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Closing Camps

Introduction

Belgrade: January 2018. On one freezing January morning we return to the backstage of a major recent development in central Belgrade: The Belgrade Waterfront. What is now a large, flat and empty area between the main station and the shining new building of the waterfront was only one year earlier occupied by abandoned warehouses where up to 2,000 refugees found shelter for several winter months, establishing one of the largest makeshift camps in Europe. After many announcements, the camp was closed in May of 2017. The (remaining) refugees were evicted and taken to a formal camp in Obrenovac, a small town 32km from Belgrade. In visiting the site today, one finds little material testimony of the life lived in a sort of city-in-the-city that for months hosted, in dire conditions, thousands of individuals waiting to go north. What is left of that social life? How should the closure and the erasure of this makeshift camp be understood in terms of the geographies of informal mobility affecting the Balkan region, and Serbia in particular? How can one study a camp that is no more? (author's fieldnotes)

Kigoma: April 2018. Mtabila is currently a camp for the Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa (JKT) branch of the Tanzanian military, but until 2012 had been a camp for Burundian refugees, with aid provided by international agencies for sixteen years. In 2012, after years of decreased services and calls for return, cessation removed the refugee status of over 35,000 Burundians remaining in Mtabila Camp. Soldiers set-up military encampments encircling the then 'former refugee' camp for several months, to ensure 'security' during the mass repatriation exercise, which UNHCR reports was safe, orderly, and 'with dignity.' Refugees however recount violence, the destruction of homes, theft, and forced return. Since 2015, many former Mtabila residents have fled Burundi again, and now live in nearby camps in Tanzania. Their time in Mtabila, and its closure, figure prominently in the life history interviews I conduct—including fears of future refoulement. I pass the turnoff for Mtabila many times on my way to the current camps, but as it is a military site, I never visit. What remains of Mtabila's period as a refugee camp? How should its closing

and afterlife be understood in terms of the geopolitics of forced migration and humanitarianism? (author's fieldnotes)

Despite their differences, these snapshots both show how the closures of refugee camps deserve as much scrutiny as their opening and functioning. While research on camps has been attentive to their spatialities relatively little work has focused on closures. This article focuses on the diverse closures of the wide range of formal and informal camps for migrants and refugees. As in the snapshots above, camp closure often implies a degree of violence, and even its anticipation may have important effects on camp residents, including their decision whether to leave before the final events of closure, or remain as long as possible. Relatedly, it may provoke a fear of being abandoned, losing the support and protection, however minimal, offered in the camp. This article focuses on the question of refugee camp closure, in an attempt to conceptualize one key aspect/moment of camp life often overlooked by the relevant literature in Camp Studies. Camp closures are not themselves explanatory, as camps close for a variety of reasons and in different ways. The context, conditions, and outcomes of camp closures vary greatly: there are fundamental differences between violent closure on the part of the authorities, or a camp's gradual dissolution or transformation. Camp closures are sometimes framed as a resolution to the problem of displacement, or to poor camp conditions (therefore ending a situation of 'emergency'); however, other times they merely consist of an attempt to displace 'the refugee problem' due to political pressure, donor fatigue, geopolitical considerations, or supposed security concerns (Abreek-Zubiedat and Nitzan-Shiftan, 2018; Gabiam, 2012; Loescher et al., 2007; Sanyal, 2017; Williams, 2012). The prospect of camp closure may also be used as a tool to manage refugee behaviour (e.g. closure after riots or fire). The outcome for camp residents is often significant—whether a camp closure is due to a true resolution to the problems of their displacement, their transfer to (an)other camp(s), *refoulement*, or their dispersal and abandonment.

The Camp Studies literature tends to agree on the fact that camps, and refugee camps particularly, have become a permanent presence in today's political geographies globally (Agier and Lecadet, 2014; Martin et al., 2020). Just as scholars have noted a proliferation of camps in

the past decade, one can also observe a proliferation of camp closures. Yet relatively little has been written on what happens when camps close and their spaces–once marked by regimes of exception and humanitarian care–are redefined. Critiquing camp closures does not imply advocating the continuity of the exceptional spatialities created in the opening of camps. As closures do not always spell the end of encampment they must be studied within broader landscapes and ongoing contexts of camp exceptionality, where abandonment and displacement are also implemented through closure (in addition to, and differently from, encampment). That closures are often resisted by camp residents speaks to the contradictions of camp workings, and the importance of camps closures to the experiences of those displaced through both encampment and closure.

This article addresses this issue by assuming that *the possibility of closure is a constitutive element of the camp*, and therefore a fundamental component of camp-making and governance, but also of the life and sociality of camps. The first part of the paper consists in a critical review of how the existing camp literature treats closures, from their domicidal destruction, to their varied transformations, and the re-emergence of once-closed camps, tracing power relations and resistance emerging in diverse (geo)political contexts of encampment. Mapping patterns and silences of research on closing/closed camps we infer that studying closures is important to understanding camps not only in the urgency of the exception which often characterizes the rationale for their opening, but also in the longue-durée and their broader geographies, situated in exclusionary landscapes of migration management. Beyond reflecting on what is happening when 'the camp is the space that is opened' (Agamben, 1998), we ask what is happening in terms of sovereignty and exception, as well as memory, care, and belonging, when a camp is closed? These questions lead to the second part of the paper, which proposes to conceptualize camp closure. It does so by considering (the ever-present possibility of) camp closure as: (1) a manifestation of sovereign power often linked to forms of (potential) abandonment; and (2) in terms of the afterlives of camps, including their visible and invisible remnants. In conceptualizing closure as a manifestation of sovereign exception, this paper contributes to work on the temporalities of camps[1]—specifically on their temporariness and

[1] On questions of temporariness in geography, and temporary urbanism in particular, see the recent reflections of Andres and Kraftl (2021).

liminality—which qualitatively transform as closure is threatened, and when it actually occurs. Drawing on Agamben's theorization of sovereign power as *potentia,* that is, the sovereign's faculty of acting and of non-acting, we argue that whether (or not) a camp is closed, the fact that it always, potentially, could be closed is constitutive of the sovereign exception at the foundation of all camp geographies. The threat of closure, and the potential removal of humanitarian care, is thus also a biopolitical tool of governance, and a strategy for the management of people deemed out-of-place. In approaching the afterlives of camps, we thus ask how a camp can be studied once it no longer exists as it once did—a methodological challenge, which is nevertheless politically important to what Tazzioli (2020) terms a 'counter-mapping' of spaces that are intentionally 'invisibilised.' We conclude by suggesting that camp closure should be seriously taken into consideration in all studies of camps and that camp closure may be seen as a useful interpretative tool to understand the complicated workings of these geographical formations that are used to contain, support and manage specific populations 'in excess' (Rahola, 2003).

