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‘Digging Aid’: The Camp as an Option in East and the Horn of Africa

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The 22-year-old Kenyan refugee camp of Kakuma has in many ways developed into an accidental city, and challenges the imagery of refugee camps as seclusion sites and warehouses of wasted lives. Conceptually, the camp is not only a physical structure, but also indicates a relation between humanitarian actors and beneficiaries of aid. In the camp, this relation is intimate, but the relation between refugees and aid actors does not stop at the camp’s boundaries. Increasingly, humanitarian and other actors are recognizing that the refugee camps in Kenya are becoming a ‘normal’ part of the regional socio-economic landscape. People strategize and/or find themselves, as individuals or as part of social networks, in different proximities to humanitarian action. This is a fluid process. People are sometimes in the camp, sometimes in the city and sometimes in South Sudan, Uganda or the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they relate in different ways to aid. This article explores the ways in which people seek and maintain access to the camp and how the Kenyan camps become a part of livelihood options available in the region.

Keywords: protracted refugee camps; refugee camp economies; anthropology; Kenya

Introduction

A camp is characterized by its boundaries. Both metaphorically and physically, the notion of a camp suggests a demarcation of what is inside and what is outside—a rigid disconnection between the two: a separation (Verdirame and Pobjoy 2013). Refugee camps have been criticized for exactly this—as exclusion and seclusion mechanisms, that separate refugees from the outside, the real world, and have been associated with rendering people to redundancy as a form of wasted life (Bauman 2004) or insignificant as bare life (Agamben 1998). Encamped refugees are stocked as in a warehouse, concentrated to keep them out of mainstream society, while serving the functionality of humanitarian operations.

Yet camps and their history display a more complex dynamic. Over the past two decades, Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp represented different functions that nuance this idea of separation and exclusion. The camp was simultaneously an emergency shelter; a point of transit; a centre of facilities such as health care and education; an emerging economy; and a last resort—governed by a functioning bureaucracy based on humanitarian ideas. Combined, depending on how different people approach the place, the camp is an option. People relate to this option in different ways and from different proximities and, as such, the camp allows for people to move in and out of humanitarian care.

In this article, I explore the ways in which people relate to the camp from various proximities. I take the camp as the site of the most intimate form of humanitarian governance, where the relation between aid giver and aid receiver is the closest. But, from here, the relation extends beyond the camp's boundaries into the region, hereby linking people that fall under the term beneficiaries—including returnees, urban refugees and host populations—in various ways and levels of intensity to the camp. I am looking at the normalization of those linkages and how as a result the camp can be understood as an option in a larger scheme of livelihood and economic possibilities. The article is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in and around Kakuma between 2004 and 2006, with follow-up visits in 2010 and 2012, and several research trips to South Sudan and Nairobi over the past seven years.

The Refugee Camp as an Accidental City in a Wider Kenyan Landscape

The two-decade-old Kenyan refugee camp of Kakuma has in many ways developed into an accidental city, and challenges the imagery of refugee camps as seclusion sites, spaces of exception and 'warehouses' of wasted or bare life. Although the refugee population fluctuates in size and origin, the camp as a humanitarian structure has become increasingly normal. Conceptually, the camp is not only a physical structure, but also indicates a relation between humanitarian actors and beneficiaries of aid. In the camp, this relation is intimate, and refugees and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seek access to each other in the process of distributing and allocating protection measures and services such as education, training and health care, and other opportunities for assistance, in an elaborate aid infrastructure. However, the relation between refugees and aid actors does not stop at the camp's boundaries.

Increasingly, humanitarian actors and, albeit hesitatingly, the government of Kenya are recognizing that the refugee camps in Kenya are becoming a 'normal' part of the regional socio-economic landscape (Enghoff *et al.* 2010; Refugee Consortium of Kenya 2012). People strategize and/or find themselves, as individuals or as part of social networks, in different proximities

to humanitarian action. This is a fluid process. People are sometimes in the camp, sometimes in the city and sometimes in South Sudan, Uganda or the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where they relate in different ways to aid. People redefine aid by the ways they seek access and explore what is on offer, and increasingly the Kenyan camps are an accepted part of livelihood options available.

