easily recognisable as 'humanitarian'. In this vein, in the places where the humanitarian presence is more difficult to be identified, the urban-itarian ecology still undergirds the provision of services, although in less overt ways. Moreover, such an urban-itarian ecology is characterised by opposing timeframes: while humanitarian symbols, logos, flags, and offices appear as temporary to international dwellers, for local and refugee residents they are often a 'permanent topography of assistance' (Smirl, 2015, p. 111). With compounds having often become a metaphor of contemporary humanitarian intervention (ibid., p. 113; Duffield, 2015, p. S85), my experiences in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan instead come from out-of-camp open spaces where the transformation of a social space into a humanitarian space can still happen through less straightforward avenues.

Against this backdrop, first, I will explain what a vernacular understanding of 'urban' involves in the different field-sites. Second, through the case of an internationally-funded market in Halba and the hybrid economies in border towns, I will discuss the relational dimension of the urban-itarian ecology and how local (peri)urban histories and relationships go unheeded. With research conducted in Lebanon and Jordan, my observations will point to how the urbanisation of aid increasingly sheds light on the importance of the relationship between humanitarian actors and local authorities. Finally, the research I carried out in the two Istanbul neighbourhoods will show the spatial dimension of the urban-itarian ecology and the need to go beyond overtly visible forms of humanitarian assistance to capture the spatial politics in place. Drawing upon local scholarship, I will show how, while the humanitarian in Türkiye has hardly been investigated in relation to the urban, processes of migration, vulnerability, and marginalisation (which, yet all speak to humanitarianism) have been researched in relation to the urban in the growing field of '*Gecekondu* Studies' in Turkish (Karpat, 1976). In the three countries, the urban-itarian helps to spell out and comprehend the ongoing relational and spatial processes.

14.2 Vernacular Understandings of 'Urban': Does Humanitarianism Make the City?

Whenever international scholars broach migration-related issues (e.g. integration), the urban as a system and a way of life re-emerges in its primary importance. However, most of the research conducted on urban migration adopts a normative understanding of 'urban', with mainly local municipality and governorate actors being viewed as 'urban actors'. Alternative vernacular understandings of the latter, such as figures who, from local people's perspective *make* the city, often go unheeded. Instead, I seek to adopt a contextual understanding of 'urban', which meaningfully emerged in my research on Halba (Lebanon). This small city, counting approximately 4000 inhabitants (with no official census conducted in Lebanon since 1932), is still characterised by a rural economy and poor urban infrastructure. However, unlike the surrounding hamlets, Halba still offers more job and shopping opportunities. The 'urban', in my research across Halba, was locally identified as the presence of a university branch, library staff, shops, malls, and cafeterias (cfr. Carpi, 2017). Such vernacular understandings indicate that entertainment and learning spaces were perceived as a sign of urbanity that humanitarian actors can further empower. By this token, my interpretation of 'urban' goes beyond 'systems-thinking' in defining cities (Campbell, 2016), which has inadvertently dictated the orthodoxy of what urbanity *should* involve in any space and at any time.

More specifically, in the research I carried out on Gaziantep in southeast Türkiye (Carpi, 2020), I observed how the urban settings receiving large numbers of refugees from Syria were perceived as 'enlarged cities' after such arrivals. Gaziantep, a city of more than two million residents, has been a main destination for refugees from Syria in Türkiye (some 462,000 people who now make up nearly one-fourth of the city's population). It has been considered a place where skilled and unskilled employment is way more likely than in nearby smaller towns located on the Syrian-Turkish border. At that time, I noticed that especially the presence of Syrian businessmen was able to trigger the local perception that Gaziantep had become 'more of a city' after 2011 (ibid.). In other words, Syrian businessmen in border cities such as Gaziantep further marked the urban character of the city's politics of livelihoods as well as its urban lifestyle. From a local perspective, the presence of 'refugee businessmen' had amplified the urban character of Gaziantep.[2] Along with the presence of libraries, shops, and university branches (like in the case of Halba), Gaziantep's urban space was described by local residents as 'more urban' than ever.

---

[2] 'Refugee businessmen' from Syria do exist in Türkiye. However, this does not imply that every Syrian national is allowed to set up a commercial activity in Türkiye. For instance, although these everyday regulations are perceived as being more enabling in Türkiye (Irgil, 2022) than in Lebanon (Carpi, 2020), people holding the temporary protection status are not allowed to start businesses. Most of these businessmen have Turkish citizenship. Here I refer to some refugee men I met in Gaziantep in summer 2017 who viewed themselves as 'refugees', i.e., as unable to return to Syria if they ever wished but not official refugees in the Turkish context.