Contextualizing camp closure

Recent research on refugee and migrant camps has been vibrant, as highlighted in a number of substantial books and review essays (Agier, 2014, 2016; Ehrkamp, 2016; Katz et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2020; Minca, 2015; Turner, 2015). A common thread in this literature is the difficulties of defining *the camp*, as diverse sites in which varied forms of shelter and modes of care coincide and conflict with technologies of control, governance, and containment of refugees, migrants, and displaced people (Lecadet and de Hasque, 2019). Within this rich body of work relatively little literature focuses on the space-times of camp closures and afterlives. Like camps themselves, camp closures vary greatly. In reflecting on camp futures, Agier outlines three possible scenarios for camps: they can disappear; they can gradually transform; or they can simply remain places of waiting (Agier, 2016: 465). Elements of all three scenarios might be present in a single location, while the cause of a closure (such as state violence) is not a consistent predictor of the outcome for the camp (such as destruction or transformation) (Agier, 2014).

The most significant recent contribution to the study of camp closures is an edited volume on *after* camps (*Après les camps)*, in which Lecadet and de Hasque (2019: 18) note that given the strong critiques of camps, the question of their end has been present from their beginnings. Through archival research the two authors link histories of camp closure and camp diffusion: the spread of the refugee camp model outside of Europe closely followed intense effort by UNHCR to definitively close the Displaced Person camps in Europe due to the "shameful stigma" of encampment after concentration camps (and at times using the same sites) (ibid.: 19). While camp closure has often been presented as a response to refugee camp proliferation, they conclude, it has not been sought everywhere in the same way or for the same reasons, the process often being affected by uneven terrains of colonialism and racism.

Other recent work attentive to camp closures has situated them within broader spatio-temporal landscapes by conceiving of camps as part of transnational fields–not only of displacement and exclusion, but also of (re)creation of social and political life (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019; Thiollet, 2014; Hagan, 2018; Katz et al., 2018). For example, Thiollet (2014) situates individual formal camp closures within broader networks of displacement and migration by tracing variations of camp disappearance, transformation, and non-closure in a network of Eritrean refugee camps in eastern Sudan over five decades. She conceives of camps as part of a transnational field in a region that people have moved in and through before and after it was crossed by borders. Individual camp closures are thus presented as part of the dynamic trajectories of this field. Closures, for Thiollet, are accordingly affected by many actors, including refugees and former refugees, as well as humanitarian actors and donors. They shape and are shaped by politics and conflicts in both home and host states (Thiollet, 2014).

The situating of camp closures in broader spatial-temporal patterns is also evident in literature on informal camps. The proliferation of informal camps in parts of Europe and the Middle East has been matched with widespread camp destructions, often mentioned in writings more focused on other aspects of the geographies of encampment (Davies et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2020; Mould, 2017a; Rygiel, 2011; Sanyal, 2017). Indirectly, the increasing attention to informal camps may thus contribute to shaping theories and empirical accounts of camp closure. The volume *Camps Revisited*, for instance, opens discussing the closure of the makeshift Idomeni camp in Greece,

and "the Jungle" in Calais (Katz et al., 2018). Katz et al. ask what these closures mean for conceptualisations of the camp, signalling increasing attention to camp closures in their spatialities and temporalities. After its closure, the Idomeni informal encampment which hosted up to 15,000 refugees stranded for months at the border with North Macedonia in Spring 2016, seemed quickly forgotten. Other smaller, makeshift camps emerged along the so-called 'Balkan Route,' part of a broader spatial pattern of camps that 'appear and disappear' (Katz et al., 2018: 3; Jordan and Moser, 2020; Minca et al., 2018; 2019; Minca and Umek, 2020; Šantic et al., 2019; Stojić Mitrović et al., 2020; Thorpe, 2019). In such landscapes, formal camps and makeshift encampments have a 'complementary, almost symbiotic relationship' (Martin et al., 2020: 744). Closing informal camps may aim to push their residents into formal "migration management" systems, but can also increase informality, fracturing rather than eliminating makeshift camps, and pushing further abandonment of already dispossessed people (Bock, 2018; Hagan, 2018). Closures work within broader systems of migration management, reducing refugee and migrant visibility and altering possibilities for advocacy, solidarities, care, and mobility (Tazzioli, 2020). We will return to this aspect in the second part of the article.

Camp domicide, disappearance, and dissolution

Theories of urbicide and domicide have been applied to the destruction of both formal and informal camps. Ramadan (2009), drawing on theories of urbicide, suggests the term 'campicide' to analyze the destruction of camps in warfare. He argues that the destruction of Nahr el-Bared in Lebanon in 2007 was 'a case of urbicide in a space of exception,' particularly evident through the looting and ruin of homes, that exceeded 'any possible military necessity and became the deliberate and systematic erasure of the camp' (2009: 153). Hagan (2018) uses this terminology to describe the destruction of the Calais' larger makeshift camp, famously named 'the Jungle,' after which many smaller sites emerged and have been continually subject to violent demolition. Dispersed, hidden, and lacking an 'urban' character, their devastation is better described as 'domicide' (Hagan, 2018), a term applied also by Mould to the larger camp (2017b) as 'the Jungle' had become 'home' for many. Like the destruction of larger camps, the attempts to erase even the smallest dispersed encampments are a form of state oppression through the dispossession and dispersal of camp residents (Hagan, 2018: 19).

