

# **The Accidental City**

**Violence, Economy and Humanitarianism  
in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya**

**Bram J. Jansen**

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**Bram J. Jansen**

**Thesis**

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Figure 1: Map of Kenya

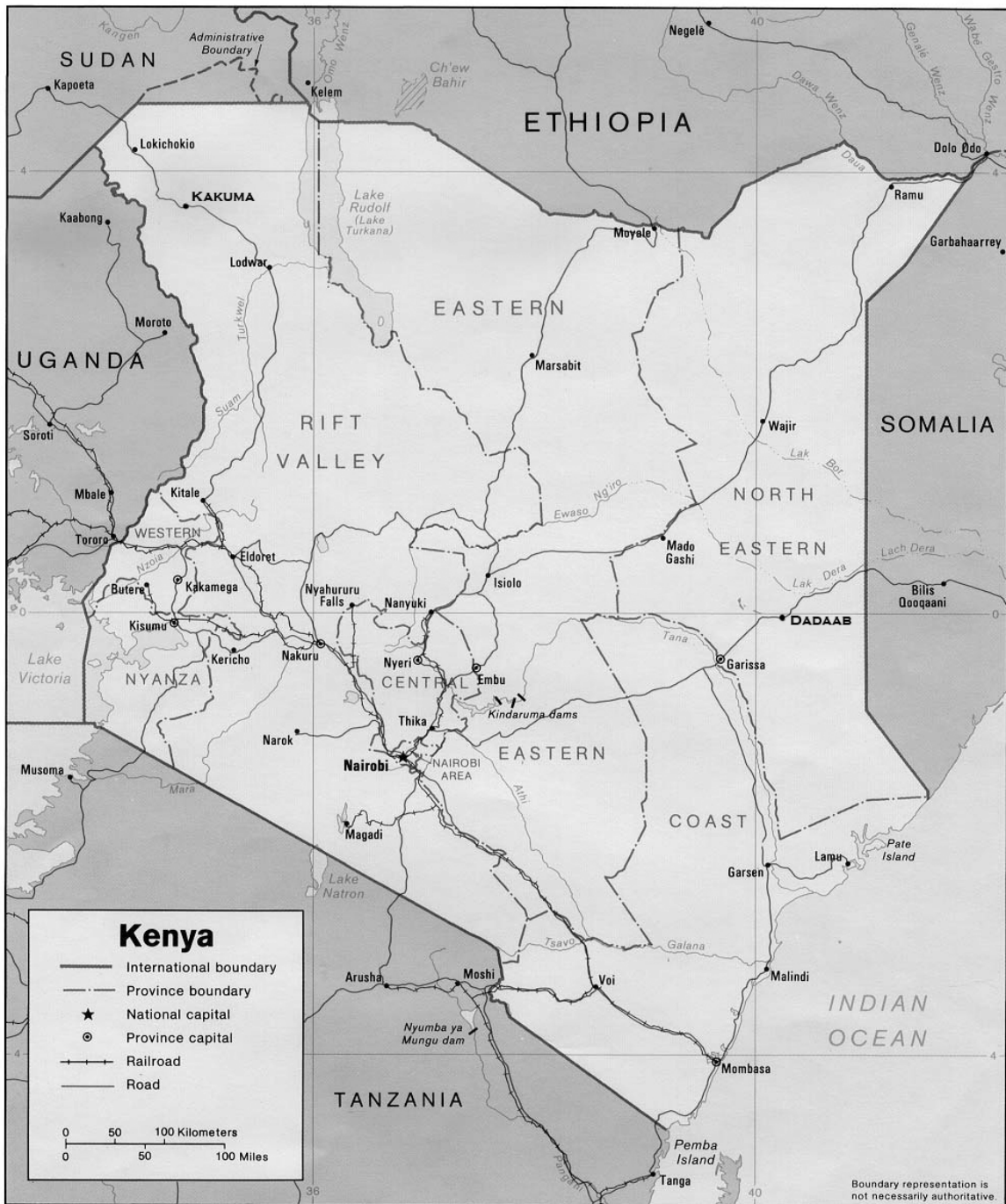
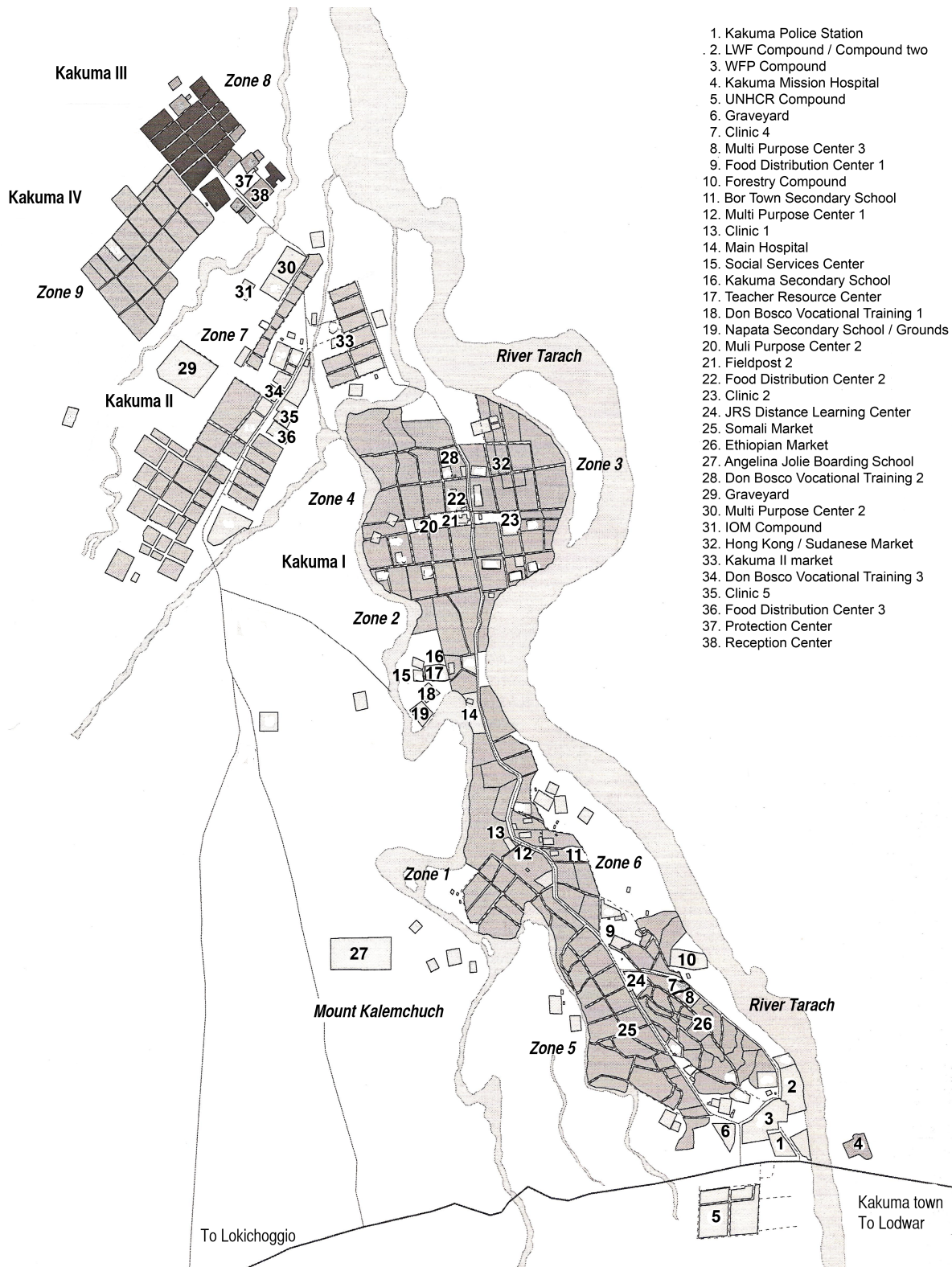




Figure 2: Kakuma refugee camp map



1. Kakuma Police Station
2. LWF Compound / Compound two
3. WFP Compound
4. Kakuma Mission Hospital
5. UNHCR Compound
6. Graveyard
7. Clinic 4
8. Multi Purpose Center 3
9. Food Distribution Center 1
10. Forestry Compound
11. Bor Town Secondary School
12. Multi Purpose Center 1
13. Clinic 1
14. Main Hospital
15. Social Services Center
16. Kakuma Secondary School
17. Teacher Resource Center
18. Don Bosco Vocational Training 1
19. Napata Secondary School / Grounds
20. Multi Purpose Center 2
21. Fieldpost 2
22. Food Distribution Center 2
23. Clinic 2
24. JRS Distance Learning Center
25. Somali Market
26. Ethiopian Market
27. Angelina Jolie Boarding School
28. Don Bosco Vocational Training 2
29. Graveyard
30. Multi Purpose Center 2
31. IOM Compound
32. Hong Kong / Sudanese Market
33. Kakuma II market
34. Don Bosco Vocational Training 3
35. Clinic 5
36. Food Distribution Center 3
37. Protection Center
38. Reception Center

Source: Adapted from UNHCR camp map as per April 2005



## Chapter One: The refugee camp as an accidental city

Once upon a time, Englishmen came to the remote northeastern part of British East-Africa known as Kenya. In the semi-desert near the borders of the Ugandan Protectorate, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of Sudan and the Ethiopian Empire, they found some old Turkana men on a small hill near the dry riverbed of the seasonal river *Tarach*. The men were making containers from cow horns used for the storage of ceremonial ostrich feathers and tobacco. The Englishmen asked: “what is this place, where are we?” pointing at the hill perhaps. The old Turkana men replied “Akumai,” the Turkana word for the horn of the bull, as well as the container made from it, as they thought the visitors were asking what they were making. In good colonial conduct, the Englishmen wrote down Kakuma on the white spot on the map, as a phonetic translation of what they had just heard. In Kiswahili, “ka(a)” means “to sit (on),” while “kuma” means “a virgin’s or young girl’s vagina.” So goes the story of how the town that lent its name to one of the largest refugee camps in the world in the beginning of the 21st century came to carry a rather strange name in this Kiswahili-speaking nation.

*Ka-kuma*. Depending on which syllable is stressed, the word may be interpreted as rather offensive, strange, foreign, abusive and excessive. These adjectives are also colloquially used with regard to refugee camps. The world of Kakuma refugee camp and its surrounding desert in the Turkana region is in many discourses associated with offensive, strange, foreign, abusive and excessive, even among Kenyans from the south of the country. It is unknown, a temporary hazard ridden with violence and abuse and seen from the perspective of security or humanitarian assistance mostly. This thesis proposes another view on these camps, not following the offensive and strange meaning of *Kakuma*, but rather, with a wink, its literal Kiswahili meaning of “sitting on virgin territory” – a new place, grown out of blank humanitarian space, and created, contested, negotiated, organized and given meaning by refugees, Kenyans and humanitarians.

Kakuma refugee camp was founded in 1992 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the reception of people who had fled from the various war zones in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo, Uganda, Eritrea, Burundi and Rwanda. Protracted conflict produces protracted refugee situations, and over time the camp took on a less temporary character and started to show signs of settlement and development both in terms of refugees’ lives but also on the part of the humanitarian infrastructure hosting them.

This research suggests viewing the refugee camp as an “accidental city,” denoting how an institutional arrangement meant to be temporary has taken on characteristics of

settlement and habitation, while this was never intended. Previously empty desert was turned into humanitarian space, and now rests uneasy between a humanitarian construction and people “making place” and settling down. The main question of this research is how this place making takes shape, and how social ordering processes look like. Although the camp was planned to be a temporary solution, the settlement and dubious status of the place and its inhabitants are nicely captured as “accidental.” This ethnography explores how refugees order their lives and surroundings in the refugee camp, and how they create space for maneuvering in this accidental city.

### **Protracted refugee camps**

In the past decade, protracted refugee situations have gained attention among scholars and humanitarian agencies (Crisp 2002; Loescher, Milner et al. 2008a). UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one that lasts longer than five years, with a population of over 25,000 people (UNHCR 2008a). Alternatively, Adelman (2008) uses a duration of ten years in which no durable solutions have been found. According to UNHCR, the average duration of refugee crises has increased from nine years in 1993 to seventeen years in 2003 (UNHCR 2004b). Long existing camps in Nepal, Thailand, Tanzania, Sudan, Ghana and Algeria testify to this, and give shape to what a journalist described as “a sort of semi-sovereign archipelago spread out around the world, managed by the United Nations and sustained by NGOs. The people who live there are refugees, noncitizens confined to ad hoc cities, perhaps the purest form of a growing and global phenomenon: makeshift architecture, last-ditch living, emergency urbanism.”<sup>1</sup> Managed by UNHCR and humanitarian NGOs, the semi-sovereign archipelago represents, as Gilbert notes, “a worldwide mini-empire with a population numbered in the millions” (1998: 359-60).

Reverberating Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of surplus humanity as “wasted life” (2004), Michel Agier views the use of the camp formula for the hosting of refugees in the most dispossessed regions of the world as:

[T]he formation of a global space for the “humanitarian” management of the most unthinkable and undesirable populations of the planet. The camps are both the emblem of the social condition created by the coupling of war with humanitarian action, the site where it is constructed in the most elaborate manner, as a life kept at distance from the ordinary social and political world, and the experimentation of the large-scale segregations that are being established on a planetary scale. (Agier 2002: 320)

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<sup>1</sup> “The Exigent City,” Jim Lewis, New York Times, June 8, 2008.



Refugees, in this view, are warehoused in a non-place (Augé 2008) where “refugee camps are perfect materializations of a ‘fear of touching’ [...] the refugee camp can be considered as, to use Sennet’s (1994) apt metaphor, an ‘urban condom’ ” (Diken and Laustsen 2005: 87).

That “urban condom” has been heavily criticized as promoting dependency and leading to security threats and squandered resources among refugees and hosts alike (UNHCR 2004b; Jacobsen 2005: 23; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005; Loescher, Milner et al. 2008a; UNHCR 2008a). Refugees themselves, being subject to encampment, have been described as living bare lives, excluded from essential rights and citizenship, leading to behavior such as prostitution (what UNHCR names negative survival strategies) and alcoholism. Refugees are seen to be subjected to increased occurrences of sexual and domestic violence as a result of the conditions of camp life (Crisp 2000; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005; Kagwanja and Juma 2008). Jacobsen notes with regard to the culture of camps: “the anomic, alienated environment of camps coupled with the absence or breakdown of the rule of law in the camps often creates a climate of violence and intimidation” (Jacobsen 2000: 11). Protracted refugee camps are thought to produce radicalization, which may lead to political instability in the long run if no solutions are found (Helton 2002).

In a similar vein, Verdirame and Harrell-Bond write:

That, of all people, those who are uprooted should be relegated to camps at the margins of society and be denied their freedom of movement is a tragic irony. Hopefully, in a not-so-distant future, confining refugees in camps will be perceived for what it really is: a breach of the most fundamental human rights, a cruel and dehumanizing absurdity which neither economic nor political factors can justify. The dysfunctions and misperceptions that led to the adoption and implementation of this policy by UNHCR and humanitarian organizations will be viewed as a tragic accident of history. Refugee camps will then join the array of total institutions (mental asylums, internment camps, Bantustans) premised in the segregation of human beings that human kind has learnt to regard as aberrant. (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005: 338)

Quotes like the above can be found in many refugee related resources and literature. This denotes the problem of refugees being deprived of the protection of a state, and in order to remain so in the country of refuge, they are *forced* into camps. Refugee camps express the unwillingness of receiving countries to absorb asylum seekers on equal footing with their own populace, and have been labeled “warehouses” (ECRE 2003) that serve to temporarily store excess population.

Although refugee camps are usually cast as abnormalities, as objects awaiting dissolution, an alternative body of literature and research is emerging that asks the question what social phenomena remain in the shadow of this frame. Mbembe writes:

Although we have witnessed some spectacular cases of refugees returning to their homelands, the time spent in camps grows even longer. As a result, the camp ceases to be a provisional place, a space of transit that is inhabited while awaiting a hypothetical return home. From the legal as well as the factual point of view, what was supposed to be an exception becomes a routine and the rule within an organization of space that tends to become permanent. In these human concentrations with an extraterritorial status, veritable imaginary nations henceforth live. (Mbembe 2000: 270)

Wilde referred to camps like these as “‘development camps’: sophisticated polities, with market places, schools, hospitals, mosques, churches, running water, and decision making fora” (1998: 108). For this reason, Agier (2002: xix) labels the Kenyan refugee camp Dadaab a “naked city,” emphasizing the processes of economic development and social change that have taken place during the first ten years of its existence. Montclos and Kagwanja projected that the Kenyan camps of Dadaab and Kakuma could “eventually present features of a virtual city,” and referred to the camps as emerging urbanities – “as urban enclaves in a sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped part of Kenya” (2000: 206). Agier conducted his fieldwork in 2000 (2002: 323) and Montclos and Kagwanja in 1998 (2000: 206). I follow up with this ethnography on Kakuma, for which I carried out fieldwork from the end of 2004 until mid-2006, with a final visit in early 2010.

### **Studying refugee camps**

Studies on refugee camps and refugee-related issues can be classified into three discursive categories. These categories are partly overlapping, yet represent different traditions of motivating, positioning and focusing research. The first category concerns the legal and policy-oriented studies that intend to assist, criticize, evaluate or otherwise engage in refugee hosting matters. These studies focus on the legal and governing aspects of relief operations, and are usually rather technocratic in the sense that they regard issues as management challenges rather than political and dynamic phenomena. These studies are often commissioned by the refugee-hosting apparatus, or conducted under the auspices of the very programs they seek to study. The appropriation of policy categories in the field of refugee studies leads Bakewell to observe that “policy categories are conflated with the analytical” (2008: 437), which, unsurprisingly, narrows down academic perspectives on refugee situations to policy orientations. As Black notes, there is a risk of

research being co-opted by organizations with particular political and bureaucratic interests (Black 2001: 67), which may result in work that is under-theorized. As indicated by Chimni (1998) a history of this co-option has contributed to a “myth of difference,” in which the very regimes that produce knowledge about refugees cast them as specific cases, requiring specific understanding.

The second category involves studies that specifically aim to assist people and their plight as refugees. Although these studies are comparable to the first category in taking a problem-oriented approach, this category concerns not the refugee assisting organizations themselves, but their subjects. Within the field of refugee studies, a specific research ethic seems to prescribe implicitly the necessity of contributing to the assistance and improvement of the situation of the beneficiary-subject. The “dual imperative of refugee research,” as proclaimed by Jacobsen and Landau (2003) stipulates that refugee research should be aimed at helping and assisting refugees. Similar activist approaches, described by an anonymous reviewer of one of my papers as characteristic of “Anglo-Saxon miserabilism,” are widely used in refugee research. The inclination to moral partiality is widespread, and consequently blurs the lines between social science and advocacy, sometimes in a rather imposing way. For instance: “we can surely agree that there is no justification for studying, and attempting to understand, the causes of human suffering if the purpose of one’s study is not, ultimately, to find ways of relieving and preventing that suffering” (Turton, in Bradley 2007: 125). I do not agree with this point of view, something I will return to shortly.

The third category concerns a growing body of ethnographic research and literature that aims at studying the social life of refugees in camp settings and exceeds the humanitarian concern *per se*. These studies point out that although refugees may find themselves “betwixt and between,” they make sense of their lives in exile. Protracted refugee camps are more than desolate temporary waiting places and encompass a variety of lives, livelihoods and circumstances. Moreover, they develop through time. This research builds on these in-depth studies on social life and organization in refugee camps (Malkki 1995; Turner 2001; Horst 2003; Petet 2005).

One of the ways in which this thesis aims to bring out the lived experience in refugee camps is by focusing on the camp history as a chronology of social patterns and relations that have emerged, developed, and changed over time. This research adds to studies that explore life in refugee camps, but the fieldwork period falls outside the emergency phase and the first decade of existence of the refugee camp. Most ethnographic studies on life in the refugee camps focus on and take place in the first ten years of existence of these camps (Malkki 1995; Turner 2001; Horst 2003). A good exception can be found in Petet’s studies of Palestinian camps in Lebanon. However, as also she realizes, the

Palestinians are an exceptional case. Because Palestinian refugees “are effectively delinked from international refugee discourse and law, one can ask whether this resulted in excluding Palestinians from scholarly discourses and debates on refugee situations and their solutions. Given their demographic weight and the length of time they have been refugees, their absence in the academic literature on refugees is remarkable” (2005: 19).

This is of some importance, because if there is one group that confronts the idea of refugee settlements being a temporary phenomenon, it must be the Palestinians. Then again, this group is not part of the international refugee protection scheme of UNHCR and for that reason, subjected to different humanitarian governing, effectively exempted from mainstream refugee law (King-Irani 2006; Feldman 2007).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, most Palestinian camps are *de facto* parts of and integrated in cities such as Amman in Jordan, Beirut in Lebanon, and Damascus in Syria, and as such, are not entirely new humanitarian constructions. Instead, these “camps” are for a large part inserted in and connected to “normal” urban environments. They have become like neighborhoods (Hudson 1997; Halabi 2004).

Although I place my research in this third category, it remains difficult to separate social scientific observation and analysis from humanitarian concerns and politics. A note on discourses of refugees or humanitarianism is therefore appropriate. The partly overlapping categories of refugee research lead to what Nyers refers to as discourses of emergency. He writes: “It is an approach that is thoroughly implicated within a specific regime of power/knowledge that structures and orders the discourse on refugees and their movements” (Nyers 2006: 5-6). Normally referred to as refugee studies and forced migration studies, the linkages with policy have played an important role (Black 2001: 58). This is also recognizable in the distribution and circulation of research results. Humanitarian organizations have their own publications ranging from high-ranking academic journals to online grey literature. The peer reviewed *International Migration*, for instance, is “published on behalf of IOM.” UNHCR publishes the *Refugee Survey Quarterly* in conjuncture with the Refugee Studies Centre of the University of Oxford, as well as a range of journals such as *Refugees* and the online *New Issues in Refugee Research*.

The “problem solving” perspective in the discourse on refugees is reminiscent of Foucauldian-style “regimes of truth” as “the mentalities and rationalities as they are framed to inform the ‘thought’ secreted in projects of rule” (Huxley 2007: 187). This

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<sup>2</sup> Because their main impetus for exile occurred before the main refugee conventions came into being, the Palestinian refugees are subjected to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). They represent a *de facto* different legal category than refugees that fall under UNHCRs mandate.

shapes a body of conventional knowledge that is comparable to what Ferguson describes in his “anti-politics machine” as knowledge that serves policy and intervention (1990). Similarly, Fadlalla writes that “social justice activists and the media alike often condense the voices of the poor and displace them into a universal ‘suffering form’ in order to attract funding and to push their agenda” (2009: 80). Although I do not intend to overlook suffering, poverty or the realistic concerns of policy and activist-oriented research, I am simultaneously aware of the academic norm of viewing social phenomena in their own context, and in their own right, without preconceived notions of urgency or a need for intervention merely for the sake of intervention.

Apart from the humanitarian subject of study and its embeddedness in humanitarian discourse and organizations, the geographical location of the camp in Africa adds to this problem-oriented episteme. As Mbembe and Nuttall note: “Africa is not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness. More radically, the sign is fraught because Africa so often ends up epitomizing the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly” (2004: 384). Or, as Chaball and Daloz write: “it seems to be the enduring fate of Africa to be ‘explained’ in terms which are so a-historical as to be risible – a lowering of analytical standards which we would reject out of hand if it were applied to the societies in which we, in the West, live” (1999: xviii). Processes of othering are prevalent in studies on Africa, rooted in development institutes and western academe, and are similarly recognizable in studies on refugees in Africa. More recently, social scientists have started to assert themselves as critical to these development-oriented paradigms (Mbembe 2001; Ferguson 2006; Francis 2008; Chabal 2009).

With this research I adhere to Jackson, who writes:

[..] in an unjust world, one should not have to wait upon social justice for all before one commits one’s energies to describing in depth the ways in which people actually experience and cope with life. In my view, we are justified, as anthropologists, in exploring and documenting human life worlds without necessarily allying our endeavors to social policies that promise to improve the objective conditions of those who inhabit those life worlds. In working among people who have suffered deeply and unjustly, I do not seek, as a prior justification for my work, solutions for problems, either epistemological or social, nor bear witness to the truths of humanism. (Jackson 2006: 84-85)

Paul Richards wrote on the ethnography of war: “[..] to understand war we must first deny its special status. We try to avoid quarantining war as a ‘disease’ – a matter for security specialists – but we try instead to grasp its character as but one among many different phases or aspects of social reality” (Richards 2005: 3). He goes on: “we intend to place war back within the range of social possibilities, as something made through action,

and something that can be moderated by action, rather than viewing it as so exceptional as to require ‘special’ explanatory effort’ ” (ibid). This applies to refugees in refugee camps too. The frame of an accidental city is helpful in dislodging the refugee camp from its vulnerability discourse and its humanitarian context in which social processes normal to man are sometimes overlooked, so we can see what lies underneath.

Once the city, a self-constituting form of human cohabitation, has been selected as a metaphor organizing the experience of the camp settlement, questions could be addressed to refugee life that are ordinary in urban studies but have not been addressed thus far to the assemblies of the refugees, partly because of their tight entanglement in the victimization and humanitarian discourses, but also because of the counterfactually assumed transitional nature of the settlements. The status of refugee was misleadingly deemed to be too brief and too evidently transitory to generate processes natural in the history of cities with their usually extensive past and expectation of an infinite future. (Bauman 2002: 344)

Viewing the camp as an urban environment allows one to study the productive capacities of refugees. What social forms are created, adapted and maintained once dominant discourses of dysfunctionality or humanitarian norms are lifted? The reference to the city is useful as a metaphor against which to view social processes of place-making and social organization. Before I get there, I will introduce a short history of Kakuma refugee camp as the research setting of this study.

### **The coming of people with long lower lips – a history of Kakuma refugee camp**

The Turkana in Kakuma town have a song about the coming of the people with “long lower lips,” the Dinka Bor from southern Sudan: “*Hasima hasima lobotolo, Dinka Boro, erukut ka itokengye.*” It means: “you, you with the long lower lips, Dinka Bor, you have come with your mothers.”<sup>3</sup> In the beginning of 1992, approximately 12,000 mostly young Sudanese boys were brought from Lokichoggio on the Sudanese border to Kakuma. The previous year, they had wandered through the Sudan after having been expelled from Ethiopia where they had stayed in Itang, Funyido or Dimma refugee camps in the Gambella region since 1986. The story of the “Lost Boys” – as the group was coined by journalists; after the young followers of Peter Pan – captures the imagination. When the war that started in Bor in 1983 reached the villages in various parts of southern Sudan, people started to flee towards Ethiopia. Here were the fabled camps that people, and rebels, spoke about in Sudan, for there would be education, food and safety. They would

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<sup>3</sup> This is the translation and writing of the girls who sang the song to me.

become fabled for a second reason, since education went hand in hand with military training. The groups of boys were simultaneously groups of young recruits taken in by the rebel movement. For young men, the Ethiopian camps were as much a place of refuge as a place of enrollment in the rebel army. In 1991 the Sudanese were expelled from their Ethiopian camps after the overthrow of Ethiopia's Mengistu regime, and the refugees moved towards the Kenyan town of Lokichoggio on the Sudanese border that had become the aid hub of the massive relief project Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), about 100 kilometers north of Kakuma town.

The early 1990s saw a multitude of armed conflicts in the region of East and the Horn of Africa. Sudan had been in conflict since 1983, when the rebels of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) waged war against the northern government that installed Sharia law upon a mostly non-Islamic people, while a multitude of armed groups, were simultaneously fighting each in multiple and shifting fashions (Deng 1995; Johnson 2007). The governments of Somalia and Ethiopia were overthrown after years of civil war, and in the Great Lakes region Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda simultaneously experienced a variety of rebel wars and localized conflicts that would increasingly lead to refugee movements as the 1990s progressed.

Kenya became center stage in diplomatic, military, relief and media efforts operating in and covering these events.<sup>4</sup> It also became a major destination for refugees. In the first half of the 1990s there were various refugee camps hosting Somalis, Ethiopians and Sudanese refugees in Kenya. In December 1992, fifteen refugee camps had been established that housed over 420,000 people.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of a decade, all of these camps would close until only two remained, and people were internally resettled to these two locations: Kakuma camp in the north-west, 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.

Itaru Otha (2005) has worked as an anthropologist among the Turkana since 1978. Approximately six kilometers north of Kakuma town, opposite the river Tarach close to the camp, he had a homestead and had married a Turkana woman. He would come to

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<sup>4</sup> This resulted in some highly informative semi-biographical accounts of peacekeepers, journalists and humanitarians, including: *The Zanzibar chest: a story of life, love, and death in foreign lands* by Aidan Hartley (2003); *Emma's war: love, betrayal and death in the Sudan* by Deborah Scroggins (2003); *Emergency sex (and other desperate measures): true stories from a warzone* by Kenneth Cain and Heidi Postlewait (2004); and *Where soldiers fear to tread: at work in the fields of anarchy* by John Burnett (2005).

<sup>5</sup> 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).

conduct field research on a regular basis, dividing his time between Japan and Kenya. People in town told me about him: he was one of those anthropologists with a reputation between hero and madman, for people respected his willingness to understand and undergo the pastoralist life of the Turkana, but also did not really see why any person from Japan should be interested in doing so. In 1992 he was in Kakuma when the coming of the refugee camp was announced. He had heard the stories of Sudanese who had come to Lokichoggio, and in June they came to Kakuma. “The camp appeared almost out of nowhere,” he writes, and “the camp is not merely a place of residence for the refugees. It bears all the characteristics of a large town” (Otha 2005: 231). An enormous influx of relief goods, services, trading opportunities, job availability and intercultural contact were the result. Due to the camp Kakuma town changed dramatically within one year.

Kakuma was crowded with strangers taller than the Turkana and with much darker skin color. Some of them had cut marks in their forehead. They were the Nuer, of whom I had read about in the classic ethnography *The Nuer*. I was really surprised to meet them in Turkana land. Others were Ethiopians, with a smart urban manner. Along the roadside, the refugees were busy selling a variety of goods in the open air such as blankets, clothes, powdered milk, oil, rice, and wheat flour that were supplied to them by aid agencies. Formerly, Kakuma had only a few shops that stood on both sides of the street. But now, there was a second shopping street, on which even reggae music tapes were sold. Kakuma seemed to have swelled ten times its former size. (Otha 2005: 229)

The paramount chief in town estimated that before the refugees came, the town had a population of between 2,000 and 4,000 people, others give a figure of 8,000 (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 209) or 2,000 (Otha 2005: 231). Since then the number of residents in Kakuma town grew to around 50,000 according to UNHCR in 2006, or, according to the chief, 65,000 in the same year,<sup>6</sup> as the predominantly nomadic pastoralist Turkanas found sources of alternative livelihoods in the conditions created by the presence of the refugee camp (Okoti, Ng'ethe et al. 2004: 87).

The coming of refugees to the area was not without precedent. According to Little and Leslie (1999), there was a famine relief camp near Kalokol as early as 1924, and later in the early 1960s relief camps were set up in Lodwar and Lorugum. There is a long history of famine and drought in the region due to the variability of the climate: of every four years, only one delivers adequate rainfall (Hendrickson, Armon et al. 1998: 187). Relief food has become an increasingly “normal” survival strategy for the Turkana in the past decades. For pastoralists this meant that they could move and temporarily settle in

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<sup>6</sup> UNHCR's archives in Geneva had limited photographic or cinematographic material of the early days of the camp, of which they sent me some, but none focusing on Kakuma town. In addition, there was a Dutchman with a car workshop in Lodwar who had aerial pictures from the late 1980s, indicating a large difference of land use around town.



towns and relief camps to access outside assistance, for instance after their herds were decimated due to drought. Since the inception of famine relief in the 1960s, food relief in Turkana has increased steadily, and due to expectations of climate change, drought frequency is projected to increase. In the past ten years regular food shortages and famines have led to an increasing dependency on emergency interventions. According to the head of the World Food Program (WFP) in Kakuma, yearly emergency operations were predicted to be necessary in the areas outside the camp for the coming fifteen years, with no end in sight.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, many Turkanas have given up their nomadic lifestyle to stay in towns as sedentarized or “drop-out pastoralists.” As such, in the limited environment of northern Turkana, Kakuma became a resourceful alternative. In town, the drought of 1979-81 is particularly well remembered. Many people came; Turkanas and other tribes that were ethnically related to them such as the Karimojong from neighboring Uganda, but also the first humanitarian aid workers from foreign countries.<sup>8</sup> The famine was named *Lochuu/Lopiar*: “the year of maize,” because of the relief food that was distributed following the drought of 1979 (Middleton and O’Keefe 1997: 60). Little and Leslie argue that the problem of hunger in Turkana was exacerbated by population increase. In the twenty years between 1940 and 1960, it is estimated that the population tripled (1999: 39).<sup>9</sup>

In the beginning of 2006, fourteen years after the first refugees came, 94,680 people were registered as refugees in Kakuma refugee camp (UNHCR 2007a: annex Kenya). Most of them came from southern Sudan and Somalia, others from Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, and the odd solitary stranger from the Central African Republic, Chad, Tanzania, or Liberia. In the middle of a semi-desert stretched a settlement of 95,000 refugees and between 50,000 and 65,000 Turkanas. The coming of the people with long lower lips had made that the area, accidentally, had become something resembling a city.

It was, however, not an uncontested place. Kakuma was renowned for its violence: between hosts and refugees, between different groups of refugees, and a high occurrence

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<sup>7</sup> He argued that anything short of something comparable to Europe’s post-WW2 “Marshall Plan” would not result in resolving the chronic food insecurity in the near future. Interview, Program Manager WFP Kakuma, Kakuma: September 6, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Some people narrated how foreign aid workers freely travelled the region on motorbikes and interacted with the people. They would risk occasional insecurity, but were not as tied by organizational security policies as in present days, in which employees are not allowed to travel without armed escorts. According to some older people in town, it is not the circumstances that changed but the policies of the NGOs.

<sup>9</sup> This is one of the most complicated paradoxes of protracted food aid in famine prone environments. One expert explained that every year the relief givers return, they see more pregnant women, while without relief this would not have been the case due to nutrition deficiency.

of sexual and domestic violence (Verdirame 1999; Crisp 2000; Kagwanja 2000; Obura 2002; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005; Kaiser 2008; Loescher and Milner 2008c). This violence was attributed to various factors. First, the impoverished condition of the Turkana pastoralists in a famine prone environment, combined with a proliferation of small arms, resulted in attacks and violent robberies of refugees. Second, spillover effects and the continuation of political conflict between groups of refugees in the camp led to inter-group clashes. Third, frustration because of boredom and the lingering away in the camp was believed to result in increased sexual and domestic violence. A former Lost Boy writes in his autobiography:

If you were robbed, you went back to the camp weeping for the fact that war in your land had driven you to this arid part of northern Kenya, where the starved local inhabitants were as ravenous as wolves (Deng, Deng et al. 2005: 265).

When my fieldwork started, the UNHCR Head of Sub-Office of Kakuma stated that violence had been brought down considerably, both among people in the camp and between Turkanas and refugees.<sup>10</sup> The UNHCR Head of Security spoke of a “security revolution” on the highway between Lodwar and Lokichoggio (with Kakuma in the middle), a road that was notorious for robbery and shootings. In Kakuma, specific conflict mitigating programming of UNHCR aimed to include the Turkana community in assistance programs, thereby reducing their hostility towards refugees. For refugees, different programs were designed to deal with various forms of insecurity. For instance, a firewood project was designed to prevent refugees from searching for firewood outside the camp boundaries, in order not to expose them to sexual violence. Similarly, peace education programs and the introduction of a mobile court system resulted in improvements in security (Loescher and Milner 2008c: 354).

Although UNHCR explains the reduction of violence almost exclusively as a result of humanitarian measures, I will argue that it can also be understood as a consequence of the changing attitudes of both Turkanas and refugees. Violent clashes have indeed been met with policy changes and specific programming aimed at peace building and income generation. However, equally relevant is that the various groups in Kakuma have learned about each other and gotten used to the situation, also outside the humanitarian domain. The initial period of high incidences of direct physical violence can be understood as a stage in the organization of the camp. Violence is an ordering act, in which boundaries between communities in the camp environment are set and re-set.

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<sup>10</sup> A similar sharp decline in levels of violence is noted with regard to the Dadaab camps after nine years of existence. They write that “cases of violent crime dropped from 300 in 1998 to 36 in 2003 and reports of rape, murder and armed robbery have also been declining significantly” (Kagwanja and Juma 2008: 222).

Kakuma camp is relatively well known, and also well visited. Within the larger region, the plight of refugees in Kenya is well exposed due to the country being such a humanitarian hub in the Horn and East Africa, with Nairobi as its relief and diplomatic capital. Visitors fly from Nairobi to the camp in the morning and can be home again before dinner. The camp is exposed to a relatively large amount of assistance and projects. The UNHCR Head of Sub-Office of Dadaab, for example, saw striking differences between the willingness of [western] NGOs and governments to assist Kakuma, as opposed to “his” Dadaab. He ascribed this to a different perception of Kakuma with its “friendly” and Christian Sudanese, as compared to the “difficult” and Islamic Somalis in Dadaab.<sup>11</sup>

The resettlement of nearly 4,000 of the Lost Boys and 15,000 Somali Bantus from Kakuma camp to the USA since the beginning of the year 2000 became a famous story. It was later narrated in books, some auto-biographical such as “They poured fire on us from the sky” (Deng, Deng et al. 2005) and “What is the what” (Eggers 2006), but also academic studies such as “The Lost Boys from Sudan” (Bixler 2005) and “Governing Lost Boys” (Schechter 2004). Documentary movies include “The Lost Boys from Sudan,” “God grew tired of us,” “Benjamin and his brother,” and “Rain in a dry land,” the last one depicting the resettlement of the Somali Bantus.