Importantly, I do not intend to compare the urban space of Halba – which is rather a 'peri-urban' space that local inhabitants refer to as 'neither a village, nor a city' (Carpi, 2017) – to large urban areas such as Gaziantep and, later in this paper, Istanbul. Indeed, in the small urban and demographic space of Halba, humanitarian logos and offices could play a substantial role in *making the city*. Instead, in large Turkish cities such as Gaziantep and Istanbul, the physical humanitarian presence blurs into a large space where urban visibility continuously needs to be negotiated and, according to NGO practitioners (conversations in Gaziantep in 2017; Istanbul in 2022), it even puts subaltern humanitarian actors at risk of symbolical absorption into state-led hegemonic practices of aid provision. Particularly in Istanbul, Türkiye's most-populated city with nearly 16 million inhabitants and 540,000 Syrian refugees (3.4% of local demographics), humanitarianism is certainly deemed unlikely to make the city-space. Yet, while here we do not need humanitarianism to make the city, the power relations underlying the urban-itarian ecology in these large urban areas go unheeded in contemporary scholarship. This also shows a telling tendency of scholars in contemporary Türkiye to predominantly associate the relevance of humanitarianism with border areas and societies. Importantly, as will be evident, my conversations with aid practitioners and refugee residents in Istanbul highlighted power relations and negotiations around the humanitarian presence.

14.3   The Relational Dimension of the Urban-itarian Ecology

14.3.1   The Urban Shift: A Standardised Approach
              in Border Towns

Previously, I researched the humanitarian tendency to understand the space of intervention as dichotomic, centred on addressing either urban or camp refugees as though they were obviously separate realities and environments. As a result of the increasing urbanisation of humanitarian response, some towns in the border regions neighbouring Syria retain a rural character despite rapid growth accelerated by the arrival of large numbers of refugees. Indeed, in such areas, rural livelihoods are still at the centre of their economies. While these settings cannot be fully categorised as either urban or rural – rather implying a spatial continuum between the two – I observed how the urbanisation of humanitarian action, which sets urban livelihoods as a priority, is often applied regardless of spatial specificities. Moreover, often disputed, rapidly changing border territories are particularly complex environments (Carpi & Boano, 2018a).

Border towns hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees in the Middle East – such as Halba in northern Lebanon, Kilis in southern Türkiye, and ar-Ramtha in northwest Jordan – function as an interface between the rural and the urban. Halba, Kilis, and ar-Ramtha can be called 'peri-urban' as they form a mosaic of agricultural and urban ecosystems. A lack of systematic planning has meant that these towns have grown organically, with a proliferation of unauthorised and unregulated housing

and limited infrastructure development (Tacoli et al., 2015). Finding the right balance between urban and rural approaches, therefore, is a requirement for planning and for the development of humanitarian policies that reflect socio-spatial diversity. By this token, the 'urban shift' also proves to be exclusive, as it ends up both neglecting rural forms of livelihood and promoting inappropriate approaches to the complex systems and spaces at the peri-urban interface. The case of ar-Ramtha, Halba, and Kilis shows how the ways of life that cut across rural and urban spaces are inherently hybrid (Allen & Davila, 2002).

In the interviews I conducted with refugees from Syria in each of these localities, their majority believed they predominantly needed rural means of livelihoods to survive, while they noticed that international humanitarian support was growingly urban-centred (ibid.). This lack of balance in focus between rural and urban suggested the neglect of contextual specificities in traditional border economies. As an example, in the small city of Halba, most livelihood programmes revolved around IT classes and training to start private businesses that would strengthen the third sector's urban economy. The Syrian women interviewed in Winter 2017 (Carpi, 2017) affirmed that rural livelihood programmes were better able to provide them with sustainable income than urban livelihood programmes in Halba. While a large proportion of urban livelihood projects focus on making refugees employable in hairdressing and beauty salons or food groceries, Lebanese law allows them to work only in construction, gardening, cleaning, and agriculture. In the southern Turkish border town of Kilis, which is historically characterised by a traditional economy, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) started helping municipal authorities improve local service delivery in waste management and recovery with delay. Livelihood programmes initially prioritised agricultural activities (e.g. olive-picking) in the surrounding countryside as urban job opportunities for refugees and other low-income residents were rare. However, in the longer run, the refugee inhabitants I spoke to during 2017 negatively assessed the apparently abrupt, recent de-prioritisation of rural income activities vis-à-vis the urban. Unlike Kilis and Halba, in ar-Ramtha, humanitarian support has mainly been directed towards agriculture (Carpi & Boano, 2018a). While this is appropriate in this context where (non)governmental support has historically favoured urban dwellers over farmers (and where a large proportion of food needs is met on international markets rather than through domestic production), according to refugees and humanitarian practitioners living there, a better balance between support for urban and rural ways of life still needed to be achieved.