After two decades of large-scale refugee care in Kenya, the refugee complex is now facing interesting challenges. In Kenya, the perspective on the Dadaab camps is changing, reflected in an increasing recognition of the urban-like features of the camps. The Refugee Consortium of Kenya notes that 'the Dadaab camps are very much a feature of the North Eastern Province, and they represent its most significant city', and states that the camps bring about \$14 million into the area on a yearly basis and the annual turnover of refugee-run, camp-based businesses in Dadaab is around \$25 million (Refugee Consortium of Kenya 2012: 82). Others have used the label 'boom towns' to denote Kakuma and Dadaab as emerging economies, where also companies are increasingly seeking access to.¹

For Dadaab, it is argued that, despite a negative impact in the physical environment—and the political rhetoric concerning the terrorist spillover from Somalia—the camp has had a positive effect on the local economy by bringing employment, investment and opportunity to host communities, rather than limiting them. Indicatively, many Kenyan nationals from drought affected and impoverished communities have registered as refugees. The Kenyan Department for Refugee Affairs noted in 2010, that 27 per cent of the communities in a 50-kilometre radius were holding refugee ration cards (Refugee Consortium of Kenya 2012: 82). During my visit to Dadaab in 2005, an UN official I interviewed argued that one-third or more of the registered refugees may be Kenyan, with a note that Kenya Somalis, the host population around Dadaab, share the same ethnic background as Somalis, and therefore blend in relatively easily. In Kakuma, this ethnic similarity was more limited, but similar stories were heard here, too. Although sometimes normatively dismissed as abuse of fraud, it is also a livelihood strategy to negotiate oneself into a position to fit the criteria to become eligible for refugee assistance. Elsewhere, I referred to this as one way of 'digging aid', as a way of harvesting humanitarian resources (Jansen 2011). It indicates that camps like these present livelihood opportunities, as much as they, from another perspective, limit them.

Camps like these are odd entities and have been given different labels to nuance and contrast the image of the seclusion site with either a reference to governance and care, or its socio-economic capacity: a naked city (Agier 2002), a surrogate state (Slaughter and Crisp 2008), a 'country of UNHCR' (Kagan 2011), an accidental city (Jansen 2011). This is a coming to terms with the paradoxical life forms found in camps, in which processes of reordering, identity formation, emerging humanitarian economies and politicization take shape. As a result, camps become spaces of inclusion,

too, especially highlighted when they are located in fragile states and host regions with weak governance that contrast with the humanitarian bureaucracy.

This opposes the often managerial or problem-oriented view on refugee studies and issues that seeks to remedy rights violations or camp governance matters. There is only limited recognition for the potential benefit of camps that become protracted, yet, increasingly, their existence proves their potential and viability, alongside their necessity. Instead, most writing on refugees has the a priori aim of aiding refugees and aid programmes, according to what Nyers refers to as discourses of emergency: approaches that are 'thoroughly implicated within a specific regime of power/knowledge that structures and orders the discourse on refugees and their movements' (Nyers 2006: 5–6).

Although the Kenyan camps have received considerable attention, with little exception (see e.g. De Montclos and Kagwanja 2000; Schechter 2004; and more recently Oka 2011), studies have focused on the negative circumstances in which refugees exist (Verdirame 1999; Jamal 2000; Bartolomei *et al.* 2003; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005; Feyissa and Horn 2008; Kaiser 2008). More in general, the refugee camp has been associated with a state of exception (i.e. Agier and Bouchet-Saulnier 2004; Diken and Laustsen 2005), in which host states can decide to force refugees to remain in camps, while the UNHCR and NGOs deliver aid, and engage in programmes to change social and cultural norms. This may be understood, as many authors have done, as another way of containing people: the production of docile beneficiaries by exerting a tight, geographically bounded bio-political control (see e.g. Agier 2011) or, following Turner (2001) with regard to Tanzanian camps in the second half of the 1990s, as a 'new sort of citizenship' in the bush. Yet, over time, this also represents service delivery and empowerment, and possibilities, and refugees organized and managed themselves in relation to this.

Indeed, the Kenyan policy concerning the hosting of refugees stipulates that they are obliged to stay in camps, where they are not allowed to work, and receive meagre rations. The camps themselves have a history of violent clashes and gender-based violence, and refugees have been excluded from essential human and refugee rights, and from Kenyan society. But what does this mean in practice? References to insecurity and gender violence, and more general perspectives on life and livelihoods in the camps, are often isolated from circumstances in the host locality and the wider region, which may be similar or comparable and related to cultural practice and custom. Moreover, the problem solving approach in refugee studies has neglected to focus on emerging patterns of settlement, lives and lifestyles, and indeed treat camps as places void of history. This presents us with a disconnection between how the camp is represented by mainstream refugee or forced migration studies and by more ethnographic approaches.