Due to the publicity that came with the story of the Lost Boys and the positioning in the “safe zone” of Kenya, Kakuma was placed in a humanitarian spotlight, simultaneously known for its hardships and its level of services. Although a lot of attention has gone to the detrimental situation of refugees in the camp (Verdirame 1999; Jamal 2000; Bartolomei, Pittaway et al. 2003; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005; Feyissa and Horn 2008; Kaiser 2008), somewhat surprisingly, many humanitarian workers I have spoken to on a more informal basis, refer to the camp as “Disney camp,” “model camp,” or equivalent.<sup>12</sup>

In the everyday reality of the camp, third-country resettlement as a solution to refugee crises was a prominent theme and practice and a highly desired option for most refugees (Jansen 2008). During my fieldwork, resettlement screenings and departures were ever-present events and topics of conversation. In fact, as Sagy (2008) recognized in Buduburam camp in Ghana, and Horst (2003) in Dadaab, it was one of the most relevant occupations and ordering mechanisms in the camp. Although, surprisingly enough, aggregated statistics on resettlements are hard to come by, adding the numbers from various statistical year reports of UNHCR results in a figure of 84,240 refugees having

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, Head of Sub-Office UNHCR Dadaab refugee camp, Dadaab: September 9, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Various former humanitarian personnel, during fieldwork and on various conferences afterwards, expressed versions of this when I explained my research to them. Similarly, various other visitors and refugees themselves came up with the analogy of a city when experiencing the camp.

been resettled from Kenya to third – western – countries between 1992 and 2006, many of them from Kakuma.<sup>13</sup> The large projects directly from Kakuma camp, most notably the Lost Boys and the Somali Bantus, started around the year 2000, and according to some this was also the time when the outlook of the camp really started to change.

The resettlement resulted in a flow of remittances that started to aid the remaining refugees in the camp (Riak Akuei 2005). Refugees became engaged in all manners of activities; they too started schools and training centers in languages and vocational skills, sometimes with Kenyan teachers or volunteers from the camp, as a form of entrepreneurship. The camp had various market areas, such as the Ethiopian and Somali markets in the first and oldest section of the camp – called Kakuma One, *Hong Kong* (Sudanese) market at the end of Kakuma One. Kakuma Two market, mainly operated by Congolese and Somalis, and, more premature, an emerging market area in Kakuma Three and Four. A rough overview of the items on sale includes: various fresh and canned food items, vegetables and meat; clothing and traveling equipment (suitcases), shoes and bicycles. There was also a large service sector with restaurants, bars, pool halls, as well as telephone, computing and Internet services. There were also all kinds of hidden entrepreneurial activities in the camp, either because they took place within houses or communities, or because they were simply illegal, for instance the brewing of alcohol.

The Nuer community had a missionary training school in exile. 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 tourists. This all added up to a sort of cosmopolitan outlook of Kakuma, where apart from people suffering from traumas as a result of various wars, hazardous flight experiences and poverty, there was also simply life.

Facilities and services from the refugee regime in the camp, as well as its population and its international linkages, 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” (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 210). This resulted in a general notion that the refugees are better off than the locals (Obura 2002: 6; Aukot 2003).

Since these reports, which were published in the early 2000s, refugee resources evolved and the level of services increased further. Camp-camp migration patterns indicated the same. People came from camps in Uganda and Tanzania to Kakuma,

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<sup>13</sup> UNHCR Statistical yearbook 2001 (UNHCR 2002), UNHCR Statistical yearbook 2005 (UNHCR 2007a), and UNHCR Global Report 2007 (UNHCR 2007b), accessible on [www.unhcr.org/statistics](http://www.unhcr.org/statistics).

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 blend in due to the economy of the camp, which provided a means of living or the facilities to receive remittances.

In the camp, a diversity and heterogeneity of role repertoires, livelihoods and services or facilities has evolved that dismisses the discursive notion of the camp as a non-place. The image of Lost Boys in “Never-Never land,” guarded by UNHCR as Peter Pan, renders life as temporary and people as out of place, subjected to the violence of a suppressing camp governance structure and conflicting groups of violent refugees and locals. For this reason, many young Sudanese – like their elders – expressed disapproval of the term Lost Boys, stating that it reduced their humanity. They were never lost; they were just in a difficult situation of conflict and flight.

*Mzee* Aletea, Turkana and former counselor of Kakuma town, lived by the junction named *Freedom Corner*, where the road from Lokichoggio to Lodwar splits for Arid Zone primary school. His house was a Karimojong *tukul*, built by Karimojong “refugees” who came from Uganda in search of food during a drought in the early 1980s. Here, he made and sold bricks, and he kept some goats in the interior – as Turkanas referred to the “bush” – away from town. He frequently went to the camp to use the Internet facilities and the Somalis provided him with *Miraa*, the light amphetamine-like drug also known as *Khat*. Chewing the latter, we sat down in the shade behind his shed, where he told me his perspective of the future of Kakuma.

The *Mzee* compared Kakuma to Mombasa – the old harbor city on the Swahili coast – a multicultural mixture of people, religions and languages that developed over time due to migration and various colonial occupations. He thought that people would get used to Kakuma, whereas the dominant opinion was that its climate was too hard, too hot, too dry, and too desolate. The *Mzee* saw people intermarrying, learning the Turkana language and starting businesses. I agree with the *Mzee*. The town and its villages and the camp have become strongly interdependent, to such an extent that the references to the hostility of the Turkana towards the refugees was something I came across mostly as isolated incidents in a coexistence that was otherwise also beneficial for the local Turkana people. What Turkanas in town expressed was mostly that they desired more involvement in the humanitarian programs, an equal share in job allocation of the NGOs and durable development for their region. Regardless of some rhetoric of refugees depleting the environment, people in town had no clear desire for the camp to disappear, for they were

very aware of their dependency on the camp. One Turkana joked with regard to the prospects of the refugees leaving: “we are nothing without these refugees; if they go, we’ll fly the Palestinians in.”

To compare the refugee camp to Mombasa is obviously an exaggeration, but what the narration of the *Mzee* denotes are processes of place making that open up an alternative view of the social organization of refugee camp life, with a possible future and an uncertain outcome. In the next section I explore the rudimentary forms of this accidental city.

### **Parameters of an accidental city**

Montclos and Kagwanja note that “what makes a city in Africa is rather a controversial issue” (2000: 207). The ambiguity in defining urbanity, or how to measure it, regardless of the city being in Africa or elsewhere, has to do with what standards are used. UN-Habitat provides an analysis of countries that shows that different criteria and methods are currently being used by governments for (their own) definitions of “urban.” These definitions vary from a measurement of total population (ranging between 2,000 to 50,000 inhabitants), of population density, or included such factors as the availability of paved streets, water supply and sewage systems or electricity, distance to healthcare facilities and schools, and economic characteristics with a focus on the labor force that is not engaged in agricultural activities (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2006: 7). Standards are subject to scale, for various countries define urbanity or what constitutes a city as set against their countryside. For the Kenyan government, concentrated populations of 2,000 people are considered urban areas. Compared to the semi-desert, the town becomes an *urbs*. But the town, when compared to Nairobi, becomes the bush again. Hannerz therefore simplifies the definition of cities, which he considers “sizeable, dense settlements” (1980: 243), and he stresses that cities have in common that they make “people more accessible to each other, in more or less limited space” (ibid). It is the process of defining various and multiple roles set against the specific properties of the built and symbolic environment that makes up the urban.

But the city is more than a site of concentration, density, and multiplicity. The reference to the city serves to de-isolate the refugee camp from the confines of desolation. The conceptualization of urbanity and its sociological relevance need to be sought in the local understanding of the “outside”: the non-*urbs*. The city symbolizes the binary of its exterior as the village/countryside/bush/desert. In that constellation, the city knows sophistication, while its outside is the wild.

The city has educational facilities, healthcare, transport, business, and art. The typical association with the city is one of modernity, access, economy and diversification, all set against a possible outside in the form of the lack thereof. The imagery of the urban includes globalization and transnationalism, travel and cultural exchange. The population, as in the Greek polis, is comprised of political beings; citizens who are allowed to stay inside the polis and are entitled to certain privileges. In Agamben's words, "the exclusion of *bare life* [the non-political human] is what founds the city of man" (Agamben 1998: 6). This is most visibly illustrated by the practice of Turkana pastoralists who drop their "traditional" attire upon entering town, where they wear "town clothes" – they even have a term for the unadapted, the *Raja*, like an unsophisticated bushman who does not know how to behave in town, where he walks around with a spear, without shoes, or even naked. Applied to the refugee camp, the city is an opposition to an outside as a referent through which it defines itself: the opposition is the enduring war, displacement and marginalization of East Africa and the Horn of Africa, the urbs is where order reigns.

The opposition between the urban and the rural is somewhat artificial. A growing connection between people and markets has led Sieverts (2003) to identify the "zwischenstadt," where the traditional difference between urban and rural spaces is less clear. In the zwischenstadt, or in-between-city, rural areas take on some characteristics of urban places, as cities may take on rural phenomena. The growth of slums is exemplary in this regard, since the same material provisions or services that are oftentimes associated with urbanity are usually lacking here (Davis 2007). Moreover, "slums in many cities are no longer just marginalized neighborhoods housing a relatively small proportion of the urban population; in many cities, they are the dominant type of human settlement, carving their way into the fabric of modern-day cities, and making their mark as a distinct category of human settlement that now characterizes so many cities in the developing world" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2006: 14). In other words, as Simone notes about modern African cities, "they are largely sites of intensifying and broadening impoverishment and rampant informality operating on highly insubstantial economic platforms through which it is difficult to discern any sense of long-term viability" (Simone 2001: 16).

This highlights an important axiom. Mbembe and Nuttal note, quoting Ferguson, that early urban studies have in various ways been dependent on "an underlying meta-narrative of modernization" (2004: 353). Modernization itself is a hard to define construction or even an essentially ethnocentric one (Hannerz 1992: 263; Ferguson 2006: 157). The result was however, that African cities have often been described as in crisis, or otherwise failed or problematic, to such an extent that it is not so much the African city

that is dysfunctional, but the meta-narrative of modernization itself that renders the African city as a “negative” space.

Agier writes: “[t]he camp, then, is comparable to the city, and yet it cannot ‘reach it’. An economy that could exist since people show they are willing to work (and, for many of them, to remain where they are), a social division which adapts to the plurality of constraints, an occupation of space which, however precarious, gives meaning to an originally deserted place – everything is potential but nothing develops” (Agier 2002: 336). It represents, in his words, “an incomplete, unfinished, form of urbanity,” and he asks himself, “why does it not manage to turn into a genuine space of urban sociability, an *urbs*, and from there to realize itself as a political space, a polis?” (Agier 2002: 337). What Agier views as an incomplete, unfinished form of urbanity might well be the disillusionment of widespread poverty and informality, coupled with the political repression of a humanitarian governing structure, and an overarching rationale and setting of insecurity (some years later Agier published a moral outcry over the exclusionary nature of refugee camps that stands in sharp contrast with his interesting earlier work (Agier 2008)). In other words, this is the meta-narrative of modernity that creeps into the analysis, and is expressed in a large part in moral terms. Similarly, with regard to Lukole camp in Tanzania Turner notes: “in a sense the camp is like a super-compressed urbanization process, if it were not for the free food and the restrictions on movement and political and economic initiative, and if it were not for the temporary character of the camp” (Turner 2001: 67). As such, the initial reference to the city has been interpreted as stalled in the sense of not overcoming what it is meant to be: a humanitarian governed setting. This however, does not mean that the concentration of infrastructure, economic activities, and diversification of livelihoods have disappeared or become irrelevant, even if they do occur under a humanitarian government.

Chabal and Daloz write: “the notion of disorder should not be construed, as it normally is in classical political analysis, merely as a state of dereliction. It should also be seen as a condition which offers opportunities for those who know how to play that system” (1999: xix). In a similar line of reasoning, Peteet (2005: 2) stresses the contradictory meaning of camps, in that they are sites of poverty, marginality and terror as well as remarkable creativity. That approaches the way Hoffman writes about Freetown and Monrovia: “life within that [urban] space is a process of constructing fragmented and often contradictory selves; it is an experience of being subjected to arbitrary, uncertain, and unpredictable forms of discipline, the demands of which may be for life itself” (Hoffman 2007: 405). He states that violence or disorder are essential elements of the



African city, and thus looks into violence as a productive factor, and not as a dysfunction *per se*.

The dysfunction of the African city is, in other words, a label based on a preconceived perception of modernity, similar to a dominant opinion that regard camps as spaces where “normal” political, social and juridical order does no longer exist. As such, informality, poverty, criminality, violence, injustice and inequality are not abnormalities in the characterization of cities; they are essential phenomena in their organization.<sup>14</sup> Instead of determining what a “genuine space of urban sociability” may look like, I analyze various processes of “production of locality,” and the “creation of space” in the organization of this insecurity. I mean to study the social processes that occur in the camp on their own terms, viewing the camp as a place in the larger world, connected but also localized. The frame of the “Accidental City” intends to accommodate exactly this.

Agier’s “naked” city refers to three aspects of “a probable form of urban life: sketches of a symbolic of space, social differentiation and identity change” (2002: 324). Montclos and Kagwanja (2000) suggested viewing the “urban dwellers in the making” mainly through an economic lens: the emergence of an economy with linkages to the outside world and forms of income generation and entrepreneurship that contribute to a diversification of labor and social change. Building on this, I study the urban dynamics of the camp by focusing on processes of place making and social organization. I propose the following concepts as essential for an understanding of the production of the camp as an accidental city: the social ordering of space; role repertoires; and connections and flux.

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<sup>14</sup> Alex de Waal identified a “compressed normality” of urbanization in Darfur, Sudan, where a large amount of people moved to the cities, since the violence intensified in the beginning of the 2000’s. In all likelihood, processes of normal urban migration have been sped up due to crisis, and as such urban migration should not be attributed to crisis *per se*, although its intensity and speed may be. (From his Keynote speech in the opening session of the Conference on Humanitarian Studies, Groningen: 4-7 February 2009).

## *Space*

The idea that space is made meaningful is, of course, a familiar one to anthropologists; indeed, there is hardly an older or better established anthropological truth. East or west, inside or outside, left or right, mound or floodplain – from at least the time of Durkheim, anthropologists have known that the experience of space is always socially constructed. The more urgent task would seem to be to politicize this uncontested observation. With meaning-making understood as a social practice, how are spatial meanings established? Who has the power to make places of spaces? Who contests this? What is at stake? (Anderson 1999: 40)

The social ordering of the camp is a negotiation of space, identity and power. The camp consists of a variety of spaces, or, following Hoffman (2007), the city is comprised of a variety of cities, all of which exist in a specific but flexible configuration between the people that occupy those spaces and the powers that seek to govern them. Those configurations can be seen as “localities.” According to Chabal, “questions of origin and identity come together in the notion of community, or locality. On the face of it, this is a fuzzy, catch-all, category, which covers a very large number of possible forms of grouping” (2009: 35-36). Different notions of community exist simultaneously, in which various identities are grouped. In the camp, there really is an Ethiopian community, as an administrative unit, but only as set against the Sudanese community, and with varying degrees of inclusion. Ethnic and tribal affiliations are flexible and thus part of ordering processes, in line with Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as an “imagined political community” – communities in that sense are to be distinguished, “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1991: 6).

As with ethnicity, community is a label that is imagined from both the perspective of a label-giver and that of a label-taker. Mamdani (2002: 140) distinguishes between two forms of ethnicity. The first is a cultural identity, which is voluntary and consensual and can be multiple. It is emic and “owned” by the subject. The second is a legal cultural identity, which is labeled upon people. It is exclusive, static, political, and etic. Hence, the former is a form of self-identification (in negotiation with other ‘us’-members); the latter is state or bureaucratic identification. People, however, continuously contest and negotiate the labels that are ascribed to them to advance or improve their position or opportunities. Petzet writes that “place is socially constructed by a dynamic confluence of external forces, structural constraints, and human agency” (2005: 27), indicating how the process of place making is a negotiation between those forms of self-identification and bureaucratic identification mentioned above, set in the context of a camp. This negotiation makes that labels and meanings are contested and change over time (Bauman 1996; Hilhorst 2003).

However, within national denominations there are also other ethnic, tribal and kinship affiliations. The national label, then, is a labeling that is too simplistic and narrow, for in Kakuma some communities consisted of clans and entire extended families, while others were made up of individuals of various ethnic and national groups. Referring to a “myth of community,” Hyndman suggests that “populations that make up refugee camps are not ‘communities’, they are made up of groups of individuals which are hierarchically positioned and partitioned” (2000: 138-147). Although communities are inherently organized and partitioned hierarchically in one way or another, in Kakuma, violence was an important factor. As I will describe in chapter three, where I depict the camp as a “warcape,” histories and experiences with violence play a large role in how people group together in the camp. It is the productive capacity of violence that plays a role in creating boundaries between groups that are in a large part countering or altering and fine-tuning the notion of the ethnic and national “communities” as bureaucratically identified by the UNHCR. In response, UNHCR and the agencies have over the years adapted or changed the application of various labels and understandings of how communities are formed, and how this impacted on social circumstances within those groups for instance in terms of gender, tradition, and dispute resolution. Leadership and authority formed within these groupings of people, or communities, influences and shape normative structures, behavior, and relations with the agencies.

### *Role repertoires*

Hannerz emphasizes the multiplicity of role repertoires in the urban environment. He views the city as:

[a] collection of individuals who exist as social beings primarily through their roles, setting up relations to one another through these. Urban lives, then, are shaped as people join a number of roles together in a role repertoire and probably to some degree adjust them to each other. The social structure of the city consists of the relationships by which people are linked through various components of their role repertoires. (Hannerz 1980: 249)

There are great differences between the roles and backgrounds of refugees. The various and multiple role repertoires and their role-discriminatory attributes in the camp make that, as Hannerz so nicely puts it, “the city is softer to some people than to others” (Hannerz 1980: 250). Some people are civilian war victims who were shot and walked for weeks on end, while others are the people that shot them. There were women fleeing female inheritance conflicts after their husbands died and families from villages that had

not encountered violence themselves, but fled in anticipation after a neighboring village was attacked. There were former political elites who came by car and had been hosted in hotels in Nairobi, and there was the individual survivor of Burundi's *Gatumbo* camp that was burned to the ground by Hutu rebels in 2004, and who was transferred by UNHCR. There were refugees that had been living in four different camps in Kenya before coming to Kakuma in 1992; others lived in different camps and towns in multiple countries since 1986. There were first-timers, who arrived after my fieldwork started, straight from some regional capital where they finished high school, and who were looking for jobs or resettlement. There were Kenyans living in the camp, married to refugees or trying to make a living, or better yet, trying to go for resettlement. The humanitarian system brings these people under a common denominator – “refugee” – and places them together in national or ethnic categories that sometimes include the very enemies that caused flight in the first place.

Viewing where people come from, and focusing on primordial ethnic and tribal statuses, neglects that being displaced may change their sense of belonging. “Refugeeness,” the term used by Malkki (1995) to indicate a broader identity than just ethnicity among refugees, refers to collective processes of identity making by negotiating between old and new, the powerful and the traditional. I agree with Malkki that residence in the refugee camp, and becoming subject to humanitarian governance and labeling, changes or impacts on people’s identities and sense of belonging. I object, however, to the way in which she reduces people to refugees. The concept of refugeeness places the existence as refugees as central, hereby casting the refugee as a special category as an aberration in the “natural order of things.” Instead, I argue that refugeeness is only one among many social repertoires. One is a refugee, trader, mother, Dinka, poet and rebel at the same time, fitting what Chabal refers to as “overlapping circles of identity” (2009: 31). The usage of the label refugee then may have a function in the dealings with the refugee regime, but may be less important among refugees themselves, or in their daily transactions with others, where a variety of identities and categorization operate simultaneously.

Being on the move and living in camps leads to new social realities and forms of identity, as Agier stresses: “camps create identity, both ethnic and non-ethnic, even more so than they reproduce, maintain or reinforce identity” (2002: 333). One identity category that has often been observed as highly changeable in camps as well as in cities is gender. Active gender programming by the agencies, changes in the provision of livelihoods and household activities. In the food aid environment of refugee camps men easily lose their occupational possibilities, while women still serve as keepers of the household. Roles such as cooking and cleaning are still part of household work. An increase in domestic violence

has been indicated as one of the effects of women gaining power over household and family affairs, while men become frustrated with losing theirs.

Simultaneously, however, the camp economy also offers new opportunities. Role repertoires and identity come together in the urban attribute as a diversification of labor. On a micro level, this is recognizable in the camp as a variety of livelihoods among refugees. Livelihoods and refugee camp economies are increasingly being recognized (Jacobsen 2005; Werker 2007) as part of refugee camp environments. Rather than viewing livelihoods in a strictly income generating sense, it is important to recognize the production of social differentiation as a result of a variety in livelihoods. Horst (2003, 2006) analyzes livelihood strategies in the Kenyan refugee camp of Dadaab and shows how refugees manage to cope by creating and maintaining social networks that exceed national borders with the Somali Diaspora. This shows that the role repertoires as drawn from the camp are embedded in wider networks. These wider connections are a third defining element of the camp as an accidental city.

### *Connections and flux*

People in the camp, and the camp itself, are connected to the wider world in a variety of ways. The movement of people in and out of the camp indicates that although the refugee camp exists for a period of time, its population fluctuates and renews itself continuously as people go home, leave for third countries or return, often invisibly and without knowledge of UNHCR (Loescher, Milner et al. 2008a). Moreover, newcomers or “caseloads” transferred from other camps may fill the space left by the many resettled refugees. The camp, thus, is also a transitory place. This movement of people represents what Mbembe and Nuttall, in describing Africa, refer to as a space of flows, or flux, of translocation, with multiple nexuses of entry and exit points (2004: 351). Simone writes:

[T]hese [African] cities exist in a universe of being rooted “everywhere and nowhere.” But at the same time, they have an extensive history of being subject to often highly idiosyncratic compromises, social and economic arrangements that make them very “localized” whatever the series of networks and external connections in which they “participate. (Simone 2001: 18)

This is another reference to the camp as an urbanity in that it has become a nodal point in a network connecting people, a portal of some sort, which provides access to other parts of the network and is made up of multiple social forms and populations. The camp was inhabited by people of various backgrounds, for various motives and for different and sometimes repeated durations. In addition, although it is typically applied to global

patterns in forced migration and not specifically to refugee camps as such, the idea of an asylum-migration nexus recognizes the blurring of forced migration and economic migration (Castles 2003: 17). The modest applicability of this nexus to the isolated camp adds to the idea of the camps as an accidental city. Most importantly however, the protractedness of a refugee situation does not necessarily imply that all refugees in it are themselves protracted, but the camp as an entity may be, while people pass through continuously.<sup>15</sup> The camp thus gains history that exceeds its contemporary population.

The camp as portal is also witness to a less physical dimension in the flow of ideas and meaning. In the heyday of the globalization studies boom, Appadurai (1996) distinguished between a variety of flows that represent cultural material and that can be appropriated for “self-tuning.” The technical, sociological, financial and political process of globalization is what offers building blocks for identities to produce “glocalization.” The camp facilitates coming into contact with globalized flows of cultural material via refugees’ movements, media and visitors, the ideas (or ideologies) of empowerment programming, and the presence of people with different backgrounds and experiences who come together due to the cosmological make-up of the camp. In the camp, the creation of livelihoods and formation of identity groups, a multi-ethnic make-up of the refugee population plus its “host” neighbors, makes that cultural encounters take place in a variety of fashions, and access to some forms of globalized flows that present ideas, media and connections to other parts of the world, mean that people adjust and change due to this locale of concentration.

In her research on Burundians in Tanzania, Malkki (1995) has shown that the camp experience reinforced Burundian Hutu ethnic identity via “mythico-histories,” glorifying the homeland, and envisioning a place therein in an uncertain but imagined future. Peteet (2005) describes how imagined futures are nurtured and envisaged in Palestinian refugee camps. As I will show in chapter three, similar processes took place among some groups of refugees in Kakuma. After more than ten years of the camp’s existence, a growing group of children was born in Kakuma, or grew up in exile from a very young age. For them, the camps represent a different place than for older generations that have an extensive history in their “home-countries.” With the resettlement-boom something comparable happened with regard to moving to the USA, Canada or Australia. These new imagined communities were fostered by cultural orientation programs in the camp, organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as crash courses for proto-Americans.

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, in 2009 the transfer started of 20,000 Somalis from Dadaab to Kakuma, made possible by the space left by returned Sudanese. In total 13,000 were projected to be relocated at the end of 2010. The remaining 7,000 will follow in 2011.

The frame of the accidental city opens up a view of a much wider array of multiple and overlapping identity formations, and the way these interrelate in organizing localities. It takes into account “issues of social heterogeneity with a view to understanding the differential interpretations and responses to circumstances” (Long 2001: 240). Referring to Goffman (1959) and his depiction of people’s presentation of self as actors on a stage, it sheds light on the way in which identity is constructed in relation to others and structures, as dynamic everyday processes. For that, we should look at the camp as a place that is connected to the wider world, and which draws symbolic and cultural material from outside to which people relate.

### **Aim of the study: social ordering processes in Kakuma refugee camp**

This research uses the conceptual elements of space, role repertoires and connections and flux to study how refugees seek room to maneuver in the refugee camp as an accidental city and what roles violence and identity play in the social ordering of that space. The metaphorical urban as well as its physical manifestations as introduced in the foregoing paragraphs are the outcome of this ordering and negotiation. But how does this ordering come about? How do agencies, different refugee groups or communities, Kenyan government officials, police and local Turkanas, interrelate to create this Kakuma? Moreover, how do norms, cultural forms and ideas gain prominence or change with time in this multi-actor setting.

At first sight, there is an “official” order, established by the Government of Kenya and the UNHCR and NGOs, that seeks to organize the settling down of refugees and the provision of aid and assistance to them. Refugees organize themselves in relation to this order: sometimes parallel to, evasive of, or countering it and thereby partly transforming it (it is important to note that refugees are also part of the humanitarian regime, as implementers of programs via jobs and participation). A second inspection shows that multiple orders simultaneously co-exist and replicate the above first form of ordering. Different refugee communities, NGOs with competing mandates, Kenyans and refugees vie for seeking to align, oppose, add to or transform social practice.

I view these interrelations and the processes that guide them, as well as their produce, as an arena. The idea of humanitarian space as an arena is founded theoretically and methodologically in an actor orientation (Long 1992; Hilhorst and Jansen 2010). Social actors have agency, described by Chabal as “directed, meaningful, intentional and self-reflective social action” (2009: 7). People reflect upon their experiences and what happens around them, and use their knowledge and capabilities to interpret and respond to their

environment. Applied to the humanitarian context, Hilhorst that writes “conflicts and disasters are breakpoints of social order, with a considerable degree of chaos and disruption, but they are also marked by processes of continuity and re-ordering, or the creation of new institutions and linkages” (Hilhorst 2007: 3). The refugee camp can be understood as space where such re-ordering occurs on a daily basis.

The concept of agency has found resonance in recent academic writing on refugees, and opens up perspective on how refugees build lives in exile by relating to the structure that hosts them (Jacobsen 2000: 18; Turner 2001; Horst 2006: 144; Marfleet 2006: 109). Skills, facilities, livelihoods, community networks and knowledge help shape access to the humanitarian system, which in turn shapes the accidental city. The ability to get oneself or another through a referral system, controlled by refugee administrations and agencies, inside the compounds, is partly dependent on one’s knowledgeability of the system, access to the goodwill of community members or agency personnel, or the means to grease the hands a little (bribe).

Studies have focused on how refugees build lives in refugee camps, negotiating a new social order in a new environment. Turner viewed particular refugees in Lukole camp in Tanzania as “liminal men,” who where knowledgeable about the workings of the refugee regime, and – to a certain extent – able to renegotiate political identities instead of being faceless victims of what at first glance appears to be a top-down camp governance structure (Turner 2001, 2005, 2006). His work will be a recurring reference in this dissertation, as I apply his observations of a Tanzanian camp to Kakuma. Turner looks at how refugees make sense of life in the camp, ordering processes that are not essentially geared towards the homeland, but to life in the camp itself. He recognizes the carving out of pockets of authority by refugee “Big Men” (2006). In a similar vein, Hilhorst (2003) recognized what she terms “interface experts,” people who are knowledgeable and skillful in negotiating relations with relevant actors in aid. In the next chapter I will argue that UNHCR and the NGOs partly produce their own interface experts through empowerment and participation programming.

The refugee regime, on the other hand, is simultaneously engaged in everyday politics by responding and reacting to the agency employed by the refugees and other actors, such as humanitarian agencies themselves. The refugee-hosting structure is not a static bureaucratic grid of governance, but subject to change and policy shifts, managed by people that occupy diverse positions in that management. Moreover, the policy directions from New York or Geneva (as well as their reports) do not necessarily represent what happens on the ground. Power relations on the ground are, for a large part, local arrangements.



The relation and negotiations that are forged between the refugee-hosting structures and refugees and between different refugee communities can be fruitfully studied in those areas where interests clash or come into contact. Interface analysis focuses on how “discrepancies of social interest, cultural interpretation, knowledge and power are mediated and perpetuated or transformed at critical points of linkage or confrontation” (Long 1989: 221). These encounters then are where social negotiation takes place and become visible. I have selected domains that can be understood as themes or settings of interface encounters. These domains coincide with the chapters of this book as: humanitarian governance and ordering (chapter two), the role of violence and armed movements (chapter three), livelihoods and the camp economy (chapter four), third country resettlement (chapter five) and repatriation (chapter six). A main argument of this dissertation is that these domains are for an important part rooted in a social understanding of insecurity. Whereas the refugee regime governs the camp by “protecting” the population, the relationship between groups in the camp and those outside are to a large extent governed by the threat of violence by powerful groups. Individuals’ negotiations of space are shown to link up somewhere in between the facility and economics of refugee protection and the violence of their wars and tribes and ethnic hierarchies.

### **Ethnography in a humanitarian setting**

The world is discursive; it is a text that is constantly being written and rewritten with no other authors except us. Therefore, for a critical perspective on refugees to proceed, some questioning of the discourse that structures the characteristics and polices the boundaries of intelligibility is in order. (Nyers 2006: 7)

People are identified as refugees under international law when they can prove a well-founded fear of persecution. Evidence for this well-founded fear consists for a large part of the narratives of the asylum seeker checked by his or her community, or experts of some sort within UNHCR or a receiving government.<sup>16</sup> As a result, refugee identity is an essential resource and its proper presentation is an obligatory point of passage to enter the bureaucratic workings of the refugee regime, the refugee camp, and its associated entitlements. Identities are molded around bureaucratic labels to maneuver and navigate

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<sup>16</sup> See Nyers’ (2006) interesting discussion of the paradox of a “well-founded fear.” In the process of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) refugees are expected to provide a well-formulated and coherent narrative of their fear in order to qualify for protection. However, the very fears that lay at the basis of many a refugee’s motivation to flee, are usually shrouded in uncertainty, shattered recollections, improvisation and rumor.

the camp environment. In chapter two I will describe this process as an “entitlement arena.” For now, it is important to recognize this same process in the context of ethnographic research, for the narratives of research subjects form the main source of data for the anthropologist.

If anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens – from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them, from the whole vast business of the world – is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant. A good interpretation of anything – a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society – takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. (Geertz 1973: 18)

The refugee camp setting as a locus of research has a tendency to suffer from “desirability bias.” Refugees have grown used to consultants, journalists, and researchers advocating for them, or in another way seeking to improve policies aimed at their protection and assistance. In that sense, refugees become skilled in Goffmanesque (1959) impression management, with front and backstage behavior. Utas explains how women in the Sierra Leonean Civil war use “victimcy”: “a form of self-representation by which agency may be effectively exercised under trying, uncertain and disempowering circumstances” (2005: 408). Victimcy “as a form of narrative that structures the presentation of self in particular ways – cannot be interpreted apart from an understanding of the interaction context within which such representations are made” (Utas 2005: 409). Sandvik refers to this as a “choreography of suffering and empathy” on the basis of (refugee) law (2008). In Kakuma, the Lost Boys spearheaded a “narrative form” of suffering that others could jump on to. As Fadlalla describes: “activists’ discourses and media reports highlighted how these Sudanese youth ate insects and grass, risked being eaten by jungle carnivores, and drank their own urine to survive as testimonies to legitimate the Lost Boys’ rescue and social visibility” (2009: 102).

Informally, many humanitarian workers were distrustful of the narratives of refugees. Officially, however, the agencies have learnt not to represent refugees as tricksters and frauds (Horst 2003). Kibreab writes: “the line between real dependency and simulated dependency among refugee communities is extremely thin and research must distinguish between essence and appearance” (1993: 336). Paraphrasing Zetter, “[w]hen the gap between bureaucratic expectations and the actual behavior of refugees became too wide, the former fell back on over-simplified stereotypical perceptions and labeled behavior” (in Kibreab 1993: 332).

One of the results is that emphasizing of vulnerabilities out of context carries with it a risk of establishing rather dehumanizing undertones, for instance in claiming large scale abuse among specific refugee communities (such as “the Somalis,” or “the Sudanese”)

that are seen as condoning or agreeing to mistreatment of women, children and others. This is not unusual in humanitarian studies. Narrations of instances in which people are extremely vulnerable and abused while neighbors, members of the clan, the tribe, or the community do not intervene while aware of this abuse, or even condone it, are problematic to me. In Kakuma people aided, assisted and protected each other all the time, in many different small and bigger ways, not even eschewing violence if necessary.

I analyze my findings in an attempt to understand the social ordering processes of refugees. This ordering partly takes place in negotiating the meaning and discourses of vulnerabilities, sexual violence, and insecurities, in an environment that simultaneously shapes these discourses and tries to prevent them. It therefore becomes important to disclose the everyday realities of these processes.

The accounts produced by the people under study must neither be treated as “valid in their own terms” and thus as beyond assessment and explanation, nor dismissed as epiphenomena or ideological distortions. They can be used both as a source of information about events, and as revealing the perspectives and discursive practices of those who produced them. [...] Rather, all accounts must be examined as social phenomena occurring in, and shaped by, particular contexts. (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 156)

Becoming part of small networks of actors in which conflicting interests occur is valuable, as it opens up the possibility to inquire about the various perspectives and deconstruct the claims of insecurity by diplomatically and carefully triangulating inconsistencies. Often, these were fairly mundane inconsistencies, but at times they were fairly sensitive. In some cases I knew both perpetrator and victim of violent or abusive events, or two or three people with competing claims. Sometimes, it is too obvious that informants lie and that some grasp of events is necessary; in other words, a degree of truth. Where do the boundaries lie of doubting or believing an informant’s narratives, stories and the common perceptions of colleagues? And, if we start exploring those boundaries, then where do we stop? What are ethical implications in following up on inconsistencies? I adhere to Lammers who writes that ultimately, “people decide what to tell, how to tell it, what to hide or when to be quiet” (Lammers 2007: 73). Because my fieldwork period was relatively long, I was able to question and observe issues spread out over a considerable period of time, and over many sessions, visits and interviews, simultaneously learning how to go about sensitivities in the camp setting. Most importantly, I guarded against revealing to others the stories and experiences that informants told me, or what I witnessed and experienced.

On a slightly different note, one of the ways in which I tried to combat the desirability bias, was by including “less usual” research informants. Long refers to “oddballs” when

he proposes a strategy by which specifically those groups and individuals are selected who in the eyes of some locals are deviants, or oddballs (Long 1989: 247). The quintessential refugee representatives are skillful in presenting themselves in a desired and informed manner, adhere to standard images of “the refugee”, and are often allocated by UNHCR to be interpreters or guides to journalists and researchers. I have met the usual “interface agents” who behave like, talk about, and know the humanitarian scripts that are part of the desirability bias. The oddballs, however, are somewhat clear in the ways they are odd, and this opens up a vulnerability, honesty and humanity that is valuable in perceiving a place. For instance, the one that occasionally forgets his “stage,” gets drunk, gets into a fight, gets arrested, or in any other way is contradictory, or not the usual trustworthy ethnographic subject, may all of a sudden contribute very relevant insights, for instance by completely reversing a story told earlier, something to note and to come back to later. As such, the one whose story or reputation rattles is interesting and perhaps even more so than the one who has learned which scripts to use, with the story of the Lost Boys as example, nurtured and fed by activist and moral support that became the resource for intercontinental migration in the form of resettlement. On the other hand, following “odd-balls” may entail visiting ethnographic shadow zones: where the researcher risks being seduced (Robben 1995) by rumors, accusations, legitimizations and so on, which can not only result in other forms of bias, but may create vulnerabilities for respondents or the researcher.

## **Research methods**

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior. (Geertz 1973: 10)

During a preparatory visit to Kakuma in 2003 – then hosted by UNHCR – I had to decide where I would live during my fieldwork. Living in the camp itself was no option, because I had no clear understanding of the security risks involved. In refugee camps, circumstances may change considerably after dark when NGOs leave and withdraw to their compounds, but often remain hidden due to security concerns or regulations of host

organizations (Terry 2002; Vogler 2006).<sup>17</sup> Occasionally, I stayed in the camp in the evening after sunset, and sometimes I spent the night with host families and informants.