14.3.2 The Halba Market

A further example of how local urban histories and relationships are ignored by humanitarian actors is offered by the case of the urban market in Halba – a 2016 initiative that pumped large amounts of funding into the new project, allegedly aimed at enlarging local economic capacities (Carpi & Boano, 2018b). Funded by

UNDP and UK-Aid, the market was built in Halba's surroundings. Set in 6000 square metres of public space and with the potential capacity to accommodate 390 traders, the market was inaugurated in December 2016 (UK-Aid, 2016). However, it was shut down after four days as the newly appointed municipal authorities had not given permission for its operation.

According to the local governor (in local Arabic, *mohafez*), whom I interviewed in February 2017, the market would soon have failed because an extremely small segment of local consumers could have reached the area. The area was poorly frequented since public transport – the only type of transport that local and refugee residents can generally afford – does not reach this isolated area. The case illustrates how the provision of public infrastructure needs to be carefully planned and coordinated with the relevant municipal authorities and how the local urban systems of trade and consumption work. Over time, in this viewpoint, the market would have implied a waste of resources (Carpi & Boano, 2018b). As a result, even though UNDP had provided financial management and capacity-building support to the Halba municipality, the market was short-lived. Ignoring the socio-spatial implications of the market's construction, the actual needs and the local infrastructure ended up unused, abandoned, and ineffective (Fig. 14.1).

In light of my more recent research on the urban-itarian, the case of the Halba market further shows how, despite their need to build access to local populations in need, foreign humanitarian actors are usually reluctant to involve local authorities in their own work. Many interviewees (six NGO practitioners in Halba, March 2017) openly declared they desire to keep humanitarian action out of local politics.

Fig. 14.1 Foreign aid funded market in Halba, February 2017. Photo credits: Estella Carpi

Yet their attempt at avoiding involvement in local politics and the decision to exclude public authorities, who still gatekeep urban settings to a certain extent, remain neatly political, often impeding multilateral knowledge transfers that would eventually lead to actual collaborations and exchange.

In the Lebanese scenario, foreign humanitarian actors, with meaningful delay, resorted to local authorities to guarantee legitimacy merely as a way to build quicker access to refugee populations rather than to seek in-depth knowledge of the peri-urban history and local life. The Lebanese case shows how training urban actors and seeking only their formal approval to operate should not be mistaken for substantive engagement from the side of foreign humanitarian actors. These findings appear as antithetical to my research experience in Türkiye, where the approval of humanitarian programming and the subsequent operationality of foreign humanitarian actors had to come directly from governmental administration (interview with UNDP officer in Gaziantep, 2017; conversation with two NGO practitioners in Esenyurt, 2022). In the case of Türkiye, therefore, the urban-itarian encounter, rather than missed, emerges as imposed since any form of humanitarian and civilian support is increasingly bound by the rulemaking and monitoring of the central state (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2021, p. 8). Similar to Lebanon, however, a deeper mutual understanding between local governance and the humanitarian system is lacking along with the possibility for them to integrate.

More broadly, scholars have reported diverse accounts on the either cooperative or reluctant attitude of foreign humanitarian actors towards urban actors in the countries receiving refugees from Syria. For instance, according to some sources (Betts et al., 2017), municipalities in Lebanon and Türkiye were eager to collaborate with humanitarian actors and improve their urban infrastructure. By contrast, during my 2016 and 2017 fieldwork in Lebanon, the Halba municipality's deputy mayor and mayor explicitly said they lacked, to some extent, the incentive to improve the city (Carpi, 2020): in their view, even when humanitarian actors began offering greater support, developing solid infrastructure and well-functioning urban systems might attract larger numbers of refugees from other areas that are less well served. From this perspective, as the Global North's borders are mostly inaccessible, preserving the *status quo* in the towns receiving refugees, rather than enhancing the capacity of urban actors and infrastructures, spares these areas having to host even larger numbers of refugees in search of job opportunities and better quality of life. Hence, my past research in Lebanon illustrates that the international failure in upholding and sharing responsibility often resulted in the lack of cooperation from urban actors (Carpi & Boano, 2018b) and in a missed urban-itarian encounter. The lack of incentives for improving local infrastructure questions the oversimplifying *dictum* of 'working with urban actors and local authorities', which overpopulates today's experts' recommendations contained in policy briefs and humanitarian accounts.