Hagan and Ramadan both draw on Agamben to argue that camp destruction highlights the lack of meaningful rights for exiles and the exceptionality of the camp. Although Ramadan finds Agamben's theorizations of the camp insufficient in describing the social and political life of existing Palestinian camps in Lebanon, he nonetheless highlights that, in events of violent destruction, when the institutions that emerge and order a camp are destroyed, 'something more like bare life' and exceptionality is brought to the fore (Ramadan, 2013: 72). Ultimately, in Nahr el-Bared and Calais the homes and community spaces created by refugees and exiles were excluded from the protection of law (Hagan, 2018; Ramadan, 2009). While the opening of the camp-space and the ongoing functioning of camps has most often been associated with Agamben's path breaking conceptualizations of (mainly but not exclusively concentration) camps, attention to camp closures and particularly state-sanctioned camp destruction may provide a new perspective on the nature of such exceptionality and its relation not only to the spatiality of the camp and its existence, but also to its closure and afterlives—precisely because camps are not only spaces of exception, but also sites of care, home, survival and belonging, in broader landscapes of exclusion and abandonment (Agier and Lecadet, 2014; Brun and Fábos, 2015; Feldman, 2015; Grayson, 2015; Katz et al., 2018; Holzer, 2015; Singh, 2020; Smith, 2016).

Camp disappearances are not always the result of quick destruction. They can occur as camp residents chose to leave a place that does not meet their needs and limits their rights and when life seems more livable elsewhere (Boano et al., 2018; Neto, 2014), or as donor support declines (IOM et al., 2015). More positively, camps may disappear if the problems causing displacement have been resolved or, in rare but celebrated cases, when recognized durable solutions have been achieved such as through mass resettlement (Vermylen, 2019). A planned 'phase-out' can take many years, extending the period of slow closure through a qualitatively different liminality than that which defines camps where closure is not perceived as immanent. A 'phase-out' is characterized by the withdrawal of humanitarian organizations and services, and orderly dismantling of infrastructure through Camp Management Plans (IOM et al., 2015). These planned processes involve a vast range of humanitarian 'sectors' and defined 'standards' including issues such as environmental site rehabilitation, decommissioning latrines, the 'hand-over' of built infrastructure, data management and 'deregistration'. For humanitarian

organizations, such plans are said to ideally be tied to camp set-up, as 'the start and end points of interconnected processes of a camp's-life- cycle' (ibid.: 10), bureaucratically extending *the temporality of closure* to all aspects of camp management – though closure is also described as a separate and distinct 'phase' (ibid.: 14; 19). As the population of a camp decreases, some camp 'zones' may close, consolidating the remaining residents in smaller and smaller areas (Neto, 2014). Thus, as the temporal horizon of remaining time for an institutional camp diminishes, its designated and serviced space are gradually reduced as well. These bureaucratic and technical processes, however, do not preclude violent forms of eviction on which humanitarian organizations may rely, complicit with the violence of host country police (Lecadet and de Hasque, 2019: 22).

Resistance to camp closure

Even planned, 'orderly' closures seem rarely without conflict. The possibilities for resistance to closure may be limited. Overt protest can risk repression. Nevertheless, closures may birth new forms of refugee solidarities (Bock, 2018; Boochani, 2018; Neto, 2014; Perera, 2018). Resistance to their closures speaks to the ways camps provide shelter, protection, and places of belonging—although they do so within broader landscapes of exclusion and abandonment. Drawing on the work of Behrooz Boochani, Perera (2018) describes how the violent breakup of Australian migrant detention centres in Papua New Guinea catalyzed collective resistance. While the protests did not stop the closure, Boochani (2017) writes: 'we did not compromise / our autonomy but instead made it possible'. The contradictions of camp life were prominent in these protests and their outcome was that: 'the refugees are overpowered / the refugees have claimed power' (Boochani, 2017; Perera, 2018).

There is a politics of visibility in the existence of camps, which is variously used by governments, humanitarian organizations, activists, and by refugees themselves. It can be a powerful source of claims-making (Agier, 2016; Bock, 2018; Hagan, 2018; Singh, 2020). For example, formal refugee recognition (and related possibilities for more stable futures), while possible in many contexts, is often tied up with camp residence, and is therefore an aspect of opposition to closures (de Hasque and Lecadet, 2019; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017; Ikanda, 2018). On the other hand, self-settled forced migrants may be denied formal status, 'illegalized,' and

relocated to formal camps or deported. Camp closures may be justified by cessation, or simply non-recognition of asylum claims or *prima facie* status. However, visibility can also be politically framed as a threat. Sanyal (2017) records that in Lebanon informal settlements are destroyed based on their proximity to army encampments, borders, or other places of security concern to the state. In the case of the former Via Cupa makeshift camp in Rome, Bock argues that increased attention to a camp associated with advocacy may '[contribute] to a harsher response from the authorities,' standing in as 'a microcosm of migration politics' and creating a visible target for state response (Bock, 2018: 170, 172). Erasing visibility can be an attempt to erase claims for recognition and assistance. Nevertheless, closures are also visible, and can spur further protest, media coverage, and solidarity.

Protest of closures is also rooted in the loss of meaningful places of 'world-making' and everyday life (Singh, 2020). de Hasque describes how for Félicien, a Togolese refugee in Benin, the destruction of Agamé camp signaled not only the refusal of recognition of refugee status by UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, but also '*le destruction de son avenir*'—the destruction of his future (2019: 242). Adapting to camp life, Félicien became a market farmer, and participated in building an integrated market with surrounding Béninois residents. Although his new home was close to the former camp, he was no longer able to undertake the same work. A place of conviviality, integration, and aspiration had been destroyed (de Hasque, 2019).