This article is the result of such an ethnographic approach. Between 2004 and 2006, I lived for 18 months in the village of Kakuma next to the camp. During this period, I participated in the lives of refugees and the host community, interviewed refugees, Kenyans, humanitarian staff from the UNHCR and NGOs, and in general spent much time engaging in informal conversations and observations, and in other ways—as (Rodgers 2004) aptly calls it, ‘hanging out’ with forced migrants. The material here presented is thus mainly primary empirical data. I visited again during two follow-up field visits in 2010 and 2012, and a separate fieldwork looking into urban refugees in Nairobi in 2010. During the study, I chose to be as independent from the humanitarian and aid community as possible, and I tried to dissociate myself to avoid reactivity, and to allow myself more freedom in associating with the research population also at night, or in circumstances where security considerations of the aid community would otherwise compromise my work.

I am interested in what properties refugee camps produce without following a moral or humanitarian agenda. Instead, I observe the relationship between people and aid governance structures from a more socio-economic instead of a strict problem-solving perspective. A view on the urbanization of refugee camps allows for this, and opens up a perspective on refugees as social agents, with capabilities and strategies that actively seek to access and manoeuvre the camp environment, hereby shaping and altering it. It leads to interesting observation and analyses of the sociology of camps, as has been explored in recent years with regard to protracted refugee settlements in various locations in Kenya specifically (De Montclos and Kagwanja 2000; Agier 2002, 2011; Jansen 2011), and reflected in a broader sense in a growing genre of refugee camp ethnographies (see e.g. Malkki 1995; Peteet 2005; Horst 2006; Turner 2011). The starting point of this urban approach is that the refugee camp as a bureaucratic structure, in which people are aided, assisted and emancipated, develops into an economy with distinct livelihoods and processes of social and spatial organization. Refugee protection in this sense should not be reduced to a mere notion of assistance or aid, but rather approached as a form of governance, and the camp as a reflection of the relation between aid governors and refugees that, due to the longevity and intensity of the aid encounter, surpassed the temporary provision of relief.

The Context: The Protracted Refugee Camp of Kakuma

Kakuma refugee camp opened in the early summer of 1992 with the arrival of the famous Lost Boys from Sudan. They were predominantly from the Dinka ethnic group from Bor and Twic, and presented a mix of refugees and rebel recruits that were chased out of the Ethiopian camps in Gambella the year before. They were part of a larger refugee influx into Kenya from the various armed conflicts in East, Central and the Horn of Africa. At the end of 1992, 15 camps in Kenya hosted more than 420,000 Somalis, Ethiopians and

Sudanese refugees.² Over the course of a decade, all of these camps would close until only two remained, and people were relocated to these two locations: Kakuma camp in the north-western Turkana district bordering Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia, and the Dadaab camps of Ifo, Dagahaley and Hagadera, in the north-eastern province, near the border with Somalia (henceforth referred to as Dadaab). Both are located in desert-like, semi-arid, remote borderlands, inhabited by nomadic pastoralist communities: the Turkana and the Kenyan-Somalis, respectively.

Kakuma camp gradually grew until the end of 2005 when, nearly 14 years after the first refugees came, 94,680 people were registered as refugees (UNHCR 2007). Most of them came from Sudan and Somalia, others from Uganda, Burundi, the DRC, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Rwanda, as well as the odd solitary stranger from the Central African Republic, Chad, Tanzania or Liberia. By this time, coinciding with my main period of fieldwork, the camp had emerged as an economy and a cosmopolitan mix of people that congregated in a—given the circumstances—reasonably well-governed environment. In 2005, there were four secondary schools, more than 20 primary schools, seven pre-schools and numerous vocational training and other courses, targeting the education of refugees. There were four clinics and a main hospital with the possibility and practice of referral to other hospitals in Kakuma town, Lopideng, Lodwar and Nairobi. Although there were occasional hiccups in the food pipeline, there was regular food and water distribution.