Staying in town, also at night, provided additional insights about the surroundings of the camp. Staying in the compound of the aid agencies, on the other hand, would have helped facilitate relationships with the NGOs. I finally opted to stay in a room in Kakuma guesthouse, a lodging and bar in town that was frequented by people working with NGOs in the camp or the region, or *en route* to and from southern Sudan. This turned out to be a valuable choice. In the conference room, peace delegations from surrounding pastoralist communities held peace talks and the police received human rights or AIDS awareness training. Refugees and townsmen alike could just walk in, contrary to the guarded compounds of the NGOs and UNHCR. As such, I was free to receive and meet people without them having to pass security guards and gates. It also provided me with a place with at least some privacy where refugees could come and be out of *their* environment, which on some occasions may have created the space to discuss some sensitive issues. I lived in Kakuma between December 2004 and September 2006, with a break of one month in the Netherlands and some breaks to Nairobi and the Kenyan coast. In 2010, I returned to Kakuma for a follow-up visit.

Ethnography means “the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 1). Or, in the words of Peteet, “the anthropologist’s craft is to elicit and observe, to lie in wait, so to speak, for that revelation, for that casual yet illuminating remark or action, that with deeper probing and observation, indicates a pattern of behavior that might otherwise have been ignored” (Peteet 2005: 18-19). With specific regard to refugees as research population, Rodgers (2004) has mentioned an approach best understood as “hanging out with refugees,” as a way to get to know the research population and to gain access to the possibility of being present when relevant activities or events occur. My approach was similar, which is not to say that it was not strategized. I went into camp by bicycle, by foot or *bodaboda* (bicycle taxi) on a near daily basis to spend time with people in various parts of the camp, in various capacities – in school, in refugee businesses, in public bars and restaurants, the reception center, the hospital, and so on – and among various national and ethnic communities. I tried to balance my presence and attention among selected

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<sup>17</sup> In the camps in Eastern Nepal that I visited it happened that very many men work in towns during day, and only return when the evenings begin. During day then the camps are rather empty or even quite deserted. These differences may lead to a considerable hiatus in describing social life in camps.

communities, some Sudanese, some Somali, Some Ethiopian and so on, and to cover all the different geographical areas and “neighborhoods” in the camp.

In various communities I selected key informants, which I met on regular basis sometimes while “hanging out,” strolling around and discussing aspects of camp life, and sometimes in my room reviewing my thoughts on the camp. I visited and interviewed all the NGOs working in the camp, as well as UNHCR, on multiple occasions. I interviewed and spent time with the Kenyan authorities, the police, and the chiefs of Kakuma town. I went to Lokichoggio and to Lodwar to get acquainted with the region in which the camp is located, and in Nairobi I visited and interviewed NGO staff at head offices of those NGOs present in Kakuma. I also went to Dadaab for a comparison between the two Kenyan refugee locations, and to Juba in Sudan.

For a variety of reasons, the main research population concerns men, and with that, men who speak English or a combination of English, Kiswahili and French. I did not restrict my data gathering on this basis of language entirely. My key informants continuously assisted in interpreting other people’s answers to my questions, their comments and contributions, as well as those of elderly and children. But overall, the selection of research population on the basis of being able to discuss things in detail greatly enlarged the quality of data. Moreover, the combination of English, Kiswahili and French, covered a great number of people, as many have followed education in English, or have learned Kiswahili during exile. Kiswahili and English both were *lingua franca* in the camp.

The gender representation in this research is tilted towards males. This is perhaps unfortunate but finds its reason first, in a cultural barrier, especially among Somalis, and second, in the sensitive, if not highly charged environment with regard to the programming around sexual abuse and exploitation. After having been implicitly drawn into sexually charged situations (girls starting to undress, for instance, in the privacy of their house, or hiding my belongings in their underwear inviting me to come take them), I thought it better to be careful with, and sometimes withhold, the part of “hanging out” with girls or women alone. On the other hand, these instances also indicated forms of negotiation, as I will describe in chapter five, and the few instances in which I was approached in this way were situations many male refugees experienced or feared too. In the end, I have also had many opportunities to interview or discuss issues with women, but not as often alone as I was with male informants. Their position is not absent from this study, but it should be noted that there is a bias towards men in the research population. Lastly, but not unimportantly, life in the camp outside of the home is in a large part also simply a men’s world due both to culture and circumstance.

While recognizing its shortcomings (most notably, validity of findings in official and/or statistical representation), hanging out with refugees, combined with more formal conversations and interviews with UNHCR, NGOs, police, the government of Kenya, and refugees has proven very insightful. The circumstances under which data was gathered are at times made explicit in the choice of writing myself into the text. This means that I illustrate case material and show under what circumstances data was collected, by allowing some narrative liberties that to some may conflict with norms of scientific reporting. In choosing to do so however, I follow ethnographers like Nordstrom (1997, 2004), Horst (2003) and Van de Port (1994) who remind their readers continuously how they, as researchers, walked around, conversed, and gained access to data, and in times became part of the setting they were researching. This approach simultaneously offers an impression of how the researcher worked in the field, as well as a natural and recurring space in the text to allow reflection on my own methods – observations and doubts that are necessary to clarify my position vis-à-vis the data gathered.

Histories of war include stories of suffering and loss, such as the stories of the Lost Boys. So do individual histories from the Congo, Uganda and Somalia, and Rwanda. Researching the present life of refugees in the camp means visiting the Rwandan Patriotic Army's (RPA) invasion from (refugee camps) in Uganda culminating in the 1994 genocide, National Resistance Movement's (NRA) ravaging of Northern Uganda, and the subsequent Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) terror. It means switching from war in Ethiopia's countryside more than a decade ago to political repression in its universities and the crackdown of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). It means being narrated the chaos of the disintegration of Somalia after Siad Barre's defeat, the strong clan connections of the warlords, and the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). It means, over and over again, the exploration of the different factions of the SPLA, and other rebel movements, that fought not only the Khartoum government but also each other, and other militias. These topics however, became part of a routine, a normality which, with exceptions noted, most refugees that I base this research on seemed to have incorporated as normal too. It is lived experience.

I oftentimes struggled with the thought that I was perhaps overlooking hardship, like violence, insecurity and suffering in the camp. By immersing myself in the camp and increasingly perceiving of the prevailing conditions as "normality," I might be discrediting this very suffering. Horst writes: "[a]s in any actor-oriented approach, the risk exists that people's strengths are overemphasized; thus ignoring the structural vulnerabilities they face" (Horst 2006: 9). I agree with this, and I have been reminding myself of this principle

throughout the research. I inscribe some of these struggles into this text, where they are relevant for the way I shape my analysis.

### **To embed or to irritate**

Hyndman writes that both anthropologists and geographers have issued the call to “study up,” to analyze and theorize the institutions, organizations, and bodies that govern human relations rather than to study the governed themselves (2000: xvii). She then notes that “as a former employee, I was generously hosted and my queries tolerated” (Hyndman 2000: xviii). Similarly, Agier explains that he was hosted by *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) in the fieldwork he carried out in Dadaab. He writes: “this NGO and its employees (local and expatriate staff, refugees) are well trusted by the refugees on account of the kind of services they provide, generously and unreservedly, and this greatly facilitated my presence and contacts with the refugees” (Agier 2002: 324).<sup>18</sup>

I did not have a specific host agency, for the reasons mentioned above. The result was that my relation with the agencies at times became mildly antagonistic. On the other hand, I believe that the distance I had from agencies gave me better access to people’s perceptions about these agencies, including those of humanitarian workers employed by them. I would never claim, like Agier, that people in the camp trusted any of the agencies that helped them, instead, I would argue rather the opposite.

After initial hesitation (and a considerable amount of dodging and even lying about regulations by UNHCR Branch Office in Nairobi),<sup>19</sup> I obtained official approval from UNHCR to do the research. I was free to do what I wanted in the camp. In terms of data gathering however, relations with UNHCR and NGOs were sometimes complicated in that some information was withheld or denied. After a while it became clear that I was not allowed to speak to any member of UNHCR except the Head of Sub Office, the boss of UNHCR Kakuma.

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<sup>18</sup> When I went to Dadaab I was pleasantly hosted by CARE International in Kenya. They provided me with assistance, information, transport and housing, but I was not allowed to go into the camps on my own without an interpreter or guide of their choosing. This was fine for the limited duration and purpose of this visit – a general comparison between camps – but it would have been problematic for a more long-term ethnographic study as I did in Kakuma.

<sup>19</sup> In rather tiresome telephone and email exchanges it was made clear by the national representative of UNHCR in Kenya, that without UNHCR’s permission, I would not be allowed in the camp, and that they were responsible for handing out permission. After six weeks of waiting in Nairobi, I was informed that “as I knew,” all I needed was permission from the Kenyan government, which I had already acquired in the first week. Later, on various occasions, new or altered permission requirements would emerge. All of a sudden, for instance, after having made a much desired but rather complex appointment for an interview with an LWF manager, I was told that new regulations required another permit from government or head offices in Nairobi.



With the other NGOs, it was sometimes difficult to arrange interviews, and they were not always able or capable to go into specific policy or practice. However, this taught me about the workings of UNHCR and the NGOs, and about their power to exclude and to include, people and information. The arbitrariness by which one gets access to knowledge, interviews with agency staff, and lodging in compounds is remarkable. Later for instance, I was told by visiting and embedded journalists and researchers that the overall manager of LWF warned them better not to come look me up, describing me as a “bad man” – which I would then hear when they came to look for me anyway. This went way beyond professional, let alone, humanitarian concern or mutual interest. In short, my experience with humanitarian agencies in Kakuma, especially with international staff, was at times distressing and difficult.

However, I also valued my problematic relationship with the agencies for it enhanced my credibility in stressing that I was not a “member” of the humanitarian apparatus in Kakuma. For instance, when I wanted to go to for an interview or to arrange something in one of the agencies’ compounds I had to wait outside the gates, which left me with the other “waitees” – refugees – who began wondering why I was not allowed quick access and what this implied about my relationship with the agencies. As many refugees were suspicious of the agencies and their power in deciding their fate, my visible dissociation from them became an asset in my own representation towards informants. On some occasions, I would sneak into the UNHCR compound with the police who had access at all times, or found an excuse to be there, and would then try to move around a bit. On the LWF compound, being granted access to one NGO meant being able to access the others, as they were all in the same compound. Here, security was less tight and I would be able to get in with refugees or Turkanas who had gate passes, and after some time security guards I had befriended bended the rules a bit. Then, once inside I could sometimes make an appointment. In this way, I was able to conduct my interviews with all the agencies – several times even – as well as a considerable amount of observation within the compounds, although it required some element of maneuvering.

One of the results of this problematic relationship is that some base-line data were hard to come, by or is simply absent in this study. Keeping in mind Ferguson’s warning on statistics – “in ‘development’ discourse, the fact that there are no statistics available is no excuse for not presenting statistics, and even made-up numbers are better than none at all” (1990: 41) – this is not necessarily an indication of weak research, or even a problem as such. Statistical representations that I received were invariably messy,

incomplete and contradictory.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, many of the policies as they are implemented on the ground differ from the way in which they are written down.

Among humanitarian employees, there were differences between the international expatriate staff, the non-Turkana Kenyan employees and the local Turkana employees. Moreover, they had different levels of guard with regard to their freedom to discuss the refugee program. As such, it became worthwhile getting to know the little clusters of employees on other occasions, especially where official staff interviews were difficult to obtain. For instance, nearly everyday Kenyan employees of IRC, LWF and Oxfam would come to the police canteen after work, where I would regularly meet them, as well as in other places. In the wee hours of informality, which on behalf of routine became structured, information on the refugee project was spread. And the official texts of NGOs would become nuanced by stories from the ground. Overhearing the stories of daily life brought the discrepancy between the official narratives and the unofficial to the fore. In that informality, the camp would be part of the “local human landscape” (Appadurai 1996), and those who worked with refugees in a professional capacity on a daily basis, became “unofficial” in the evenings.

Among the people I was not allowed to interview by the Head of Sub-Office was a man who had worked for UNHCR in Kakuma since the very start of the refugee project. People like him had a unique insight into the project and its history, and in the end I often met him somewhere in town or in the camp, where I would ask my questions and check his perspective in an informal way. Staying around long enough allowed me to partake in the daily conversations and frustrations of many of the aid workers, who, without discrediting them, often spoke differently about their daily affairs and refugee issues in the privacy of out-of-officeness, than their managers did in more official forums. This approach however led me to ethically motivate that I refer to people anonymously as much as possible.

## **Structure of the book**

This ethnography takes the metaphorical and physical parameters of urbanity to analyze social ordering processes in Kakuma refugee camp. In this first chapter I have described the reason, rationale and the conceptual organization of this study. My empirical findings

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, I received a UNHCR breakdown of ethnicities in the camp that when I decided to count the listed individuals, reached a little over 30,000 people. This is three times less than the official figure of registered refugees at that time. For this reason, I did not include much of this type of data in the study. In a similar vein, police and UNHCR statistics on crime and violence differed considerably. Numbers on births, deaths and other health related data provided by IRC showed similar disparities.

are organized according to five domains as subsets of the urban lens. In addition, an intermission and an epilogue provide two shorter contributions in the form of a mapping of the camp, and a follow-up some years after my fieldwork. The five domains also represent a broad chronology of developments in the camp. In this way, the chapters are organized incrementally in the sense that they represent broad developments in the camp over the years.

In chapter two, the camp is explored from the perspective of humanitarian governance, generally referred to as “refugee protection.” UNHCR and the NGOs form a pseudo-government for the refugee population. The implementation of services and protection measures based on a variety of rights set out in international legal instruments is part of an order that is being imposed on the refugee population, and that attempts stimulating empowerment and social change. Refugees, however, engage with the agencies to divert, adapt, challenge and change that ordering to their preferences or needs. For this reason, I view the camp as an entitlement arena, where under the inclusionary measures of humanitarian governance, refugees seek access to negotiate with the regime. I describe the bio-politics of the agencies and give a brief overview of services and assistance.

An intermission – not a chapter in its own right, but still important enough to present in the main text – presents a virtual tour of the camp to familiarize the reader with its contours. Since the occupation and usage of “space” plays a large role in the ordering of the camp and the reference to urbanity, it is important to know what this camp looks like. Before continuing on to the more empirical domains of the study, I will “walk the camp,” thereby virtualizing the physical make-up by describing which people live where, what services are provided in which locations, and what structures look like. The following chapters refer back to the places that are introduced in this intermission.

In chapter three, I use the notion of a “warscape” to examine how experiences and histories of violence, and past and present liaisons with rebel or military movements, regulate the use of space and influence power processes in the camp. Various material and symbolic linkages between countries of war and the camp, give shape to processes of place making and ordering. Violence and its references in ideology and cosmology have a productive capacity in carving out pockets of authority and autonomy, sometimes in an informal, or even criminal, setting. Moreover, the camp also functioned as a rear base and harbor for rebel movements. This contributes not only to processes of boundary-setting between communities, but also to a local understanding of insecurity and place.

The fourth chapter examines the camp in a socio-economic capacity, analyzing how refugees negotiate ways to generate livelihoods using the infrastructure in the camp, like “digging” aid, hereby creating a refugee camp economy. Simultaneously, this chapter explores the impacts of these livelihoods on a social level, since the refugee economy, with linkages outside the camp, is closely intertwined with education and social change. This leads to the camp developing a modest cosmopolitan quality, as the combined result of multiculturalism, entrepreneurship and social change.

The fifth chapter deals with linkages that are shaped between the presumed isolated camp and various elements of the global world, most importantly via the process of third country resettlement, and its impact on the camp. The camp is discussed as a portal in which a variety of streams or flows from the world at large arrive in the camp, and through which refugees are skillful in their attempts to access opportunities for resettlement to move further abroad. I analyze the ways in which insecurity becomes not only a resource but also something that is negotiated to access services and opportunities such as resettlement.

Chapter six examines the politics of repatriation, combined with future expectations with regard to the camp. After the signing of the peace agreement in Sudan, an additional dynamic entered Kakuma. The possibility of repatriation created expectations and nervousness among almost everybody. For those who remained behind, there was the danger of the camp closing; for those going, there was an expectation of return to citizenship in an uncertain future. But who determines when to go, and what to expect? And what do refugees themselves expect after prolonged refugeedom?

Chapter seven is the general conclusion in which I will present the main findings of the research. In the epilogue, I return to the camp after some relevant changes have taken place. It is a test of the frame of the accidental city some years after the main fieldwork was done: what remains of the conceptual urbanity in Kakuma, and does it have any value for policy or academic observation? In this epilogue I also report on my meetings with informants, during which I presented and discussed some of my findings.

## Chapter Two: The refugee camp as an entitlement arena

The single-engine Cessna Caravan, the humanitarian air-vehicle *par excellence*, chartered by UNHCR, flies over a seemingly endless and empty Turkanaland. I see empty riverbeds and clusters of trees along its banks in the otherwise barren landscape, with every now and then a nomad's collection of *tukuls*, thatched huts with circled fences around them. Following the mountain range along the Ugandan border on the western edge of the Great Rift Valley, it suddenly bends over Kakuma town and circles downwards over the refugee camp. Then, an enormous collection of small houses and shelters emerges, in circles and in groups, some in squares with neat rectangular streets and others in seemingly random order. As the plane lands, I am reminded of Simon Turner who introduces his visualization of the grid of order laid over *Lukole* refugee camp in Tanzania as seen from the sky, as most visitors do when they come for the first time (2001: 19). It is a powerful image as he introduces the helicopter view of the refugee regime's ordering of stalled humanity. I remember this when I am in the plane as it turns over the refugee houses of Kakuma and I slowly get a grasp of the vastness of the place, but in part also of its seeming disorder and variety.

As a sign of the times, sometime in the summer of 2008, overlay satellite imagery of Kakuma camp and town, as well as the Dadaab camps, was added to Google Earth. Hovering over the camp can now be done from behind my computer. I can follow the same routes I took during my fieldwork between 2004 and 2006, just as I took them then by foot or by bicycle. I can see the places where I would meet my informants, zooming in on their houses and communities. Browsing like this I can move to the schools, the hospital and the food distribution centers. I am able to locate boreholes and the agency compounds, and the new living quarters of World Food Program (WFP) personnel, who just erected a third compound. I see the new Angelina Jolie girls boarding school close to mount *Kalemchuch*, and the secondary schools of Napata, Kakuma Secondary and Bor Town.

There are variations in how different communities, nationalities and ethnicities build their compounds and organize their living spaces; some houses are positioned towards a common center ground, while others are simply lined up in rows; some areas are covered by trees, others are in the desert. In the sun, the blistering corrugated iron roofs of *Addis Abeba street* and *Mogadishu street* – the Ethiopian and Somali markets respectively – light up. Moving further along *Kakuma highway*, *Hong Kong* and Kakuma Two markets are clearly visible, and then the relatively new and undeveloped emptiness of Kakuma Three and Four. I see where the houses once stood of the Somali Bantus who were resettled to the

USA. I remember them from a reconnaissance of the camp in 2003, and many of them have been torn down since. The remnants that once housed approximately 15,000 people are visible from the sky as drawings in the ground, signs of where walls once stood. A chronology of lived space is visible from the digital sky: from the oldest parts to the new, from settled to bare – literally, without trees.

From the sky, the camp shows both functionally organized space and organically occupied space. This juxtaposition serves as a visual reminder of the negotiation that defines this place, in which the governing and ordering of the refugee regime is met by the governing and ordering of the refugees themselves. This research is essentially about that meeting, in the context of the development through protractedness that Kakuma has known over the past years.

In this chapter I will explore the refugee hosting rationale of UNHCR and the NGOs in Kakuma. I argue that the camp is an arena in which entitlements are handed to refugees by a pseudo-sovereign “city” government, and that various elements among the population vie for, evade or build on. Based on a rationale of both human and refugee rights, refugees are empowered to participate in the governing of the camp. The result is the creation of sub-authorities among the refugee population that form interfaces linking people, programs and ideas. These interfaces are an important locus of study for this is where the transfer of power takes place, and where social ordering processes materialize or become visible.

## **Refugee protection in Kenya**

Diken and Laustsen name three characteristics of the “camp” as a sociological structure. First: its temporality. Second: the camp signifies a position or a doctrine, which makes the differences between the insiders of the camp less important than those between insiders and outsiders – it is thus a mechanism of ordering (as they refer to Gilroy, “camp mentality relentlessly translates heterogeneity into homogeneity”). And third: the camp is defined by a particular life form (Diken and Laustsen 2005: 17). In the previous chapter I have questioned the first of these characteristics, suggesting instead that protractedness changes the idea of the camp as temporary settlement. This chapter is about the second characteristic and explores refugee protection as a position or doctrine that informs camp governance.

“Refugee protection” refers to the activities undertaken to assist refugees, both as rights-holders in a legal sense, and as beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. These are distinct

but converging understandings. The first category is rooted in a body of law and declarations that bind signatory States to ensuring that the reception and hosting of refugees takes place in accordance with internationally agreed standards. The second category concerns the practical implementation of humanitarian assistance to refugees. Before entering the camp to examine the more ad-hoc regulations that guide the practical implementation of refugee assistance on the ground, I will briefly explain the legal understanding of refugee protection, based in the first instance on the refugee as a legal category. This first conceptualization of refugee protection, and the requirements that follow from it, are neatly set out by Helton and Caverzasio:

When we speak of “protection,” we mean *legal* protection. The concept must be associated with entitlements under law and, for effective redress of grievances, mechanisms to vindicate claims in respect of those entitlements. An inquiry, then, into whether a population has “protection” is an examination of the fashion in which the pertinent authorities comply with the entitlements of individuals under international law, and the manner in which these legal precepts are implemented and respected. (Helton 2003: 20)

Protection is: “all activities aimed at insuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of the law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. Human rights and humanitarian organizations must conduct these activities in an impartial manner and not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, language or gender. (Sylvie Giosso Caverzasio, in Slim and Bonwick 2005: 33)

The rights accorded to refugees are laid down in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the 1951 Convention) and its 1967 Protocol. The 1951 Convention binds states to protect persons who:

Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (1951 Convention)

Since its inception, the framework of refugee rights has gradually expanded. The 1951 Convention originally targeted those who fled following events occurring before 1951, and concerned refugees in Europe only. A changing world characterized by anti-colonial liberation struggles with large-scale displacement in their wake prompted to this expansion (Martin, Weiss Fagen et al. 2005: 35). The temporal and geographical limitations were dismissed with the coming into force of the 1967 Protocol, broadening

the 1951 Convention to give it global applicability. Shortly thereafter, in recognition of the specificities of colonial heritage, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa in 1969, which further broadened the scope of the refugee definition:

The term “refugee” shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.<sup>1</sup> (1969 OAU Convention)

The main difference with the earlier 1951 Convention is the inclusion of “events seriously disturbing public order.” This is a step away from the individual fear of persecution that is fundamental to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and allows for an inclusion of broader reasons to flee. Circumstances resulting from *coups d'état*, political shifts, ethnic struggle, but also climatological circumstances such as drought or general poverty became intertwined with the refugee phenomenon. These matters often coincide; for instance, armed conflict may result in food insecurity prompting people to flee not so much because of an individual fear of persecution as such, but because they seek access to food, water, health and so on. More recently, the coming together of economic and political motivations and strategies for fleeing were recognized as an “asylum-migration nexus” (Betts 2010). For instance, from 2004 onwards, the majority of Sudanese who came to Kakuma reported reasons of food insecurity or educational opportunities as motivation for flight.

States that have ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol are obliged to accord to refugees the rights of freedom of religion, elementary education, access to healthcare and courts, on equal footing with their own citizens. Other rights that are to be granted on an equal basis as those accorded to (non-refugee) nationals of other countries residing in the host country are the rights of association and freedom of movement. The right to wage-earning employment, public education beyond elementary school, and property and housing, should be *no less* than accorded to other aliens residing in the host country. Additionally, rights and access to wage-earning employment should be equal to citizens after three years of residence in the host-country (1951 Convention). The most important element of refugee law however, is the principle of *non-refoulement* which

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “events seriously disturbing public order,” may be interpreted to include a variety of development-related circumstances or lack of livelihood opportunities. Failed states that are subject to recurring famine, poverty, as well as dictatorships that suppress people at large, but not on the basis of individual characteristics, are valid reasons for people to pursue flight. Some have argued that with the OAU supplement, the refugee definition becomes too broad to be properly administered.



stipulates that refugees may not be forcefully returned to their country of origin against their will, when there are still objective circumstances of insecurity.

Kenya has acceded to the 1951 Convention, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. At the time of my fieldwork, however, Kenya had not implemented any domestic refugee legislation and its ad-hoc policy with regard to refugees basically meant that they were not allowed to integrate and were obliged to reside in refugee camps. This measure was instigated by the influx of refugees in 1991, for until that time the Kenyan government recognized what were termed as “convention refugees.” In 2005 there were approximately 2,500 out of an earlier, pre-1991, figure of 12,500 convention refugees left in Kenya, who fully enjoyed the rights granted under the 1951 Convention and were free to settle anywhere in Kenya and to obtain work permits (Turton 2005: 9).

The reason for the Kenyan government to cease recognizing asylum seekers as convention refugees was the overwhelming influx of asylum seekers in the early 1990s. Between March 1991 and the end of 1992, the refugee population in Kenya grew from 16,000 to 427,278 (Kagwanja and Juma 2008: 220). Although the government established the National Refugee Secretariat within the Ministry of Home Affairs, the system “was too feeble to deal effectively with refugees” (ibid). From then on, the government *de facto* marginalized itself from refugee affairs, and relegated most administrative responsibilities to the international community in the form of UNHCR.

At the end of 2006 however, the long awaited refugee bill was passed in the Kenyan parliament. Amongst other measures, with capacity building by UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), a new Department for Refugee Affairs (DRA) was created under the Ministry of Immigration and Naturalization of Persons, and first steps were taken for the gradual resumption of refugee administration by the Kenyan government.<sup>2</sup> In the epilogue I will briefly update on this development.

Since 1991, the Kenyan government’s policy with regard to refugees stipulates that they must remain in refugee camps, and relegates nearly every aspect of refugee protection to UNHCR and NGOs as implementing partners. UNHCR took over the process of Refugee Status Determination (RSD), but since the agency itself is not a signatory to the convention, refugees recognized by UNHCR were labeled “mandate refugees,” reflecting their recognition under UNHCR’s mandate, instead of the 1951 Convention. A large part

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of my last visit to Nairobi in November 2010, not only was the Department for Refugee Affairs hardly operational, but RSD was still performed by UNHCR. More problematic was that its management, as well as that of the Ministry of Immigration and Naturalization of Persons, was suspended from work on account of suspected corruption in the form of the trade in refugee documents. See: “Immigration chiefs purged in graft war,” *Daily nation*, November 2, 2010; and “Officers in a spot over human smuggling,” *The Standard*, November 8, 2010.

of the refugees in Kenya have been accepted as *prima facie* refugees. A legal procedure that is used for circumstances of mass influx, when capacity to perform RSD becomes overwhelmed, and when general circumstances in countries of origin are determined as valid reasons for flight (Mandal 2005). Under a *prima facie* arrangement, asylum seekers are recognized as refugees on the basis of belonging to a certain group, instead of individual circumstances. In Kenya, the Sudanese and the Somalis fell under this arrangement. Other nationalities in the camp underwent individual RSD, but in history some had *prima facie* status too, such as the Ethiopians until 1997.

*Prima facie* refugees, like mandate refugees, theoretically fall under the 1951 Convention. They were not, however, given the same alien registration cards as the earlier convention refugees. Instead, in line with encampment policy, the “ration card,” or “protection letter,” served as refugee document. In 2005, an estimated 250,000 refugees resided in Kenya, most of them in Kakuma and Dadaab. There were also an estimated 15,000 to 60,000 illegal and undocumented migrants in Nairobi (Turton 2005: 7), although in several interviews conducted with government representatives and UNHCR in Nairobi, numbers up to 100,000 were mentioned. The majority of asylum seekers who came to Kenya were told to report to the UNHCR office in Nairobi, from where they would be provided with a movement pass to go to one of the camps.<sup>3</sup> Refugees coming from Sudan were “processed” by UNHCR in Lokichoggio, from where they were transported to the camp in trucks.

Kenya’s involvement in the running of the camp was basically restricted to police duties: maintaining security. Kenyan police aimed to keep the refugees within the virtual walls of the refugee camps and to maintain the rule of law and order. The Administration Police (AP), a special branch called in to support the Kenyan police, also had a base in town. Occasionally, a paramilitary force called the General Service Unit (GSU) was brought in when there were severe situations of violence and disturbance (Kakuma being a border area in a cattle rustling prone area, is being subject to increased insecurity anyway – the GSU and Kenyan army are never very far away). Although the District Officer (DO) would not mention the exact number of police and administration police, it is known that the forces of Dadaab and Kakuma are among the largest police forces in the country. The other responsibilities for camp administration fell to UNHCR and the NGOs.

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<sup>3</sup> Several refugees explained how they were picked up by Kenyan officials at the border when they crossed, and indicated that they were questioned for their motives of flight, some of them being held in border offices at the border or even hosted in Nairobi in Hotels. This indicates Kenya’s involvement in keeping out undesirable elements, mainly suspected refugee warriors and political dissidents.

The extent of UNHCR's role as a humanitarian implementer, which it has come more and more in the past decades, has provoked an important debate on whether the agency is compromising its mandate of safeguarding refugee rights; a role initially carried out predominantly in an advocacy and advisory capacity (Loescher 2003: 11). As Hathaway notes: "UNHCR is – in law or in fact – the means by which refugee protection is delivered on the ground. In seeking to exercise its traditional supervisory authority, UNHCR therefore faces a serious ethical dilemma, since it is often in the position of being responsible effectively to supervise itself" (Hathaway 1995: 996). This is a powerful position, and it is interesting to see how this power is manifested and the extent of its reach.

### **UNHCR's Power to govern**

As the core agency coordinating, funding and implementing humanitarian aid to refugees and IPDs, and the regions that host them, UNHCR has executive power over people. In this paragraph I explore what this "power to govern" looks like and in which ways it is used to order the refugee-hosting environment.

In the absence of Kenyan refugee law, UNHCR's authority to run refugee operations in the camps and in Nairobi has impacted on Kenyan state matters in important ways. This became very visible on the local level in Kakuma, where executive power relegated to UNHCR has begun to resemble power normally accorded to governments. Although UNHCR states that it cannot be considered a substitute for government responsibility, in many refugee camps it has *de facto* become this substitute (Wilde 1998; Turner 2004; Pallis 2006; Slaughter and Crisp 2008; Griek 2009).<sup>4</sup> As one program officer of an NGO in Kakuma explained, in the meetings with all the agencies the Head of Sub-Office (HSO) of UNHCR would be the chairman, and the District Officer of the Government – the highest Kenyan authority around – would "sit between the members of the committee," on equal footing with the refugee representatives.<sup>5</sup> For the program officer, this was the world turned upside down. On the streets of Kakuma town, Turkanas referred to the UNHCR HSO as "the president of Kakuma," referring to the town and the camp combined. According to the HSO himself, the relegation of responsibilities from the

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<sup>4</sup> Surprisingly, there was very limited discussion and collaboration between the two refugee projects of Kakuma and Dadaab, as I found after meeting with humanitarian managers in both settings over the years. Long serving humanitarian managers explained never to have set foot in the other camp, and not to share best practices and policy experiences.

<sup>5</sup> Instead, when I interviewed the DO of the Dadaab camps, he appeared to have a more pro-active role in the refugee project. As the representative of the government of Kenya, he was in charge, for instance, of issuing travel permits to refugees, and chaired the common meetings.

Kenyan state to UNHCR was unusual in this case.<sup>6</sup> The result was that the camp became like a state within a state, where UNHCR was like a near-sovereign handing out something comparable to citizenship (Turner 2004) in a small isolated camp as a state of exception, governed by what Agier and Bouchet-Saulnier (2004) call “regimes of exception.”

Recently, the concept of the state of exception has found resonance in studies concerning refugees (Agamben 1998; Diken and Laustsen 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Turner 2005; Nyers 2006). The state of exception refers to the power of a sovereign to suspend the law, and to declare a human a subject or to exclude him from that status. Once lawfully excluded, the refugee may be treated as a secondary citizen – relegated to camps without freedom of movement, of freedom to work for instance – because normal law does not apply to the refugee. The refugee is beyond law, as the sovereign is legally above it.<sup>7</sup> Agamben depicts the refugee as a modern day *Homo Sacer*, an outlaw, one that is human but not part of the political community; he can be killed but not sacrificed (1998).

Instead of applying the state of exception to view how refugees are positioned outside of the “normal” political order, I focus on how the power of UNHCR and the NGOs vis-à-vis the Kenyan government is constituted. In other words, what room for maneuver does UNHCR have in relation to the sovereign state of Kenya with regard to the protection of refugees? Agamben refers to the State of exception as an ambiguous zone, “a no-man’s land between public law and political fact” (2005: 1). That no-man’s land between public and political fact describes the situation well. The absence of refugee law, coupled by the “hands-off” approach of the Kenyan government with regard to camp administration, makes that most of the regulations that appear to be policy, are in fact localized ad-hoc arrangements. As a result, UNHCR grew to possess considerable power vis-à-vis the Kenyan government. Kagwanja and Juma use the word “untrammelled,” as in unrestricted or unlimited, and argue that government marginalized itself to such an extent that it “stifled the emergence of new capacity for humanitarian management” (Kagwanja and Juma 2008: 220).

For instance, UNHCR paid various government personnel an additional allowance on top of their Kenyan salaries, although both UNHCR and police and other Kenyan

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<sup>6</sup> In Turner’s writings on Lukole refugee camp in Tanzania, the camp commander is a Tanzanian government representative from the Ministry of Home Affairs, in Kakuma it is the head of the main implementing partner. Turner notes how the Tanzanian government prohibited the establishment of secondary education in the Burundian camps. That active role, intervening on UNHCR policy inside the camps, I have not heard of in Kakuma.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, when we equate UNHCR to be a near-sovereign in a state of exception, it is illustrative that the body and its expatriate personnel operate literally above the law in that they enjoy diplomatic immunity, unless that immunity is recalled by the UN itself (Gilbert 1998).

officials were hesitant to disclose the exact amount.<sup>8</sup> The police, local authorities such as the DO and the Kenyan mobile court magistrates from Lodwar all received extra income for their work in or related to the refugee camp. This was one reason why some police I spoke to preferred a posting in Kakuma. In this way, UNHCR became a co-employer of local Kenyan civil servants, administrators and police officers, and as a result gained some leverage over them.

Over the years, UNHCR built offices and residences for the police and the DO. It has built offices for the Turkana chiefs, improved and continued to fund the mission hospital, and provided a borehole and a generator for Kakuma town. It built an airstrip. It provided vehicles for the police and the DO, who were allowed to take the gasoline they needed from the UNHCR compound's private pump.

Another of UNHCR's discretions [or sovereign decision-making moments] was its ability to provide "protection letters" for refugees allowing them to stay outside of the refugee camps on the basis of insecurity or special needs. According to the Kenyan government official responsible for refugees, UNHCR was "more or less" free to decide on the number of people who were permitted to live as urban refugees.<sup>9</sup> He explained that the government was not involved in determining or limiting the number of people who would be granted a protection letter – meaning permission to stay elsewhere in Kenya – and he hinted that UNHCR itself tried to limit this number.

An equally relevant aspect impacting on Kenyan state sovereignty was that UNHCR also decided on which refugees were allowed to travel from the camps into Kenya with a valid travel document from the Kenyan government. Unlike in Dadaab where refugees had to apply in person for a travel document with the DO, who then decided on the matter as the Kenyan government representative responsible, in Kakuma UNHCR had pre-signed and pre-stamped slips from the DO that it could hand out itself at its own discretion. The importance of this in terms of power is not to be underestimated. It is not only power with regard to the refugee, by deciding on the legitimacy or necessity of travel, but also with regard to the Kenyan State. Although the state, by sovereign decision, has made it clear that it wants no refugees beyond the camp, UNHCR has the power to overrule this.

In effect, the land on which the camps lie has almost been "leased" from the state which is no longer in de facto control of that area; international law, which maintains that the state is responsible for what happens on its territory, ignores the effective power of NGOs, which are the only bodies

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<sup>8</sup> On asking the HSO about the distribution of responsibilities his first answer was "I am sure you know 1951 Convention." I am not sure how comfortable he was with disclosing UNHCR's executive powers to me, but this answer obviously was a diversion.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, Director of the Department of Refugee Affairs, Nairobi: August 30, 2006.

capable of providing for the large scale influxes of displaced persons during some humanitarian crises (Gilbert 1998: 360).

This is perhaps inherent to humanitarian assistance in general. The relationship between sovereign states that receive aid and “western” donors, the UN and NGOs that *do* humanitarian assistance in the first place, has been described, from the perspective of the givers, as “expanding the sovereign frontier” (Duffield 2007). This not only has an impact on aspects of the material protection of refugees, such as feeding or curing them inside the allocated humanitarian space of the camp, but also on UNHCR and the NGO’s ability to “teach” Kenyan police and administrators human rights, HIV/AIDS and gender awareness, and to organize clean-up sessions in Kakuma town, to teach Kenyan how to take care of their environment. These are all very normal humanitarian practices, but they simultaneously resemble “playing government” in Kenyan sovereign space. Various authors recognize this aspect of the humanitarian, labeling it “humanitarian empire” (De Waal 1997), “colonialism of compassion” (Hyndman 2000), “cultural imperialism” (Sagy 2008), or “global ethics incorporated” (De Waal 2010: s136).