In response to these systems of urban governance, on the one hand, in Lebanon, foreign humanitarian actors implicitly ask for unconditional intervention, denouncing bureaucratic hurdles and local power dynamics with which they must comply. In Türkiye, on the other hand, the foreign humanitarian actors I met over the years

in Gaziantep and Istanbul all vehemently advocated for 'democratising urban governance' as the centralised system of aid provision and coordination is deemed to be 'suffocating' (interview with UNDP officer in Gaziantep, 2017; conversation with two NGO practitioners in Esenyurt, August 2022). In sum, while in Lebanon, as mentioned above, foreign humanitarian actors did not opt for building relations with urban actors to illusively remain disentangled from local politics, in Türkiye, foreign humanitarian actors were expressively invited to not participate in local politics (conversation with NGO practitioner in Esenyurt, January 2022).

In Lebanon-focused humanitarian reports, where the central government's continuous abdication of responsibility is often indulged due to presumed 'state fragility' (Mouawad & Baumann, 2017), Lebanese municipalities are increasingly cited as an actor to be supported for improving the livelihood and the basic service delivery of both Syrians and local residents and as actors of social cohesion activities (Callet-Ravat & Madoré, 2016, p. 21). This, as seen, clashes with what Halba's mayors and deputy mayors hoped for. There is therefore a need to acknowledge municipalities in humanitarian action (ibid., p. 6).

The case of the short-lived Halba market thus not only shows the need for in-depth knowledge of local urban histories before supporting local urban infrastructure and acknowledging the close interconnection of urban and the rural lifestyles, but also the peculiar relational history between urban and humanitarian actors, which, at times, cannot be learnt through mere official plans and agreements in place.

14.4 The Spatial Dimension of the Urban-itarian Ecology

14.4.1 The 'Urban-itarian' in Two Istanbul Districts

I will now integrate my earlier reflections on the 'urban-itarian' with observations and conversations during 2022 with nine NGO practitioners and faith-inspired charity coordinators, six refugee families, and eight refugee individuals in the municipalities of Esenyurt and Beyoğlu within the city of Istanbul, the icon of public life (Birkalan-Gedik, 2011, p. 2). Unlike Lebanon and Jordan, Istanbul (and Türkiye in general) is a place where humanitarian actors historically intervened to assist people affected by disasters. As a result, it is noteworthy to specify the type of humanitarian actors I refer to here. According to the practitioners I spoke with and in line with my personal observations throughout the districts of Esenyurt and Beyoğlu, the humanitarian actors dealing with forced migrants – especially from Syria – have the longest presence. Notwithstanding, some of the providers who initially came to assist local dwellers displaced from disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and landslides enlarged their mandate to forced migration and, thus, in some cases, remained on the ground for a longer time. In the Turkish context, therefore, the urban-itarian encounter does not merely happen as a result of humanitarian actors coming to assist in conflict, but, instead, it continuously occurs in various Turkish cities often

faced with natural hazards which, historically, caused the loss of many human lives (Johnson, 2011; Candaş et al., 2016, p. 669). When such disasters occur across Türkiye, international humanitarian actors mostly intervene in indirect ways, namely, in the capacity of donors or temporary aid providers (conversation with NGO practitioner in Esenyurt, January 2022). In this sense, it is hard to identify a continual presence of disaster-focused humanitarian actors in Türkiye's urban spaces.

With humanitarian agencies being barely visible in the space of the big city, I was interested in observing how their (mostly temporary) emplacement challenged, completed, or preserved Istanbul's urban systems, spatial negotiations, and inequalities. Wondering how the international humanitarian presence, overall, relates to Türkiye's urbanity means understanding how it relates to areas of residency, leisure, social mingling, and necessity. To capture the emplacement of the international humanitarian into local urban life requires an up-close look at vernacular understandings of city-making and urban history. Beyoğlu, with some migrant and refugee groups living in old buildings (mostly in the Taksim area), emerged as a particularly relevant space. In fact, after a year-long observation, it was possible to identify many faith-inspired aid and service providers, often cooperating with the nearby churches, which, as a Beyoğlu-based foreign Catholic priest I spoke to affirmed, 'intentionally prefer keeping a low profile to not be absorbed into the hegemonic way of doing humanitarian aid, such as the *Kizilay* (Turkish Red Crescent, which is led by the national government)'. Indeed, due to the scarce visibility of such refugee and migrant support services, Beyoğlu is mostly viewed as a touristic neighbourhood that has become increasingly middle-class oriented and gentrified over the last two decades.