A camp like this is first and foremost a humanitarian economy in which resources are being re-distributed according to certain principles, loosely captured under the idea of ‘refugee protection’. Over the years, refugee camp governance was altered and experimented with in the field of livelihoods, protection and security, education, empowerment, and gender and age mainstreaming. When camp organization moved from emergency mode to a phase of ‘care and maintenance’, to include more developmental and empowerment programming, people became subject to various forms of training directed at social change, such as peace education, but also vocational training that aimed at increasing self-reliance. The camp and its economy developed accordingly, and refugees explained that their reason for coming to the camp was inspired by the availability of education for themselves and their children, or to try to opt for resettlement, in addition to, or sometimes instead of, the more general fleeing of violence.

Based on what Jacobsen (2005) calls refugee resources—the aid infrastructure and provisions—and in combination with remittances sent by relatives and friends after the start of large third-country resettlement programmes (Riak Akuei 2005; Jansen 2008), people started a wide variety of entrepreneurial activities in the camp. The camp had various markets, mostly organized according to ethnicity, where a wide variety of products were on sale, such as fresh and canned food items, vegetables and meat, clothing and household items, building equipment, electrical equipment,

such as radios and telephones, and bicycles. There was a service sector with restaurants, bars, pool halls and businesses offering telephone, banking, computing and, later, internet services. As a form of entrepreneurship, refugees started schools and training centres for language and vocational skills, sometimes with Kenyan teachers or volunteers from the camp.

There were all kinds of less visible entrepreneurial activities in the camp, either because they took place within houses or communities, or because they were simply illegal, such as the brewing of alcohol, but also catering and food preparation. Satellite TVs and video shops provided people with access to media and the camp was host to a continuous flow of visitors, ranging from church and missionary groups, diplomatic staff, UN and other NGO personnel, human and refugee rights activists, journalists, researchers of various sorts, visiting resettled refugees, relatives of refugees living in the camp and even the odd tourist.

Kakuma gained a cosmopolitan appearance that indicates that, regardless of the experiences of various wars, hazardous flight and poverty, there was also simply life. This became strikingly clear when venturing out of the camp to find out how the adjacent local communities perceived the camp. Most of them recognized the absolute state of misery in which the refugees arrived in those early years, but also noted that, after the first decade, things had changed. Facilities and services from the refugee regime in the camp were seen to exceed those available in the wider area. 'Compared to the wider region, the Kakuma and Dadaab camps have better health facilities and a higher percentage of children in full-time education' (De Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 210). This resulted in a general notion that the refugees were better off than the locals (Obura 2002: 6; Aukot 2003; Otha 2005). This idea was not very different during my main fieldwork period in 2004–06, nor during follow-up visits in 2010 and 2012.

The emergence of a camp economy went hand in hand with social change. These social dynamics are intrinsically linked to the camp economy and include the emergence of social class, and a diversification of labour, a relatively broad offering of services, and some more cosmopolitan initiatives and developments. The camp knows routines, systems and ways of life that are tied to that environment. Although rather vague, this is also what makes a place a place. An anthropologist remarked 'the camp is not merely a place of residence for the refugees. It bears all the characteristics of a large town' (Otha 2005: 231).

This had a profound impact on the local environment. The town and the surrounding villages and the camp have become strongly interdependent. An enormous influx of relief goods, services, trading opportunities, job availability and intercultural contact were dropped on the original town of Kakuma. The emerged economic capacity led to people who ostensibly have nothing to do with it, such as local Kenyans of the Turkana people, becoming part of that economy in considerable numbers. Many Kenyan Turkanas settled around the camp as 'drop-out pastoralists', as they found

sources of alternative livelihoods in camp economy and the conditions created by the presence of the refugees (Okoti *et al.* 2004: 87). The number of local inhabitants settling around the camp and in Kakuma town rose from an estimated 2,000 (Otha 2005: 231), 8,000 (De Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 209) and something between that before the coming of the camp according to the paramount chief of Kakuma town to around 50,000–65,000 according to the UNHCR in 2006.

In 2005, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended the decades- old war in Sudan. After some initial reservation, the camp's population started to decrease when people began returning to Sudan, either privately or via repatriation. In its wake, the Kenyan Government and the UNHCR commenced relocation of more than 15,000 Somalis from the overflowing Dadaab to Kakuma in 2009. The combined effects of war, drought and famine made more Somalis follow, also independently, and consequently the camp started growing again.