Based on the above, the camp did indeed resemble a state within a state, or a city-state, a *polis*, with a far-reaching, near-sovereign, power to govern. This power is essential in that it determines who will be allowed inside the camp, and who will be excluded. This makes the camp not only a site of seclusion, but also a place of inclusion and elaborate humanitarian care. A reference back to chapter one and the idea of the metaphorical city as a place from which bare life is excluded illustrates this point. The elaborate humanitarian care is a sign of the refugees’ inclusion. They are not bare at all, but they are subject to powerful, state-like, humanitarian governance. The following section explores what this near-sovereign’s governing of its humanitarian subjects looks like in practice.

### **The camp as an entitlement arena**

Turner described the governing of *Lukole* camp in Tanzania as a bio-governmental project in which the refugees were being governed by attempts to uplift and emancipate them: “while the Tanzanian authorities govern the camp through control and restriction, international relief agencies – led by UNHCR – govern the camp by trying to foster life” (Turner 2006: 760). Bio-governance concerns the “governmental preoccupation with social welfare and security, the large scale management of life and death in the interest of the state” (Howell 2007: 293). Indeed, assistance in the camp exceeds the provision of

food, health, shelter, psycho-social care, to include the teaching and stimulation of the rights of children, women, gays and minorities, democracy, responsibilities towards animals and the environment, respect for the sick and the disabled, and so on.

UNHCR seeks to govern the camp by using the language of rights and empowerment. This is recognizable in its application of a rights based approach, as a “conceptual framework that integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the policies, programs and processes of development and humanitarian actors” (UNHCR 2008c: 16).

In a rights based approach, human rights determine the relationship between individuals and groups with valid claims (rights-holders) and State and non-state actors with correlative obligations (duty-bearers). [...] A rights based approach starts from the *rights to be met*, not from *needs identified*. A rights-based approach adds legal obligation and accountability. It is based on international standards and thus consists of obligations based on legal entitlements. (UNHCR 2005: 17)

It signifies how the focus of development and foreign (humanitarian) interventions has shifted towards programs of justice and rule of law, issues previously considered state matters (Oomen 2005). The notion of rights however, is largely ideological and problematic in that rights are inspirational and unrealistic to be met in crisis or humanitarian settings, and even may enlarge frustration or desires (Bakewell 2003; Muggah 2005; Griek 2009). The inspirational nature of the language of rights in humanitarian settings becomes clear in the way Slim and Bonwick note that “[a]ll people have certain fundamental and ‘non-derogable’ rights that must be protected at all times – even in conditions of war, disaster and emergency. These include: the right to life; the right to legal personality and due process of law; the prohibition of torture, slavery and degrading or inhuman treatment or punishment; the right to freedom of religion, thought and conscience” (2005: 34). Translated to the responsibilities of the duty-bearer “... this means assuring a quality of individual life that is free from personal assault, sexual violation, degrading treatment and physical deprivation, and that is given sufficient civil, political, social, cultural and economic opportunity and autonomy” (Slim and Bonwick 2005: 35). With regard to this inspirational nature of rights, Clements notes that there are more than 70,000 treaties “insuring” human rights like those mentioned above (in Nordstrom 1997: 5).

There are good reasons to view this rights-speak as another way of applying top down power in ordering refugees (Sagy 2008), or to push a security agenda while talking about rights (Chimni 2000: 10). I however focus on another aspect of the rights-based approach. The language of rights translates into entitlements in the camp. Coupled with the power by which agencies spread these messages to people in the camp, these

“entitlements” to food, to water, to health, to education, but also to be free from sexual and domestic violence, or degrading behavior, turn into promises and expectations.

UNHCR as camp administrator finds itself in a split of responsibilities. It operates in a confusion of roles: protecting and empowering the refugee on the one hand, and limiting their movement and freedom on the other (on behalf of the State that fails to do so). Verdirame and Harrell-Bond (2005) depict this splits of responsibilities of UNHCR with the title “Janus faced humanitarianism.” Janus, the Roman two-faced God, represents UNHCR as both a protector and as a violator of refugee rights.

Rather than making a moral appeal about this confusion of roles from the perspective of refugee rights and protection, there is another interpretation of this dual role from the perspective of social ordering. The Roman God Janus was also the god of doors and pass ways symbolizing beginnings and endings (Frazer 1922: 219-220). This depicts the power of UNHCR to decide autonomously who to assist, with what, and whom to exclude from that assistance. In other words, where things begin or end for its beneficiary-subjects, often with large consequences, is at the discretion of UNHCR.

This is however not as straightforward as it may seem. UNHCR and the NGOs are not mere uniform bodies with coherent and clear policies, but are composed of individuals with different backgrounds. These individuals are manning various offices and counters, both inside and outside of the camp. They are distributed over various NGOs and departments, thereby representing various mandates and NGO mores. Hilhorst refers to this as multiple realities within NGOs, that result in “discontinuities and segmentations” that are “exacerbated by differences among staff members in the NGO with regard to their politics, origin, kinship, sexuality and livelihoods” (Hilhorst 2003: 217).

In all these places and positions decisions are made to forward refugees in referral systems; to declare particular people vulnerable; in need of additional rations; deserving a scholarship, a new house or household goods; eligible for a travel permit; a target for resettlement or family reunification, repatriation, and so forth. All these different aspects of organization are linked to each other by interfaces between people and organizations.

Moreover, many workers in the aid system were refugees themselves (in chapter four I will refer to these workers as civil servants of the aid regime) who serve multiple roles as organizers of aid delivery as well as recipients. Since these categories overlap, there is not necessarily a clear separation between providers and beneficiaries, except for a small group of expatriates and Kenyan managers. These may appear to retain real decision-making power on the surface, but underneath they are flanked by the refugees’ room for maneuver in the everyday practice of aid delivery.



I call this setting an entitlement arena, rooted in the rights of refugees and the practice of refugee protection. Refugees are entitled to protection by the camp “government,” that is so autonomous, or sovereign, that it not only promises – implicitly or explicitly – the entitlements to protection, but simultaneously decides on the delivery of it. In Sandvik’s words, legal bureaucrats are in charge of “determining the adequate threshold of suffering” (2008: 225). The result is a constant negotiation between aid givers and aid receivers, who seek access to each other based on the entitlements as refugees under refugee protection (Inhetveen 2006). Sandvik notes that UNHCR staff in Uganda recognized an “entitlement attitude” among refugees. Those who too firmly advocated their rights and who were verbal in the accompanying jargon were distrusted for this was recognized as a strategy (Sandvik 2008: 234).

This is the playing field in which refugees maneuver, for if the agencies have the power to decide to whom to apply the norms they seek to protect and safeguard, it is the influencing, changing, challenging or bypassing of that power that is what this maneuvering is all about. This exceeds small materialistic gain to include space to enact customs and initiatives that may go against UNHCR directives or human rights norms, and results in forms of parallel governance.

For instance, a Somali *Mzee* explained to me how he struggled with custom in his community and the education of his daughters. He had sent them to school, while among Somalis, it was normal to keep girls at home once they reached marrying age, coinciding more or less with first menstruation. He and his wife were enthusiastic about the agencies’ attempts to let the girls finish their secondary schooling along with boys. But this became increasingly difficult, so he tried with the agencies to find opportunities for his girls to continue studying in Nairobi, or elsewhere in Kenya. He wanted to give them a chance to pursue a university education, like he had done himself in Mogadishu long before the collapse of the Somali State. He knew arrangements like these were made with other people, if need was deemed legitimate enough. For instance, I knew a girl from the Ethiopian community who became pregnant as a teenager and mothered a child out of wedlock. She became so stigmatized that she could not continue her secondary education in the camp, as she was harassed in her community. She received a scholarship from JRS to live and continue studying in the town of Lodwar.

There are multiple forms of organization in these examples that highlight the workings of the entitlement arena. First, the right to education is claimed by the *Mzee* and the young mother, based in part on the promise and rights awareness-raising of the humanitarian agencies, that, as Merry [2003] calls it, results in the development of “rights-defined selves.” It is their pursuit of that education that causes problems for them within their

respective communities. These communities, however, are merely seeking to uphold a norm or custom. In the first example, the girls were supposed to remain at home and be “decent Somalis.” In the second, the girl would be stigmatized and harassed on her way to, and in, school. The Janus face of the agencies, and the splits of responsibilities, are visible in that they both teach the girls that they are entitled to education, and the young mother that she is allowed to give birth at young age without being harassed, while they are simultaneously responsible for their protection, often effectively failing in the latter. These splits, and the examples that derive from it, can be found everywhere in the camp. It is important to stress that they are, for a large part, the result of humanitarian programming and the power that the agencies have over people. The spaces where that power meets its beneficiaries, then, becomes the playing fields of the entitlement arena. I will return to this arena at the end of this chapter. First I will describe the basic services in the camp.

### **A brief overview of camp facilities and services**

In this section I describe the large and intricate organization of assistance in the camp. This listing of sectors and services is not complete, since the hosting program is large, and during interviews many officers from agencies were themselves not always precise in listing the activities of their NGOs exhaustively. It is, however, a comprehensive glance. Resettlement, although not a service *per se* but nonetheless very visible and important, will be dealt with in chapter five.

#### *Food*

Twice a month, food was distributed by LWF in three distribution centers in the camp, in tandem with the World Food Program (WFP). Depending on availability – there were regular hick-ups in the food pipeline – people received rations of maize, sorghum, beans, salt, sugar, and cooking oil. In general during the time of research, the distribution of food was just below the Sphere standards – the international standard for emergency relief among humanitarian agencies.<sup>10</sup> There were differentiations in the amounts and type of food given, depending on the working of the food pipeline, which is subject to funding and other circumstances. Food supplements such as special feeding programs, school feeding, and therapeutic feeding were distributed in specific places such as schools and community centers on a less regular basis. Food was delivered in the protection area, a

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<sup>10</sup> The Sphere standard for the amount of food aid is 2,100 Kcal per person per day (Sphere Project 2004).

fenced block of houses for people that were considered insecure in other parts of the camp and their “own” communities, and in the safe house additional food was given such as meat, with the argument that people residing here cannot go to the market to obtain extra food items on their own behalf.

In 2004, 1,500 people received supplementary feeding and 150 beneficiaries received therapeutic feeding in Kakuma, of which 10 per cent was distributed among people from the host community (Turton 2005: 36). School feeding was implemented by LWF for the dual purpose of improving students’ health and stimulating attendance.<sup>11</sup> WFP and LWF also collaborated in the Emergency Operations (EMOP) targeting Turkana land, which itself is highly food insecure and subject to recurring droughts.

Water taps operated in different groups at different times once every two days. This was also sometimes subject to irregularities due to circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Refugees from water committees supervised water distribution. In general, the output of water was conform the Sphere standards as calculated between 15-20 liters per person per day (Turton 2005: 37), this however does not mean that every inhabitant of the camp received this amount.

The firewood project in Kakuma employed Turkanas from the host community to provide firewood for refugees to use for cooking. It was partly a conflict mitigating measure, since the area outside the camps became severely depleted of firewood. Turkanas saw firewood as a means for business and brought it to the camp for selling, in addition to their “normal” enterprise of producing charcoal, while refugees would venture outside the camp to look for it. Reports of violence and rapes occurring during firewood collection prompted the firewood project (a pilot project in Kakuma), and similar initiatives were implemented in Dadaab. In general, all the natural resources outside the camp were off limits for refugees. For instance, refugees were not allowed to keep livestock, as it required grazing on Turkana lands. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) offered tenders to Turkanas to collect firewood from designated areas sometimes up to 100 kilometers away from the camp, identified as suitable and not depleting the environment. However, budgetary shortages regularly paused distribution, and in 2005 they were able to supply firewood during only seven out of twelve months.

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<sup>11</sup> The regular workshops and trainings for police and leaders covered such topics as peace building, HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention of sexual abuse, and so on. They were always accompanied with goat meat, soda’s and other food and sometimes even cash in order to stimulate participants to attend.

<sup>12</sup> One interesting “camp story” was how on the day that an important western delegation visited the camp, nobody would receive water. According to the Sudanese who told it to me, LWF had used it all to spray the roads in the morning in order to prevent the ever-present dust clouds from forming when driving in the camp.

### *Education*

At the time of research LWF operated 7 pre-schools, 24 primary schools and 4 secondary schools, with education based on the Kenyan curriculum. In the 7 pre-schools, 6,050 children were enrolled, of which 3,036 boys and 3,014 girls. In the 24 primary schools, 22,600 students were enrolled, of which 16,357 were boys and 6,243 girls. In the four secondary schools, 2,663 students were enrolled of which 2,391 were boys, and 272 were girls (note the dramatic decrease of girls' attendance). Students learned English and Kiswahili and received diplomas corresponding to the official Kenyan education system. The camp schools were free also for Turkana children. Some refugees who could afford it sent their children to Kenyan schools in Kakuma town, which required additional fees. An interesting recent pilot project in Kakuma was the Angelina Jolie Girls Primary Boarding School. This project aimed at stimulating girls' attendance to school, and to prevent them from dropping out by meeting the mainly Somali concern of their girls mixing with boys in school.

A Teachers Training College (TTC) opened in 2005 to train secondary school graduates as teachers, with a specific focus on capacity building for reintegration in Sudan, and therefore mostly targeting Sudanese. 300 students were enrolled, and 225 passed at the end of the year. The TTC remained in Kakuma for one year, after which the program was to be transferred to Sudan.

Don Bosco operated a large vocational training center in the camp and three smaller ones in other parts. It offered a variety of courses such as car mechanics, bicycle repair, tailoring, building, electronics, computer, and so on. There were other NGOs that also offered vocational training programs, sometimes in line with community-based programming ideals, targeting specific categories within the population such as women, children, leaders or returnees. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) engaged in vocational training that specifically targeted refugees who were going for resettlement or repatriation.

A variety of scholarships were available through different NGOs. The Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) offered a limited amount of scholarships (highland scholarships), employed in situations of special need such as children with disabilities and forms of vulnerability and insecurity to pursue education elsewhere in Kenya. On average, JRS offered 40 vocational and university scholarships a year in Nairobi for which refugees throughout Kenya could apply (Turton 2005: 14). Windle Charitable Trust (WCT) organized the Kakuma English Language Program (KAELP) and other English language training, TOEFL examinations, and the World University Services of Canada scholarships initiative for tertiary education in Canada. Between 2002 and 2006, approximately 25 KAELP students were selected per year for a four-year university opportunity at a variety

of Universities in Canada.<sup>13</sup> The University of South Africa (UNISA) offered tertiary distance learning programs, facilitated by JRS, which ran a student center with study facilities such as computers and a small library, for 32 students on a yearly basis.

### *Health*

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) was responsible for the health sector, including the main hospital, sanitation, and community based rehabilitation programming. IRC had a 90-bed hospital and four clinics in the camp, with referral arrangements with the mission hospital in Kakuma town, the district hospital in Lodwar, hospitals in Nairobi, and the ICRC hospital in Lokichoggio. Additionally, IOM had a health unit in their compound that was sometimes used as a referral facility for specialized treatment. IRC Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programming assisted people with disabilities, resulting from violence or other causes, providing them with wheelchairs or crutches and prosthetics. The National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) ran several Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centers (VCTs) and organized HIV/AIDS awareness programming. People living with HIV/AIDS received anti-retroviral treatment.

LWF ran programs targeting disabled people, such as a wheelchair basketball program, and a braille school for the blind in the camp. JRS were allocated the sector of mental health and special education. JRS operated a psychosocial assistance program through which it trained refugees as community workers who were able to assist and identify people from their communities with mental health problems.

### *Environment*

Apart from the firewood as mentioned above, GTZ was responsible for issues related to the environment. It ran several greenbelt projects surrounding the camp, restocking the environment with trees and vegetation. Nurseries in the camp grew seedlings for refugees and locals who were advised to plant *Neem* trees, which were found to do well in the climatological circumstances of Turkana land, on their plots as part of environment sensitization and preservation programs. Other initiatives included the introduction of solar cookers and energy-saving stoves, the latter produced by refugees in the camp.

### *Income generation*

A variety of programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening refugees' livelihoods and decreasing their dependency on food handouts. Don Bosco offered limited microcredit schemes to successful graduates of their vocational training classes, to enable them to

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<sup>13</sup> With regard to the earlier "model camp" argument, in 2005, WUSC selected 25 students from Kakuma, and four from Dadaab. Similar disparities had been there for some years, and somehow became entrenched.

start businesses or other income generating activities. Other skills training initiatives were coupled with entrepreneurial opportunities, providing the NGOs with materials to distribute in the camp. Groups of refugees were supported in starting community projects involving baking and selling bread. In specific cases, items that the refugee regime introduced and offered to refugees were produced in the camp. GTZ facilitated the production and distribution of energy-saving stoves, to reduce refugees' dependency of firewood. LWF ran the Kakuma soap factory, where incentive workers produced soap, which was distributed along with the food rations. LWF ran a piggery project, raising pigs for meat, and had a similar initiative with chickens. These programs served multiple functions - they provided occupations for refugees, trained them in a variety of skills, and supported their livelihoods.

### *Protection*

JRS ran a safe house for women and children in the camp, where victims of sexual and domestic violence could stay awaiting a more durable solution, such as resettlement or a transfer to either Dadaab or Nairobi. On average, the safe house was occupied by some 40 people at any given time, including the victims' dependants such as their children.

A fenced general protection area was located next to Police Station Three, further into the camp. People who faced insecurity in their original communities, resulting from a variety of circumstances, were relocated to this area awaiting resolution of their problems. Within the fences of the protection area there was a water pump, and food was delivered directly to them, instead of refugees having to go and pick it up at one of the distribution points.

In parallel to the official refugee-hosting domain governed by UNHCR, there was also a variety of actors offering services and assistance in the private sector of the camp economy. I will come back to this in chapter four.

## Ordering “life in limbo”

**Figure 3: Population and age statistics of Kakuma, as at 26 April 2005**

		0-4	5-17	18-25	26-55	over 55	Total
Sudan	Male	4,363	15,297	13,766	8,287	624	42,337
	Female	3,940	10,331	4,716	8,106	763	27,856
	<i>Total</i>	<i>8,303</i>	<i>25,628</i>	<i>18,482</i>	<i>16,393</i>	<i>1,387</i>	<i>70,191</i>
Somalia	Male	1,081	2,742	1,595	2,180	181	7,779
	Female	1,016	2,427	1,244	1,940	199	6,826
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2,097</i>	<i>5,169</i>	<i>2,839</i>	<i>4,120</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>14,605</i>
Ethiopia	Male	98	307	327	1,240	20	1,992
	Female	93	242	196	380	14	925
	<i>Total</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>549</i>	<i>523</i>	<i>1,620</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>2,917</i>
Congo	Male	26	89	59	135	4	313
	Female	30	65	32	49	3	179
	<i>Total</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>492</i>
Uganda	Male	39	81	42	86	3	251
	Female	29	82	22	51	3	187
	<i>Total</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>438</i>
Rwanda	Male	26	50	21	76	1	174
	Female	19	42	17	33	0	111
	<i>Total</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>109</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>285</i>
Burundi	Male	15	24	23	47	1	110
	Female	10	26	6	24	1	67
	<i>Total</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>177</i>
Eritrea	Male	3	3	8	25	0	39
	Female	2	3	1	9	0	15
	<i>Total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>54</i>
CAR	Male	0	0	1	0	0	1
<i>Totals</i>		10,729 <i>12.1%</i>	31,811 <i>35.7%</i>	22,076 <i>24.8%</i>	22,668 <i>25.4%</i>	1,817 <i>2.0%</i>	89,162 <i>100%</i>

Source: UNHCR, Sub-Office Kakuma.

This table gives an indication of the population of Kakuma as registered by UNHCR in 2005.<sup>14</sup> An important characteristic that follows from the above population statistics is that the majority of the camp population is male and young.

The refugee camps of Kakuma (Kakuma I was established in 1992, Kakuma II in late 1997 and Kakuma III in early 1999) are, without a doubt, unique. Where refugee camps are usually dominated by women and children, most refugees in Kakuma are male youth. While most refugee camps offer at least some formal primary schooling, Kakuma offers youth a wide range of educational opportunities,

<sup>14</sup> Reservation on these sources is necessary however. In another demographic database I received from IRC, in April 2005, 16,636 people were under the age of five, while in the above statistic in the same month 10,729 are listed as under that same age. Similar discrepancies were found in a variety of statistical representations of the camp population with regard to crime and health.

most of which are entirely free. Kakuma also has extraordinary diversity in the refugee population (Sommers 2005: 188).

The high number of male youth led the UNHCR HSO to remark that this was a point of concern in the refugee camps, as this group is considered to be the most likely troublemakers in camp settings, citing alcohol abuse, domestic and sexual violence and criminality as manifestations of this gender and age imbalance.<sup>15</sup> As Turner remarks, while women and girls are referred to as “vulnerable” in refugee discourse, male youths are often cast as causing disturbance (Turner 2001, 2005). Sports and cultural programming, education and other initiatives and facilities are important precisely for this reason, aiming to counter the idleness that is supposed to render people into disturbances. The agencies handed out games, such as the board game Scrabble. I spent a good many of afternoons playing the game in some Sudanese communities, while observing what happened in the camp when schools were closed, which for many, meant not much (which is perhaps why they were extremely skilled in Scrabble). According to one aid worker there were also some 200 “football clubs” in the camp, competing with each other in more or less organized schedules of play.

Idleness and boredom were partly gendered. People were part of households or formed cooperatives that were comparable to households, in which, in most “cultures” represented in the camp, women and girls fulfilled the roles of domestic caretakers. In the afternoons during which I joined the Scrabble games it turned out that the Sudanese men, by “tradition,” were not even “allowed” to cook. These men were Lost Boys, in one way or another, and lived in groups where they were basically all members of the same clan. Although the men lived alone or in pairs, and sometimes shifted alliances as some would move in and out of the camp, there were generally women around from the same group who would cook, collect food rations on their behalf, and clean their clothes. The UNHCR HSO thus had a point: if this is a division of roles that is generally replicable throughout the camp, then men and boys are indeed likely to be idle and bored, and from the perspective of manageability, more easily expected to cause trouble.

Boredom and idleness in the camp are partly understood as deriving from the specificities of camp life. Jargon to denote these specificities includes “life in limbo” (UNHCR 2004b) or “debilitating dependence” (Adelman 2008: 8), denoting not only a vision of the desired functionality of a population, but also the effects of “warehousing” with its limitations on work, income generation outside the confines of the camp and travel that leave people entirely dependent on handouts. This presents us with an apparent paradox, for the camp is simultaneously the center of facilities with a large

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, Head of Sub-Office Kakuma, Kakuma: May 5, 2005.



number of programs and projects aimed at supporting, changing, challenging and uplifting the refugee populace. This then is in part – although I am not dismissing its symptoms – the result of the problem-solving perspective introduced in chapter one.

On another note, boredom and idleness cannot necessarily be attributed to camp life *per se*. In Kakuma town there was idleness and boredom too. A Dutch priest who came to teach at one of the in-camp missionary training schools for some weeks, as he had been doing for the past few years, stated that when it came to widespread unemployment and idleness, he saw no difference between Kakuma camp and towns and villages in West Africa where he had worked. Apart from presenting an interesting comparison between towns and the camp in terms of the accidental city approach, this also indicates how particular attributes or expectations are levied on to the refugee camp that do not necessarily resonate with the realities of refugee-hosting areas.

Closely related to this is the attribution of domestic and sexual violence as direct effects of camp life, whereas these may occur in equal levels outside camps. The various rights-based initiatives in the camp, then, do not necessarily target effects of camp life as such, but can be considered to engage in attempts to implement social change and creating social norms in a broader sense, partly because a camp under international protection is placed under a humanitarian spotlight. This is therefore another symbolic manifestation of the state of exception. In a real sense, in the camp, the normal law of the land no longer applies, and once under the governance of UNHCR, other criteria for life apply instead (for a related, albeit dated, discussion, see Chambers (1986)). Also, mortality figures in Kakuma were not excessive, and contrary to popular belief, the IRC program manager explained to me that levels of psychosocial problems were not higher in Kakuma than in the rest of Kenya.

Due to growing attention for the negative consequences of protracted refugee camp situations, the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (SPCP) was initiated to improve the material circumstances and reinforcement of rights for refugees in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Thailand (Slaughter and Crisp 2008: 134). The SCPC is an arrangement designed to identify specific gaps in refugee protection and was piloted in Kakuma in October 2004. It aimed at improving livelihood strategies of refugees and to enlarge means of self-reliance; to propose specific plans of actions and programs to address the gaps in protection in localized arrangements with stakeholders on a national level; and to implement what are known as Quick Impact Projects. The SPCP incorporates the specific goals of the rights-based agenda, such as participation, self-sustainability and gender mainstreaming. In the SPCP project proposals for 2008 for instance, the proposals for Kakuma were almost all geared towards additional vocational and skills training for income generating activities for women, and included the host

population to a considerable extent (UNHCR 2008b). The language of rights was widely used, and the program specifically targeted categories identified as vulnerable, such as female commercial sex workers, who were stimulated to find alternative means of income generation.

Several other programs targeted the improvement of conditions in the camp in a rights-based and participatory manner. Kakuma was the site for the pilot of UNHCR's Peace Education Program (PEP) towards the end of 1997, a program that was later expanded to other camps in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Kosovo, and other African countries (Sagy 2008: 361). The PEP was instigated following reports of widespread insecurity in Kakuma camp, due to frequently arising conflicts within and between communities in the camp, and between the Turkana and the refugees. In the refugee schools, students received peace education classes on a regular basis and facilitators were trained by LWF to go out into their communities to arrange workshops and meetings disseminating the PEP message. It was reported that refugees were so enthusiastic about PEP that when the program was halted for 8 months from mid-1999, they themselves continued their meetings and community workshops. As Sommers notes in an evaluation of the program: "the strengths of the UNHCR peace education program are many. It promotes refugee empowerment and self-sufficiency" (2005: 203). PEP not only attempts to teach people alternative means of conflict resolution, but also the basics of rights and justice. Child, gender, refugee and human rights awareness-raising are essential components of the program (Sommers 2005: 163-209).

To implement and sustain these ideas of rights and justice, UNHCR lobbied the Government of Kenya to bring a mobile court to Kakuma. The government and UNHCR arranged that a team of magistrates from Lodwar would travel to Kakuma for one week each month to be present in Kakuma. The team of five would stay in my guesthouse where I would meet them in the evenings. In court sessions held in the "Friendship Hall" next to the AP barracks, criminal cases concerning refugees and Turkana were dealt with so that refugees would not have to be brought to and from Lodwar (interestingly, some of my Turkana informants went to the court hearings for entertainment). Towards the end of my fieldwork an initiative to install legal aid clinics in the camp was proposed to assist refugees in how to go about the Kenyan court system and to provide advice about Kenyan law. Later, an initiative was launched to upgrade the Kenyan Police Station at Kakuma, to provide a better jail and hearing facilities with regard to privacy specifically for women and to get more female police officers present (UNHCR 2008b).

Since its inception, the camp has evolved significantly in terms of protection measures seeking to improve the refugees' safety and security. Moreover, humanitarian governance, based on the notion of refugee and human rights, has geared towards the empowerment of refugees, in a large part by employing participation strategies and related training and education. In the following, paragraph I will describe how refugees themselves played an important role in the delivery of assistance and the administration of their communities.

## **Participation and empowerment**

Refugee involvement in the aid system was for a large part the result of participation and empowerment strategies of UNHCR and the NGOs. The two main forms of participation in the refugee project are the practical participation in aid delivery as employment for the agencies, and political participation in the form of leadership positions in various refugee administrations in the camp.

This practical participation is simultaneously a job, referred to as incentive work, with salaries and some secondary benefits. Although these jobs were not strictly understood as participation, in effect the way it made refugees part and parcel of humanitarian governance, has the same result. "Counterpart managers" for instance, who are paid in accordance with the highest incentive salary scale in the camp, served as refugee chiefs of programs, as counterparts of the agencies' chiefs. There were counterpart managers for education, water, sanitation, etc. Similarly, the directors of schools were refugees, but they were also hired as interpreters for the NGOs, cleaners, teachers, nurses, food distributors, clerks, etc.

Although expatriates and Kenyan staff, mainly from the south, hold all the managerial positions in the agencies, refugee staff and some Turkana constitute most of the employees of the refugee-hosting structure within the camp. Although the amount fluctuates, UNHCR and the agencies employ approximately 3,000 refugees and Turkana as incentive workers, with monthly salaries ranging from 500 Kenyan Shilling (KES) to 5,500 KES (about 50 Euro) as teachers, health workers, and so on. Incentive salaries reflect the fact that officially refugees are not allowed to work, and the "incentive" is a way around this. Complaints about the limited salary were widespread, but in the camp context the salary of 3,000 KES (30 Euro) per month for a primary school teacher meant a lot for the livelihoods of refugees and their dependants.

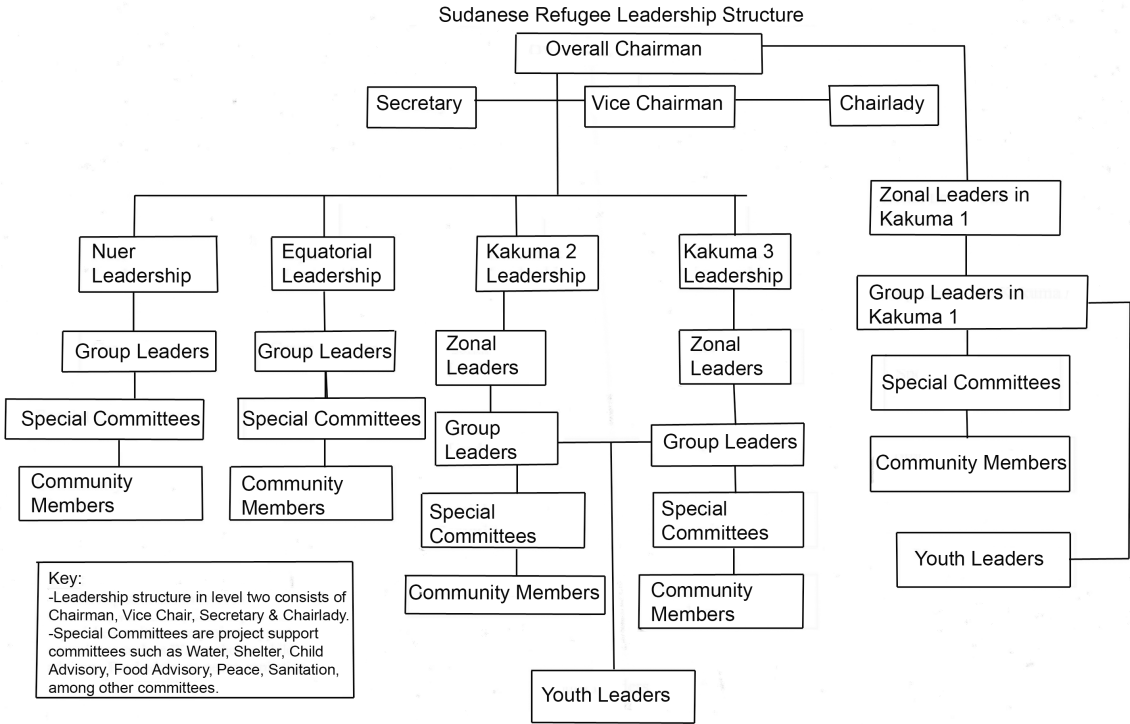
Moreover, many incentive jobs included secondary benefits in the form of training or skills development. Additionally, access to the compounds and the refugee hosting structure in general resulted in numerous other indirect benefits for refugees, ranging

from additional sources of water, to access to computers, internet and humanitarian personnel and food and bicycles (See also: Sommers 2005; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005). Although set against the total population the availability of these jobs may be limited, their impact upon the population is high, something I shall return to in chapter four, which presents a socio-economic analysis of the camp.

The official refugee leadership served as a liaison between UNHCR and the communities and groups in the camp, and was part of a referral system between refugees and the agencies and the Kenyan authorities and police. Refugee leaders could signal developments and needs in their communities and report them to the agencies, and the agencies used the refugee administrations to distribute goods and ideas, or to target the needy within communities.

The refugee administrations were organized according to nationality or ethnicity and location in the camp, depending on the size of the group. As such, refugee administrations existed at various levels and had various sub-divisions, roles and tasks. The Sudanese and the Somalis each had an overall community leadership structure, with different ethnic sub-administrations one tier lower in the administrative hierarchy. The overarching Sudanese leadership consisted of a chairman, a secretary, a vice chairman and a chairlady (see figure 4).

**Figure 4: Sudanese leadership structure**

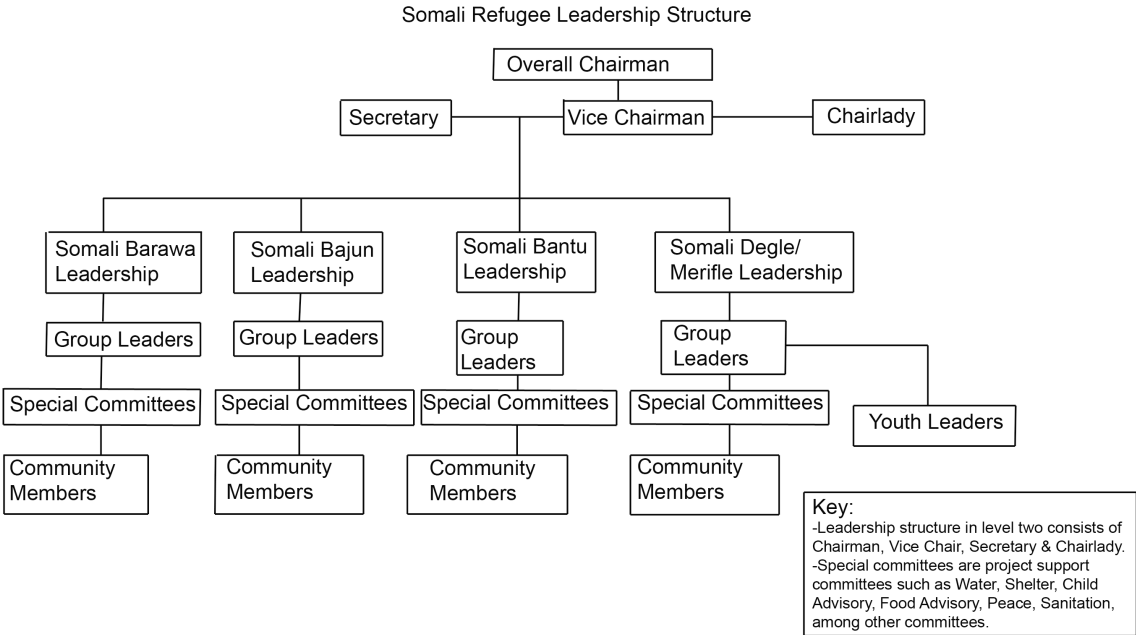


Source: UNHCR Sub-Office Kakuma.

One level lower, there was a Nuer administration, an Equatorian administration, and, representing the Dinka as the biggest Sudanese ethnic group, Kakuma One, Kakuma Two, and Kakuma Three/Four leaderships, each of them followed the same setup as the overall administration. Aside from the Nuer and Equatorian Leadership, the Kakuma One, Two, Three and Four leadership structures had zonal leaders representing areas of residence in the camp (see Kakuma refugee camp map on page xiii), who were followed by group leaders. The group leaders were followed one level below by special committees and youth leaders.

The top level of the Somali administration was organized in a similar manner with an overall chairman, secretary, vice chairman and chairlady (see figure 5). But one level below, it was subdivided into four different clan based administrations; Somali *Barawa* leadership, Somali *Bajuni* leadership, Somali *Bantu* leadership and Somali *Digle-Merifle* leadership. One level lower were the group leaders, the special committees and youth leaders. Here, the official organization did not represent place of residence in the camp. All the other nationalities had less elaborate structures for numerical reasons, although they still had their own chairman, secretary, vice chairman and a chairlady, followed by special committees and youth leaders (see figure 6).

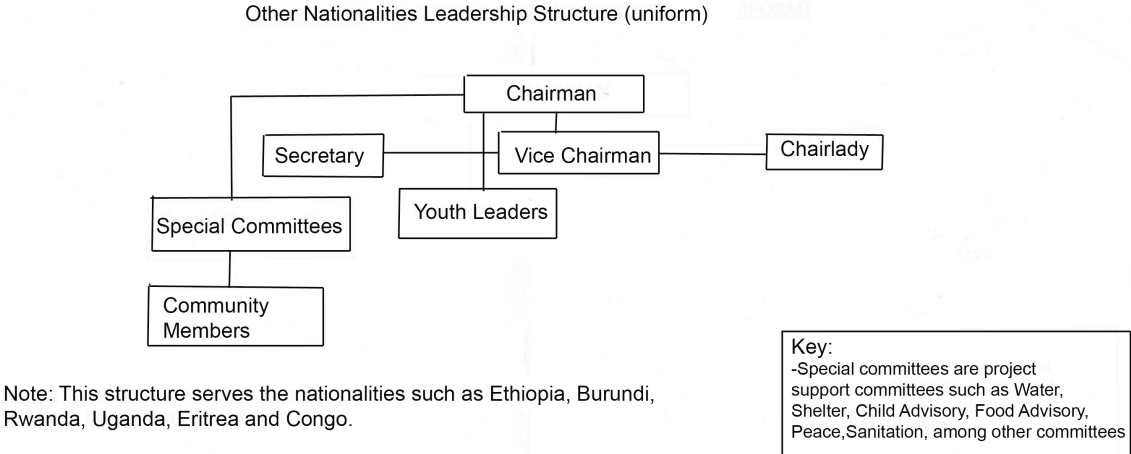
**Figure 5: Somali leadership structure**



Source: UNHCR Sub-Office Kakuma.