Camps after closure

While the violent destruction of a camp may lead to its definitive disappearance, it may also signal transformation to a qualitatively different 'camp-like-process' (Hagan, 2018). Although one iteration of a camp may disappear, other forms can evolve. Re-emergent camps draw on relationships, institutions, and socialities formed in former camps. Refugees may continue to occupy the site of a camp after its closure, as in Choucha in Tunisia (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017), and Tiwawa in eastern Sudan (Thiollet, 2014). Or they may find new, often more dispersed sites, sometimes near to the initial camp (Agier, 2016; Bock, 2018; Katz et al., 2018; Hagan, 2018; Tazzioli, 2019). This continued 'occupation of space' may be both a survival strategy and a form of protest (Agier, 2016: 465). Occupation harnesses the visibility and claims-making power of camps. It asserts what Agier calls the 'agency of inhabitation,' and the 'agency of politics'—as

place-making personalizes the site, and as it becomes a 'polis' for the 'voicing of opinion' (ibid.).

Through rhizomatic approaches to conceptualize the spatialities and temporalities of camps and their afterlives, both Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2019) and Hagan (2018) place closures in broader, relational networks. Although studying distinct contexts of protracted and formal Palestinian encampment, and fleeting informal encampments in Calais, a rhizomatic approach blurs the spatial and temporal boundaries of encampment and camp after-lives for both scholars. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2019) considers camp-closures, and their after-lives, as already present in any camp. After the closure of certain Palestinian camps, aspects of camp life were 're-membered' through the (re)creation of social life and institutions. Sometimes, new camps emerged at the sites of closed camps, such as Al-Adwa camp at the Libya-Egypt border: 'This re-eruption reconnected both the new camp and the *remains* of Al-Awda camp to an ever-evolving Palestinian rhizome that is constituted through a multiplication of (current, past, future) places and spaces (…)–a camp that *returned* (…) demonstrates that the erasure or closure of a camp at a particular time does not mark the camp's end, as it remains as a trace, or, as this case-study suggests, as a camp *in potentia*' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019: 297). Hagan (2018) traces a different form of camp re-membering in Calais, which she terms the 'contingent camp.' After the state destruction of 'the Jungle,' a 'camp-like process' emerged as humanitarians and exiles came together to continue to provide services and meet needs. Their daily routines and practices renewed the camp in spite of efforts at its destruction. 'Only emerging in brief moments' this 'contingent camp' is 'a semblance of the camp-that-was' (Hagan, 2018: 74-75). It's rhizomatic nature means that it persists 'in a constant, resistant state of becoming' even as the small, hidden dwellings of exiles are continually razed by police (ibid.: 87). It also visibly asserts the non-resolution and ongoing nature of displacement and exclusion, after the urbicidal destruction of the former Calais camp.

The re-emergence of camps at former camp locations is not always due to the choices of their residents. Ongoing exclusion may mean that there is nowhere else to go, and informal camps, although often emerging as spaces of abandonment, may be the safest option to avoid deportation or other consequences of non-recognition. Alternatively, after *refoulement,* unresolved or renewed displacement may nevertheless push refugees to return again where

camps had previously been closed. New camps may be established at prior sites because of their history, location, and infrastructure. Even when residents and other important camp characteristics change, there may be strong continuity and connection, beyond physical location, between camps at a single site (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019).

In some contexts, remaining in place is not a possibility. When definitive closure is accompanied by registration, arrests, cessation, or *refoulement*, former camp residents may not be able to re-constitute a camp, however contingent. Authorities may increase surveillance at the sites of former encampments and take measures specifically to prevent their renewed habitation (Thiollet, 2014). Even smaller emerging encampments may be subject to increased surveillance. Bock notes that 'as soon as anything resembling the Via Cupa camp appeared (…) the state intervened,' even clearing encampments established on church grounds in hopes of sanctuary (Bock, 2018: 172). The sites of former camp may become inaccessible when closure is undertaken to change the use of the site, such as in a waterfront development project in Belgrade (Obradovic-Wochnik, 2018), or in cases when land-owners re-acquired property (Sanyal, 2017).

Camps transformed

The transformation of camps, including their integration into both rural and urban areas, has been celebrated by some as a solution to the problem of protracted displacement. Camp transformation can be a gradually attained 'right to the city' (Agier, 2016), a thoroughly planned process, or a combination of both. Less celebrated transformations may resemble slum-like processes of informalization, in which residents are left outside the protection of the law and adequate service provision, subject to competing sovereigns, but without recourse to international humanitarian recognition and intervention (Sanyal, 2014). Nevertheless, city-camps can also be sites of 'urban citizenship' and political action, where claims can be made across scales, even from spaces 'at the margins' of the city (ibid.: 569-570). For example, Bengali refugees in Calcutta constructed housing and established communities, but still faced attempts at evictions. They organized, and advocated politically, linking issues of residency to national belonging (ibid.). In this case the transformation of camps through urban politics led to national citizenship claims.