By early 2012, South Sudan had become an independent nation, but renewed violence and war in Nuba mountains and Jonglei state, South Sudanese came to Kakuma again, although reportedly this coincided with a search for amenities, such as health care and education that are still largely lacking in South Sudan. Simultaneously, more Congolese arrived, as the violence in Eastern DRC intensified. Later in 2012, the camp's population passed the 100,000-people mark. At the end of 2013, however, the civil war in South Sudan was reignited, which resulted in a renewed influx of South Sudanese into Kenya. As a result, at the end of 2014, Kakuma had grown bigger than ever, with a population of 179,396 (UNHCR 2014).

The camp and its immediate surroundings has become something resembling a city governed by an assemblage of international agencies, and an essential informal economy that, according to Oka (2011: 225), is the 'fundamental mechanism by which the refugees can gain a sense of "normal"'. The camp has grown out of a place of separation, to be increasingly embedded in the wider Kenyan landscape and beyond. This raises important questions about how we can better understand the phenomenon of the protracted refugee camp and the ways people move in, out and around it from a broader socio-economic perspective.

Linking the Camp

In downtown Nairobi, there is a restaurant called 'Simmers' where, in the mid-2000s, small groups of foreigners would linger. Close to the street, between 'Simmers' and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) liaison office above Wimpy's burgers on Kenyatta Avenue, Southern Sudanese would gather and hang around. A small distance away from the main street, there was usually a Francophone gathering of Rwandan, Burundi and sometimes Congolese people. On the corner, right in front of the 680 Hotel, the Somalis could be found. I passed by there often when I was in

Nairobi between 2004 and 2006. It was a fascinating time at that corner—Sudan was in the process of signing its Comprehensive Peace Agreement, for which negotiations took place in Naivasha. Simultaneously, another round of negotiations was under way with the Somali warlords in Nairobi, some of whom stayed in the 680 Hotel. Most of the people I met here, mainly men, had experiences with the refugee camps. Many had been there, had lived there or still lived there, but were for some reason in the city. On many occasions, I met people there that I knew from Kakuma. In some way, the vicinity around Simmers, like other specific places in Nairobi, was halfway to the camp.

The camp intended as a separation yet being so connected presents us with an apparent paradox. Officially, refugees cannot move beyond the camp's boundaries, yet informally that is what many were able to do. While encampment has been the working policy of the government for some two decades, it has not been fully enshrined in law. In that sense, accidentally or by default, Kenya has had a *laissez-faire* approach to its own refugee policies. Although there is forced encampment, and a history of cracking down on refugees that stay outside of camps at times (especially with regard to Somali refugees), there has also been some leniency, also due to widespread corruption in public service which represents a grey area that creates space for refugees to manoeuvre.

When I travelled the roads around Kakuma to Lodwar and Lokichoggio, for instance, there would often be refugees without documents also travelling. Bribing the way to Nairobi was not uncommon at all (see also Campbell *et al.* 2011). Moreover, legal arrangements do not necessarily reflect on their practical application. At least until 2009, travel application and permits to move out of the camp into Kenya were decided upon by the UNHCR that then handed out a document signed by the state's representative. So, although the official policy was encampment, the refugee regime was more or less free to decide otherwise. In this way, refugees who fitted into some protection category of the refugee regime, or who would be able to manoeuvre themselves into this position, could make their way into the city. In another example of how practice interfered with legal arrangements, after the Kenyan authorities took over the process of refugee status determination in 2009, government officials were ostensibly involved in the selling of residence permits to migrants from Somalia and elsewhere. In these and other ways, regardless of legislation, there was a large grey area for refugees to manoeuvre in.

In general, aid was confined to the camp setting. Refugees who wanted to reside in the city or elsewhere outside of the camp had to cater for themselves. There were a few exceptions. The camp—or better said—refugee care transcended into the city as hospital referrals, special needs, educational arrangements and special protection measures. Next to travel permits, the UNHCR was also able to arrange urban residence permits for refugees and had large freedom in determining reasons and numbers of cases, as one

employee explained. Some of my respondents had been part of such arrangements, mainly because of security concerns in the camp setting and educational opportunities. In a similar vein, several NGOs had scholarship opportunities to allow people to go to school in other areas in Kenya, Lodwar, Nakuru and Nairobi, when continuing in the camp was deemed problematic. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) employed the 'Highland scholarships' for this purpose. For instance, a girl I knew mothered a child, unmarried and underage, and experienced such threats that she received the scholarship to continue and finalize her studies in Lodwar, close enough to visit, but far away enough to be safe.