Esenyurt, however, emerged as a greatly relevant urban area due to the large number of refugees inhabiting this one-time village. Located 20 kms from Istanbul, it initially had no proper urban infrastructure in place, with local population and constructions growing rapidly, appearing like an 'end-of-century urbanisation' and acquiring a class-based segregation character (Robins & Aksoy, 2003, p. 344). Although during the 1970s, it turned into 'a city in its own right' (ibid., p. 343), it is generally considered to be a place of disorder and a hotbed for political violence and conservativism (ibid.).

Looking at the urban-itarian in the Levant and Türkiye is an effort that needs to consider how the 'urban' is loaded with antithetical connotations that stand against the 'Rural Other' (Erdi, 2017). In this vein, local dwellers often view international humanitarian actors (which tend to temporarily settle in small or large cities) as 'foreigners who strengthen the capacities of places that are already doing way better than Turkish rural areas, because the political capital at stake is higher' (conversation with Syrian resident, Esenyurt, August 2022). As in Lebanon – merchants on the urban coast and mostly peasants and shepherds in inner villages (Khater, 2001) – urbanity in Türkiye implied access to different job opportunities and sectors. Therefore, ruralness is a meaningful political representation that carries specific spatial stories of labour migration towards Turkish cities (Mansuroğlu et al., 2006, p. 176; Nalbantoğlu, 1997) and diverse forms of vulnerabilities among the rural population during the urban age (*kent çağı*). Meaningfully, the 1930s and early

1940s had seen unprecedented efforts to realise Mustafa Kemal-led republic's 'civilising mission' in rural settlements (Nalbantoğlu, 1997, p. 200), where urbanity became a synonym with imperative secularisation and modernisation (Bozdoğan, 1997).

How Turkish urban scholars convey their vernacular understanding of urbanity particularly stands against rurality. Indeed, if we adopt a retrogressive perspective, the traditional Ottoman settlement fabric remained the same until the 1940s, when multi-group migration from the rural areas to the cities rapidly gained momentum. The resulting uncontrolled development of cities gave rise to the reshaping of some settlements, which became very different from the traditional (Kubat, 2010, p. 34) while remaining ambiguously connected to rurality. In the Turkish context, architects, urban geographers, and historians have long emphasised the impact of party politics on such urban-rural relationships (e.g. Kubat, 2010; Çaylı, 2022). In this framework, unravelling the urban-itarian therefore means digging into multiple state politics of space (Çaylı, 2022) as Türkiye's urban spaces have been built upon multi-parties interventions happening across different historical stages (Lotfata, 2013). Such political actors, in turn, interact with short or long-term humanitarian actors.

14.4.2 *Invisible Urban-itarian Ecologies in Esenyurt and Beyoğlu?*

In Istanbul both local and foreign humanitarian actors have been made invisible in different ways. On the one hand, according to the practitioners from international NGOs and local faith-inspired charities I spoke to, the local government administration often relegated official humanitarian aid provision and logos to marginal spaces to make refugeehood invisible in the city. This first process of 'invisibilisation' is related to the historical formation of refugee-friendly urban areas in cities like Istanbul. Poverty, difficult living conditions, and slums (*gecekondu*) were part of Türkiye's urban normality during the 1970s; nearly half the population of Türkiye's largest cities Istanbul and Ankara had been living in *gecekondu*. However, slum housing for low-income local, refugee, and migrant residents was surely not unique to Türkiye (Avci, 2014, p. 212). Indeed, in the broader region, there has historically been a large gap between rapid urbanisation and slow industrialisation, which can be further exacerbated by limited public funds and poor urban infrastructure (ibid.). As a result of rapid urbanisation (*kentleşme*) and the migration of low-income people to urban slums, 'user-built first-generation squatting was progressively replaced by higher-rise, multi-unit apartments, now produced by a speculative process of commercialised, profit-driven, frequently illegal, and substandard construction' (Bakır, 2019). In this context, such transformations in the urban landscape involved interruptions on the 'urban morphology' (Eren & Tökmeci, 2012, p. 206), that is, on the formation and marginalisation of human settlements in the urban space.

On the other hand, the invisibilisation of the humanitarian presence in Istanbul pinpoints how different political ideologies have impacted the physical environment. Some local opinion-makers from upper and middle classes, ideologically aspiring to urban Türkiye's 'Westernisation' – and echoing the Kemal's 'civilising mission' – also contributed to making refugeehood and humanitarianism invisible to plan the transformation of the 'Oriental city' into an 'Occidental city' (Erkan, 2010, p. 189).