Processes of camp transformation, however, are not always refugee-led. Humanitarian organizations emphasize camp transformation through local integration and self-sufficiency due to donor fatigue, as they seek to withdraw from camps, and when other recognized durable solutions do not seem viable (Neto, 2014; Thiollet, 2014; Vermylen, 2019). 'Development' has long been associated with displacement in critical social sciences (Pull et al., 2020; Zamore, 2018), so its proposal as a 'solution' for displacement is confronted with caution by many academics. The 'transformation' of camps through 'development' can in fact challenge rights and entrench displacement (Abreek-Zubiedat and Nitzan-Shiftan, 2018; de Geoffroy, 2015; Gabiam, 2012; Obradovic-Wochnik, 2018). Abreek-Zubiedat & Nitzan-Shiftan (2018) highlight plans and efforts by the Israeli state to 'de-camp' Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip in the 1960's and 70's through the construction of urban neighborhoods, while Gabiam (2012) traces post-2000's UNRWA-led development programs in Ein el Tal and Neirab camps for Palestinian refugees in northern Syria. Despite being decades apart, both programs were controversial among the camp-based Palestinian refugees whose lives they claimed to improve. The Israeli project aimed to make camps 'unnecessary and redundant' through the inclusion of refugees in existing cities, effectively 'liquidating' the camps in order to reduce claims to the right of return in Palestine (Abreek-Zubiedat and Nitzan-Shiftan, 2018: 138). This transformation was contested by camp residents precisely because of its geopolitical aims. Similarly, Gabiam (2012) highlights anxieties around sustainable development projects meant to create durable housing and infrastructure for Palestinian refugees in Syria. Improvements in housing are seen as making claims to the right of return less urgent, as refugees become more settled and comfortable, and less visible as displaced people, thus compromising the political narrative of international responsibility for the Palestinian refugee situation (Gabiam, 2012; see also, Abreek-Zubiedat and Nitzan-Shiftan, 2018). Transformation and integration in these contexts are thus politically contested, underlining the importance of context to the study of camp closures.

In other cases, camp transformation is not accompanied by 'development' in any meaningful way. In urban Khartoum, de Geoffroy (2015) notes that Internally Displaced People's sites formally changed status after peace agreements, even though many people remained displaced. Their location in the city meant that in many ways they were integrated into the fabric of urban life, but services differed between sites for displaced people and other neighborhoods.

Humanitarian agencies, who had played key roles in service provision, were no longer granted any access after the sites were formally decommissioned (de Geoffroy, 2015). Unlike lauded politics of ongoing presence at the site of former camps, transformations may also decrease visibility and the legibility of residents as displaced people. Transformation can thus be a form of closure and in-situ abandonment.

When camps are already informal and hidden, in the margins, Lecadet (2014) observes that it can be hard to note the exact moment when they are unmade. This liminality can also apply to the transformation of formal camps. Neto (2014) addresses the hybridization and urbanization of Maheba camp in Zambia as a question—with Zambian families moving into the camp and a relaxing of control over movement: '*Le camp deviendra-t-il une ville?*' Will the camp become a city? Uncertainty remains as transformations occur. Miletzki (2014) writes of liminal space created when majority of Burundian refugees resident in certain Tanzanian settlements were naturalized after four decades in exile, yet the places they inhabit remained largely the same. The slow pace of changing the governance and ownership of the 'refugee designated areas' left them in limbo as designated camp commandants are still present, and the sites are not yet formally 'de-gazetted' (see also Daley et al., 2018; Kuch, 2016). Transformation may thus overlap with the uncertainty of 'waiting' scenarios of camp futures.

In light of the existing rich and diverse body of work on camps this article thus proposes conceptualizing camp closure as a constitutive element of camp life and camp management, as well as a key component of the ways in which migrants' mobility and immobility is enforced on them as a form of government of migration. Accordingly, the second part of the article discusses camp closure as (1) a manifestation of sovereign power often linked to forms of (potential) abandonment, and (2) in terms of the afterlives of camps, including their visible and invisible remnants.

Conceptualizing camp closure

Closure as sovereign exception

As noted at the outset of this article, camps, and refugee camps in particular, are temporary installations normally based on situations of emergency that require the creation of specific spaces where certain populations or groups of individuals can be accommodated, contained, and controlled. The temporary nature of these spaces together with the transitional conditions of their 'guests' are often at the origin of the exceptional spatio-temporal regimes under which 'life in the camp' is organized and conducted. From the registration process of camp residents to the ways in which their time and mobility is structured internally, from the adapted architecture of many camps to the precarious material arrangements they often present, these all seem to speak of places that are not conceived to last. The humanitarian 'Camp Coordination and Camp Management' (CCCM) handbooks frequently note that camps are a 'last resort' and that 'planning for exit and the eventual closure of the camp should be seen as an integral part of the set-up process' (IOM et al., 2015: 111, 119; NRC, 2008; UNHCR, 2008). This top-down planning of temporariness differs from that which emerges in informal camps, where the coming-together of people to create their own refuge emerges through *bricolage* and contingency (Hagan, 2018), temporary because they are not planned (and therefore subject to destruction), rather than through planning.

Despite this temporary nature, some camps remain active for decades and in this way challenge the assumptions at the basis of their conception and realization (Jansen, 2018). However, it is precisely the explicit temporary nature of all camps that makes the possibility of closure an inherent and constitutive camp condition. Notably, there has been increasing attention to the often-protracted condition of exile and encampment–and the ontological uncertainty this creates for refugees (Agier, 2014; Ehrkamp, 2016; Hyndman and Giles, 2017; Ramadan, 2013; Turner, 2015). Often with a focus on formal/institutional camps, the literature on uncertainty and waiting has largely examined cases marked by the protracted nature of encampment's liminality, or 'permanent-temporariness' (Hyndman, 2011; Hyndman and Giles, 2011; Miletzki, 2014; Picker and Pasquetti, 2015). Ramadan writes of the camp as 'permanently impermanent,' 'an enduring moment of rupture,' and 'a time of interruption, waiting, stasis' (2013: 72-3). Yet the uncertainty created is qualitatively different when camp closure is announced as imminent, particularly if accompanied by coercive threats, or violence (IRRI and Rema Ministries, 2011, 2012; Neto, 2014). For example, Minca and Ong (2018) recount how in the months prior to the planned

closure of Galang Camp in Indonesia, the number of deaths due to suicide greatly increased, as the refugees living there were told they would be returned to their country of origin.