Other refugees were less dependent on the refugee regime. Many refugees in the camp preferred to stay in Nairobi and tried to do so if they had the social or financial capital to be able to sustain themselves or be sustained by others. They could always return to the camp as long as they retained their refugee status. In this way, families were spread over several places, due to intermarriage with Kenyans, education elsewhere in Kenya or had just blended into the informal refugee enclaves of Nairobi. Horst wrote about Dadaab that Somalis coped by being mobile (Horst 2006, 2008). Similarly, in Kakuma, many refugees were mobile and travelled between Kenyan cities and the camp, or otherwise making use of networks or technology in maintaining these links. At the end of 2013, I spoke with several former informants in South Sudan who still had family in Kenya, in Nairobi and Nakuru, and yet were still registered in Kakuma, almost 10 years after the peace agreement. Although they did not live there, they kept their registration up to date and occasionally travelled there to do so.

Some people I got to know in the camp could be considered refugee elites in the broader socio-economic organization of the camp. Relatives from powerful politicians, rebel or army commanders and business people in their home countries stayed in the city and the camp in rotation. Some went to school or university elsewhere in Kenya, coming to the camp to visit family and relatives in the holidays. Others rotated periods in the camp with periods elsewhere in Kenya in family networks, sometimes, or even often, with another relative in a Western country that contributed financially. It adds up to the idea that many refugees in the camp, given the opportunities, try to make their way to the city. As a sign of reconciling this reality, the UNHCR and the Kenyan Government are seeking renewed recognition for the urban refugee category. The UNHCR's efforts to increase access to health services in the city, after having run separate health care systems for refugees (Campbell *et al.* 2011: 28) is an interesting development, for the UNHCR followed Kenya's directive of encampment by only providing assistance to refugees in the camp setting, with the exception of limited special protection measures outside the camps. Now, it realizes that, regardless of policy, refugees make their way to the city anyway and, instead of ignoring them, it is more suitable to seek out how to manage and assist a category of people that is indeed able to navigate out of the camp.

Moreover, it is not necessarily problematic for the city. The Nairobi area of Eastleigh, for instance, as a refugee-migrant enclave, is regarded as an economic powerhouse for the city. Refugees, migrants and local Somalis form networks and invest in businesses that contribute significantly to the urban economy and, although still largely informal, with the recognition of urban refugees not as an illegal category but as a creative and self-sufficient alternative, could be more beneficial for Kenya. The camps were seen by some as a staging point for refugees who want to make a bid for the city, not necessarily as the end point of refuge, but rather one among others. Refugees first move to the camps, learn Swahili, maintain or seek out a possible network link, get some cash in the local economy and then attempt to go to Nairobi. This highlights the more informal linkages between the camp and beyond that depend on social and financial capital. Informally, a system emerges whereby the city and the camp are part of the same refugee complex but not separated per se, but intimately linked instead. Refugees have the option of trying to make it to/in the city, just as they have the option of trying to become eligible for third-country resettlement, using the refugee regimes' labels and criteria, or individual social and financial networks. If they should fail, there is always the camp.

Refuge, Reputation and Re-Repatriation

In December 2012, I was visiting the embattled town of Pibor in Jonglei State in South Sudan where I went to visit the Relief and Rehabilitation Committee. The deputy director I met there declared that he wanted to go to Kakuma to further his education. Not to Bor, the regional state capital, not to Juba, the country's capital, but to a humanitarian enclave in northern Kenya. I found this fascinating. Pibor was highly insecure with an ongoing rebellion, and there was an increasing movement of people fleeing towards Kenya. At the same time, with the exception of several pockets of rebellion, South Sudan was seeking to rebuild itself, and was offering education and health services itself, with the involvement of a large humanitarian and UN community. However, Kakuma had a reputation. Exploring further, I met people everywhere who had experiences with, in or about Kakuma; I met them in Bor, in Juba and even in Wau—people who at some point had been in the camp in various circumstances for various periods of time. Kakuma, or Kenya, as a site for refuge resonated here in the area.

The camp then represented an alternative. When I met one of my former informants in Juba in 2013, he was contemplating returning to Kakuma because of his disappointment with Juba, and his failure to procure employment. His family used to run a business in the camp, and he thought he would be able to pick that up again. It indicates that, even up to 2013, prior to the re-ignition of the war in South Sudan, active linkages between the camp, Kenyan urban areas and home countries were maintained.