The Ethiopian and Congolese communities were largely organized according to geographical location in the camp, but not exclusively. The newer “New Area” and “Multinational Area” in Kakuma Three and Four were adaptations in grouping refugees together to accommodate what were multi-ethnic communities from the onset. This is an interesting development in the context of the accidental city. People from different backgrounds were grouped together in the new environment of the camp, and were forced to cooperate and interact with each other in an intimate way. Similarly, and equally multi-ethnic in setup, the protection area also had its separate administration.

**Figure 6: Leadership structure of other nationalities**



Source: UNHCR Sub-Office Kakuma.

In general, leaders were chosen through a system of democratic elections based on the different administrations’ constitutions. The overall Sudanese community was the only group that did not hand in a written constitution to UNHCR, but it chose leaders every three years. The Somalis chose new leaders every six months, and the Ethiopians chose once a year. UNHCR stimulated the democratic election of refugee leaders. The aim of this form of participation was not only to smoothen the running of the camp, but simultaneously to train and expose people and leaders to the concept of democracy, aiming at possible positive impact upon repatriation. In theory, the administrations met with the UNHCR HSO on a weekly basis to discuss issues relating to their communities, and to suggest or bring to the fore the needs and desires of their community members.

Another part of the community leadership structure was a multitude of Community Support Committees dealing with specific aspects of camp governing, and each of which liaised with an implementing agency.

**Figure 7: Committees in the camp**

Committee type	No	Men	Women	Total	Sector	Function
Water committee	19	44	22	66	Water sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In charge of water distribution</li> <li>- Monitor water supply</li> <li>- Report cases of pipe breakages for action</li> </ul>
Zonal Sport Council	11	99	44	143	Community Services (youth and Sports Development Unit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decision making body in sports management</li> <li>- Arbitration in sports conflicts</li> <li>- Resource control</li> <li>- Generates needs on the ground, i.e. training, resource, etc</li> </ul>
Zonal Peace Committee / Security	9	45	10	55	Community Services (Peace building and conflict resolution unit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early warning signs of tension / conflict build up in the community</li> <li>- Identify those with ill motives and motivate them to participate in peace building activities</li> <li>- Carrying out awareness on peace education and security issues in the community</li> <li>- Community policing on peace and security in the communities</li> </ul>
Camp Peace Committee / Security	1	16	4	20		
Joint Peace / security committee	2	32	8	40		
Food Advisory committee	3	30	30	60	Logistics (Food Distribution Unit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monitoring of the food distribution process on behalf of the community i.e. ensuring access to rightful entitlement</li> <li>- Acts as information pipeline on food basket between the organization and beneficiaries and giving feedback</li> <li>- Arbitration of food related conflicts both at the community and at the distribution points</li> </ul>
Child Advisory Committee	17	105	55	160	Community Services (Child Development Unit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify issues of child right violation and assist in arbitration</li> <li>- Assist in mobilizing children to participate in child development activities such as drawing, dancing, singing, toy making, etc</li> <li>- Assist in identification of foster families for OVCs</li> </ul>
Gender Support Committee	1	136	410	546	Community Services (Gender Equality and Human Rights Unit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mobilization of women to participate on women activities</li> <li>- Conduct awareness on SGBV prevention</li> <li>- Complement the unit's effort in intervening in SGBV issues</li> </ul>
Education committee (incentive worker)	1	11	1*	12	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supreme decision making organ on education issues in the camp</li> <li>- Supervise the implementation of education curriculum to the refugees</li> <li>- Recruitment of staff</li> </ul>
Parents Teachers Association (PTA)	24	288	48	336	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Address education matters within the school</li> <li>- Supplement the donor effort by undertaking fencing of the schools, buying of exams practice papers and simple school repair of the depilated structures</li> </ul>
School Management Committee (SMC) (in 24 schools)	24	288	48	336	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coordinates the activities of PTAs</li> <li>- Supports Head Teacher in the daily running of the school</li> <li>- Liaison between PTA and Head Teacher</li> <li>- Manages finance for PTA</li> <li>- Does procurement and supervises the works sponsored by PTA</li> </ul>

Source: UNHCR (\*: due to a low literacy level, as mentioned on the original unofficial chart).

Other committees that worked directly with agencies were the Shelter committee (UNHCR); Environmental Committee (GTZ); Community Based Rehabilitation Committee (IRC); Health Committee (IRC); Sanitation Committee (IRC); Reproductive Health Committee (IRC); Elderly Committee (IRC); Landmine Information Committee (Handicap International) and the Video Screening Committee (Filmaid International).

The myriad of committees linked to the refugee community administrations, as well as the incentive workers, became interfaces between the agencies and the refugees. Although the range of these interfaces differed per situation, they indicated that some refugees were linked-in to the humanitarian system, and/or in another way were influential up to the extent of parallel ordering.

### **Parallel order and governance**

Among Sudanese refugees, marriages were often arranged via the process of “elopement.” Elopement as the Sudanese understood it in the camp refers to the running away with a girl, with or without her consent, in order to enforce a marriage. I narrate this case because it is an example of the way in which the language and intentions of UNHCR with regard to forced marriages, child marriages and sexual violence is met by refugees’ perceptions of these matters. This is one theme where the ordering of UNHCR and its implementing partners and that of refugees meet.

One morning, I was in my room in the guesthouse when I heard people screaming and glass breaking outside. There was a group of young Sudanese Dinka men, who had lured a Dinka girl and her age-mate to the guesthouse under false pretenses to assist a friend to “elope” her. The friend was a Lost Boy who had been resettled to the US some time earlier. He had now returned and wanted to marry within a limited period of time. Elopement was a culturally acceptable or even customary way of doing this, although the event was being covered up by a relative of the Lost Boy. I call him the health manager, for he had an incentive job as a reproductive health manager with the IRC. He told me and the guesthouse manager that this was not an elopement but a pre-marriage ceremony, and that the parents of the girl had already approved the marriage. This meant that they only had to tell the girl, and then there would be no problem. As such, he explained that the girl knew about the proceedings, but “had to” act unwilling, lest her husband-to-be might think that she was “easy” or cheap. It sounded like the invention of a cultural repertoire. This was his front stage performance, with the manager of the guesthouse and other concerned bystanders, including me, as his audience.



“Backstage” however – literally in the backyard of the guesthouse – I found a cousin-brother of the health manager sipping a soda. He worked with the SPLA’s air defense, but “since the comprehensive peace agreement, there are not much Arabs too shoot from the sky,” so he was on a two-week R&R to Kakuma, to relax a bit with his family. He told me that they stole the girl and that around that time her parents would be informed that they “had” their daughter, after which negotiations for the dowry could begin. Perhaps the reason that he told me so easily and without any reservation was that he was not so sensitized to the rights agenda of the NGOs. Because he had been recruited for the rebel army at a young age, he did not spend a long time in Kakuma. For him, the practice was conventional. The practice of elopement is not encouraged by the NGOs, but it is widely practiced. There are different formats however, some of which are relatively harmless while others can lead to serious conflict and even violence between communities. Sudanese marital practice is an arrangement between families, and not just between individuals. The cousin-brother’s explanation could mean two things. One possibility was that the girl as well as her parents would agree, and a marriage process would start. Alternatively, the Lost Boy could force himself upon her, and would then be obliged to marry the girl, adding a fine of some cows to the dowry, which was also not unusual.<sup>16</sup>

It was a long day. The girl refused. The friends and relatives of the Lost Boy had to restrain her every time the boy would enter her room. She was violent, and the health manager explained to me – since he had learned that I was informed by his cousin-brother in the back yard, his reservations had faded – that this was because “her mind was not academically well-defined.” Later that afternoon she escaped and ran away, but the boys recaptured her. They locked her and her friend, who was meant to be the witness, inside the room. One of my Sudanese Dinka informants came to visit me at that time. When the health manager saw him, he asked me to take him away or to ask him to leave, because my informant was from the same clan of the girl, and he would know her. The health manager was worried that when my informant would find out what was going on, he would most likely inform his clan and they would come to demand the release of the girl. This was the reason for luring the girl to the guesthouse in the first place; it was a neutral place in town rather than in the camp (just as those cheating on their husbands and wives came to the guesthouse for a few hours alone with their lovers, while people from town would do the same at Ethiopia hotel in Kakuma One. They used each other’s camps as neutral zones). My informant refused to be sent away, but also didn’t cause any

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<sup>16</sup> The Sudanese Islamic scholar Hassan al-Turabi stated: “in this part of the world, actually, these are just females; people don’t *kidnap* them, they take them as wives. It’s almost a customary thing in tribal areas, you can go and ..” he chuckled, “ .. grab a girl and take her and she’s your wife and then later on you’re discovered and you send some cows and that settles it. It’s not a crime, kidnapping and so forth” (Green 2008: 202-3).

trouble. He was used to the practice. In fact, I could now question him about these matters too.

At the end of the day, the *elders* of the Lost Boy came to the guesthouse to talk to the girl. They invited me into the room where they tried to convince her, and explained the procedure to me. They were happy and laughing, although the girl had still not given in. Partly because of my informant's presence, the group rented a car and decided to go to the other end of the camp, near a Turkana village called "Borehole 5" behind Kakuma Four (it was named after the nearby LWF Borehole number 5, which produced enough water residue to create a small irrigated plot for some vegetable gardens), to proceed with the negotiations "under the tree." This was another neutral territory, far away from the girl's and my informant's communities. The men only informed me later that they specifically chose this area behind Kakuma Four so as not to have to inform the informant that was visiting me. The next day she was "given" to the man and it was agreed that they would be married. Later the health manager sent me her greetings and told me that everything went well and that the couple was happily married.

In the guesthouse the Turkana manager disapproved of the tradition, but others viewed the operation as a joyful event, just like my Sudanese informant, who himself had yet to get married. The aunt of the guesthouse manager was worried about the possible violence and the damage caused at the hotel, the window and the door, but she herself had gotten married in a similar way.<sup>17</sup> As had many others in the camp.

The health manager had arranged it all. He told me that one day in advance, he had gone to the Administration Police (AP), which had its base on the other side of the airstrip opposite of the guesthouse to inform the deputy Police chief (one of our mutual acquaintances) what they were going to do. Since this practice of taking wives is not uncommon in Kenya either, the commander tended to understand, and was sensitive when these matter were reported, for instance by one of the agencies. Moreover, if something were to go wrong with the group of the girl, the police would also know how to interpret the situation and could act accordingly.

This case indicates that refugees refused to accept the rights-based order in its entirety, and sought room to enact their own custom. In this case, the people organizing it were also humanitarian incentive workers, with access to the police and the compounds, who

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<sup>17</sup> Shortly after the Sudanese elopement, one my Turkana informants eloped an 11-year-old girl from the "reserves" who was visiting her father in town. He put her in his *tukul* for a week. He was severely beaten by the relatives of the girl. After intervention by Turkana elders – I was invited and they explained about the procedures to me during a meeting in the guesthouse – a dowry was agreed upon, to be paid in the future, and the man was allowed to marry the girl. Whereas humanitarian concern applied to these practices in the camp, they were not unusual among pastoralists in the whole region.

were knowledgeable about the sensitivities involved. The interesting thing is that the health manager derived his position as a “small big man,” as Turner refers to people with similar statuses, partly or perhaps for a large part as a result of UNHCR and agency empowerment and participation programming, as described in the previous section. The agencies then, have over the years contributed to the creation of pockets of authority that rest with one leg in the refugee project and with the other in refugees’ own, alternative adaptation of it.

Malkki writes that “as a technology of power, the camp ended up being much more than a device of containment and enclosure; it grew into a locus of continual creative subversion and transformation” (Malkki 1995: 236-37). Indeed, the governance of empowerment in Kakuma was sometimes met with resistance and subversion, resulting in what Boege, Brown et al (2009) refer to as “hybrid political orders”:

In hybrid political orders, diverse and competing authority structures, sets of rules, logics of order, and claims to power co-exist, overlap, interact, and intertwine, combining elements of introduced Western models of governance and elements stemming from local indigenous traditions of governance and politics, with further influences exerted by the forces of globalization and associated societal fragmentation (in various forms: ethnic, tribal, religious) (Boege, Brown et al. 2009: 17).

One time, as I was walking around the camp with a Congolese teacher, we passed a child with a T-shirt given by one of the NGOs that read: “I am a child with rights.” The teacher remarked, “ah, those are the campaigns of the NGOs that are sucking the life out of us.” The continuous attempts to alter refugees’ norms and behavior were more than good intentions; the agencies sought to reorganize refugees’ lives in very fundamental ways, and created conflicts of norms. Merry writes, following Foucault (1978), “the making of subjectivity through law is a particular intimate locus for the operation of hegemony and resistance” (2003: 351). These subjectivities often revolved around the position of women, children and minorities and their treatment by men. It may explain why the teacher above was frustrated, because rights-awareness campaigns primarily challenge the masculinity of men, particularly in patriarchal societies (Ibid: 352). As I will explore more in detail in chapter five, programming based on empowerment and rights creates or highlights vulnerabilities, which may become lucrative resources in terms of agencies granting access to humanitarian programs and durable solutions, or withholding these. Another effect was that refugees sought and created the space to enact their own customs, either in parallel to UNHCRs rights-based ordering or in a hybrid form thereof.

For instance, various communities had their own jails in the camp, most notably the Sudanese in Zone Six, next to the Sudanese administration blocks. These were actual cellblocks, that I would describe as more appropriate than the crowded metal container

that was used by the Kakuma Police Station for the same purpose. Smaller communities used adapted refugee shelters, spread over the camp. Nominally these refugee jails were monitored by UNHCR, but as Griek (2007: 123) notes, these visits to the cells are “sporadic at best.” As a result, these jails, and the space that refugee communities have to enact their own customary ruling form grey areas somewhere between UNHCR’s desired order and authority and that of the refugees themselves. Similarly, LWF employs security men as part of the refugee administration. Some of these yielded considerable power, not only as leaders liaising with the agencies, but also directly to the Kenyan police, and as powerful actors in their communities.

Hyndman notes that the NGO CARE proposed refugee community participation projects in the Kenyan camps in the early 1990s, aimed at self-governance and participation in the allocation of funds and assistance in the camp. UNHCR met the plan with “some resistance,” as she paraphrases the opinion of a UNHCR officer: “UNHCR is effectively the governing body of the three camps [of Dadaab]. Refugee self management is viewed by this staff member as dangerous because it poses the possibility of redirecting this power and reinstating elder enclaves of supposedly autocratic power” (Hyndman 2000: 139). Similarly, Sommers notes: “training is a form of empowerment. Targeting refugee elites – most of whom are male and educated – instead of the most vulnerable, may strengthen the existing power structure and contribute to the frustrations, and perhaps the violence, of the marginalized” (Sommers 2005: 204).

Turner observed in Lukole camp that “the refugees themselves seek to maneuver in this temporary space, thus creating pockets of sovereign power outside the reach of either the camp commandant’s restrictions or UNHCR’s benevolent control. Although they are positioned as bare life by the Tanzanian state, they are not paralyzed. And, likewise, as much as the bio-politics of UNHCR attempts to create moral apolitical beings, it never succeeds and history and politics strike back” (Turner 2005: 313-14).

This suits the frame and theoretical notion of an accidental city. The very protractedness of refugee situations makes it increasingly complicated to treat people as beneficiary-subjects who are temporarily beyond politics. As Hyndman writes: “though camps are arguably a useful and acceptable short-term emergency measure, the second rate status accorded to refugees in these ‘temporary cities’ is problematic” (Hyndman 2000: 23). Similarly, De Waal notes that “humanitarian action is paradigmatically regarded as a state of exception – it takes place beyond politics. In this sense, humanitarianism is seen as a moment at which history is suspended [life in limbo] and pure humanity is briefly in focus. This is a necessary fiction for the humanitarian enterprise, but as emergencies become prolonged, it is a pretense that becomes harder to uphold” (De Waal 2010: s135).

This is of some discursive importance. A static image of the refugee as vulnerable and dependent has been nurtured (if not marketed) at least in part to legitimize their containment in refugee camps. The reasoning goes as follows: if too much humanity is associated with the refugee, their seclusion in holding camps becomes – rather than anything resembling humanitarianism – a brutal exclusion. The act of forcing people in camps therefore is legitimized by the discursive positioning of needy and incapable refugees, and by necessity following emergency or crisis (Harrell-Bond 1986; Kaiser 2006). The idea of the camp as an accidental city, which becomes increasingly less temporary, and in which refugees organize themselves and claim the very entitlements they are promised (including the “right” to self-management) stands in sharp contrast to this image of a temporary seclusion site.

The refugee agencies sought to change the norms of their beneficiaries and were relatively free to declare their behavior, culture or any other expressions of “otherness” dysfunctional, vulnerable, insecure, or to apply any other label. Analyzing and recognizing this power of UNHCR over its refugee subjects is relevant because this governmentality lies at the heart of the interplay between refugees and the authorities / UNHCR. This power finds its way into the constituting of refugees as subjects of aid, the local host population, and the camp at large through a myriad of small and daily activities ranging from food aid to gender awareness and peace building programs, all caught up in the language of rights and entitlements to those rights. This is what I have come to understand as an entitlement arena, in which the relations between refugees and the humanitarian governing structure are shaped.

A good example to illustrate the above is to look at differences between the customs of refugees and UNHCR’s rights-based policy with respect to the understanding of what constitutes a crime. This is one of the areas where refugees’ and UNHCR’s orders meet. Which behavior is tolerated and condoned in a particular community and which is not? In Kakuma, sanctions and sometimes violent punishment could come at the hand of refugees’ own community, as well as from the Kenyan police and sometimes even UNHCR or NGOs. Non-criminal offenses were dealt with by the Sudanese community itself by the varying levels of bench courts, instead of being reported to the police and/or UNHCR for adjudication by Kenyan courts, as was officially required for cases defined as “crimes” under Kenyan law. But the same held for theft and general aggression, and even murder (Griek 2007: 123). One of my informants was “fined” 1,500 KES by the Sudanese administration for reporting a crime to the Kenyan police. The argument for the fine was that he should have turned to “his own” authorities: the Sudanese leadership. “Sudan has their own morals, they don’t believe in Kenyan justice,” he told me, an opinion that was widely shared. In some cases the Kenyan police demanded the presence of a refugee

representative, such as a chairman, when reporting a crime, making the control of the Sudanese administration practically inescapable.

The Sudanese administration also intervened directly in elopement cases. Another Lost Boy who came back from the US similarly “held” his girlfriend in the guesthouse. This was a classic elopement in that it occurred with her consent, as she later explained to me. They had been friends for a long time, and now they just wanted to evade their elders’ decision on the matter, and to speed up the marriage process as the man had to return to the US, where he would be able to apply for family reunification for his newlywed. News reached us in the guesthouse that the parents of the girl had gone to the Sudanese administration to report the case. Because the Lost Boy could not be found in the camp, the administration grabbed six of his relatives and put them in jail for the illegal “kidnapping” of the girl. After some days, he went to the administration and changed places with his relatives. He married the girl after the bench court ruling, in which it was decided that he had to pay a fine of two cows on top of the dowry. As he was leaving for the US again, the Lost Boy explained that he had anticipated an increase in the bride price; this was how he had planned it all. Moreover, it was a general phenomenon in the camp that returning Lost Boys drove up the price of the dowry for their brides because of their jobs in the US. In that sense, to anticipate a few cows extra was not seen as overly problematic, especially for those “rich” resettled Lost Boys. In contrast, many young men in the camp complained that the Lost Boys’ American cash drove up bride prices to such an extent that they could not compete with the resettled ones, which was a source of frustration.

In another case, an aunt of one of my informants died after having sustained injuries in a fight. Apparently she had been aggressive and abusive, and her neighbors sought to punish that or to stop her. According to her relative, who was my informant, the official Kenyan autopsy report in the hospital in Lodwar did not indicate violence as the result of her death. As such, the case ceased to be a police matter. The Sudanese authorities in the camp held a different opinion however, and brought the perpetrators to Sudan for ruling Sudanese style. According to camp regulations, the Kenyan judiciary was to deal with murder cases in the camp. In this example, the Sudanese leadership evaded the official UNHCR / Government of Kenya regulations and decided to let tradition/custom prevail. The woman then, was in a way abducted from the camp. Griek writes in regard to similar practices, “this presents a curious protection issue, as it – in essence – amounts to *refoulement* at the hand of fellow refugees” (2006: 58). There were several bench court systems in the camp, organized hierarchically starting with the community-level bench courts at the bottom, ultimately all the way up to the high court in South Sudan (See for an analysis of these benchcourts: Griek 2006/7). Given that this is SPLA territory and

SPLA jurisdiction, the workings of the bench courts can hardly be seen separately from the SPLA. Although the link is indirect, it is nonetheless strong. Some of the Big Men I knew were called upon in the bench court rulings. These men were SPLA, still “serving” in the camp, while they were simultaneously refugees who held high positions in the official refugee-run administration of Kakuma. Here, space for maneuvering was sustained by the power of the SPLA to enact custom that often directly contravened UNHCR policy, through men who were part of the very same refugee-hosting apparatus. These are prime examples of the interfaces that are influential in the organization of the camp.

In the coming chapters I will analyze forms of transformation, subversion and the adaptation of camp governance in the domains of violence, livelihoods, resettlement and repatriation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described the political and humanitarian set-up of the camp. It represents a domain of humanitarian ordering informed by the combination of a legal and practical understanding of refugee protection. Building on the conceptualization of a state of exception I have identified the camp as an entitlement arena, in which a space for maneuvering is created by the void between stimulating and guarding protection measures and human and refugee rights on the one hand, and the practicalities of camp administration on the other. The coming together of UNHCR as the body that is mandated to hold and guard (and make) refugee rights, as well as to implement them, means that the organization is able to decide to whom their created rules and regulations apply. It is, in terms of power, like a near-sovereign ordering the refugee camp environment as a state within a state.

Over time, refugee governance came to encompass empowerment and participation policies, in a part as a result of the adoption of a human rights-based approach to aid. As a result, UNHCR and the agencies have actively contributed to the creation of pockets of authorities that form interfaces between themselves and their programs, and the larger refugee population. And although the power of refugees vis-à-vis the UNHCR and the agencies may be limited, or even symbolical in some sense, their power in their own communities is considerable. Moreover, knowledge and access to the agencies, their employees, their mandates and practices adds to the possibilities of negotiating with them. These interfaces between the agencies and the refugees are where social ordering processes are played out and become visible. The bio-governmental attempts to order the

refugee population by changing norms and traditional values and customs, are simultaneously met by some with enthusiasm, and people build and act on them in terms of emancipation and opportunity; as they are resisted and considered intrusive by others. Actors seek to access, negotiate, evade, and challenge the refugee and rights based governance practices and language.

On another note, UNHCR as a near sovereign had almost unlimited freedom vis-à-vis the Kenyan government to organize the camp. With reference to the camp as an accidental city, this resulted in protection measures and services that have effectively included refugees in a functional governing body, which in some respects surpassed the position of the immediate Kenyan neighbors in town, and the Turkana in general, vis-à-vis their own government. This power to include – to decide on who is allowed within the virtual walls of the camp – and to accord “privileges” to those inside in terms of basic services, made the camp like a city-state. In this way, the camp has come to be many things for many people: it is a market, a model-camp, a facility for refuge, a rear base, and a portal. In the sense of social ordering processes in the camp, however, the domain of humanitarian governance and the working of the entitlement arena are essential in that most of the other domains of ordering are strongly related to this one.

In the rest of the book I will describe distinct domains through which refugees order and make sense of their camp environment in relation to the refugee regime, in a large part on the basis of what empowerment programming has enabled them to do, and in part through the interfaces that have been created via participation strategies of the agencies.



## Intermission: walking the camp

Ethnography must be able to bring a people and a place to life in the eyes and hearts of those who have not been there (Nordstrom 2004: 14-15).

Most people enter Kakuma by road, like the Sudanese via Lokichoggio, from the northwest, after a 100-kilometer drive, across the semi-desert. A police barrier just after leaving Lokichoggio and another in the small village of Kalobeyei protect the roads from Turkana robbers and seek to prevent refugees of moving freely beyond the camps. When driving into Kakuma town, the refugee camp slowly comes closer from the northeast, where it eventually becomes visible in the distance. From this direction one can enter the camp without passing through town, the UNHCR compound or the police station, for these are located further along the road, strictly positioned between town and the camp.

Buses, *matatus* (taxi vans) and trucks with relief food from the harbor in Mombasa destined for Kakuma camp and South Sudan come from the southeast via Lodwar. This is how most other refugees enter Kakuma. Similar police checkpoints seek to control who goes from Kakuma, and why. The town is a commercial hub along the main road, with some shops, three wholesalers, a few guesthouses and *hotelis*. There is a petrol station and following further the early contours of an Ethiopian Orthodox church that is being built by refugees as a gift to the town's converts to Orthodox Christianity. A bit away from the road lies the Catholic mission hospital. Spread out from the road are houses made of concrete with corrugated iron roofs and some pastoralist *tukuls* made of twigs, mud and pieces of plastic sheeting. Some homesteads have a combination of the two. The further from the main road, the more "temporary" the housing styles become. The village ends with river Tarach, beyond but less than a kilometer in the direction of Lokichoggio, lays the refugee camp.

Coming from the bridge, at the left side is the UNHCR compound. It is a large double fenced square with guard towers located in a "bowl" in the land, that – much to the amusement of the Turkana from town, for they had warned UNHCR about this – floods every rainy season, often requiring the temporary evacuation of personnel to the old compound on the other side of the road. This is the location where UNHCR has its offices and living quarters. IOM has houses here too, but its offices are located in the camp in Kakuma Three. In this compound, visitors from embassies, journalists, researchers and resettlement selection missions reside in guesthouses. Directly across the road is Kakuma police station, comprised of three containers with thatched roofs, two of which serve as offices and one as a jail. Beneath a roof without walls sit the officers who deal with people and complaints. Behind the station are small barracks with rooms for the

families of the officers, and next to that is the police canteen, made up of a bar and restaurant.

On the right side of the main asphalt road just after the UNHCR compound, a dirt road dives down towards the camp. Going down it we pass the billboards of the agencies that run the camp, lined up along the left side of the road. On the right side is the new WFP compound, containing permanent houses with blue roofs that were completed in 2005. Further along on the left is the old cemetery; some of the graves have epitaphs and are decorated, while others are bare, blown away, hidden under the dust or overgrown by small shrubbery. Just after a security post with a barrier – manned by LWF security incentive workers, usually tall Dinka or Nuer men – the road splits in two. To the right is the LWF compound, and to the left is the beginning of what people used to refer to as *Kakuma highway*. There are people everywhere: Turkanas with loads to sell or trade in the camp – twigs, charcoal, vegetables, wooden poles, crates of sodas and beers pushed on handcarts – or refugees coming or going to do business in town or at one of the compounds, or headed to the bus station to travel somewhere else. People walk or ride bicycles or sit on the back of *bodabodas* – bicycle taxis operated by both refugees and Turkanas. There are herders with goats and camels, and an awkward sign by IRC that reads “leave the camp better than you found it,” as it pleases to handle the environment with care. The LWF compound, or Compound One, houses LWF, IRC, JRS, GTZ, Windle Trust, Handicap International, FilmAid, Kenya Red Cross, and NCKK offices and staff quarters.

Turning left on Kakuma highway, the Nuer community is located on the right hand side. This is the beginning of Kakuma One, Zone Five. Kakuma One is the oldest part of the camp, and was built in 1992. There is a large church hidden just behind the first rows of houses. The houses are decorated with paintings that are specific for the Nuer houses, in black or brown, animals or figures like tribal tattoos, against the mud walls. In other parts of the camp, houses have different decorations, if they are decorated at all. Some of the houses have corrugated iron roofs, others have replaced them with *makuti* – palm leaves that temper the heat from the sun baking on the iron sheets. There is a common misconception among visitors, who see the *makuti* roofs as a sign of poverty. In reality, it is the other way around. A *makuti* roof signifies that the owner had resources to obtain the material from where palms do grow, near Lake Turkana for instance, whereas the iron roof is provided for free by UNHCR. Wind blows sand against the thorn hedges that demarcate homes and communities, plastic bags stick in them by the hundreds. Kakuma highway is one of those roads that are more comfortable to travel just off then on. The middle of the road is therefore used for walking, while bicycles prefer the sandy roadsides.

A little further on the right we pass the slaughter slab. This is where goats and camels are slaughtered in the morning for sale during the day. In the morning the heat works on the corpses and their parts, creating an invisible corridor of rank odor as you pass, prompting quick traversal. The Somali community begins on the left when we continue, and a little further, on the right again, a newly erected school emerges. People are still working on it. To the right, in the distance is the Ethiopian community, where a large orthodox church bears a cross that is illuminated by green lights in the evenings. The Somali market begins just beyond it. Squeezed between the Somali community on the left and the Rwandan community behind it is the Oromo community on the right, and the Burundi community behind that. On the other side, the market ends between the Equatorian community on the left, and the Lotuko community on the right.

The market branches to the left from Kakuma Highway onto Mogadishu Road. Stalls and shops sell clothing, food items, some computer and telephone services, international calling centers, *miraa/khat*, etc. On the other side of Kakuma highway is a small path that leads to the Ethiopian market area, which runs from the Nuer community to food distribution center one. This is also the location of the JRS safe house, surrounded by barbed wire fencing, containing several blocks that house women and their children who face insecurity in their communities. Behind it, in the direction of the river, another part of the Somali communities and the Congolese community. Here, too, stands a church built provided by the Congolese themselves, where there is musical equipment such as electric guitars and keyboards, and microphones for amplification. Several areas within the Congolese community carry names such as “Golgotha,” “Galaxi” or “CIA,” but also more rebellious ones, like “Mai-Mai”; after the infamous rebel movement from the Congolese rainforest.

Following the highway further into the camp, we pass what is known as UNISA on the right, a center and library for tertiary education in the form of correspondence courses of the University of South Africa. It is located in a JRS compound where students can study and seek tutoring. Here, with a large fence erected by the Ethiopians, is the main entry onto the Ethiopian market. Passing Food Distribution Center One, we enter the more open and vast groups of the different Sudanese communities, mostly Dinka but among themselves subdivided in clans and families. We pass *Baghdad*, the area beside the road next to the Ugandan community, where its chairman owns a hotel selling *Busa* and *Changa'a* – homemade alcoholic brews. *Baghdad* derives its name from the history of violence due to drunkenness. When it is late, I move a little faster since people sometimes become a little wild there. We are at the end of Zone Five.

From here to the end of Kakuma One, subdivided into zones One to Four and Six, we are in Sudanese Dinka territory, subdivided into groups inhabited by different Dinka

clans. Some of the initial square houses of the lost boys still stand here in Zone One, with roofs made out of flattened, rusty USAID oil cans. Occasionally, there are shops on the side of the road, ranging from houses, to small and portable street stalls on carts. There is an IRC community center on the left, a pre-school on the right. Ultimately, we reach the IRC hospital, with a water tap in front, where people line up their jerry cans as they await their turn when the water comes. The Hospital consists of permanent structures, occasionally supplemented by large tents when additional the capacity is needed, as was the case during a cholera outbreak in the Equatorian community in 2005. Passing along, beyond the New Paradise Hotel (according to its owner, the first refugee owned business made of concrete), there is a juncture where the road splits towards Don Bosco, a GTZ compound, Napata church, Napata grounds, Napata Secondary school, and the buildings of the Sudanese counterpart manager of education. Continuing straight on, we move to the Sudanese market area known as *Hong Kong*. This area is entirely Sudanese, and predominantly Dinka. Here is another police post, and borehole; it is the end of Kakuma One.

All along the northern side of the camp runs the *lugga*, or riverbed, of river Tarach, a seasonal river that is mostly empty and dusty. The communities border the river that when it swells up after it rains, eats houses away almost every year as it broadens its flow. On the other side are Turkana villages and homes. At the end of Kakuma One, the road has been eaten by the river, which bends at this point. We travel by wading through puddles of water and mud left from the last swelling of the river to reach Kakuma Two, instead of taking the main road via Napata grounds. When it rains in Uganda, the river fills up and becomes more difficult to pass. Every time it rains, people – mostly children – are said to drown in it. Cars don't pass here anymore, as they did when I arrived. They now go via Napata, or take the outer tarmac road entering in Kakuma Three. Kakuma Two was built in 1997, and has a different set-up than Kakuma One. Kakuma Two is known as Zone Seven, and is subdivided by three Phases. Kakuma Two Phase One is mainly inhabited by Somali Bantus and Somali Barawa and Bajuni clans. In Phase Two on the left side of the road live mostly Sudanese Dinka, some Sudanese Acholi and Somali Barawa. Phase Three is inhabited by Somali Digle-Merifle, Bajuni and some other clans.

There is another market area here, known as Kakuma Two Market. It is concentrated, with some *hotelis* and clothing shops. Bicycle repairmen have their open-air workshops in front: they call it *jua kali* work in Kiswahili, meaning work under a “strong sun.” Passing the market to the left is the road towards the IOM compound, the newly build Teachers Training College, and some buildings housing IRC's community-based rehabilitation programs and LWF's education department. Around it are groups of houses in straight

rows, differently than in Kakuma One. A change in planning has taken place, or perhaps it is that people have not started to make the place their own in the way that they did in Kakuma One. According to rumor, this is some fundamentalist Muslims with Al Qaeda sympathies live. Some people refer to it as “Tora Bora,” after the cage complex in Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden was said to hide after the American-led invasion.

To the left is a road, past a security barrier leading to the main road towards Lokichoggio. The land is cracked due to erosion. In the distance the security towers of the UNHCR compound are still visible. To the right we see Kakuma Four, crowded with huts as it was when I first came to the camp for a week-long reconnaissance in 2003. It now looks barren with straight rows of houses and hardly a tree in sight. After some time we pass the new graveyard. It is bigger than the old one, with epitaphs and symbolic messages left on the graves. They look like small hills in the land. The ground is hard. I know this from experience, since we had to dig for six hours to make a grave for an Equatorian man named ‘Ramadan’, who suddenly died of complex reasons in 2005. Behind it lies the Angelina Jolie girls primary boarding school. The boarding school is yet another pilot in the camp, a camp within a camp. It is located a bit outside the camp, with a promise to leave the facility to the Turkana when the refugees go. As it is a boarding school, the girls live in the compound. It was paid for by the UNHCR goodwill ambassador and American movie star Angelina Jolie.

The road in the other direction, behind it and to the right, leads towards borehole five, along Kakuma Three, aka Zone Eight. Here, there is another market although it is a much smaller and less developed one, as if it is still emerging despite the fact that this addition to the camp originates from 1999. The market is located between Kakuma Three and Four, and adjacent to the protection area and the police post of Kakuma Three. Here is the reception center. The set-up of Kakuma Three is different again. Ethnicities are mixed, although the majority is Sudanese from various distinct ethnic backgrounds. Instead of “groups” or “phases,” here we find the “International Area” and “New Area” behind the reception center, each host to a multitude of ethnicities and nationalities. These are new labels for new camp settlement set-ups that have evolved over time.

At the end of Kakuma Four, Zone Nine, the rows of houses suddenly end and the land continues into an open plain, with a small mountain range at the distant horizon. This was the addition to the camp made when the Somali Bantus arrived from Dadaab. The difference with Kakuma One could not be greater. A bit towards the left is where new arrivals are settled in tents until their houses are made, or in large dormitories that were erected later on, after the Sudanese peace agreement, but while there were still people flocking to Kakuma on a large scale. A bit further away is the old Somali Bantu secondary school, and the compound of an influential member of the Somali Bantu

community. It lies slightly separated from the camp, supposedly built by the reaped benefits of being a powerful community member.

Here, the camp ends. We are somewhere between 10 and 15 kilometers away from the main compound and have completed a chronological passage through the camp.

### **Chapter Three: The camp as warscape - rebelization, violence and order**

Because I lived in Kakuma Guesthouse in town people could visit me without having to go through gates, checks and regulations. Some of my more regular guests started to use my room as a little library on the conflicts from their pasts, and often took books back home to read. A Rwandan Hutu read the popular account of the Canadian commander Romeo Dallaire: “Shake hands with the devil: the failure of humanity in Rwanda” (2003). A young Sudanese Dinka worked his way through a 500+ page “War of visions: conflict of identities in the Sudan,” by Francis Mading Deng (1995). Another Rwandese was delighted with Carolyn Nordstrom’s “Shadows of war: violence, power, and international profiteering in the twenty-first century” (2004). Others read “Purity and exile: violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania” by Liisa Malkki (1995), Mahmood Mamdani’s “When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda” (2001), and “Emma’s war: love, betrayal and death in the Sudan” by Deborah Scroggins (2003).<sup>1</sup>

After reading those books, we would engage in conversations and discussions, and the books came to life as the subjects of the writing were actually around. My visitors would comment on parts of the writings they had actually been part of. As “Emma’s war” went through several hands of “Lost Boys,” some of them recalled seeing her in Nasir, where they stayed after being driven out of Ethiopia. They recalled the children’s camps and the recruitment mechanisms of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). Some would mention how relatives were taken by Arabs and were never seen again. Others had come back and were now in the camp, or in Nairobi. One Sudanese visitor, after reading on humanitarian aid to Sudan narrated about how a boy next to him was killed when part of a food airdrop landed on his head.