While camp studies have critically engaged–either by incorporating them or by rejecting them–with Agamben's (1998) conceptualizations of the camp as a space where the sovereign exception may be exercised on the life and enacted on the body of the residents, they have also noted how the strict adoption of this interpretation of sovereign power is possibly more useful in understanding the workings of concentration camps, rather than the refugee camps (for a detailed discussion see Martin et al., 2020). What Martin et al. (2020) have described as a 'Post-Agambenian' wave of camp studies, in focussing in particular on contemporary refugee camps, has thus explored different theorisations of the camp by problematizing Agamben's conceptualisations and complementing them with perspectives able to engage with the complexity of the social and political relations characterising everyday life in the camps (see McConnachie, 2018; Owens, 2009; Redclift, 2013). Refugee camps are accordingly studied also for the possibility they offer for political action and for how their exceptional 'social fabric may be used by inmates and residents to reconstitute and reshape their identities and possibly claim their rights' (Martin et al., 2020: 753; on this see also, Abreek-Zubiedat and Nitzan-Shiftan, 2018; Feldman, 2015; Katz, 2015; Perera 2018; Peteet, 2005; Ramadan, 2009; 2013; Rygiel, 2012; Sanyal, 2011; Sigona, 2015; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, 2013, 2017). Nevertheless, the existing literature recognizes that forms of sovereign power are indeed exercised in refugee camps, both in terms of individuals being forced into the regimented spatialities of the humanitarian regimes of support and control, and in terms of sovereign decisions taken by the authorities that may affect the very existence of a camp (see Edkins, 2000; Jenkins, 2004; also, Darling, 2009; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2004). Sovereign power is, in fact, not only manifested by the decision of opening a camp and including in its remit a specific group of people, but also by its closure. What is more, we identify in the ever-present threat or possibility of camp closure a clear exercise of sovereign power *in potentia*.

Agamben (2005) and other Italian political philosophers have noted how the term *potenza* (normally problematically translated into English as potentiality – see Minca, 2005) is key to the understanding of the workings of the sovereign exception. Drawing from Aristotle, Agamben

explains that *potenza* 'is not simply the potential to do this or that thing but potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality.' (1999, 179-180). True potenza is the faculty of exercising power, just as of not exercising it: '*La potenza che esiste*'–'the potentiality that exists'–is precisely the potentiality that can not [fully] pass over into actuality'(1998: 32; orig. 1995: 52). This is the origin of human power, insists Agamben, 'which is so violent and limitless with respect to other living beings. Other living beings are capable only of their specific potentiality; they can only do this or that. But human beings are the animals who are capable of their own impotentiality' (1999: 180). *Potenza* is thus the possibility on the part of 'the sovereign' *to act and not to act*, to intervene and not to intervene. This very possibility *of not acting* is key to the perpetuation of the relationship between the sovereign exception and those who are subjected to it (on the distinction between *potenza* and *potere* [power], see also Agamben, 2005). We have not space here to discuss in detail the broader question of sovereignty in Agamben's work (but see chapter 11 of his *Potentialities* (1999); and, among many others, Swiffen, 2012; in relation to refugees: Nedoh, 2017); however, we would nonetheless like to suggest that the fact that camps can be *closed or not closed, but potentially always subjected to closure* is a constitutive element of the sovereign exception that rests at the foundations of all camp geographies. We thus consider this field of possibility – *of closing or not closing a camp* – as part of the inherent 'violence of encampment', something that becomes very visible in cases of sudden and forced closure of camps supposedly predicated on humanitarian care, but also in cases of indefinitely protracted encampment, as some of the literature discussed above has shown.

Refugee camps are spaces of both custody and care, but such care can be withdrawn in any moment, and camp closures are one way this may be enforced. Despite refugee camps being a biopolitical tool of governance to impose control on their residents, they also represent, for many vulnerable individuals, the only possibility of receiving organized humanitarian support and protection. As noted in the previous sections, camp closure may lead to scenarios that threaten refugees' well-being, through violence of varied temporalities. The withdrawal of care can be long and drawn out, as a form of coercion—a slow violence to push refugees to leave—'letting die' rather than 'making live' as a bureaucratic, biopolitical exercise of power over life in times of closure. This was the case with the closure of Mtabila camp, where formal education was stopped three years before closure, health services were cut back to an extreme minimum (not

even meeting many basic needs), growing food within the camp to supplement insufficient rations was prohibited, and increased restrictions on businesses and mobility decreased possibilities for livable lives within the camp over several years (IRRI et al., 2011; 2012). Closure was a process, drawn out for years before the final military push of definitive closure (ibid.). Some such restrictions are being repeated now in Tanzanian camps to again push Burundian refugees to return. These strategies are not new. Crisp (1986) noted over thirty years ago how the withdrawal of food from Ugandan refugees in Sudan and Zaire in the early 1980's forced many to abandon camps and return to Uganda, despite ongoing insecurity (see also Chimni, 2004).

At times, camp closure entails the relocation of residents to other camps (following criteria rarely shared with the refugees); other times, closure is a step towards (often forced) repatriation. There are also cases in which camps are closed without contingency plans, thus resulting in the abandonment of refugees to their destiny–often with no clear legal status and therefore exposed to the violence of the authorities and, at times, of the local population (see Perera and Pugliese, 2015). Victims of camp closure may be forced to sleep rough or dwell in makeshift encampments. Camp closure, in these cases, can be seen as a form of transition from the 'making-live' humanitarian care to potential 'letting-die' conditions, with the former residents abandoned to the forest, to the spatialities of makeshift arrangements or to other informal and precarious conditions. In these cases of camp closure, refugees are not even considered 'deserving of a camp.' They may become subjected to what could tentatively be described as a sort of 'non-government' of specific populations on the part of the relevant authorities (on negative governance see Rose, 2014); camp closure may end up producing a growing mobile population made of figures living 'in-between camps,' and in a 'legal limbo' often at the margin of or even expelled from the official system of humanitarian support (Author, forthcoming).