When the peace treaty that ended the Sudanese war was signed in 2005 and the possibility of large-scale repatriation became increasingly realistic, large sections of the refugee programme were then readjusted to provide not so much aid, but encouragement for returnee integration and livelihoods. This was on a practical basis, since, with hindsight, echoing the language of 'linking relief, rehabilitation and development', many more projects and programmes in the camp before then had the dual aim of daily governance of the camp and empowering people for the future. Later, in South Sudan, I met people who referred back to the camp and the form of governance they were subjected to, and what they had brought along. Some noted that it is not the returnees that have to integrate, but the stayees, the former having had a higher degree of education, or education at all, some cognizance with a cosmopolitan/urban lifestyle and humanitarian/camp economy. Although this is telling for the lack of development in South Sudan, it also tells us something about the development of the camp.

Another movement in and out of the humanitarian economy concerned camp-camp migration. People came from camps in Uganda and Tanzania to Kakuma, motivated by the availability of educational facilities and resettlement opportunities, based on stories told by their kin. Some of those new arrivals were recognized as 'irregular movers'—people who were already recognized as refugees in another first country of asylum—and who were subsequently excluded from refugee status and aid in Kakuma. Even so, many of them managed to stay and blended into the economy of the camp, which provided a means of living or the facilities to receive remittances, and the prospect of seeking a way to become recognized in the future, or land a resettlement spot.

Circular migration indicates that refugees traverse between home countries and places of refuge, for reasons of opportunity, such as education, health, business or security. Several travelling salesmen did exactly this. Due to the many training opportunities in Kakuma, opposed to the lack thereof in South Sudan, the camp became like a little reservoir of potential employees. A staff member of the NGO responsible for medical programming remarked that he received requests for skilled employees to work in South Sudan on a daily basis. On other occasions, I met NGOs that actively recruited within the communities looking for people that knew English and had some level of education and skill training. Similarly, there was a missionary training school in the camp where South Sudanese students would be trained to become priests in exile and return once the training was over. There were foreign teachers on a rotating basis; I met a Dutch priest who had come to Kakuma to teach for seven years in a row. Similarly, as refugees tried their luck in Nairobi, others did so back in their homeland. In the case of failure, they would be able to return; some did so consecutively. The camp in that sense is a safety net for people that go to Nairobi, but also for people who 'try' repatriation. In the initial repatriation to Sudan, many refugees opted to

keep their registration in order to retain access to the camp in case they needed/wanted to return.

People in camp like these become 'humanitarianized', some UN staff said. They meant that, analogous to the notion of dependency syndrome, the camp experience meant that people refused to go back home to rebuild their lives and country, because they had grown accustomed to being catered for. Hence, they were seen as inactive and with limited initiative. This is indeed a widely reported negative effect of the protracted camp experience, most notably for the many poor with limited options. But another reading is that some simply seek to connect to a humanitarian environment that becomes increasingly articulate and permanent and, as such, opt for the camp not out of being inactive, but the other way around—by choice. The label 'humanitarian' then needs sharpening. The protracted refugee camps of Kenya represent specific humanitarian economies, under elaborate humanitarian governance, that are not simply temporal and artificial, but real in their own right. In this way, the camp is a possibility.

'Digging Aid': The Camp as an Option

In March 2012, when I was briefly visiting Kakuma, I went to visit a Congolese man that I had met on several previous occasions and who had been in the camp for more than a decade. He had constructed a house in one of the older sections of the camp, built by Turkana, but to his own design. As he had lived there so long, he was an interesting informant to ask about the development of the camp: the ways people settled, the camp economy and so on. While looking for him, I found his brother and his family instead, while the man himself had left with his own family for the United States via third-country resettlement. His brother had taken his spot, blending into the refugee landscape until he too could find a durable solution to someplace else.

Although our eyes tend to move to the sections with the new arrivals, where the empty land shows the white UNHCR tents in the dust, the older sections show different signs of life. Here, slowly, changes were visible that indicated the increasingly normal patterns of settlement in the camp. One of the main differences that visualized this was that, during my fieldwork, the main mode of transport had been the bicycle. Now, in 2012, there was abundance of Chinese and Indian motorbikes in the camp for both private and business purposes. There were also private cars and taxis that refugees were allowed to drive into the camp. Scheduled Matatu services linked the various spread-out sections of the camp to town, and to the larger bus stand for travel to Nairobi. The markets had been there before and were similar to earlier; these were like any other market, poorly constructed, but with a wide variety of food and non-food stuffs.