A Rwandan commented on proceedings of UN peacekeepers while he was under siege for several days in a university building in Butare. He interpreted Dallaire’s writing as guilt compensating, while simultaneously seeking room to comprehend the complexities of international interference. One of the recurring themes of discussion was how in the camp, he had to trust the very same UN that earlier “let his family and colleagues die in the genocide.” The UN forces withdrew from the university grounds and afterwards the government soldiers came in. Another study on the Rwandan

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<sup>1</sup> I found it very valuable to have been able to use those books as examples of how data that was gathered for similar research, and partly under similar circumstances as my own, was distilled into writing. I was able to refer to the format and methodology of those books to explain to my informants what I was doing, and what the result of their participation would be. Most, I believe, appreciated this.

genocide, “When victims become killers” was read by a former *Interahamwe* member, who found some comfort in a history that sought to understand the deeper underlying causes for the war, as he consistently called it, rather than genocide, as the many non-Hutu and outsiders referred to it.

The whole of Kakuma existed against the backgrounds of these wars that were so much part of real life. The histories and stories of past war and violence were all different, complex and fraught with personal interpretations. They siphoned through the camp and among its people, where some histories found continuation or were altered over time and shared between generations. Identities of individuals and groups, as people lived together compressed and mixed in this accidental city, were comprised of these histories. They influenced where people lived in the camp, where they could and could not go, or when and where to be cautious and for whom. The “as a matter of fact” way in which people told me about violent components of the affiliations and pasts of other groups in the camp first appeared exaggerated or far-fetched, but later on started to make sense. Regardless whether statements were “true” or not, they were part of how Kakuma “worked.” I came to understand these stories as part of ongoing ordering processes in the camp, whereby people made sense of their own and others’ places in the accidental city.

In this chapter I will look at violence as a domain of ordering that can be understood as a “warscape” (Nordstrom 1997). The concept of the warscape refers to the role that diffuse understandings of violence play in the everyday environment of the camp as (a part of) wartime dynamics although it is not in a direct warzone. I argue that the refugee camp is linked to that warzone, either through (imagined) pasts, in the present, or in a anticipated futures, and that violence is relevant not only in its manifest expressions but, more importantly, in an imminent and symbolic capacity. Although direct links to resistance or violence may cease to exist, it is interesting to analyze to what extent other less direct linkages impact or influence camp settlement. The dynamics of these war-related imageries and various forms of past, present and symbolic violence translate into forms of spatial and social ordering that will be explored as processes of place making.

## Spacewars

When I came to the camp in 2004, people spoke of an incident in June 2003 that caused one of the biggest clashes between Turkhanas and refugees in the history of Kakuma. Below are the versions that I heard:



A Turkana herdsboy / some Turkana herders were herding donkey(s) / cow(s) / goat(s) / camel(s) at the edge of the camp, bordering the Sudanese Dinka ‘community’ somewhere near Kakuma Two, phase Two.

One / some donkey(s) / cow(s) / goat(s) / camel(s) entered a Sudanese vegetable garden and started eating the crops.

Then, A: some Sudanese took the animal(s) and hid it / them from the / their owner(s) with the intention to sell or eat it / them. B: Sudanese, angered by the destruction of their crops killed the animal(s) and dumped the carcass(es) in a nearby pit latrine.

Or, alternatively, Turkanas found Sudanese refugees growing crops on “their” pasture / outside the camp boundaries, when they were herding their animals. They saw the Sudanese chase / attack / kill the animal(s) and they attacked the Sudanese and put his / their bodies in a nearby pit latrine.

Or, Sudanese chased / beat / killed the herder / herds boy and dumped the body in a nearby pit latrine.

Or, the herder(s) came to look for the animal(s) and found it / them in the hands of the Sudanese / in a pit latrine, and they beat / shot the Sudanese.

Then, the herds boy / men / Sudanese went home and told the story to his / their kin...

In response to the events, armed Turkanas attacked at night with semi-automatic rifles, while Dinkas defended themselves with spears and clubs, sticks and knives, bows and arrows, and the odd gun. One narrator explained that the first casualty was a rogue Dinka shot by other Dinkas with an arrow. He was part of the Turkana group attacking them, as a mercenary or a hired hand of some sort. It was an uneven battle, but the Sudanese as a group the Sudanese were large and defeated the Turkanas in the end. Some of my informants who came from the communities in the epicenter of the battle, near Kakuma One, group eight, expressed an interesting combination of simultaneous heroism and disbelief: “Man, we fought them with *spears!*” In the end, eleven Sudanese Dinkas and three Turkanas were left lifeless and many others were wounded, most of them refugees. Aid workers were briefly evacuated from in-camp activities, refugees were temporarily relocated – like IDPs within their own refugee camp – and Kenya’s elite paramilitary General Service Unit (GSU) was sent in to restore order. The GSU stayed on in the camp until just before I arrived for fieldwork at the end of 2004.

Different versions of the clash circulated in the camp – as with every event – as I showed in the narration above. To some, the battle was epic, to others traumatic, and yet

to others it was foolish. Some of my Turkana informants believed that the Sudanese had abused their animals. The Turkana, being pastoralists who attached a high material, symbolic and even existential value to their cattle,<sup>2</sup> felt offended and insecure at the hands of the refugees ‘invading’ their pasture. My Sudanese Dinka informants reasoned the other way around; they felt that the Turkana had violated the little agricultural opportunity they had, and had later brutally attacked them with guns. Indeed, although it is unknown which and how many Turkanas participated, the story among the Sudanese was that “they attacked us.” The Ethiopians distanced themselves from the event and argued that the Sudanese protected all the refugees, and that without them they would not be able to fend off the Turkanas. They reasoned that some Turkanas did not see the inner divisions in the camp, but viewed all the refugees as invaders taking up their pasture and being spoon-fed by the international community, while they themselves struggled in the adverse circumstances of the semi-desert; they received nothing, not even from their own government. In fact, most refugees were aware of the sometimes more disadvantaged position of the Turkanas.

The violence constituted more than its immediate function as defense or frustration, and served to maintain a group boundary through which a “nation in exile” simultaneously defined and defended itself. The clash was an event in which a local issue transcended into a communal struggle along group identity lines. This was one of the security “problems” in the camp in many cases. In the past – apparently less so in the presently – a bicycle incident between two children from different ethnicities, groups, clans or communities could escalate to involve great numbers of people fighting each other. These communalities indicate not only the escalating potential of violence, but also its nature as a form of sociability and even empowerment through which groups – defined in a variety of ways – solve or react to events.

Nordstrom writes about violence: “the subject is fraught with assumptions, presuppositions, and contradictions. Like power, violence is essentially contested: everyone knows it exists, but no one agrees on what actually constitutes the phenomenon” (Nordstrom 1997: 6). That contention itself is the essence of a violent order. The rumors, threats, perceived strengths and capabilities are what produce the ways in which groups perceive each other, even if violence is not (yet) manifest, but merely symbolic or imminent in the understanding of people (Galtung 1990; Žižek 2009). In this way,

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<sup>2</sup>The importance of cattle in the social life of nomadic pastoralist groups in East Africa is known, somewhat derogatory, as “the cattle complex” (Herskovits 1926). The cattle complex denotes how animals play an important role in the social world of their owners, and are almost worshipped. The prevalence of cattle rustling is sometimes explained as part of the cattle complex, just as the belief among some ethnic groups that all cattle belong to them, ordained by some divine cosmological ruling.

violence is simultaneously productive, destructive and reproductive (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 1).

Clashes like these are rooted in understandings of social relations between the different social groups in the camp. Simple statements along the lines of: “those Sudanese are power hungry”; “those Turkanas are barbaric”; “you can’t trust those Somalis” or “the Acholi are bloodthirsty” are expressions of these social relations. My Dinka informant who, while walking through the camp and passing a Nuer on the road, utters: “those Nuer have no minds, by the way,” refers to a history of past violence in multiple locales and on various occasions, not only in the camp but also in Sudan. This represents what Schröder and Schmidt call “ ‘violent imaginaries’: the emphasizing of the historicity of present day confrontations” (2001: 9), rooted in the history and context of the relations in and around the camp. In that sense, the narration and understanding of Turkanas attacking the camp, is “filed” in a “cultural archive” of past violence or antagonisms (Declich 2001).

Nordstrom borrows from Appadurai’s “ethnoscape” (1996) to introduce the warscape as a specific focus on how “each person, each group brings a history that informs action and is negotiated vis-à-vis the various other histories of those with whom they interact” (1997: 37). The warscape, then, is a part of social ordering, as “a broad field of dynamics which are part of war time processes, but not necessarily confined to the front line” (Hoffman 2005: 350).

The warscape is a useful term to denote the variety of ways in which violence shapes the landscape of Kakuma. This may be as manifestations of violence or a visible or invisible threat of violence emphasizing the power that authorizes and organizes it. Similarly, the withholding of violence by powerful actors does not necessarily remove the possibility of its application, as both derive from the same power to instigate and apply violence when this is deemed necessary.

The coupling of histories of violence and perceptions and myths of violence was everywhere. War was everywhere, although mostly in a dormant form as narratives and discourse, but it strongly affected the imagination and organization of social groups in the camp. This is what intrigued me: for all the focus on the managerial aspects of violence, in the end – at least during my fieldwork – direct violent acts were minimal when compared to the image of the camp as a “violent place.” Even the clash of 2003 may well have been an “incident,” an excess. Nevertheless, violence always lurked around the corner, not in the least in the perceptions and concerns of the agencies.

## The camp as a violent place

Kakuma refugee camp has been widely referred to as a violent place. Violent conflicts have arisen between refugees and Kenyan nationals, and between and within the various refugee ethnic groups and communities (Crisp 2000; Jacobsen 2000; Obura 2002; Crisp 2006; Kagwanja and Juma 2008; Kaiser 2008) (and various reports, evaluations and advocacy documents).

Based on a review of the above-mentioned literature and reports, the following manifestations of violence support the idea that the camp is a violent place. First, the effects of poverty and deprivation culminate in violent robbery and theft and other criminal behavior. Second, trauma from past wars results in irrational violent behavior in the camp. Third, frustration due to encampment leads to bored and frustrated youth and men, who may become rebellious in the camp or decide to join armed movements in their home countries. Fourth, the politics of war mirroring past and present conflicts in home countries feed intra-tribal and national antagonisms and occasional clashes in the camp. Fifth, the insecurity in the refugee-hosting environment of northern Kenya enters the camp in the form of robberies and attacks by Kenyan Turkanas. Sixth, arbitrary arrest and punishment by refugee community leaders and members of the local population may take on violent forms. And seventh, violence can be the result of cultural forms such as gender-based and domestic violence or abductions for the purpose of forced marriage. This last category in particular has been the focus of attention, as it is of main concern of the refugee regime; sexual violence and abuse and domestic violence that are understood as a direct consequence of encampment, perpetrated by refugees or agency personnel, has received considerable attention.

Below are some official statistics I received of violent events occurring in the period prior to and during my field research.

**Figure 8: Crime statistics Kakuma police station, 2003-2005**

<i>Type</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>Total</i>
Murder	5	9	4	18
Attempted murder	-	3	0	3
Rape	1	2	3	8
Attempted rape	4	3	1	10
Violent robbery	4	7	5	20
Robbery	5	0	2	12
Defilement	5	5	5	20
Att. defilement	2	1	4	9
Indecent assault	1	1	0	2

Source: Kakuma police station.

**Figure 9: Crime statistics UNHCR Sub-Office compared to Kakuma police station**

Type	UNHCR 2003	KPS 2003	UNHCR 2004	KPS 2004
Murder	26	5 (-)	16	9 (3)
Rape	16	1 (4)	6 (1)	2 (3)
Robbery	30 (10)	9	25 (8)	7

Source: UNHCR Kakuma, (\* (..) refers to reported attempts).

The question is how accurate this picture is. The security reports and statistics that I received from UNHCR differed considerably from those I received from the Kenyan police (see figure 10). Moreover, the listed incidents do not appear to support the idea that camp is more violent than any other place in Kenya. Moreover, it is important to ask in what ways data such as the above finds its way into research and reports. For instance, one of the researchers who played an important role in setting the tone for the camp as a violent place, and who was frequently cited by others, later told me that he spent three days in the UNHCR compound, browsing security reports and speaking with pre-selected refugee representatives, as he was not allowed to enter the camp itself.<sup>3</sup> Another, who stayed in the guesthouse for some time, only focused on and spoke with a limited number of women in the safe house, but equated their experiences to the whole camp.

I recognize that violence and insecurity are complicated and obscure phenomena that are difficult to report on, especially when shame, taboo or fear can prevent people from coming forward with their experiences. Moreover, as I discussed in the previous chapter, some refugee administrations preferred to deal with incidents themselves, and put pressure on their communities to adhere to this order by not going to the Kenyan police. As a result, instances of violence may remain beyond the scope of the police and UNHCR and the agencies.

On one of my first days in Kakuma, the UNHCR security officer explained that Kakuma had lived through a sort of security revolution, not only in the camp but most notably outside of it, on the road from Lokichoggio and Lodwar, passing Kakuma in the middle. This road was notorious for highway banditry, and during my time in Kakuma I met several travelers who had just been in a hold-up by armed Turkana men.<sup>4</sup> Special arrangements targeting the Turkana population and including them in assistance programs, however, had resulted in a decrease in Turkana-refugee animosity over the years. The aid workers framed this in terms of Turkana not understanding “the refugee,”

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<sup>3</sup> This was a personal conversation, for which reason I choose not to disclose the name of the researcher in question. On a general note however, it was not uncommon for researchers to be restricted. A staff member of UNHCR’s Regional Office in Nairobi explained that even research teams working for the UN itself are often not allowed to enter the camp on account of security concerns. Interview, Head of Resettlement Unit UNHCR, Nairobi: March 29, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> A Kenyan researcher I befriended had several experiences with highway banditry on his way to the camp, leading him to decide only to fly there in the future.

or in terms of misunderstandings about why refugees received the well-organized care provided in the camp, while the Turkana themselves, marginalized and impoverished, were excluded from that care. Moreover, in a region where inter-tribal cattle rustling was prevalent and silently condoned or stimulated (Osamba 2000; Gray, Sundal et al. 2003), the refugees taking up pasture and resources become part of that complex arrangement, not necessarily as a dysfunction *per se*, but as a logical phenomenon in the pastoralist landscape.<sup>5</sup>

The agencies themselves also contributed to the image of the camp as a violent place. They all had elaborate security policies. Personnel carried short-wave radios at all times and were subject to curfews. Many visitors entered the camp accompanied by armed escorts. One American church group consisting of elderly people hired four or five administration police personnel to guard them at night in the guesthouse, as well as everywhere else they went. The agencies' stressing of violence in the camp can be partially understood as what Schröder and Schmidt refer to as an "operational approach" to violence "focusing on the ethics of antagonism, and in particular on the measurable material and political causes of conflict" (2001: 1). In the context of refugee protection, this means that violence is seen as a problem for the refugee-hosting apparatus tasked with protecting refugees – violence is something to be cured. As such, agencies' focus on violence may be somewhat out of context, derived from a humanitarian spotlight and addressed through various programs targeting violence and peace building in the camp, some of which I introduced in chapter two.<sup>6</sup>

Within the camp, some refugees presented the reduction of various forms of violence as one of the effects of social development. As people had learned about each other, with contributions from the agencies through initiatives such as the Peace Education Programs (PEP) and different security measures like the establishment of peace and security committees, and as the camp settled down after the first ten years of existence, the number of incidents decreased. Kagwanja and Juma note a similar sharp reduction in violence in Dadaab (2008: 222). Employees framed the improvements in security as a result of UN policy, and the end of the emergency phase. In a later discussion with the

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<sup>5</sup> A friend in Nairobi working within the UN system began forwarding the weekly security updates of United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON). These contain an incredible listing of violent events with regard to cattle rustling in Kenya. The events listed often bordered on the astonishing: 3,000 camels stolen; 2,000 warriors crossed the border, etc. Turkanas themselves referred to it as a war, and there have been reports of violence taking on genocidal tactics of wiping out future generations of warriors by deliberately targeting babies and children (see also Abbink (2000) and (Gray, Sundal, et al. 2003) on changing cattle raiding trends in the wider region).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, on a regular basis people, mostly children, would be caught by surprise in the event of a rapidly swelling seasonal river and drown. UNHCR would normally report on refugees who died like this in the media and in agency reports. In town afterwards, I would hear that Turkanas died also, but these deaths would remain outside of humanitarian counting.

UNHCR HSO who was leaving Kakuma after three years in office, he stated that the security revolution was his biggest accomplishment.

My understanding of Kakuma as a warscape is not so much about the occurrence of direct violent acts. Not only because to my understanding the image of Kakuma as a violent place is not what is most relevant when it comes to ordering. Moreover, the forms of direct and “dysfunctional” violence such as robberies, criminality, domestic and sexual violence that resulted in the framing of Kakuma as a violent place are fairly normal in the region, or, for that matter, in Nairobi, or other East African cities.

I am more interested in a symbolic understanding of violence; one that is part of the history and identity of refugees, and in the camp becomes like an order of war-related imageries. In the history of the camp, conflict and competition over resources have led to violence that has escalated along tribal lines and rekindled earlier conflicts in refugees’ home countries and ancient animosities. The UNHCR Head of Sub-Office spoke of a problem of institutionalized violence, in which small problems could escalate to involve complete groups or communities. For instance, in 1993 there were clashes between the Dinka sub tribes over the distribution of water, which was scarce in the camp. This was repeated in 1997 between Somalis and the merged smaller tribes unified as the Equatorian community. Congestion at the food distribution centers caused fighting between the Dinka and the Nuer in 1996, although this might have been influenced by the fierce rivalry between them and the urge to avenge past events. Similarly, clashes between the Equatorian tribes and the Dinka in 1998 was aroused by the killing of prominent leaders from both sides back in southern Sudan, and as such a direct a spillover of the civil war.

Violence in the camp can be seen as a way of ordering and strengthening communities and defending or claiming space and interests. With regard to Sudanese *Uduk* refugees in an Ethiopian refugee camp some decades earlier, James describes how informants explained that victory in camp fights resulted in a sense of control and power (1999: 23). Such assertions went something along the line of: “Man, we fought them with spears!” not unlike my Dinka informant’s recollection of the clash referred to earlier. Moreover, the warscape and its violent manifestations, threats or imaginations serve to legitimate, condone or prescribe social forms in constituencies.

[V]iolence is a force that not only manifests itself in the destruction of boundaries but as well in their creation, and that intransitive violence (which may operate conceptually prior to manifesting itself in action) serves to create the integrities and identities which are in turn subjected to those forms of violence which seeks victims. Violence – rather than being a performance in the course of which one integral entity (person, community, state) violates the integrity of another – may as well serve to generate integral identities by inscribing borders between something becoming an entity and its surroundings. (Bowman 2001: 28)

Violence, as located in the relationship between “self and society” (Jabri 1996: 3), thus creates communities, albeit parallel to the refugee regime’s ordering. Violent threats can be seen as extensions of communities’ claims to some form of self management, for instance by allowing refugee administrations to have their own jails in the camp and condoning or tacitly approving of practices that violate international human rights or refugee law, and may be illegal or even criminal under the national laws of host states. Violence and the language of violence that creates and maintains identities based on violence, are all part of social systems that regulate “how one form of identity [...] acquires primacy over other formations which could identify cross-cutting interests across the conflict divide” (Jabri 1996: 20).

As such “the authority of those who seek to maintain order in a society can also be undermined if their actions infringe upon the norms of a moral or religious order, which likewise renders them illegitimate in the eyes of the local population” (Benda-Beckman and Pirie 2007: 4). Legitimacy and authority are thus constantly contested in the context of the camp. Social norms are like a form of currency of authority, and the more legitimate that authority, the more violent it may be in maintaining order based on those social norms. As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois note, “what constitutes violence is always mediated by an expressed or implicit dichotomy between legitimate/illegitimate, permissible or sanctioned acts” (2004: 2). Contesting that order, in turn, may also take place in violent ways, which can at times be seen as an empowering force – even in case of what can be regarded as more “dysfunctional” forms of violence. Past clashes have resulted in changes in the spatial arrangement and the formation of communities. Violence that is labeled dysfunctional or irrational may for refugees simultaneously “create meaning that allows them to survive and rebuild their lives” (Colson 2003: 12).

In Kakuma, clashes and narratives of violence were framed within a larger rebel or conflict rationale. These imageries consist of linkages and associations with rebel and military movements both in the past and in the present. The important questions are how these linkages are related to how groups perceive each other, how they settle in the camp, and how they contribute to the ordering of the camp.

### **Refugee camp rebelization**

On the occasion of a marriage ceremony in one of the Dinka communities in the camp, between a bride and groom who were both already resettled in Australia (they would marry afterwards in Australia), I met Bol. Bol lived in the Kenyan town of Nakuru and came to Kakuma to act as an elder in the ceremony. He was in charge of the arrangement



of the dowry, to be paid in cattle to the parents of the girl. Money would be exchanged and cattle would be purchased in Sudan. For a week, Bol stayed in the guesthouse, where we met daily and where he received family and guests from the camp, only occasionally going there in person. One of those days, we traveled to Lokichoggio together. He arranged that we could hitchhike with the police for a small fee of telephone scratch cards for the two officers who were tasked with escorting a UNHCR vehicle. In Loki, Bol had to arrange something with the Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (SSRRC), an operational agency of SPLA/M. We dropped him there and waited for him to return, after which he invited me for lunch at the large compound of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), a collaboration of UN agencies and NGOs providing relief in southern Sudan since 1989.

I had been there before, and since the bombing of the UNHCR compound in Baghdad, security was beefed up considerably in Lokichoggio, as well as in Kakuma. Large cement-filled oil barrels were lined up in front of the gates. I needed a passport and a valid reason to get in. Earlier, I used the argument of going banking, but they had recently built an ATM at the front gate, and so I no longer had access.

As Bol and I approached the guards, he showed his SPLA membership card and told the guards that I was with him, and we were allowed to enter. I did not need to show my passport, and nobody asked. Being an SPLA member proved to be a valid reason to get into the compound, while being a researcher was not, as I had experienced earlier. Later, Bol explained that he traveled to Kakuma on more occasions than for ceremonial functions alone. He “kept an eye on things” on behalf of “his people,” and his relatives in the camp informed him about the way they were treated by the Kenyans and the humanitarian regime. He acted as a liaison for the SPLA between Sudan, Nairobi and Kakuma.

During my fieldwork, I met other people with similar linkages to opposition or armed groups in their country of origin, sometimes openly and sometimes more hidden. Some were SPLA soldiers on “Rest & Recuperation” (R&R)<sup>7</sup> with relatives in the camp, while others were simply SPLA/M stationed in the camp. One man narrated how every summer during the break from his incentive job, he used to go fighting with “Captain Africa” in a militia he compared to a Christian version of *Mujabidin* – as a comparison to popular resistance. On such occasions, he would leave his wife and three children in the camp to join the rebel group for some time. Several women with children, spread over various Sudanese communities, lived in the camp while their husbands were on active duty. Some of these children or adult kin of influential men in the camp were offered jobs

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<sup>7</sup> This usage of the term R&R surprised me somewhat because until then I had only heard it in the context of humanitarian and military personnel who went for a break away from war, disaster or hazard area.

in the “ministry” or similar institutions, and traversed back and forth between Sudan, Kakuma and Nairobi.

From the very start of my fieldwork, refugees and humanitarian workers explained in a matter-of-fact way that “most of the men in the camp are rebels or military,” while some estimated that up to 90 per cent of the men were soldiers. This image would continue to play a role in a variety of ways, and added a multitude of abbreviations to daily conversation. The Ethiopian community was split between an old group and newer arrivals. The old group appeared to consist of men that had served in Colonel Mengistu’s DERG regime and army. The new group consisted of “students” and political activists. The group of Ethiopian Oromo was perceived as having associations with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The old group of Ugandans consisted of Acholi and Langi from the former Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) under President Obote, who fled to Kenya after being toppled by Museveni’s National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1986.

Similarly, the Rwandans in the camp, predominantly Hutu, were alleged *genocidaires*, and of the Burundians and Congolese it was rumored that many of them were in fact Rwandans trying to escape the “stamp of genocide,”<sup>8</sup> even though Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo had their own fair share of rebel movements. With regard to the Somalis, the story was less straightforward. Soldiers of the former Siad Barre regime were in the camp, as were members of rivaling clans that, after the collapse of Barre’s government, continued to fight each other in various and shifting factions. Over the course of my fieldwork memories of and references to rebel armies, fighting, military service and comradeships often popped up in formal as well as informal conversations.

Refugees who are part of rebel or military groups, have been referred to as “refugee warriors.” In camps that are located near the border, “refugee warriors” engage in conflict in their home countries and use the refugee camps as a base, much like the Afghan Mujahidin combatants in refugee camps in Pakistan (Zolberg, Suhrke et al. 1989; Muggah and Mogire 2006: 11) and the Contras in Honduras (Helton 2002: 9). Other well-known examples include the emergence of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in refugee camps in Uganda in the late 1980s and the militarization of camps in Congo in the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide (Barber 1997; Terry 2002).

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<sup>8</sup> Rwandans I knew in Nairobi spoke of a “stamp of genocide.” They felt they were treated as secondary refugees out of humanitarian fear of sheltering and assisting war criminals. “We wear a very special neck tie,” an old *Mzee* explained, while he was leaving for Tanzania to visit a relative in the custody of the Arusha Tribunal. Another Rwandese informant later mentioned being on a wanted-list of the *Gacaca* tribunals. Humanitarian concern is complicated by the implementation of justice in this case.

A former Kenyan army colonel turned security researcher with an NGO in Nairobi had a completely different view on refugees in Kenya than that which is reflected in mainstream refugee documents. He writes:

My definition of a refugee, especially in Africa, is that individual who enjoyed certain privileges under a regime whose exit from power deprives the individual of those privileges. By this I want to say that a refugee comes from the cream of society. They are professionals, politicians, military, police, and intelligence officers, etc, who get disadvantaged by the change of regime. (Kamenju 2004: 1)

For refugees, engagement in armed rebellions or membership of the military is reason for exclusion from refugee status under article 1F of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which states:

1F. The provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that:

- (a) He has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity, as defined in the international instruments drawn up to make provision in respect of such crimes;
- (b) He has committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to his admission to that country as a refugee;
- (c) He has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

This was very well understood by many refugees. At registration exercises, most former members of the military claimed to have worked in catering departments.<sup>9</sup> To have been part of a military or rebel movement that has been defeated and is subsequently persecuted is not a reason to be excluded from refugee status *per se*. In fact, in the early decades since the drafting of the 1951 Convention, those persecuted for political reasons were considered more eligible for refugee status than people fleeing general violence (Zolberg, Suhrke et al. 1989).

Camps include former political adversaries and former rebels or defeated military elements, as long as the refugees in question are not engaged in active resistance or violence, and as long as they are not guilty of “war crimes.” As such, it is important to distinguish between active and past militarization, and the impact of both on the camp. Muggah and Mogire define refugee camp militarization as “the combination of military and armed attacks on refugees within camps; the storage and diffusion of weapons, military training and recruitment; the presence of armed elements, political activism and

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<sup>9</sup> Members of a resettlement selection mission I met in the UNHCR compound noted that nearly every male candidate they interviewed told them they had been employed as non-fighting and civilian staff in the various armies of Somalia and Ethiopia. By saying that they were cooks and mechanics, Refugees tried to evade the possible application of the exclusion clause in article 1F.

criminal violence within camps; and the exploitative use of relief/development resources by non-refugee residents and their dependents” (Muggah and Mogire 2006: 7).

This is a rather broad description, and there are some blurs with non-military phenomena such as criminality and political activism. Moreover, the reference to military implies a limitation to government or former government-linked armed groups. In the conflicts in East-Africa, people often refer to rebels instead of military when describing non-government armed groups. The label “rebels” includes smaller and less formal warring factions, of which there were many in the region, many of which had some impact in the camp setting. I therefore prefer to speak of camp rebelization rather than militarization, as a more encompassing category of armed groups. I view refugee camp rebelization as the presence of active, past- or future military and rebel actors and their dependants, that with various levels of intensity, relate, engage, participate, prepare or support war efforts in their home country from the camp.

The references to military or rebel pasts were extremely important among refugees. Daily conversations and interviews stressed this importance, at least in the collective social understanding of the camp as collections of ethnicities marked by spatial organization and power relations between different groups. In a sense, the primordial identity concept of tribe was conflated with what rebel or other form of violent past bound people and dependants in a particular grouping. Mbembe writes:

Within the camps, new forms of authority are also emerging. Nominally administered by international agencies, they are secretly controlled by military leaders who are either trying to retake power in their home countries or waging wars in the host country for the benefit of local factions (Mbembe 2000: 271).

How does refugee camp rebelization lend legitimacy to practices in and between these communities, and between the refugees and the refugee regime, for instance by condoning or supporting specific customs that go against UNHCR policy? When are rebel affiliations mere narratives, and when strictly spillover effects of home country violence? These violent links constitute an essential part of the warscape.

## “Once were warriors”<sup>10</sup>

One and a half years after we first met, a man with the fictitious name of Songa came to my door in the early morning. The man was around fifty years old, and I knew him by a name and history that he announced were fictitious. Since we had spent much time discussing a wide range of topics with regard to the camp, he decided that he now felt that he could afford to be more specific about his personal history. It turned out that specific parts of earlier stories he had told me over the 18 months that we had known each other were constructions in order to protect certain affiliations from his past. Now, over the course of several sessions, he told me his “real” story.

He was a Ugandan who had served in NASA (National Security Agency), under the office of the president during the second reign of Milton Obote (1980-1985). When the Acholi Okello brothers took over power in a *coup d'état*, they checked on all the non-Nilotic personnel in the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). Songa was a Teso. He was arrested for some time, but managed to escape. When the National Resistance Army (NRA) captured Kampala, members of the old Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) fled to the north of Uganda and into the Sudan. This is where the Uganda People’s Democratic Army (UPDA) was established, a movement Songa joined. However, the UPDA had a short life span (1986-1987) and was soon demobilized. Some of its members were absorbed by the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), which still exists today. Others remained in the Sudan, under the wing (or as some say, custody) of the SPLA – since SPLA and NRA were collaborating to some degree.<sup>11</sup>

A group of Ugandan rebels formed the 63 Equatorial Brigade, stationed in Bongo camp in Ethiopia, as part of the Shield Battalion. They were all Ugandan, mostly Acholi, but posed as Sudanese by pretending to be Acholis from Equatoria, since the Acholi are a border crossing tribe. Thus, after the UPDA was dissolved, Songa became part of a group that took several initiatives to revive the Obote (who stayed in exile alternating between Zambia and Nairobi with some supporters) insurgency by trying to start a war from either Sudan or Kenya. In 1989 they initiated the Nine September Movement together with some old comrades from the 63 Equatorial Brigade.

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<sup>10</sup> In a 1994 movie called “Once were warriors” by Lee Tamahori, descendants of the Maori tribe in New Zealand recollect their imagined warrior past and struggle with their current status as they feel crushed and marginalized by the white settlers. The Maori identity as portrayed is intimately linked with their warrior past. Hence, once we were warriors.

<sup>11</sup> The interesting biography of the rebel years of the Ugandan President Museveni (1997) describes the shared guerrilla training histories of Yoweri Museveni & John Garang under the protection of president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere.

The movement existed more in intent than in real action, and they remained with the SPLA in Bongo, assisting them, *digging* (subsistence farming) and preparing. By the time the Mengistu regime was overthrown in Ethiopia and the camps were broken up, the Ugandans crossed back into Sudan. The SPLA, however, did not condone any new rebel activity from their ranks. The members of the Nine September Movement left the SPLA and went to Kakuma, where they hoped to start anew. Songa and other members of the movement were still in the camp at the time of research although the movement was never operational. A prominent member of the Ugandan community was part of the Nine September Movement, but now ran a small bar in the Ugandan community selling the home brews Changa'a and Busaa. Songa could similarly name other remnants of the movement in the camp, and narrated that some still intended to regroup, which motivated them to come to Kakuma, and still had a simmering dream of recapturing power in Uganda. According to a mutual Dinka acquaintance of Songa and myself, who was a member of the SPLA and had stayed in Dimma camp, next to Bongo, Songa in fact was ex-LRA. This was another important aspect in the understanding of the camp: rumors and gossip about the past political and military affiliations of others.

I met others who, like Songa, had come to Kakuma a long time ago with the intention to continue being warriors. This brings out an interesting question; namely, when does one cease to be a refugee warrior? Others arrived in Kakuma in the early 1990s as defeated rebel armies or with the intention of regrouping and invading their respective home countries. These were once refugee warriors in the purest sense, but somehow, their intentions never materialized, or maybe they were caught up by peace. When does one cease to be a refugee warrior? When one gets old? When one loses hope? When one gives up his intention to "liberate" the imagined homeland? Or when one is transformed by camp life, or resettled to a third country?

There were stories told about famous warriors passing through Kakuma. Carlos the Jackal, the international terrorist known for hijacking airplanes and attacking western targets for Palestine and Islamic movements, supposedly traveled to Sudan via Kakuma. Another famous name was Alice Lakwena. Although people in the camp said that she stayed in Kakuma at one point, I met her in Dadaab. And although it is a different camp, her story deserves some attention, for she is a good example of the refugee warrior who ends up in a camp.

In August 2005, I went to visit Alice Lakwena when I was visiting Dadaab's Ifo camp, one and a half years before she died in January 2007. She was the famous rebel leader, healer and prophetess who once led the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) in the war against the National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda in 1986/7. She was so well-known that there was no use in hiding her past affiliations. Lakwena was openly seen as a refugee

warrior – and treated as such since she spent six years in Kenyan detention before she was sent to UNHCR governed refugee camps – first to Thika camp in central Kenya until it closed in 1995, and then to Dadaab. But Lakwena was a refugee warrior with a magical twist; she was either a prophetess, or a mad woman. She still rallied against the Museveni government, and her alleged (family) relations to Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony were kept in the dark, although different observers reported about her being in contact with the LRA and vice versa. When I asked her about it, she laughed it away, or circumvented my questions, almost in tongues, until one of her commanders would intelligently take over and restructure the conversation.

She and some 45 commanders and their dependants shared three walled compounds in Ifo, surrounded by a common outer wall. They had their own borehole, generator and floodlights covering the compound, something that was quite unusual in the refugee space, and indicated her powerful position. She herself had a reception hall – a building that resembled a large Acholi hut, very different than the refugee shelters in the rest of the camp. Inside, there were pictures of the Holy Spirit Jazz Band, and big boards and paintings explaining the “differences between Alice Lakwena and Jesus,” and other proclamations of her divinity. She had a guest book that had been signed by numerous visitors, from NGO workers to journalists. The director of Ifo’s secondary school was one of her former commanders, and her people also held other influential jobs. The Ugandans in this refugee environment had a relatively good educational background, including knowledge of the English language and, particularly those with a military or police past, Kiswahili, the Lingua Franca of East African armies.

Most importantly, the history of the Holy Spirit Movement could be discussed very openly, and very frankly, as if we were dealing with history and the whole concept of refugee warriors didn’t exist, or at least, as I had experienced in Kakuma, as if there was no political sensitivity concerning rebel linkages.<sup>12</sup>

Alice Lakwena’s movement was no longer openly engaged in warfare. The rumors of her contacts with the LRA were never proven true or untrue (she was also asked to mediate by the government of Uganda) and she mostly limited herself to the business of healing (she claimed to have a cure for HIV/AIDS and to have solved the problems with

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<sup>12</sup> During the visit, I referred to a book that was written about her and her movement by Heike Behrend: “Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: war in Northern Uganda 1986-97.” When she remarked that she had never read it, I sent her the book. One of her commanders some time later gave me phone call in Kakuma, telling me that they were very interested and that they were preparing a reply. Soon, I received nine book reviews commenting on the book, one from Alice Lakwena and eight of her commanders. Actually, they said that they were disappointed that they had never received the book before, while the movement was so accessible. Behrend himself writes in his book that he actually never met her, in fact, that attempts to get in touch failed and she did not want to see him (Behrend 1999: 192).

violence in Ifo camp). But she was still seen as Lakwena the rebel, and although people were intimidated by her, she was strangely respected, and referred to as Mama Lakwena by some. When I visited her I was accompanied by a Kenyan staff member of CARE International. This was also his first time to visit her, but knew all the stories of her rebellious magic and was a bit nervous. She was known as a rebel prophet after all, with powers beyond the human, famous all over East Africa. When we entered her house, loaded with gifts, and the CARE employee introduced himself as a CARE employee, she demanded to know why he had not had the courtesy to pay her a visit earlier, with a flair and authority that was surprising. The man immediately apologized, and excused himself for not having visiting her earlier.

Later I found some other Ugandan men who used to be part of her movement living in another area of the camp. They explained that they had fallen out with Lakwena, and went to live somewhere else because she tormented them. This is a telling example of how far her influence reached. Some people were scared of her, although others thought she was a mad woman or a fraud. She used to go to the compound of Ifo when she was needed, accompanied by several bodyguards. And when she was offered resettlement, UNHCR probably wanted to get rid of her, she refused and said that she wanted to return home to Uganda once Museveni was gone. She kept joking: “Tell the EU to fund me, and I’ll kick the NRA out of Uganda in three days.” This was one of the interesting things that I found more often with erstwhile rebels: they kept addressing their adversaries with the abbreviations of the time when they fought them. The NRA had become the UPDF towards the end of the 1980s, but Lakwena’s mindset on the political situation in Uganda was stuck somewhere before that time, as was Songa’s.