For Tazzioli, 'the opacity and chaotic implementation of migration policies corresponds to a mode of governing through non-governing' (2020: 64), to a political technology employed to manage what she describes as the incorrigible migrants' presence. In this sense, Tazzioli describes this 'partial ungovernability as the unstable outcome of a *will not to govern* as a political technology for handling migrants' presence.' (2020: 65) Referring to Agamben's 'lexicon of ungovernability'

she recalls how the Italian political philosopher ‘notably spoke about the ungovernable as what escapes the hold of the disseminated apparatus of control and that is ultimately linked also to the concept of inoperativity–conceived as an operation that deactivates and renders works (of economy, of religion, of language, etc.) inoperative’ (Agamben, 2014: 69 in Tazzioli, 2020: 68). In light of these considerations, we would like to suggest that the possibility of camp closure–or the threat of camp closure–may be used by the authorities as a disciplinary dispositive, that is, as a way to make camp conditions acceptable to the interned population, since the alternative of being displaced to other camps or, even worse, abandoned with no camp, may be much worse. Again, as even formal camps are conceived and managed as temporary installations, the possibility of closure is thus always there, pervading all aspects of the spatio-temporal regime that is governing life in the camp.

Rumors about closure and the uncertain intervention of the authorities thus shape life in both formal and informal camps in a decisive way, where closure is always just a matter of time (Mandić, 2018; Mavrommatis, 2018; Mould, 2017a, 2017b). While the deliberate non-intervention of authorities in makeshift camps normally allows for a significant degree of self-organization in these informal dwellings, that is however always strictly linked to the imminent possibility of intervention and eviction (Agier et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2020). In many cases, insists Tazzioli, migrants are not just chased or taken away: ‘even if their presence is tolerated, they can be the object of police harassment […] and be deprived of what in Calais, where the police destroy informal encampments, migrants used to call “liveable places”.’ (2020: 117). Formal camps may also exist only precariously, even when residents have established life in these places for generations. Their presence may be continually negotiated by governments, humanitarian organizations, their funders, and even in courts, in shifting geopolitical fields (see, for example, NRC, 2017). The protracted nature of many formal camps also allows for, and often requires, significant refugee self-organization (perhaps framed as ‘participation’) in the construction of homes and community infrastructure over-time, but at the same time it is often strictly governed as impermanent—with eviction and razing always being a possibility (de Hasque, 2019; Holzer, 2015; Turner, 2010).

Camp archipelagos/systems are indeed operated by authorities via openings and closures, with camp closures applied as a form of a spatial management strategy, for example by moving

refugee populations to camps further away from the border or, alternatively, nearer to borders in the hope that they will informally cross them (Minca and Umek, 2020). According to Tazzioli (2020: 106), 'the use of mobility as a political technology for governing unruly migration' should be considered together as a fundamental stake in the politics of migration. This may explain, in some cases, the authorities' determination to 'mobilize' the refugees to make their stay or their journeys more difficult and precarious, or to simply abandon them and make them disappear from sight. Despite this, in many contexts, evicted makeshift camps are repopulated again and again, since they represent either key sites for the organization of the migrants' informal journeys across the borders or the only place where they can find temporary accommodation and support—until the next eviction will force them to move again.

Remnants: or camp afterlifes

As discussed above, despite their temporary conception, refugee camps at times last for years, if not decades (Picker and Pasquetti, 2015). This is particularly true for some institutional camps that have begun to blend into the surrounding urban fabric or have become a unique and significant component of the development of a city or a region (AlSayyad, 2004; Knudsen, 2016; Jansen, 2018; Martin, 2015; Roy and AlSayyad, 2004; Sanyal, 2012, 2014). In any case, most camps develop rich and intense forms of social interaction, real local economies, and are accordingly characterized by scenes of ordinary life (Daley, 1993; Holzer, 2015; Giles, 2012; Grayson, 2015, 2017; Singh, 2020; Smith, 2016; Turner, 2010). Poignant examples include some of the larger camps most celebrated by the media in recent years, like Calais or Idomeni in Europe, the semi-formal Rohingya camp near Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh (Authors, forthcoming), and long-term formal camps like Dadaab (Agier, 2003) or Kakuma (Ikanda, 2018; Jansen, 2018) in Kenya, to mention only a few. As people dwell in such camps, social life starts flowing again despite difficult, if not dire, living conditions.

What happens to this life-in-the-camp after closure? At times, it may evaporate–or be brutally interrupted–with camp closure. Institutional camps are often converted for other uses–tourism, military sites, etc. while the memory of their previous use and of the life that they enabled seems to disappear. Some risk being entirely erased and forgotten, yet many leave traces that, even when unseen, endure—such as cemeteries, archeological traces, or simply the way they shaped

lives, places, and memory (Benneyworth, 2019; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019; Lecadet and de Hasque, 2019). Camp closure may also have an important impact on the surrounding areas, leaving a void that affects the local economies which gravitated around the camp, as well as important environmental, cultural and social impacts (Subulwa, 2013, 2014; UNHCR, 2008; Whitaker, 1999). Some former refugee camps remain as empty shells, strange ghostly towns where the memory of suffering, but also of the hopes and the community that once lived there, vanish and blend into decaying material remnants.

The trend towards memorialization of former camps is recent, and often linked to the broader commemoration of wars and the effects of wars. This lacuna may be partly due to lack of significant historiography of refugee camps, and because more work has focused on concentration camps (Lecadet and de Hasque, 2019). How camps are closed may in fact impact their memorialization and can play role in national memory and nation building (McConnachie, 2018). For example, Williams (2012) contrasts the story told by the apartheid state of the destruction of a refugee camp in Namibia formed during freedom struggles in Southern Africa, with the ongoing official Namibian commemorations of the camp's violent destruction. Both state narratives differ from the ways in which many former residents remember the camp, yet their voices are not included in official commemorations (Williams, 2012). Lecadet and de Hasque (2019) link the current increase in the memorialization of former camps in Europe with the resurgence and proliferation of contemporary camps and with contemporary camp closure strategies, noting that the existence of memorials can be a challenge to and a critique of contemporary policies of encampment: '*Cette politique de la mémoire est aussi une politique du present*' –This politics of memory is also a politics of the present (2019: 29). Refugee camps, in few cases, are converted into museums to perpetuate the memory of those who lived (and often died) there (Minca and Ong, 2018). From the moment spaces of encampment are opened, their exceptional nature necessitates the need to testify and remember (Lecadet and de Hasque, 2019: 18).