It is indeed dutiful to consider vernacular trajectories of humanitarianism in the city. Without getting too deep into this longstanding terminological debate (e.g. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Fiori, 2020), Istanbul's urban history suggests that 'humanitarianism' per se may not be a suitable term and concept for referring to some forms of local relief. Over the course of history, humanitarian aid, welfare provision, charity, and other altruistic activities do not easily give rise to clear-cut categories of philanthropic action. Besides, the urban-itarian encounter in Istanbul does not necessarily happen between domestic and international actors. In this case, importantly, the humanitarian and welfare regimes in which local society engaged, as well as forced migration and chronic poverty, were enmeshed within the city's historical fabric. As Kubat (2010, p. 33) narrates, from an historical perspective, welfare provision, humanitarian services, religiously-inspired philanthropy, and urbanisation are all closely enmeshed:

> The Ottomans employed systematic measures, such as resettlement policies linked to voluntary and forced migrations…They interpreted the *wakf* (pious foundation) as an institution to supply the religious and socio-economic needs of society through service facilities and buildings and created *imaret* complexes (charity establishments for distributing food to the poor) which were founded and managed by the *wakf* institution. These principles, especially the institution of the *wakf-imaret* system, played an important role in the creation and development of Turkish cities.

My observations and conversations in Esenyurt and Beyoğlu explicitly point to the intention of the urban administration to make humanitarian action invisible in the public sphere. While many NGOs are located in districts such as Esenyurt and Fatih with a majority of foreign migrants and refugees who can afford low-cost rent and living, humanitarian symbols and logos are still deliberately concealed in such spaces. This deliberate politics of invisibility of alternative providers is a response to the Turkish government's tendency to centralise aid provision while obfuscating the multiple origins of its funding and its multiple actors. Indeed, it has recently been observed that the well-known Türkiye-European Union deal reshaped local welfare by empowering the public sector mandate vis-à-vis international humanitarian actors (Yilmaz, 2019). Consequently, the role of the public sector expanded at the expense of NGOs, especially in social assistance and healthcare (ibid.). Local scholars (e.g. Kubat, 2010) showed how unravelling this longstanding muddled relationship between welfare, humanitarian assistance, and the violent rural-to-urban transformation is a challenging yet worthy task to undertake if we are to investigate the urban-itarian ecology in Türkiye.

14.5 Concluding Remarks

As discussed in this chapter, the urban-itarian does not focus on urban refugees *versus* camp-based refugees and their respective urban demands (Azizi et al., 2021, p. 4455), but rather on the urban-itarian ecology: namely, the relational and spatial interplay of humanitarian and urban actors, their vernacular imaginary of the city, and the increasingly discussed urban-humanitarian management of refugee arrivals. In the cases cited, urban and relational histories barely informed humanitarian action in these contexts.

Within the urban humanitarianism literature itself (e.g. Campbell, 2016), key concepts such as 'urban planning' and 'urbanisation' have mostly been approached as ideal-types of city-related phenomena rather than how such processes are experienced and understood at an endemic level. If urbanisation is believed to radically transform every aspect of social life, institutions of governance, climatic processes, and lifestyles, how the urban-itarian ecology plays out seems to suggest a different story. It indicates that people lead hybrid lifestyles while developing complex livelihood strategies, building their worlds across the urban and the rural. Despite decades of humanitarian and urban studies and efforts, standardised strategies meant to integrate the urban and the humanitarian risk ignoring longstanding urban life histories and the vernacular understanding of space and society that local and refugee populations uphold.

By the way of conclusion, the urban-itarian ecology can flesh out how the reflections on migration in urban areas should not be limited to discussions around normative definitions of urban infrastructure, governance, and landscape or around exclusively visible forms of assistance provision. As seen, the urban and humanitarian worlds interact in an ecology undergirded by both continuities and disruptions across urban and rural spaces and relationships while overshadowing the rural component that still defines the livelihoods and lifestyles of many who inhabit the urban-itarian ecology.

References

Allen, A., & Davila, J. (2002). *Mind the gap! Bridging the rural–urban divide* (Report). Institute of Development Studies.

Archer, D. (2017). *The future of humanitarian crises is urban. IIED Blog* [Online]. International Institute for Environment and Development. www.iied.org/future-humanitarian-crises-urban

Avci, Ö. (2014). The making of a *Gecekondulu* identity: Journalistic representations of the squatters in Turkey in the 1970s. *Journal of Urban History, 40*(2), 211–231.