Alice Lakwena and her Holy Spirit Movement represent a linkage to violence and war, but as with the Nine September Movement from above, they are refugee warriors who were silenced, transcended to a more political role, or have simply given up. Although their affiliations may have had an impact on the camp, and on a personal level, people like Lakwena may have derived some power out of it, these movements were not active. In Songa’s, his past resulted in animosity between the Ugandan Nilotes and himself in the camp. Both Songa and Lakwena, however, felt they could not go home. Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo (1989) labeled the refugee warrior communities [like the Afghans] of the 1980s the “new Palestinians,” in the sense that neither could go home, and both formed part of a rebel movement (in exile). In Kakuma, people affiliated to past rebellions and wars felt that they, too, were unable to go home, fearing of retribution or arrest. Among the Sudanese, this was different. Until the beginning of the fieldwork, the SPLA were *de facto* rebels – even if they were popularly supported by western countries and as such legitimized, also by aid. After the signing of the CPA, the refugee warriors and linkages



with the rebel movement transcended into something else; the armed ideology of the New Sudan was supplanted by a political one. In the next section, I will look into a more active rebel link of the Sudanese that stretched the whole period of existence of Kakuma refugee camp.

### **From Red Army to SPLA rear base in exile**

A Kenyan to my Sudanese informant: “what do you mean, ‘when *we* fought the Arabs!’ You were here, being lazy as a refugee!”

The very origin of Kakuma camp lies in the arrival of the Lost Boys. Nominally, they were referred to as the children separated from their parents in the chaos of attack, and who managed to escape the perils of war by finding their way to the Kenyan border after having been expelled from the Ethiopian refugee camps. The image of large groups of children fleeing from conflict under extremely difficult circumstances and in dire need of help is the perfect example of a depoliticized *raison d'être* for humanitarian action. But, as I will discuss below, the coming of the Lost Boys in fact constitutes the beginning of the association of the rebel movement with the refugee camp, from the camp’s very inception, and in fact even before then, in camps in Ethiopia.

The “Red Army”<sup>13</sup> (*jaysb al-abmar*) was the name given to the units of small boys that were (to be) trained in the Ethiopian camps by the SPLA/M to create future cadres for the war. Kuol Manyang, referred to as the Butcher of Equatoria by some refugees, was a prominent Dinka leader (whose family lived in Nairobi) who was said to be the architect of the Red Army (see also: Scroggins 2003). He ordered young men to be taken from Sudan to the Gambella region in Ethiopia. In some accounts the SPLA demanded one child from every family, as they passed from village to village to collect them.<sup>14</sup> In Gambella, the refugee camps Dimma, Itang, and Fugnido were located nearby the rebel camps Bongo and Bilpam, names that resonated through the camp as collective history. The smallest children would live and go to school in the refugee camps, where they

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<sup>13</sup> Similar to the notion of the Red Army, there was also a White Army that consisted of militias recruited and armed by the Government of Sudan (GoS), such as Toposa warriors and *Murabeleen*, comparable in recent times to the *Janjaweed* militias in the Darfur region.

<sup>14</sup> One of the fascinating histories I encountered is how a Dinka boy who was being forcibly recruited, was accompanied by his father to Ethiopia. The father did not want to hand over his son, so he decided to enlist in the movement on the spot and join them to Ethiopia. Both father and son were now, on and off, running a business in the camp.

received basic military training.<sup>15</sup> Mengistu's Ethiopian DERG regime allowed and supported the military endeavors of the SPLA from their territory (Burr and Collins 1995: 296; Sommers 2005: 141), and yielded considerable influence over SPLA's ideologies, such as its adoption of Marxism. This resulted in military support of foreign sponsors like countries from the Eastern bloc and Libya, and sometimes combat help from the Ethiopian army (Young 2008: 160). After the cold war ended, the SPLA successfully shifted from Marxism to embrace Christianity as leverage for international support (Ibid 2008: 167), which increased further after 9/11. When the children were big enough, some of them were sent to the rebel camps of Bongo or Bilpam, and from there back to Sudan (Schechter 2004; Sommers 2005).

I met many young men who, in a way, seemed to be proud to refer to their training, although many of them never actually fought. But some did and came to the camp later, after the big wave of Lost Boys. The men knew about the embarrassment that this could pose for the agencies, and the repercussions that might follow for themselves or the movement. Dave Eggers wrote a biography of, and together with, a Sudanese Lost Boy who was resettled to the US. Although a popular account, the message is clear. He writes:

At Kakuma, many of us lied on our application forms and in our interviews with officials [for resettlement]. We knew that if we admitted affiliation with the SPLA, we would not be sent to Atlanta, North Dakota, Detroit. We would remain in Kakuma. So those of us who needed to lie, lied. The SPLA had been a part of our lives from early on, and over half of the young men who call themselves the Lost Boys were child soldiers to some degree or another. But this is part of our history that we have been told not to talk about. (Eggers 2006: 22)

The novel depicts how violence and war forced people to move, but how amidst this movement people became targets for recruitment in the rebel army, on top of the organized method of recruitment mentioned above. Flight and recruitment – safe zone/war zone – went hand in hand. It is hard to determine where intent and opportunity met, but meet they did, and this is how a great number of people ended up in the Ethiopian camps.

After Mengistu's government fell, the camps in Ethiopia were attacked and the SPLA was expelled. The boys took off and started wandering through the Sudan in search of safety. After some time, some ended up near Lokichoggio, on the border with Kenya. From there on, they were brought to what would become Kakuma refugee camp. Where most accounts of the Lost Boys explain that they came to Kenya in search of refuge, it is

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<sup>15</sup> Deborah Scroggins (2003) describes how Emma McCune, a British aid worker who later marries the SPLA leader Riek Machar, has frequently clashed with Kuol Manyang and other SPLA leaders over their use of schools for forced recruitment and military training.

often ignored that they were escorted and guarded by the SPLA. The extent of direct militarization that characterized the camps in Ethiopia has not been replicated in Kakuma, as the Kenyan government refused to provide direct support for the war, unlike the Ethiopian government under the Mengistu regime. Consequently, there were never any rebel camps in the vicinity of Kakuma. However, the influence of SPLA was large. It ranged from SPLA/M influence in the governing of the camp and the lives of the people to direct and indirect usage of the camp as part of the war effort.

One of the stories that went around after the clash in 2003 described in the beginning of this chapter, was that Garang himself had said that if the Sudanese did not receive protection, he would send the SPLA into the camp. A girl wrote in her composition on refugee life in Kakuma for Palotaka Primary school: "...then on 20<sup>th</sup> June Turkana attacked refugees in the camp ... then Garang gave pressure to the national rainbow coalition [Government of Kenya] to solve the case in Kakuma if not he would come to solve the problem with my people".<sup>16</sup> There were also rumors of weapons hidden under beds and floors made of mud to be retrieved and used in circumstances of threat. Accusations and rumors of murders and assassinations formed part of how strengths of other groups, tribes, and communities were perceived.

The following may help illustrate this phenomenon. One afternoon, a boy from the Lotuko tribe of Equatoria told me the image his father had about Kakuma before he came here. The Lotuko was "given" to the SPLA by his father at the age of 9. At that time, Kuol Manyang was chief of Equatoria and busy recruiting able-bodied men. The Lotuko stayed with the SPLA until he was eleven. He defected to go to Uganda as a refugee, where he stayed in Acholi Pii refugee camp in Kitgum in the north of the country. From there, where he was under constant threat of hunger and attack by LRA rebels seeking to loot and recruit, he moved south to Kiriandongo. This story speaks to the imagination and is an apt example of the complexity of war and recruitment in the region. Multiple rebel armies moved around abducting people for different wars in the region. Some informants narrated multiple experiences of recruitment and escape, including slavery in north Sudan. After some time, the Lotuko boy went back to Equatoria and asked his parents to go to Kakuma for schooling, since he had heard this was available there. Fearing another forced recruitment, his father then told him that he might as well enlist instantly with the rebels here at home, indicating the intimate link between the camp and the movement. The Lotuko went anyway, completed his schooling and now has a family. Both he and his wife have incentive jobs in the camp.

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<sup>16</sup> A teacher in one of the refugee primary schools that I had befriended allowed me to choose a topic for a students' composition in February 2005, and then let me read their writings.

After some time in the camp, I learned that there was a prominent SPLA member who organized recruitment for the movement in the camp. Arranging an interview with the man was difficult since he held a high position. To enable us to discuss these matters, which were typically of a sensitive nature, we held “visits” under the acacia tree of his house where we were able to talk in a less formal manner, rather than resorting to more formal interviews. In addition, I knew one of his assistants as well as one of his relatives, who helped me gain access by introducing me to him. The man had multiple wives in three different camps, also in Uganda, so he migrated between the three, and was registered in all of them.

The man was a Dinka with traditional scars on his forehead. He was one of the three Big Men with the same name, and an uncle of one of my informants. The three men were prominent Dinka elders who had influential positions in many aspects of life in the camp. Two of them had come with the Lost Boys from Ethiopia. In Kakuma, they took up the care of the children. One of them became director of IRC’s child care program and the other became director of education with LWF, in which capacities I interviewed them both. The third continued migrating and organized recruitment and liaised between the refugees and the movement in Sudan. All three were SPLA leaders who were also involved in the (traditional) bench court system in the camp, as well as in other governance issues. After the signing of the peace agreement, they all returned to Sudan. One became Member of Parliament (MP) of the (unity) Government of Sudan (GoS) in Khartoum, Another became MP for Bor, and another became MP for the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) in Juba. It was suggested by refugees that they were called upon by the SPLM leadership as a reward for their duties or plight in Kakuma protecting and assisting the Lost Boys, bringing them from the Red Army in Ethiopia into Kenya, perhaps to become educated cadres, in favor of the SPLA.

Lischer introduces the notion of state-in-exile refugees, a category that suits the Sudanese Dinka as a group intimately linked to the rebel movement:

Although state-in-exile refugees exist within a strong and politicized leadership structure, many of the refugees may have little desire to become involved in violence. The nature of the exiled group makes it more likely, however, that these refugees will serve as a political and military resource for their leaders. By maintaining an iron grip on the information that reaches the refugees and controlling the distribution of humanitarian aid, leaders can convince many refugees of possible threats to their safety and of the need to mobilize. Leaders emphasize real and imagined injustices to foster fear of return among the refugees. (Lischer 2005: 25)

What started functionally as a rear base gained its own dynamic, adjusting to new ambitions and opportunities over time. Similar to the way in which the camps in Gambella were seen as facilities that could accommodate for military cadres during the 1980s, Kakuma partly ended up as a facility that would accommodate education and overseas connections for the SPLA in the context of cadre training for the movement. As Sommers puts it: “the thrust of early education in Kakuma was ‘not education for development, but education for the military’. Unlike the Ethiopian camps they had evacuated in 1991, this changed over time in Kakuma, as ‘education gradually began to be viewed as more relevant for skills development’ ” (Sommers 2005: 167).

While the Big Man introduced above was a direct link between the SPLA and recruitment from the camp, the other Big Men were influential in the governing of the camp as directors of education and childcare. In these roles, they were able, from the very start of the camp’s existence, to influence the way youth were positioned in Kakuma. As they explained, even before NGOs started education programs, they organized the first schools, under a tree, just as they had done in Gambella. The Sudanese camp administration, and their involvement in education, the bench courts, the imaginations of the “New Sudan” after the war, were all part of SPLA’s or the Movement’s – as it was referred to – cosmology in one way or another. I will return to this later in this chapter.

Not only in the camp but also in Nairobi’s Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (SSRRC, formerly known as SRRC), in Juba and in other places, SPLA/M officials spoke openly about Kakuma as a cadre training facility, elaborating on the high level of services in the camp. When I spoke to an SPLA official in Juba in 2006, one and a half years after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, he no longer mentioned the training of cadres for war, but instead, focused on the use of educated cadres for development and reconstruction. Estimating the number of secondary schools that were operational in the whole of South Sudan at seven, while in Kakuma alone there were already four, it is clear that the educational capacity of the camp, as a source of educated youth, was an important pull factor for the Sudanese.<sup>17</sup> Previously, the SPLA had invested in education by sending youth to schools through an initiative called the Face Foundation, organized in collaboration with and funded by Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA). Under this program, one of my informants was first sent to school in Equatoria and then in Lodwar at the end of the 1980s. When the refugees came, he registered as a refugee too, but then went back to school in Lodwar. He later got a job with the

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<sup>17</sup> Sommers indicates that during the war, there were twenty-two secondary schools in the south, and only one for tertiary education (2005: 71).

Movement in Juba, but returned to Kakuma to pursue further education. His pursuit paid off: he was one of the students who received a scholarship to study in Canada.

The Sudanese were not only the biggest group in the camp in terms of numbers; they were also the most politically attached to a rebel organization. The Sudanese represented a special position since the SPLA/M was (although not openly acknowledged as such) the “master of the camp,” while simultaneously being an active rebel army. This changed during my fieldwork after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed on January 9 in 2005. Since the CPA, it is perhaps not correct to continue speaking of SPLA as rebels. In the void of the six-year transitional period awaiting the 2011 referendum, they acquired a status that was more like that of a transitional government in waiting, army and political movement in one. However, in the camp this status was still intimately linked to the rebel past. It is interesting to see how such an active and obvious role of the rebel movement in the camp contributed to the imagination of a “New Sudan,” and to compare this to other nationalities with a less present rebel ideology in refuge.

### **Nurturing home – from Sudan to Somalia**

The New Sudan is an idea. It is a dream; a proto-nation that exists in narratives that tap into an imaginary past to a large extent, and that has been nurtured in the camp. The quest for the New Sudan had been part of young people’s existence for most of their lives, for some in military camps and drilling exercises, for others in their communities in the camp, and indeed as a *raison d’être* for camp life in general. This New Sudan constituted a promise for a new future, but it was linked to the SPLM/A in almost every way. The SPLA *was* the New Sudan. The quintessential pastoralist “cattle camps,” symbols of coming of age for Dinka and Nuer youth, were only faint memories for many who could not have been older than five at the time they left Sudan. Even so, people still spoke with awe about life in these cattle camps, and could then jump to the SPLA with a similar form of affection. This intertwining of the SPLA and life in Sudan was an image of the future they recalled, instead of a past.

The coming together of the SPLA, refugee governance, and camp ordering presents another aspect of the warscape; namely, the nurturing of militant identities and indoctrination of powerful rebel ideologies. The New Sudan had become a common goal, a prospect that for the young and old in the camp appeared to be their sole rationale for being. Mallki’s (1995) mythico-history comes to mind, in which the camp setting seems to brew, and stimulate a vision of the homeland that came close to becoming an ideology: the New Sudan – the name says it all, a new Sudan for all of its population to be accepted

equally – although the initial New Sudan as propagated by the late John Garang proposed unity with the North, and was only gradually replaced with a claim for independence and separation (Kameir 2010: 18-20). Much like Peteet's (2005) description of the Palestinian camps as places of hope and expectation, the lack of an independent South Sudan has nurtured people's desire for it. This is exemplified by the Sudanese youth, many of whom have, from a very young age, been indoctrinated by their leaders about the repression by the *Arabs*. The SPLA has been part of the "taken-for-granted world" in the camp, and although contested, it is ultimately connected to Sudan, not only for most Dinka but also for many others with whom I had contact. Every aspect of rebuilding South Sudan – building the New Sudan – was part of this schema. People who received resettlement or a scholarship abroad were addressed by "their" elders prior to their departure. The elders would say "go, study hard, don't forget who you are, and come back to rebuild Sudan." And this Sudan was the SPLA, just as in a sense – according to the Dinka – the camp was Sudanese. One Dinka jokingly said about the Turkanas that they were being *Sudanized*, which went along with the claim that Northern Turkana belonged to Sudan anyway, all the way up to Lodwar – a claim that has been made on several occasions by the Sudanese authorities before. Another man argued that since so many Sudanese were buried in Kakuma, it already belonged to the Sudanese.

The contrast with the Somalis was interesting, for they had a very different view about their home country. To many it had simply become irrelevant, and people joked about the way Somalis liked dying and shooting themselves in the foot, referring to how they keep fighting each other, and thus harming themselves as a group.<sup>18</sup> The Sudanese idealization of Dinka pastoralist life, it can be argued, was a reconstruction that was formed in the sphere of SPLA doctrine. From there on, it was a small step to find willing recruits to fight. From another perspective, it would thus appear that in order to create a functional environment for participation in civil conflict, one needs people to love the cause – hence, the stressing of tradition and identity. Muggah and Mogire point out that it is difficult to discern whether refugees or IDPs are "manipulated" or "willing agents" in joining rebel movements (Muggah and Mogire 2006). Joining or supporting rebels may be a viable alternative to camp life, but it can also be the result of forced recruitment. In other words, how much power do these groups have and to what extent do they actively bring the warzone to the camp? The intertwining of the SPLA and the Sudanese

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<sup>18</sup> A romantic interpretation of a defiance of death and pain is a recurring topic in writing on Somalis. It is often used when explanations are sought for the self-destructive inter-clan wars that raged through Somalia for the past decades, but also earlier during colonial times, with qualifications such as war-like, etc. These, however, are part of a broader popular and ethnographic repertoire depicting nomadic pastoralists in the region in a similar tone. (See for instance: Adamson 1967; Broch-Due and Sanders 1999; Dowden 2008).

(predominantly but not only the Dinka) from an early age indicates that indoctrination for the cause of the Movement and the dream for a New Sudan are closely related. A similar intertwining was noted among Rwandan Tutsis living in exile in Uganda since the 1970s, culminating in the invasion of Rwanda in 1990 by refugees who formed the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA).

Among Somalis, there was a much weaker ideological or cosmological recognition of struggle. However, this is precisely the role Islamism was slowly beginning to fulfill in Somalia. In the epilogue, I will briefly discuss how the warscape of Kakuma after the repatriation of considerable number of Sudanese became dominated by Somalis, and how linkages as they are discussed in this chapter with regard to the SPLM, began to be re-interpreted, as rumors, stories and reports of activities of Al Shabab and al Qaeda began to spread (Howell and Lind 2010). At the time of my fieldwork, however, this was not yet visible. People who had left Somalia years before, with its history of pragmatic Islam, did not turn into Islamists overnight and in practice, were contained by the Sudanese who had little sympathy, to put it mildly, for radical or political Islam.

Nevertheless, among Somalis there were refugee warriors as well, although these were nurtured by an unexpected source. I met Mohammed via a Turkana staff of the private security firm tasked with guarding the compounds. Mohammed used to be a fighter pilot in the Somali air force. One day in 1992, he took his wife, loaded her and himself onto a plane on a Mogadishu airstrip and took off for Mombasa. He was refused permission to land and redirected his plane to Nairobi. After a brief stop at Jomo Kenyatta National Airport, Mohammed was redirected again, this time to Moi's Airbase in Nairobi.<sup>19</sup> With Kenya apparently in need of pilots, Mohammed was offered an opportunity to stay in service for six months as a pilot for the Kenyan air force, during which he was offered temporary residency. If he refused, he was told, he would have to go to one of the refugee camps. He chose the former option, and in the meantime met old friends and fellow countrymen who informed him about the resettlement schemes that UNHCR/IOM were initiating. He was told that he could only apply for the program if he was registered with UNHCR. With this information in hand, when his first six month period with the air force ended he decided to leave the airbase, checked in to a Nairobi hotel and reported to UNHCR.

Sometime later he was approached by the US military, who asked him whether he was willing to participate in the planned operation Restore Hope, the 1992 US invasion of Somalia. He indicated that he was willing and offered the US military his skills and

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<sup>19</sup> According to the informant, the plane was still in Nairobi and more Somali military aircraft were left in other countries, whose pilots fled with their airplanes in similar ways. Supposedly, there were two planes somewhere in Germany and in Djibouti, but this is unchecked information that might very well be little more than a rumor.



experience of Somali airspace. They, in turn, promised him resettlement to the US as a reward for his service afterwards. After nine months, however, he was wounded in a car crash in Somalia and resigned. He returned to Kenya, where he was informed that to be able to opt for resettlement, he should go to Kakuma refugee camp, and so he went. Another Somali informant told me that he had been employed on an American warship as a mechanic during Restore Hope with a similar promise, which was also not followed up. He had been a mechanic in international maritime shipping before the war broke out.

Mohammed was a refugee warrior, but he sided with the “good guys” and was therefore probably not perceived as such. Hoping to cash in on the promise that was made to him, he decided to stay in the camp in order to be processed for resettlement. He became a teacher in one of the refugee schools, and for some time, until the Kenyan authorities found out and directed him back to the camp, he flew a small Cessna airplane between Kenya and Sudan for a Kenyan-Somali charter business based in Lokichoggio. He grew frustrated as time after time, the resettlement opportunity that was promised to him failed to materialize. Then, as it turned out, he was told that he had been involved in the bombing of Hargeisa in Somalia back in 1988, in which the city was leveled to the ground. Mohammed’s name had apparently been added to a list compiled by an American human rights organization, whereby he was declared a war criminal. We were introduced by my informant who worked for AGK, a private security firm that guards the UN compound and those of its implementing partners in Kakuma agencies, and whose members were enormously well informed about the events that took place within these compounds and the camp. When I met him, he hinted that a few weeks earlier, he had been approached by an Islamic militant group that asked him to join to fight Jihad, but he did not go into details, and I thought it wise to let the topic rest there.

One of the fascinating elements of the experiences above is that in one way or another, different people and warring parties knew how to locate Mohammed. While his flying skills and knowledge of Somali air space were obviously valuable, how could the US army locate him in Nairobi? He himself thought it had something to do with UNHCR, which if true would constitute a serious violation of confidentiality arrangements. But then, how was he traced inside the camp? If there is any truth to the latter part of his story, it signifies that there are networks of militants extending into the refugee camp, or perhaps even the physical presence of a refugee warrior community among the Somalis. Dadaab has been implicated by popular media as hosting members of militant factions from Somalia, but these accusations have not been substantiated (in later years however, though this would be acknowledged, see the epilogue). Nevertheless, the possibility is not altogether unlikely. In Kakuma, I did on occasion encounter anti-western comments and

aggression, especially in Kakuma Two, which some people referred to as Tora Bora, after the Afghan mountain caves where Osama Bin Laden was supposedly hiding during the American led invasion. Some went as far as actually implying that there was an Al Qaeda presence there.<sup>20</sup>

To many, Somalia seemed a forgotten nation. In the camp, the ongoing conflict for what seemed to many like no other reason than brutal power and economic gain, detached many Somalis from ideological notions of a “New Somalia,” comparable to the New Sudan. It appeared that among the young and educated, identification along clan, tribe, and party lines was not only less relevant, but was considered problematic. Many young people, and young men in particular, were determined to make their way abroad to the US or elsewhere – a topic that will be dealt with in more detail in chapter five.

IOM has been scared by bomb threats that must be understood in the context of the war on terror / Jihad on America. This fear was the main reason for the relocation of Somali Bantus to Kakuma for resettlement processing. Dadaab was considered too dangerous and too Islamic for the mostly American teams of IOM and the Joint Voluntary Agency (JVA) to travel there. What this IOM official explained to me was an interesting, and expensive, public secret.<sup>21</sup> The usual argument for the relocation was the insecurity threatening the Somali Bantus in Dadaab, and not the insecurity affecting the agencies. A visual representation of this fear is the IOM fortress in Kakuma 3. Like the Angelina Jolie boarding school, the IOM compound is like a camp within a camp, protected by double fences and barbed wire. Whenever the JVA is “in town,” security is beefed up, since JVA is not only American but also has a strong Christian foundation. As they move around, they are accompanied by extra protection from the administration police. These measures are not necessarily steps taken without reason, as there was some mentioning of Islamist threat. In 2005, the IOM compound was evacuated and the American team rushed back to Nairobi by plane due to a bomb scare. Someone in Kakuma Two had been found with a grenade. On another occasion, a young man ostensibly made a joke when he went for an interview at the IOM compound, hinting at being a militant.

In Kakuma, the rebelization of the camp was a given. For UNHCR and the agencies, however, this presented a sensitive issue that only became more sensitive with the possibility of spillover effects from the dynamics of the Bush Administration’s War on

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<sup>20</sup> Upon my first request to UNHCR to be allowed to visit Dadaab, they responded that this was too dangerous and complicated since they were expecting the US military to sweep the camps for Islamic terrorist elements. I thought this was a hilarious attempt to keep me out, although history might have caught up with the matter in later years with respect to armed incursions and recruitment of Al-Shabab in the late 2000s.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, IOM Head of Sub-Office, Kakuma: May 24, 2006.

Terror as it evolved during in the first decade of the new millennium. The agencies responded to these dynamics in several ways that will be explored below.

## **Humanitarian responses to refugee camp rebelization**

Refugee warrior communities make a mockery of these cherished principles [neutrality, impartiality and independence] and transform humanitarian space into something much more partisan, biased, and dangerous – in short, political. Indeed, they undermine the humanitarian discourse on refugees precisely because refugee warriors have attained – and are recognized as possessing – political subjectivities. (Nyers 2006: 99)

Aid has historically always legitimized the SPLA in some form or other, treating it as more than merely a rebel movement. With Operation Lifeline Sudan, the civil war in South Sudan has been witness to an elaborate and long running aid operation. As a side effect of aid, the plight of the South Sudanese tribes has been illuminated by this operation, which arguably legitimized their struggle through its close consideration for and cooperation with the southern rebels in the delivery of aid (Scroggins 2003; Agier and Bouchet-Saulnier 2004; Johnson 2007). Lischer (2005: 6) names four ways in which humanitarian aid in refugee crises can exacerbate conflict: by feeding militants, sustaining and protecting militants' dependants, supporting a war economy, and providing legitimacy to combatants. Kakuma hosted members of the SPLA leadership, defectors and war victims simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> The large Red Cross hospital in Lopideng near Lokichoggio treated many war wounded, and many were sent to Kakuma to rehabilitate. In this manner, the camp became a part of the war effort in a more direct manner. According to Lavergne and Weissman, many of the refugee camps that together harbored almost half a million Sudanese refugees in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic, in fact served as SPLA rear bases (Lavergne and Weissman 2004: 150).

The presence of so many people with a military or rebel/guerrilla background had become something of a public secret. It was in the agencies' and UNHCR's interest to keep up the appearance of the population of the camp as victims and innocent refugees; (see here an argument for the humanitarian apparatus to nurture an image of the camp as a violent place, in order to supplant or hide the real extent of refugee camp militarization)

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<sup>22</sup> I met Turkanas who had been forcefully recruited by SPLA as children who now lived in Kakuma town. One of them worked as a driver for UNHCR. He had been in the SPLA for some years, and I often met him speaking Dinka with friends from the camp. Sometimes he was publicly praised in my presence as a friend of "the struggle" and the Sudanese. Another was the son of the house help in the Guesthouse where I lived. I asked his relative whether the boy had been a child soldier, he said: "No, he was twelve!" I thought that this was indicative and surprising simultaneously.

instead of possible past perpetrators of violence, and refugees sometimes presented themselves as such in their encounters with agencies.

The issue is typically approached by “a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy of aid provision, that allows militarization to continue as long as it does not occur under the noses of the aid workers” (Lischer 2005: 33).<sup>23</sup> In UNHCR’s 2005 Annual Protection Report for Kenya<sup>24</sup> refugee recruitment by SPLA is said not to occur in Kakuma, even though it was obvious that it happened, as observed by refugees, staff,<sup>25</sup> and myself. In earlier reports, it was explicitly acknowledged as occurring (Crisp 2000). The degree of embarrassment or secrecy is so large that some researchers choose to remain silent on these matters,<sup>26</sup> whether out of concerns for the preservation of the NGO/UN, which often fund researchers, or out of consideration for organizational culture – the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy – or an ethical stance on safeguarding the safety and reputation of research subjects. In other instances it is simply secret, for refugees know the political quagmire surrounding refugee camp militarization and the importance and necessity of preserving their image as victims.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, both heads of security for UNHCR and LWF were former army men – and refugees knew it, they were equally part of the warscape in that sense – and were therefore likely to be sensitive to forms of refugee militarization, in contrast to the more “soft” humanitarian or victim image of refugees. Turner, recognizing a similar issue in Lukole, writes:

Although I was in the camp for more than a year and gained the confidence of many refugees it was only years afterwards, in May 2004, that a young man told me that he and his friends had been doing military training every day after school. I had met him as a big schoolboy in Lukole and now again in Nairobi as a young man, where he felt safe enough to tell me about it. (Turner 2006: 3)

It is hard to know what exactly constitutes this military training. In Kakuma, Sudanese youth would run in formation in the dry riverbeds and plains surrounding the camp, and it might well be that this was organized as some form of training. Another rumor that went around was about shooting practice somewhere near mount *Kalemchub* a bit outside

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<sup>23</sup> NGOs have had difficulties in supporting refugee programs in the camps with Rwandan refugees in Goma, Congo, after they began to notice the violent incursions of the former armed forces. The Rwandan genocide continued among “moderate Hutus” legitimized by the old Rwandan government and army in exile, which effectively took over the refugee camps. Eventually, MSF-France decided to quit their programs in Goma, because it could not operate according to its principles in this situation (Terry 2002).

<sup>24</sup> ‘UNHCR Annual protection report Kenya 2005’, unpublished but internally distributed document.

<sup>25</sup> Informal conversations with UNHCR and NGO staff.

<sup>26</sup> Informal conversations with a researcher who worked with NGOs in the Ethiopian refugee camps, and later as a consultant for UNHCR in Sudan and elsewhere.

<sup>27</sup> It is for this reason that I choose not to name people, and have tried my best to disguise the identities of people when sensitive matters are discussed. In some instances I have expressly refrained from including personal details and bio-data in order to protect the anonymity of my informants.

Kakuma two. There was an old brick wall that must have been part of a house once, which some people told me was now used as a target for shooting practice by the Sudanese. More importantly than these direct examples of training for war, as I argued in the previous paragraph the nurturing of militant identities and/or sympathy for the cause of fighting may be a less physical or direct form of training, but can nonetheless be understood as an important part of the war effort.

The risk that the schoolboy would have taken by telling Turner about his training,<sup>28</sup> indicates that political affiliations and links to rebel movements may be hard to recognize. One of the “problems” is that people allied to the Movement, such as the three Big Men, were part of the refugee-hosting system. A Sudanese explained to me how the SPLA consequently tried to place representatives from its ranks within all the humanitarian NGOs as staff or incentive workers, as well as in Sudan through its humanitarian wing (SRRC) (see also: Lavergne and Weissman 2004). Similarly, the former overall chairman of the Sudanese community in Kakuma now worked with Save the Children Nairobi. The influential refugee Big Men who were part of the refugee administrations and the rebel movement are clear examples of the ways in which the influence and interests of political and armed movements become part and parcel of the social order in the camp.

The Sudanese had a different status than the Somalis with regard to their affiliation to rebel movements. The war on terror discourse surrounding the conflict in Somalia, and the memory of the Al Qaeda bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, reminded Kenya of the differences in conflict dynamics and threats for Kenya between the Somalis and the Sudanese. But this also translated into humanitarian policy. The Head of Sub Office of UNHCR Dadaab expressed his frustration about how sympathy for the ‘Sudanese Cause’ resulted in more funding for Sudan-related aid and assistance than for the Somalis.<sup>29</sup> Various forms of Islamic aid were active in Kakuma on occasion, including Al Haramain and Islamic Relief, although they did not operate openly or structurally. The covertness of their activities has to do with their alleged association to Al Qaeda and the politics of the war on terror. The violence that overcame and was perpetrated by the South Sudanese was perceived as a different kind of violence than that overcoming and perpetrated by the Somalis: one was depicted as a just war of liberation against oppression, where the other was characterized as anarchistic *warlordism* with a recent addition of Islamist terror. This distinction was reflected in the camps, and was highly visible in one major difference in agencies’ dealings with the refugees within them. Unlike other nationalities represented in Kakuma, the Sudanese did not have to “excuse”

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<sup>28</sup> A rebel warrior who chose to “come out” described a similar risk when I spoke to him. He was in the middle of a resettlement process and stated that if “they” would know, he would never make it (see chapter five).

<sup>29</sup> Interview, UNHCR Head of Sub-Office Dadaab, Dadaab: September 9, 2005.

or hide their “violent links” so much for fear that it would “offend” the humanitarian program. In fact, the US government actively sought to support SPLA and USAID deliberately channeled aid through “SPLA friendly NGOs such as Norwegians Peoples Aid” (NPA) (Young 2008: 167).<sup>30</sup>

The direct links between rebel and armed movements form one aspect of refugee camp rebelization. However, more subtle understanding and less direct forms of rebelization are the ways in which power and authority derived from rebel movements or affiliations with them conflated with ethnicity and settlement. In the next paragraph, I look into the impact this had on the social understanding and relations between different groups of people in the camp

### **Between tribe and rebel movement: parties, authority and order**

Ethnicity and rebel history became conflated in the camp. The influence of Sudanese, linked to or part of a rebel movement, transcended into everyday governance on a micro-level. But other groups had similar connections, with similar impacts on their communities. The normality of the SPLA connection and influence in the camp was predominantly connected to Dinka and Nuer. How did other groups in the camp relate to them?

A young man from the Equatorian community kept a faded picture of Colonel Joseph Lagu, the leader who managed to unite a variety of armed rebellion groups from South Sudan into the single Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) in 1970, which would later be redubbed Anyanya I, after previous rebellion initiatives since 1955 (Deng 1995: 141). Anyanya was regarded as a predecessor of the SPLA. However, Joseph Lagu was a *Madi*, one of the Sudanese Equatorian tribes, as was the man showing me the picture. The hero-rebel leader among the Sudanese in the camp was John Garang, founder of the SPLA. For many in the camp he was almost a holy man, especially after his death,<sup>31</sup> but he was also a Dinka.

The man who showed me the faded picture was critical about the dominance of the Dinka in the SPLA, stating that under Joseph Lagu, the people of the south had been “more equally” represented. Equatoria, as the southern part of South Sudan, then gained another meaning. A collection of Equatorian tribes formed an old, (and, since the

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<sup>30</sup> Norwegians Peoples Aid (NPA) was widely seen as being supportive of the war of the SPLA, also by Sudanese beneficiaries I spoke to. Jokingly, a researcher I met on an evaluation mission called them “Norwegians Peoples Army.”

<sup>31</sup> In 2006 I visited the grave of John Garang in Juba. While his officers were buried out of town, Garang’s grave was like a shrine.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement, redundant) administrative unit. The community of Equatorian tribes – Madi, Bari, Acholi, Zande, Lughbara, Lotuko, Kukoo, and so on – became like a separate identity group in relation to the Dinka: not-Dinka. On another occasion, a Lotuko commended another Equatorian Anyanya leader called Saturnino, for the similar reasons as that for which Lagu was remembered: mostly, for “not being Dinka.” Not being Dinka contributed to a sense of community in the camp’s spatial and conceptual arrangements. The three main Sudanese communities were Dinka, Nuer and Equatorian, the first two being ethnic definitions and the latter a geographical notion. In the camp, the three groupings equaled the rationale of conflict and war.

The politics of the war in Sudan had been heavily felt in the camp in the past. The 1994 split in the SPLA, in which a Nuer section called SPLA Nasir seceded under the command of Riak Machar, caused infighting among the Sudanese. Around Bor, heavy fighting had taken place in the early 1990s which became colloquially known as the Bor Massacre, and which was mirrored in the camp in clashes between the Dinka and the Nuer. In response to these clashes, the Nuer were relocated to the beginning of the camp in Kakuma One, Zone Five. Similarly, after a “war” between Equatorians and the Dinka, the Equatorians were concentrated in a specific area. In the history of the camp, the Dinka, Equatorian and Nuer “communities” had been spatially reorganized to be as far apart.<sup>32</sup>

The weight of the Sudanese leadership over the camp can be translated to a claim for governance, not handed over by UNHCR, but backed up by power of constituency and imminent control of violent means, of which I have given some examples in the previous chapter. For a large part, this constituency was conflated with the rebel movement, which became most clear in the threats of the SPLA to intervene on behalf of the Sudanese in the camp following the clash with the Turkhanas that I introduced in the beginning of this chapter. This influence is also aptly illustrated by the yearly celebration of the start of the civil war in Sudan. Each year on that day, the Sudanese did not permit the use of bicycles in the camp, for it was a holiday marking the start of the war and the firing of the first SPLA bullet in Bor on May 16, 1983. Sudanese youth would patrol the camp armed with wooden sticks, backed by the overall Sudanese camp administration that agreed and ordered the ban on bikes. This meant that on May 16, I had to walk.

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<sup>32</sup> In the Dadaab camps, the distance between Ifo, Dagahaley and Hagadera offered a “natural” barrier between the Dinka, Nuer and Equatorian ethnic groups, who were separated in three different camps after the occurrence of clashes between them. Their numbers are rather negligible, however, in comparison to Kakuma. None of the Dadaab camps have a numerical dominance of Sudanese refugees, and there is far less SPLA influence.

On other occasions, the weight of the Sudanese translated to violent attempts to change UNHCR policy in the camp. A famous example was a reaction to changes made to the food distribution system in the 1990s. In the first years of the camp's existence, food trucks visited each separate community and left food there to be subdivided by the communities themselves. The agencies changed the system, which did not allow them to control who received what, into a system that required refugees (except those in the protection area) to come to food distribution centers in the camp themselves to collect their rations. After negotiations with UNHCR bore no fruit, the then Dinka chairman ordered the Sudanese to torch the new built distribution centers, and within a few hours they went up in flames. Nevertheless, the centers were rebuilt and the new policy was implemented all the same. Aid workers explained how in this occurrence, the leadership of the camp and the SPLA were close, and that its power was large enough that it was easy to mobilize the Sudanese, and the Dinka in particular.