The sense of erasure and loss of memory when camps close is dramatic when one considers camps that for months, or sometimes years, have hosted a vibrant and rich community life and that, after being demolished (despite frequent resistance) leave very little behind: a bit of

garbage, a broken tent, a few shoes, some trampled ground… In some cases, camps that have formally or informally hosted thousands of people are now simply empty fields or, again, simply rotted buildings with a few remaining signs of the daily practices and 'world-building' (Singh, 2020) that they hosted and made possible. This brings us to an additional and final reason why camp remnants after closure are critically important: how can camps be studied once they have been closed? How can the life in a camp that is no more and is now an empty building or an empty field, be reported? How can the void, those decadent ruins or buildings converted for new uses, be linked to the social relationships that emerged from those temporary camp arrangements? What can be made of an abandoned shoe or of the sign of a bonfire in a former makeshift camp? How can former camps be studied through archive and testimony, but also, how can they be studied when there is no archive and no testimony? Many scholars have noted that the captivity of encamped people makes them somewhat 'easier' populations to study, and perhaps at times, over-studied (Fresia, 2007; Pascucci, 2017)—but closures can result in dispersal of former camp residents, making access to witnesses more challenging. How a camp has closed and how their sites are then governed can also influence access and raise ethical questions for researchers. For example, Ramadan (2009) noted that after the destruction of Nahr el-Bared camp in battle in 2007, photographing the camp's remnants was prohibited. Nevertheless, his research participants encouraged him to share what had happened, and he clandestinely took hundreds of photos, documenting the aftermath of the camp's destruction, supplementing the interviews he had conducted with those who had experienced the camp's closure. From archeological investigations into everyday life in the first 'refugee camps' of the Boer war, to discussion of refugee-produced video documentation of recently closed camps in west Africa, and even tours of camps-become-tourist-sites, several cases highlight how we can continue to learn from camps and their meanings after they seem to disappear (Benneyworth, 2019; de Hasque, 2019; Galitzine-Loumpet, 2019; Lecadet and de Hasque, 2019; Minca and Ong, 2018). Although still sparse, these recent studies are attentive to the 'afterlives' of camps, including how place, power, and national narratives shape the ways in which they are memorialized.

We therefore endorse Tazzioli's call for *counter-mappings* capable of bringing to the fore these fleeting spaces of containment, movement and struggle, and of preserving the 'memory of spaces

that are invisibilised and whose traces get lost' (2020: 150). Such mappings would thus help recognising and making somewhat visible the remnants of official and unofficial camps as well as the traces of refugees' camp lives and experiences. This exercise of counter-mapping would thus take to task the tracking of camp remnants, including their interplay between presence and absence of people and things, and the spatial void left in those sites where 'life-in-the-camp' emerged and marked, in a decisive way, the formal and informal spatialities of the refugees. According to Tazzioli and Garelli, 'an archive of encampments' may help resisting 'the total disappearance of the memory and the existence of places that have been evicted or shut down. Spaces of refuge and transit often crystallise or remain alive in the collective memory due to reiterated re-emergence of these spaces, upon eviction or, in the case of institutional camps, after being officially closed' (2018: 407). Such archive, we trust, would be key to highlight *how life in the camp is crucially connected to closure* and to the indeterminate spatio-temporal horizon that the potential of closure–or the sovereign decision of closure–is imposing on the actual fields of possibility for camp residents.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to conceptualize camp closure as one key aspect/moment of camp life often overlooked by the relevant literature. It has done so by assuming closure is a constitutive element of the camp, and therefore ought to be considered as a fundamental component of the government of refugees (and, at times, of the strategic 'non-government') on the part of the authorities. After critically reviewing the relevant literature on this key question we have discussed camp closure as a manifestation of sovereign power often linked to forms of abandonment, while suggesting how closure is as important as opening, for what Agier (2011) has powerfully described as 'managing the undesirables'. Camp closures are often presented as a response to poor camp living conditions or to the end of the emergency situation that initially justified the openings, while they may be linked to geopolitical strategies or simply a way to 'move further'–that is, to displace, replace or disperse the refugees and accordingly neglect the persistence of a refugee crisis. This is why it is important to understand closure–and the *possibility of closing or not closing*–as an essential manifestation of sovereign power and of the

exceptional condition in which camp residents permanently find themselves, since that possibility often crucially affects the ways in which camp life develops, together with the associated social relationships and politics of resistance and affect. The fact that closures are often resisted by camp residents reveals the importance of camp closure to the experiences of those displaced since it may translate into further displacement, the transfer to (an)other camp(s), *refoulement* or abandonment.

We have also highlighted how camp closure does not always entail the end of encampment for many refugees since, when related to abandonment, dispersal and displacement, it may force former residents to resort to makeshift camps and 'jungles,' which are often subjected to eviction and closure as well, or subjects them to other forms of ongoing displacement and exclusion. For this reason, we believe that it is particularly important to study also the afterlives of camps, including their visible and invisible remnants. We would like to conclude by suggesting that investigating camp closure is necessary not only to appreciate the fact that it represents a constitutive element of 'camp making' but also to highlight how camp memories and remnants are an important testimony of the camp experience for the refugees. The dismissal or even the erasure of a camp material spaces therefore does not necessarily represent the erasure of the related social relationships, the trauma of encampment, or the ongoing survival and endurance of refugees beyond camps and their closures, continuing to seek and create 'livable places' to belong.

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