Azizi, S., et al. (2021). Aid allocation for camp-based and urban refugees with uncertain demand and replenishments. *Production and Operations Management, 30*(2), 4455–4474.

Bakır, N. Y. (2019). Project-based urban renewal and transformation of urban landscape in Turkey. In L. Loures (Ed.), *Landscape reclamation – Rising from what's left* (pp. 1–22). Books on Demand.

Betts, A., Memişoğlu, F., & Ali, A. (2017). *Local politics and the Syrian refugee crisis: Exploring responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan*. Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper.

Biehl, K. S. (2015). Spatialising diversities, diversifying spaces: Housing experiences and home space perceptions in a migrant hub of Istanbul. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(4), 596–607.

Birkalan-Gedik, H. (2011). Anthropological writings on urban Turkey: A historical overview. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development, 40*(1/2), 1–66.

Boustani, M., Carpi, E., Gebara, H., & Mourad, Y. (2016). *Responding to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon. Collaboration between aid agencies and local governance structures.* UN-Habitat and 'Issam Fares Institute (AUB). Report published with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

Bozdoğan, S. (1997). The predicament of modernism in Turkish architectural culture: An overview. In S. Bozdoğan & R. Kasaba (Eds.), *Rethinking modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (pp. 133–156). University of Washington Press.

Callet-Ravat, L, & Madoré, M. (2016). *The role of municipalities of Turkey and Lebanon in the Syrian Migratory Influx Management*. United Cities and Local Governments – Middle East and West Asia Report, supported by the European Commission.

Campbell, L. (2016). *Stepping Back: Understanding cities and their systems* (ALNAP Working Paper). ALNAP.

Candaş, E., Flacke, J., & Yomralioğlu, T. (2016). Understanding urban regeneration in Turkey. *The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, XLI-B4.

Carpi, E. (2017). Learning and earning in constrained labour markets. The politics of livelihoods in Lebanon's Halba. In J. Fiori & A. Rigon (Eds.), *Making lives. Refugee self-reliance and humanitarian action in cities* (pp. 11–36). Save the Children UK.

Carpi, E. (2020). The Borderwork of humanitarianism during displacement from war-torn Syria. Livelihoods as identity politics in northern Lebanon and Southeast Turkey. In Z. Babar (Ed.), *Mobility and forced displacement in the Middle East* (pp. 33–53). Hurst and Oxford University Press.

Carpi, E. (2022). Spaces of transregional aid and visual politics in Lebanon. In L. Schiocchet, & C. Nolle-Karimi (Eds), *Forced migration studies: Current interventions* (pp. 87–104). Refugee Outreach and Research Network (ROR-n).

Carpi, E., & Boano, C. (2018a, March 27). Border towns: Humanitarian assistance in Peri-Urban Areas. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, *71*. Humanitarian Practice Network, Overseas Development Institute.

Carpi, E., & Boano, C. (2018b, February 7). Humanitarianism in an urban Lebanese setting: Missed opportunities. Legal Agenda. http://legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=4211

Çaylı, E. (2022). Introduction: The material and spatial politics of emergency. In E. Çaylı, P. Aykac, & S. Ercan (Eds.), *Architectures of emergency in Turkey: Heritage, displacement and catastrophe* (pp. 1–20). I.B. Tauris.

Duffield, M. (2015). From immersion to simulation: Remote methodologies and the decline of area studies. *Review of African Political Economy, 41*(1), S75–S94.

Erdi, G. (2017). Neighbourhood resistance and *Gecekondu* women in Ankara. In E. Gülçin & Y. Şentürk (Eds.), *Identity, justice, and resistance in the Neoliberal City* (pp. 143–170). Palgrave Macmillan.

Eren, İ. Ö., & Tökmeci, E. Ö. (2012). A view on urban regeneration in Turkey with local implications: Bursa case in terms of sustainability. *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment, 162*, 205–216.

Erkan, N. E. (2010). Urban planning in Turkey as a process of translation. *Translation Studies, 3*(2), 188–200.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., & Fiori, J. (2020). Migration, humanitarianism, and the politics of knowledge. An interview with Juliano Fiori. *Migration and Society, 3*, 180–189.

Gabiam, N. (2016). *The politics of suffering. Syria's Palestinian refugee camps*. Indiana University Press.

Irgil, E. (2022). When the government comes to the Neighbourhood: Everyday regulations and Syrian refugees' encounters with local state authorities. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 35*(2), 893–909.