If circumstances allow, refugees choose the level of intimacy they want or need with regard to humanitarian governance and services. Outside of the

camp, the most problematic issue is legal status, for many refugees who choose to stay in the city will do so illegally, with limited protection measures, work permits, etc. Yet active linkages to camp environments contribute to a social security for refugees. Instead of the camps as exclusion, in this reading, they represent an inclusion. Since 2009, with the publication of a new refugee policy, the UNHCR has become more vocal in advocating the viability of a urban refugee case load, recognizing that, already, a large group of people that is more or less capable of catering for themselves should be entitled to refugee rights regardless of the place where they reside.

In Nairobi's Eastleigh estate, the distinction between urban migrants and urban refugees is blurred and, as the camps of Kenya, both Kakuma and Dadaab, slowly urbanize and take on a more permanent form of organization and economy, the notion of urban versus camp may become more irrelevant in the future. Instead, protracted refugee camps such as Kakuma and their increasingly urban-like structure can be understood primarily because of their linkages to other sites and places. It is these linkages that are largely informal, for they are a 'creative disturbance' of the forced isolation in the camp. To understand how the Kenyan refugee camps are part of the Kenyan landscape, we need to focus on that grey zone of the humanitarian economy, where notions of formality and informality, legal and illegal are transgressed, as are the strict camp boundaries. It is the interfaces and linkages between the camp and the wider region—cities, home countries, resettlement countries—that shape its working: how the economy is supplied and maintained, how people seek further movement, but at the same try to retain access as a form of contingency or security, and how as a result the camp becomes increasingly normal. What this implies for the understanding of these linkages is that it is necessary to look beyond the legal letter, and the official policies, to verify what practices have emerged on a more informal level.

Moreover, Kakuma has seen several waves of people from specific areas coming and going. Sometimes, they come from Sudan, then from Somalia or from Ethiopia, Uganda or the DRC. In this respect, it is not so much the refugees that become protracted, but rather the camp itself, while refugees move in and out, in groups or individually, officially or informally.

In 2005, the then-Head of Sub-office of Dadaab speculated that, if only the Kenyan Government would allow refugee to travel freely, Dadaab could indeed be considered a city that would be viable to support itself. Recognition of the economic capacity of the camp, and the benefit of that for the wider region, expressed in the freedom of movement, would increase the possibility for people to become more self-reliant, against a backdrop of aid as a social security mechanism. This is speculation of course, although some other camps have shown resilience after the withdrawal of aid, such as Buduburam in Ghana, whereas others became virtual suburbs. The point is that, even with governmental restrictions in place, the camps of Kakuma and Dadaab grew to be part of a wider migratory-economic complex. Although

occasional political rhetoric speaks of closure of both Dadaab and Kakuma, specifically in the face and aftermath of Al Shabaab actions and threats, there is no indication that this may happen anytime soon. Until then, Kakuma is growing and becoming a more permanent aspect of the refugee environment in Kenya.

Conclusion

In Kenya, as in other places, refugee camps have taken on the shape of accidental cities, through development in protractedness, with no end in sight. With this, the refugee camp, intended as a temporary measure, becomes increasingly embedded in and linked to the wider socio-economic landscape of Kenya and the region. Although presented as seclusion sites, started as functional infrastructure for refuge, over time, protracted refugee camps gain a socio-economic life of their own. Part of this increasing normality is the option for people to move in and out of humanitarianism. People then relate to the camp from different proximities, as the camp relates to people from different proximities. For people, the camp is a possibility, among a wider range of possibilities. This brings the notion of the protracted refugee camp out of the somewhat simplistic depiction of an exclusion site, a blockage to life, a storage and so on. Instead, the above shows how people are creative and resilient in shaping their lives in, around and out of humanitarianism. Camps should be understood in their linkages to other places: cities, home countries, resettlement countries, and coming to the camp as a choice among others, including the flight for insecurity but also poverty, and the search for access to education, health care and economic opportunity.

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1 <http://www.theestafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/1034316/-/onj721z/-/index.html>. Accessed 22 October 2010.

2 Camps in Kenya in the early 1990s included: Mandera, Banissa, El Wak, Walda, Ifo, Hagadera, Dagahaley, Swaleh Nguru, Utange, Marafa, Hatimy, Jomvu, Kakuma and Thika (UNHCR in Kenya briefing note—date unknown).

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