Johnson, C. (2011). Kernels of change: Civil society challenges to state-led strategies for recovery and risk reduction in Turkey. *Environment and Urbanization, 23*(2), 415–430.

Karpat, K. (1976). *Gecekondu. Rural migration and urbanization*. Cambridge University Press.

Khater, A. F. (2001). *Inventing home: Emigration, gender, and middle class in Lebanon, 1870–1920*. University of California Press.

Kubat, A. S. (2010). The study of urban form in Turkey. *Urban Morphology, 14*(1), 31–48.

Landau, L., et al. (2016). *Becoming urban humanitarians: Engaging local government to protect displaced people*. The Urban Institute.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Basil Blackwell.

Lotfata, A. (2013). Transformation of urban spaces through time-space politics towards ethical developing urban spaces in Turkey context. *Global Journal of Human Social Science and Political Science, 13*(4), 21–26.

Mansuroğlu, S., Ortacesme, V., & Karaguzel, O. (2006). Biotope mapping in an urban environment and its implications for urban management in Turkey. *Journal of Environmental Management, 81*, 175–187.

Memişoğlu, F., & Yavçan, B. (2022). Beyond ideology – A comparative analysis of how local governance can expand National Integration Policy: The case of Syrian refugees in Istanbul. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 48*(3), 503–523.

Mouawad, J., & Baumann, H. (2017). 'Wayn al Dawla?' Locating the Lebanese state in social theory. *Arab Studies Journal, 25*(1), 66–90.

Mourad, L., & Piron, L.-H. (2016). Municipal service delivery, stability, social cohesion and legitimacy in Lebanon. In *An analytical literature review*. American University of Beirut.

Nalbantoğlu, G. B. (1997). Silent interruptions. Urban encounters with rural Turkey. In S. Bozdoğan & R. Kasaba (Eds.), *Rethinking modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (pp. 102–210). University of Washington Press.

Patel, R., et al. (2017). Discussion informed by recurrent lessons from a systematic review on targeting practices in urban humanitarian crises. *Plos Currents, 13*(9).

Robins, K., & Aksoy, A. (2003). Worlds apart and together: Trial by space in Istanbul. In G. Bridge & S. Watson (Eds.), *A companion to the City* (pp. 341–353). Wiley-Blackwell.

Şahin-Mencütek, Z. (2020). *Refugee governance, state and politics in the Middle East*. Routledge.

Şahin-Mencütek, Z., Karal, D., & Altıntop, I. (2021). Governance of refugee children protection in Turkey: Between vulnerability and paternalism. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, 19*(3), 316–330.

Sitko, P. (2017, May 30). Humanitarian response is getting a major urban Overhaul. *Citiscope*. http:// citiscope.org/commentary/2017/05/humanitarian-response-getting-major-urban-overhaul

Smirl, L. (2015). *Spaces of aid. How cars, compounds and hotels shape humanitarianism*. Zed Books.

Tacoli, Cecilia, McGranahan, Gordon and Satterthwaite, David (2015) *Urbanisation, Rural–urban migration and urban poverty*. : IIED Publications.

Tsavdaroglou, C. (2020). The refugees' right to the Center of the City and Spatial Justice: Gentrification vs Commoning practices in Tarlabaşı-Istanbul. *Urban Planning, 5*(3), 230–240.

UK-Aid. (2016, December 16). *UK-Aid funded projects in underprivileged Akkar*. British Embassy Beirut. *Gov.uk* [Online]. www.gov.uk/government/news/the-uk-has-not-forgotten-akkar

Yilmaz, V. (2019). The emerging welfare mix for Syrian refugees in Turkey: The interplay between humanitarian assistance Programmes and the Turkish welfare system. *Journal of Social Policy, 48*(4), 721–739.

Estella Carpi is an Assistant Professor in Humanitarian Studies in the Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction at University College London (UCL). Between 2016 and 2022, she was a Research Associate in the Development Planning Unit and the Department of Geography at UCL, respectively working on the urban-humanitarian nexus and on 'Southern-led" responses to displacement. She received her PhD in social anthropology from the University of Sydney (2015), with a project on the social response to crisis management in Lebanon. After studying Arabic in Milan and Damascus (2002–2008), she worked as a researcher for several academic and research institutions in the Middle East. Her work has appeared in international academic journals such as the *Journal of Refugee Studies* and *Third World Quarterly*. As a multilingual researcher, she has published in Italian, Arabic, French, and Brazilian Portuguese. She is author of *The Politics of Crisis-Making. Cultures of Assistance and Forced Displacement in Lebanon* (Indiana University Press, 2023).