Other groups similarly became part of the dynamics between tribe and rebel movement. Set in the dynamics of the warscape, identity and violent pasts came together in social ordering and spatial arrangements in Kakuma. I will elaborate the case of the Ugandans. The Ugandan community was spread over different geographical areas in the camp. The original Ugandan community was located in Kakuma One, Zone Five, groups 57 and 58. This was the place of the northerners, the Nilotic tribes of Luo speaking Acholi and Langi. Bordering the Nuer community and near the former livestock houses near Compound One was what some referred to as "Uganda B." This was a small community consisting of a few houses that separated from the original Ugandan community because of some conflicts between them. Informants indicated that another group of northerners lived in Kakuma Two, although they claimed to be Sudanese. Behind the reception center in Kakuma Three was the New Area. This is a small and ethnically mixed group inhabited by most of the non-Nilotic Ugandans: the southerners and Bantus. From here on, some were scattered throughout the rest of the camp, such as in the Ethiopian community for instance, mostly following individual opportunities to move houses and/or individualized incidents of insecurity.

The informal regulation of the settling of people in the camp in "communities," and as such, the constitution of their boundaries, is well illustrated by an example of the arrival of a young man from Uganda in early 2005. He was a Bahima, from the same tribe as the Ugandan president Museveni. This is relevant, because bearing tribal politics in mind, he was an unlikely refugee. When he came to Nairobi he stayed with a friend for some time, after which he went to the UNHCR and was sent to Kakuma. He arrived in the evening, around 8:00 p.m. He had been in a bus with a Dinka man who was able to assist him



because at the time of their arrival at the camp, all the offices were closed and at the police station, at the entrance of the camp, nobody gave him any attention. New arrivals often spent their first night in Kakuma at the police station for security reasons, and/or because they didn't know where to go or what to do. The Dinka man offered to take the man to the Ugandan community, in Zone Five, Kakuma One. They reached in the dark but the people he met were hostile and aggressive. They called him a spy for Museveni and UPDF; they were historical enemies, with him being a recognizable Bantu while they themselves were recognizable Nilotics. They said, "why don't you go to your brothers at Kakuma Three?" Because Kakuma Three was quite far, a one-hour walk or more, the Dinka invited him to spend the night at his house in group six.

The next morning, the Dinka brought him to Kakuma Three, New Area. Here, the chairman and secretary of the New Area received him. They listened to his stories but went through his bag to check his belongings all the same. They found his pass as a Presidential Guard Brigade – a Ugandan elite military unit – and became very suspicious. They notified the Kenyan intelligence officer, a solitary man on a motorcycle crisscrossing the camp, who once questioned me about my intentions and status but refused to disclose what department he worked for. Even so, everybody knew who he was, and the Ugandans of the New Area told him that they might be in danger. They were all dissidents in Uganda who had been accused of rebel activities, and now a military-man had reached them. The Kenyan intelligence officer came to interview the new arrival, but let him go. Between the men in the camp, however, the issue was never really resolved. The Ugandan met another Bahima in the camp when they were introduced as tribe mates. Together, they were the only two members of Museveni's tribe in Kakuma at that time, representing the ruling elite in Uganda in a camp filled with political opponents and former rebel enemies.

They decided to stick together, and neither of the two men wanted to stay in the New Area, where they felt unwelcome and monitored. The fact that some of the Ugandans who resided there were also ex-military did not really help them to feel more secure; they were all erstwhile enemies in one form or another. When one of them got a job with an NGO, both men moved to the Ethiopian community where they started renting a house.

When another new Ugandan arrival came by bus from Nairobi (ostensibly after having been declined refugee status by Tanzania, where he was believed to be a potential rebel) and arrived in Kakuma at the end of the afternoon. He was told to go to the Ugandan community in Zone Five. There, the Nilotes took him for a spy or a soldier and called security. He was taken to the police and spent the night in jail. The next day, the police took him to the reception area where he was picked up by a man named Joseph.

Joseph was one of the leaders of the New Area made it his “job” to monitor which Ugandans entered Kakuma. The New Area was located behind the reception, and as such it was easy to go there every other day to check on new arrivals. This served a dual purpose: by meeting the new arrivals, he was able to check on potential security threats, but could assist those who needed his help. In this way, he tried to discern where people came from and what their intentions were, especially with regard to his own small group of Ugandan southerners, who constituted a minority among the mostly northern Ugandans in the camp.

Stories about spies and government agents were widespread. The Ethiopians, Ugandans, Rwandese and Sudanese all mentioned rumors of the occasional presence of spies in the camps. Most dealt with government or military personnel seeking out former military adversaries, especially in the cases of the Ethiopians, Rwandese and Sudanese. In an interesting event, A Dutch-Moroccan man came to Kakuma.<sup>33</sup> The first time he went into the camp and reached the first Sudanese Dinka community halfway to Kakuma One, he was immediately surrounded by ten tall Dinkas and escorted out of the camp. Because of his Arab appearance, he was taken to be a potential spy for Khartoum. I would on several occasions hear examples of people with a North-African appearance being escorted out of the camp. From then on, the visitor stuck to the Ethiopian and Somali communities in Zone Five.

The group of articulate Ugandans strongly voiced their political ambitions, making demands of whoever wanted to listen. “Resettlement or ammunition,” they would say; a phrase that was made all the more interesting given that one of them continuously walked around dressed in military fatigues. This was the time that rumors were going around about the newly emerged Ugandan rebel movement called the Peoples Redemption Army (PRA) – supposedly the armed wing of the opposition led by Kizza Besigye – around a time when he and other opposition members were harassed and arrested on and off. New arrivals were easily associated with the rumors, and most of the southern non-Nilotic Ugandans from the New Area were recent arrivals too, coinciding with the ongoing crackdowns by the Ugandan government on the opposition and the rumored emerging of the PRA. This was the reason that Museveni’s tribe mates were severely mistrusted, all the more so because one carried an ID showing him to be a member of an elite military force.

They wrote anti-Museveni and pro-democracy manifestos and pamphlets, which they tried to slip into the hands of visiting journalists and UN officials, and got into trouble with UNHCR security for it. They would triangulate, handing their petitions and

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<sup>33</sup> The man worked for a Dutch refugee agency in a small town, and, while holidaying in Kenya, he took the opportunity to go and see what he called “a real refugee camp”. I found that to be admirable as well as surprising.

manifestos and letters to the UN and the DO in his capacity as representative of the GOK simultaneously. One time, after spotting me in one of the restaurants with one of the politicians, a police officer asked me: “what are you doing with that troubled boy?” The Ugandan with whom the officer had seen me had attempted to organize a protest march through the camp after Museveni’s third term project passed, but the march was banned by the DO and UNHCR.

Stories, conspiracies and truths went around that were hard to unravel, but which were nonetheless loaded with meaning. One such story went that in the past, the Ugandan government would send women to the camp to engage with his political opponents in exile to extract information. Another version was that it would send women with HIV/AIDS with the intention of infecting the “dissidents.” Similar stories were told by other groups in the camp, such as the Ethiopians and the Rwandans. This was why Joseph wanted to know who came to Kakuma, since a spy could easily pose as a refugee or defector. Later, I went to the reception center with Joseph to “check” on some new arrivals from Uganda. They had already been staying in the reception center for some time and were awaiting their first RSD interview. They slept on mats on the concrete floor of the dormitory. There was one new arrival with wounds on his hands and feet, sitting quietly in a corner on his mat. He looked like he was in his forties and said he came from Gulu. He sat apart from the rest, the other Ugandans being southerners, young and presumably members of the opposition. Later, while Joseph and I were walking in Kakuma Three, he said that the man was LRA, and explained, as some Sudanese had also done, that people from the border crossing Acholi tribe, amongst others, would sometimes try to register as Sudanese in order to escape association with the LRA. Various informants argued that every Sudanese who did not speak Arabic was in fact a Ugandan member of the LRA who was trying to hide his identity.

Among the Rwandan, Burundian, Somali and Ethiopian refugees were both victims and perpetrators (Veney 2007: 20). There were the antagonists as well as former allies. The Sudanese and the Ethiopians shared an old camaraderie. Wounded soldiers of the SPLA were cared for in the camp, which also hosted SPLA defectors. These group lines were strongly felt in the camp, and were a source of constant rumors. Within the Ethiopian community there was a natural split between Christian Ethiopians and Islamic Oromos, the latter being more drawn towards – and spatially located beside – the Somali community. As such, people perceived of each other’s identity as rooted in and linked to wider rationales and histories of conflict. It is not that dissimilar from the concept of tribalism in that primordial ascribed statuses are hard to escape in the social relations between people in East Africa. Tribal identity carries certain obligations and expectations

that I also recognized in the ways people perceived each other in a capacity of being somewhere between tribe and rebel movement. As the next section shows, these relations worked out in various ways.

## **The Ethiopian Strike**

In the beginning of 2005, tensions between the Ethiopian and Nuer communities led to a widespread protest in the camp. The protest quickly became part of the warscape rationale, but from there went on to impact on the economic organization of the camp. This shows how the camp as an accidental city was built up of different co-existing and overflowing social arrangements that have evolved though time in the specificity of Kakuma.

The protest was known as the “Ethiopian strike.” It was the result of an accumulation of problems with young men or gangs from the neighboring Sudanese Nuer community, whose “notorious” youth robbed one person too many. An old Nuer man explained to me that some of “their” youth were “out of culture” and had forgotten the rules of the clan, and said that “most of them are outlaws, Lost Boys and orphans.” Robberies and theft around the markets of Zone Five by Nuer youth were not uncommon in the camp.

When some Nuer youth were caught stealing yet again, two of them were beaten by the Ethiopians, and conflict ensued between them and the adjacent Nuer community. The Ethiopian leadership decided that it would close the Ethiopian market with its popular restaurants, retail shops and bars. The leaders called their initiative a strike and laid down a request with UNHCR that the organization should either move the Nuer community to another place in the camp, or grant the Ethiopians resettlement. To add leverage to this “request,” the entire Ethiopian community was asked by its leadership to participate in the strike. As a result, many incentive workers with the agencies, including teachers, medical and administrative personnel, stayed home. The otherwise very lively neighborhood was shut down completely, except for the Ethiopia hotel, a bar and restaurant run by an Ethiopian who did not wish to join the effort, but who operated with caution. He kept the door locked during the strike, and only allowed a few people to enter discretely.

Together with a Sudanese Dinka informant, I was walking through the deserted area at a sudden moment of tension. I had asked him to come along since he was neither Nuer nor Ethiopian, on account of which I imagined him to be perceived as somewhat neutral in this matter. He explained, however, that he had been robbed of his mobile phone by seven Nuer only a few weeks before, right there in the Ethiopian community. Towards

the end of the Ethiopian community, near the “border” with the Nuer, we met one of my informant’s Ethiopian acquaintances and asked him about the latest news. Initially, he sputtered somewhat, stating that things were a bit sensitive. But later on, as other men also gathered around, he began to tell us that they were guarding the community. In effect, the spot where they stood was a roadblock, located at the point where the two communities met. The men had organized themselves to patrol the area, both during the day and at night. After we crossed the “border” and entered Nuer territory, we passed what looked like an Ethiopian man being beaten up by four Nuers, next to the path on which we were walking. The man, red blood on his white shirt, was kicked and beaten while the Dinka warned me not to stop and look, but to keep walking. Conflicts in the camp were renowned for their potential to escalate and involve entire communities over issues that were initially small, and perhaps the Dinka reasoned that if he was to become involved, the Sudanese Dinka community would too.

Upon leaving the Nuer community, on a bend near the main road in the direction of the Somali community, we ran into three Ethiopians coming from the direction of the LWF compound. We advised them not to take the route from which we came because of what we had just seen, and warned them that they might be attacked as well. They explained that they just returned from the police to report an attack by the Nuer earlier that day, in which one of the three Ethiopians had been injured. They were worried about the fate of the man being beaten, and we left them debating whether they should go to try to assist him.

Upon entering the Somali market after our little tour around the Nuer community, we saw a group of Somali men rallied with sticks and walking canes. These walking canes, as people had shown me on previous occasions, can contain swords – the wood serving as the shaft – and one of the men was waving one that was drawn. They were rallying to go into the Nuer community, as they had heard reports that the man who was being beaten was not an Ethiopian but a Somali. The sometimes similar appearances of people from both nationalities made the confusion not unlikely. As we moved on, my Dinka informant warned me again that we should not stay to witness this. He was knowledgeable since he had been present and participated in some of the famous battles of Kakuma, when the Sudanese fought against the Turkana and the Dinka against the Nuer. News arrived that the man we had seen turned out not to be a Somali from the camp, but a Kenyan-Somali from town. Again, this news had explosive potential, as the people from town would not accept one of “theirs” being attacked in the camp (it was not unimaginable that the Turkanas themselves would react). Moreover, the Somalis in town and those in the camp had strong connections.

All of a sudden, the conflict appeared to have petered out. The man who was being beaten turned out to be Kenyan-Somali from Kitale, a town situated in the south of Turkana district. He was in the camp for business, but did not belong to any identity group in the camp or its vicinity, and therefore, no group was interested in avenging his beating.

Later that day, we met another Dinka who had just returned from “Somalia” where things had nonetheless escalated between some Somalis and Nuer. Several men were taken to the hospital with cuts from *pangas* (machetes) and swords. By the time I returned home in the evening, everything was calm once more, although the Ethiopian market remained closed. Throughout the period of the strike, similar tensions were reported. Rumors and gossip were essential components of this tension, particularly since the camp is so large that it is hard to keep track of incidents, even for the police. Time and again, I sat in bars or at the guesthouse with police officers or UN/NGO employees who had their radios on the table at high volume, enabling me to overhear many reports and rumors of events in the camp.

The communities or neighborhoods are, depending on place, demarcated spaces that are governed from within. The Ethiopian community, for example, had erected a wired fence, financed by contributions from the members of the community. They were able to lock down the entire community at night, as could many smaller compounds that were fenced and had wood and metal doors that could be closed with padlocks. This sat uneasily with UNHCR, which wanted access to these places. In a similar vein, roadblocks were forbidden by UNHCR with the argument that the police and ambulances would be unable to drive through the camp.

My Dinka informant said that all the Ethiopians were soldiers, and that they were able to protect themselves. Many had said before that the Ethiopian community had their own little “army,” comprised of former military men from Mengistu’s government. It was rumored that guns were hidden beneath their beds, built into the clay floors of their huts. But the Dinka also said that the refugees were all suffering because of the strike; shops were closed, the bars and *hotelis* were closed, and the other refugees had come to depend on the Ethiopian market. After more than a month, the strike came to a sudden end. The UNHCR Head of Sub-Office told me later that UNHCR had threatened to fire every incentive worker who did not report for work, a threat that bore considerable weight in the camp economy. Moreover, the Ethiopians had been out of business for nearly two months – with the exception of some minor activities – while the nearby Somali market, which had taken over much of the Ethiopians’ Sudanese clientele, was flourishing.

Analyzing the strike in the context of the development of the camp presents some interesting insights. In the past, issues between the Nuer and the Ethiopians could have

easily escalated and were likely to be resolved through violence, as other past clashes had been. In this case, however, the Ethiopians opted for alternative ways to try and influence policy by shutting down a very relevant economic sector in the camp. This shows how, with time, camp economy came to be an important aspect of camp life and organization. In the next chapter, I will explore Kakuma camp from a socio-economic perspective.

## Conclusion

I have analyzed processes of social ordering in the context of a warscape. The warscape denotes how war related imageries and relations continue to shape and affect social relations outside of that warzone. Particularly in the case of the Sudanese, the boundaries between refugee leadership and the rebel movement have been blurred from the very inception of the camp. In the past, the camp formed a rear base in the broader war tactics of rebel movements. The notion of the camp as rear base is important for the accidental city approach in two ways. First, it shows that the camp had a function as harbor and hide-out, allowing people who were linked to rebel movements or defeated armies in the region in one way or another to regroup, recuperate and revalidate. This made the camp a facility not just for vulnerable refugees *per se*, but for political agents and subjects. I refer to this as refugee camp rebelization. The notion of refugee warriors was elemental to this rebelization, as many refugees had links with rebel movements and armies in their countries of origin, either in the past, in the present or both. As a center of facilities including education, aid and protection, the camp thus served not only a humanitarian function, but also a practical function relating to the politics of the wider region.

This leads to the second point, and a more social interpretation of rebelization: the refugees, as political subjects, interpreted and organized the camp according to the pasts and imaginations about linkages between people and rebel movements. This led to refugees' re-ordering of UNHCR's allocation of living space and leadership representation in primordial "communities" on the basis of nationality or tribe, by means of violence or threat. For different ethnic groups all over the camp, this meant that their "communities" organized on the basis of nationality began to reflect other determinants; in most cases, an intertwining of ethnicity and conflict history or rationale, sometimes on a very local level, between individuals or small groups that were perceived as enemies by their allocated communities and leadership. This process of ordering is denoted as a warscape, and references, threats and the use of violence in that setting has a productive quality that contributes to place making. Violence, in this sense, has contributed to the formation of communities in the camp.

As noted in chapter one, African cities are produced by violent fragmentation that regulates space. The violent links and the imminent and symbolic understanding of violence in Kakuma can be understood as processes of fragmentation and space making. This is also where the relevance of the domain of the warscape lies in the argument of the camp as an accidental city. Processes of place making are the result of the habitation of space. The emergence of “neighborhoods”, sections, and areas that are defined according to refugees’ own interpretations and understandings of the others in the camp can be seen as ways of giving meaning to their environment. It is a way of contesting and challenging the initial allocation of space by humanitarian agencies.

The intertwining of the rebel movement and the major ethnic group in the camp, the Dinka, made that they had a powerful role in Kakuma. Their authority over refugees, not only from other groups but also vis-à-vis UNHCR and the NGOs, was for a large part derived from or backed up by that very intertwining. This authority then transcended into everyday forms of power and governance, in which many aspects of daily life became subject to demarcations of norms and legitimization.

Moreover (but this is a discussion that will be addressed in another chapter), insecurity is imagined and utilized as rationale for seeking options that enlarge refugees’ room for maneuver.

Further along in this dissertation, the ingredients of this warscape return in another social order that revolves around the casting of insecurity as a practical strategy. Before getting to that, however, I will first explore another domain of ordering: that of livelihoods and economy. For, in the chronology of the camp, we find that the notion of the warscape is not just prominent, but can be seen as the initial mode of organization by refugees vis-à-vis the humanitarian governance system. The Kakuma warscape and the constant alternations to it set the parameters for what follows: processes of socio-economic ordering in the camp.



## Chapter Four: 'Digging' aid - humanitarian resources in a refugee camp economy

Premier League football is on TV in Kakuma One, Zone Five, Group Six in the Sudanese Community. I am sitting amidst around three hundred Sudanese youth, mostly boys, watching the English football competition. They are seated in an open courtyard pointed towards a television screen a few meters high, sitting in a construction that looks like a large birdhouse for the screen. There are more people in an adjacent hall, watching another TV-set. On the opposite side of the yard another screen caters to another group of people in a cleared dining hall. Seniors sit on plastic chairs inside, while those a bit less senior sit on wooden benches outside, and the youngest sit on the ground.

The private generator runs in the background. Waiters pass sodas and drinks from the fridge to people who can afford it. While most of the camp is dark at this hour, this place, like other bars and *hotelis*, is lit up with the modern form of globalized football entertainment. There are limits to forms of entertainment that are available in this *hoteli* however. The manager explains that dance parties are prohibited as per the desire of the elders of his community, who will otherwise protest and demand closure. For a football match screening, each visitor pays 10 or 20 Kenyan Shillings (KES) depending on the preference of the manager of the establishment. I calculate that this evening, if there are indeed 300 youth inside, this *hoteli* should earn between 3,000 and 6,000 KES (30-60 Euro) on entrance fees alone. This is one example of income generation in the camp setting, and although the entry fee seems like a small amount, the fact that people are able to pay shows that they are able to obtain cash from somewhere.

Livelihood strategies among refugees have gained attention among scholars and humanitarian agencies in the past years. This is partly as a result of an increased focus on protracted refugee situations. Scholars and others have realized that life within camps does not come to a standstill, but finds new and other forms in the specificities of refugee hosting environments (Jacobsen 2002b, 2005; Horst 2006; Werker 2007). One of the points of departure for viewing Kakuma as an accidental city is the diversification and organization of livelihoods, analogue to the phenomenon of the division of labor associated with processes of urbanization. The ways refugees seek access to opportunities in the refugee-hosting environment and the ways livelihoods are created out of humanitarian resources determine both how the camp looks, and how its inhabitants manage their lives.

Moreover, the camp has taken on regional importance as a market place; on a regular basis, traders and buyers come to camp and sustain linkages with the larger Kenyan economy. In this chapter I explore how the development of a camp economy and the linkages between the aid, the informal and “normal” economy; the relations between hosts and refugees; and transnational connections are forms of “digging aid.” The word *digging* is a regional colloquial term for subsistence farming, and is used here to underline that aid is a resource that people can tap into and build on. The analogy with natural resources is interesting, also in a historical sense. Cities and towns were founded as a result of gold rushes, as for instance in California, to which people were attracted and would come and try their luck. From an initial focus on this one resource, more differentiated economies emerged. In fact, there is one such town not too far away from Kakuma. Approximately halfway on the road to Lodwar, a road that branches off to Lake Turkana and Lokitaung leads through a small town called “Gold.”<sup>1</sup> Some decades ago a modest gold rush took place here. Through the years, the main chucks have gone after substantial industrial harvesting in the town, although when I visited it, individuals were still delving small amounts of gold, which they sold to Indians from Nairobi.

Gold rush, oil rush, aid rush. Rather than seeing it as a form of assistance, a necessity or handout alone, I perceive aid as a resource that refugees render into livelihoods, albeit through informal activities and arrangements. In this way, I analyze aid as one among other livelihood assets and resources, on the basis of which other forms of income generation and socio-cultural phenomena in the camp are built. An amalgam of livelihoods and income generating activities produces a social organization in terms of status and power, within which access to resources creates room for maneuver. Aside from resources, livelihoods are dependent on skills and social networks in and beyond the camp. Both skills and networks are created and sustained in the camp setting. This chapter illustrates in what ways people create possibilities for income generation, and how this relates to and shapes lives and organization in Kakuma.

## **Refugee livelihoods**

Chambers and Conway (1992: 7) define livelihood as comprising “the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living.”

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<sup>1</sup> As Gold was named after gold, in a similar construction, there was small village on the road to Lake Turkana from Lodwar near Kalokol, which was called “Kenya Oil.” It was named after an oil find of which the piping still sticks out of the ground.

Jacobsen (2005: 10) lists the following assets framework through which various forms of livelihoods can be ranked:<sup>2</sup>

- Natural capital (land, water and forests);
- Physical capital (livestock, equipment, infrastructure like roads, buildings);
- Human capital (education and skills, life experience, health);
- Social capital (community trust and knowledge, networks);
- Financial capital (stocks and flows) which include:
  - Regular inflows of money through earned income. State transfers (for example pensions), and remittances;
  - Savings, in the form of cash, bank deposits, or liquid assets like livestock and jewelry; and
  - Credit, including access to credit institutions.

Jacobsen recognizes three sets of livelihood resources that are of “key importance to refugees.” These are: arable land, local resources and assets; transnational resources, including capital and information; and international assistance, such as direct employment, income generating activities and microcredit (Jacobsen 2002b: 9).

Self-reliance of refugees in Africa is often seen as synonymous to subsistence farming or access to labor, and most activities designed to support self-reliance focus on rural economies. In other camp situations, like the Sudanese camps in Northern Uganda or the Burundi camps in Tanzania, refugees were allocated small plots for subsistence farming (Kaiser 2006). This perception of African refugees based on an image of “experienced” farmers is problematic. As Macchiavello (2003) remarks with regard to agricultural refugee policy in Uganda, most refugees coming from an urban background were unable to utilize farm opportunities. There is little inclusion of non-agricultural labor in the livelihood debate, while there is ample evidence that refugees seek other forms of income generation. In the Beldangi refugee camps for Bhutanese in south-eastern Nepal, for instance, many refugees find employment in the adjacent town of Damak. Similarly, Palestinians living in camps or settlements in urban areas in Lebanon and Amman seek urban employment. From Buduburam camp in Ghana, people commute to Accra. These economic ties are so intertwined that in a way, the camps can be considered “suburbs,” from which refugees commute to economic or urban centers. When UNHCR stopped food distribution in Buduburam, people remained in the camp as they were able to commute for work themselves. They fed their income back into the camp economy, by which it became a real suburb (Dick 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> Based on DFID livelihood approach, see <http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/dossiers/livelihoods-connect/what-are-livelihoods-approaches/livelihoods-assets>.

Subsistence farming in Kakuma refugee camp is problematic for two reasons. First, the climate does not allow intensive use of the land for growing crops, except for small periods of time during and following the rains. Second, the limited agricultural opportunities mean that there is a fragile distribution of space between the pastoralists and the refugees, resulting in a regulation that stipulates that officially only Kenyans are allowed to make use of natural resources (reports of violence from Turkana to refugees who were gathering firewood outside of the camp can in part be understood as preserving that resource). Refugees received food aid as handouts, but they also sought to complement or bypass this dependency by engaging in entrepreneurship and income generating activities, or by finding other sources of income using their social networks and families. Most people I knew during my time in the camp were able to complement their handouts with cash derived from some aspect of the refugee camp economy.

Officially, refugees were not allowed to engage in wage earning employment, but informally they were engaged in a wide variety of income generating activities. The livelihood strategies refugees employed were therefore metaphorically “urban,” that is, non-agricultural: trade, bartering and businesses, service provision such as catering or running restaurants and entertainment establishments. They were also largely limited to non-productive activities in the informal sector, like livelihood strategies in many African cities. Another characteristic was the availability of income through networks of relatives overseas or in refugees’ countries of origin, who sent remittances to the camp. These transnational forms of income were dependent on infrastructure or technology for monetary transfer and communication, making Kakuma a nodal point in the global economy.

Horst (2006) recognizes three essential aspects of livelihood strategies among refugees: social networks, mobility and investment in education and skills development. Social networks are comprised of all the linkages and relations people have and address to get assistance in any form, whether through money lending, labor or any other service. Mobility means that refugees can strategically migrate – as nomads do, as Horst compares livelihoods in Dadaab to the Somali heritage of nomadic pastoralism – to benefit and/or strengthen their opportunities for survival. One way of doing this, for instance, is by having different relatives live in different camps and cities or even countries. Green (2000) indicates that household livelihoods in camps are substantially more complex than the mere receiving of food and other items. People in camps often live together in family units, but kinship ties of broader extended families are often not recorded, or used in programming (for instance, third country resettlement programs do not take into account polygamous marriages, and as a result, a polygamous husband can only take one wife). In

Kakuma it seemed that UNHCR was preoccupied with the nuclear family. Within broader kinship ties, people engage in commerce with host areas, home areas, and start commercial activities within camps by moving between them. He writes:

Cross-flows into and out of refuge frequently characterize war situations, as rural security (especially for food production) ebbs and flows differentially by area, with wide swings around any trend and indeed often with no discernable trend until well after the event. (Green 2000: 255)

The three livelihood categories indicated by Horst overlap and are highly dependent upon each other. Social networks often play a pivotal role in the motivation and possibility of mobility. People are being informed about where to go, and once they arrive, they are hosted by people through these networks. Education and skills development depend on access to the opportunity to obtain or access these, which is again partly dependent on social networks. I say partly because some forms of education and skills development available in the camp are relatively accessible to all. So instead of looking at what strategies people employ, we can also look at which resources exist that people can use and build strategies upon.

Christoplos and Hilhorst write that “household coping practices and the ways in which individual actors develop preferences and lifestyles, while seeking to adjust their livelihoods to changing opportunities and constraints, results in new mechanisms of social and economic ordering” (2009: 39). Refugee livelihoods and livelihood strategies need to be observed in their specific geographical and cultural contexts. I will illustrate this with a vignette of the Madi boys, one of the groups in the camp that I visited regularly.

### **A vignette of a group livelihood: the Madi boys**

In group 10D of the Equatorian community, just off Kakuma highway after the Rwandan community, lived a group of young men. They had a fenced courtyard with houses built in a square around it, facing a common open space. One house was designated as a kitchen and storage. The other houses were shared among them, and with occasional visitors and new arrivals from their tribe or tribes related to theirs. Most of them were Madi, an ethnic group from southern Sudan and northern Uganda. They shared geographical and cultural commonalities with the Acholi, Lughbara and Kakwa, whose sub-communities were located beside theirs in group 10D. Together, they were all part of what in the camp was referred to as the Equatorian community, a tribal collective from

the Equatoria province in South Sudan. The Equatorians were distinguished in the camp organization from the Dinka and the Nuer, as introduced in the previous chapter.

The Madi men were all young and alone, and they did not have their (extended) families with them in the camp. Instead, they had created their own network based on the above communality of ethnic and geographical decent. Some of the men held incentive jobs that resulted in a supply of cash (Even though I almost always came announced, not once was I served lunch without meat), which gave them secondary benefits such as bicycles, access to the compounds, access to computers, and on the job training with corresponding diplomas, certificates and letters of recommendation. Others had created their own income generating activities. One had a portable VHF radio that he toured around with in the camp for Sudanese to be able to phone home, an activity that was mainly relevant before mobile phone networks came to cover Kakuma in 2004. Another traversed between Uganda and the camp with bundles of cloth, and after he brought a sewing machine, he hired someone to sew Ugandan style clothing to sell in the camp. Another was enrolled in the distance-learning program of the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Even those without regular jobs and income found occasional work on a day-to-day basis, like assisting in one of the video shops on the road owned by a fellow Equatorian or neighbor from an adjacent group. In the group bordering the Madi boys lived a mother of three, whose husband was in the SPLA in Sudan and who sent money. She also sold weavings to customers in Australia via the Sudanese diaspora, and was able to take care of a whole group of people in a neighboring compound. Yet another girl from a different neighboring community received regular remittances of up to 300 US\$ a month, with which she supported herself and some extended family members. On top of this, refugees in the camp received their relief supplies. Aid, then, when seen as the combined resources of housing, plots of land, food, water, health, education, and so on, forms an important basis for the refugee camp economy.

Most of these forms of income generation and survival are multiple, partly invisible, and therefore difficult to generalize. The examples above however, are illustrative for arrangements I encountered all over the camp. Many forms of entrepreneurship take place in the informal sector, while income opportunities keep shifting, and people keep moving. One of the members of the group of Madi boys above was recruited by an NGO in Sudan and left the camp. In order to keep his ration card and a “right to return,” he did not report that he was leaving, but sent money back to his wife who remained in the camp and created opportunities for others in Sudan by extending their network and leaving a vacant incentive job slot in the camp for the position he abandoned. Others were resettled to third countries, where they drew on or invented family relationships to

arrange for others still in the camp to join them for family reunification. These arrangements were fluid. Networks like these also depend on how people settle in the camp and become part of communities as described in the previous chapter. Some people decide to stick together on the basis of shared insecurities, shared ethnic or national backgrounds, or new relations shaped in the camp setting. They shift places and rent or buy houses. In the above example of the Madi boys for instance, new arrivals would not stay in their designated houses in Kakuma Four, but would trade them or sell them to others while they themselves found their way to the Equatorian community in Kakuma One.

The livelihood situation of the Madi boys depends in part on humanitarian resources and assets. In the eyes of the aid giver, they are dependent on their aid because their survival strategy is partly invisible. When I illustrated an example of entrepreneurship to a UNHCR manager by explaining the average turnover of one of the barbershops as the Oromo owner calculated it for me, he responded in disbelief. On another note, refugees were reluctant to display income because they feared they might lose their entitlement to aid. For this reason, the aid economy and the livelihoods that are derived from this remain largely informal and outside the purview of UNHCR.

### **Aid, assets and representation – a note on methodology**

According to refugee policy in Kenya, refugees were not allowed to work, and from that perspective, the informal sector was the only viable sector in which they could engage in income generation. However, informality is a predominant phenomenon in all Sub-Saharan cities, where the informal sector accounts for an average of 78 per cent of all non-agricultural employment. In Kenya alone, there were an estimated 5.5 million informal workers, against 1.7 million wage earners in formal employment (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2006: 11). (Refugee) livelihoods can therefore not be measured against what is considered formal, for this leaves out an enormous informal sector that does not merit dismissal as something unreal or irrelevant.

In 1998, the informal sector [...] was estimated to employ almost 3 million people or 63.5 per cent of the labor force [...] and without a doubt has continued to expand since. The informal sector is clearly the most important source of non-agricultural jobs and livelihoods in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, and its growth seems to be linked very closely to the rate of urbanization in these countries. (SID 2006: 69)

Moreover, an arguably rather large portion of entrepreneurship in the camp is not so much informal as illegal or even criminal. As was found in Liberian refugee camps in Ghana, a range of illegal and potentially harmful livelihood strategies were practiced by camp inhabitants, including prostitution, selling drugs, robbery (including armed robbery), illegal electrical connections and gambling (Porter, Hampshire et al. 2008: 239).

An ILO report states about income generation in the Kenyan refugee camps: “no reliable camp activity employment statistics exist” (2005: 18). As refugees explained and I noticed while doing the exercise, there were various obstacles in obtaining information on livelihoods, and this leads to problematic methodological considerations with regard to data collection. When I attempted to survey one of the groups’ entrepreneurial activities and income using a research assistant from that community, it turned out that more than half of the activities conducted were either illegal by standards of the government of Kenya or UNHCR, or even criminal. They part-took in the brewing of alcohol, smuggling, illegal VHF-radio business, and prostitution. My research assistant then explained that because he was part of that community, he knew most of these forms of entrepreneurship and who did what and so on, but he was met resistance when formalizing the data collection on my behalf. I decided not to ask him to push forward in this way, as I reasoned that some of the sensitivities of the economic landscape of the camp were inherent to its organization.

I found the following as problematic aspects of collecting survey data on livelihoods:

- Disclosing one’s relative wealth or success in business may limit the support of agencies. This is a risk when disclosing information to a researcher who may report back to a larger audience, potentially including these agencies.
- Exposing one’s relative wealth might endanger the owner because he/she puts him/herself at risk of being robbed, or may cause problems in the community because of jealousy, or may simply make someone a target for a demanding community or others in the camp.
- Regardless of refugees not being allowed to work officially, a rather wide variety of income generating activities are illegal or criminal. Disclosure may result in arrest or punishment.
- Disclosing income that is derived from or involves corrupt practices either from the agencies or refugees (not necessarily the same as illegal practices), such as the trade in ration cards, shelters / houses, and services, may endanger the recipient.
- Some activities can be taboo within refugee communities. These activities may simultaneously be illegal, criminal or corrupt, or simply against community norms. Prostitution, brewing alcohol, drugs, and simply cheating may be part of this category. Shame or desire to preserve status may then be important factors in withholding. This may also account for people hiding their inability to gain any income at all.



- The essence of the humanitarian economy is the entitlement to aid on a basis of need and vulnerability. Nurturing, at least not undermining this image, is the very basic rule of refugee camp life.

To gain a better understanding of livelihoods, I decided to shift strategies and to focus instead on ethnographic accounts of a number of close informants, analyzing forms of entrepreneurship and livelihoods and their perspectives about these livelihoods in this way instead. Nevertheless, while the barriers to survey data mentioned above may restrict gathering particular forms of knowledge, they are simultaneously indications of how the informal camp economy works, something that I will explore further below.

## **Digging aid**

Resources stemming from direct aid and intended to fulfill basic needs can in practice all become resources in the camp economy. Food handouts, its packaging (the flattened tins of USAID cooking oil or powdered milk are widely used materials for the construction of doors, roofs and the like, and relief food bags are also re-used), the corrugated iron roofs, their iron doors, plastic sheeting, and complete houses are traded, sold or bartered for something else. In refugee literature, refugees who are *being forced* to sell part of their food rations are seen as extremely vulnerable (Harrell-Bond 2000; Hunter 2009). However, instead of focusing on the “forced” motive for selling a part of one’s rations, it is also important to focus on people’s *ability* to do so. In a refugee camps, people receive direct resources for trade and barter: food rations. While visiting a group of Ugandan refugees in Kakuma Three, two Turkana girls came along and traded their beans for sorghum from the relief basket. Turkanas would often roam through the camp with goods to sell, entering refugees’ compounds and communities. In these roamings, patterns emerged, and these became regular and normal transactions. These particular refugees did not like sorghum, and were able to trade it for local beans. They explained that they were able to make good deals because the Turkana girls were illiterate. Therefore, they were able to cheat them a bit in their negotiations, juggling with numbers and amounts. In this way, the aid economy served as a basis for a more normal, albeit still largely informal, economy that transcended beyond the aid context.

The WFP relief food bags have large letters saying NOT FOR SALE. On a trip monitoring the distribution of relief in the Turkana region by LWF-EMOP (Emergency operations: a collaboration between LWF and OXFAM distributing relief in the larger Turkana region), I asked the manager what he did when he noticed when relief goods

were sold. He was a Turkana himself, and was very clear in that explaining that according to him, people were free to use relief as they saw fit. Similarly, during distribution in the camp, trade with rations would take place straight in front of the distribution center's gates, while other relief bags would be piled up along the main road in town to be ferried to Kenyan cities by bus. In this manner, refugee items such as UNHCR-stamped jerry cans and relief food bags found their way even to the refugee populated areas and markets in Nairobi.

The accumulation of free housing, food, education, healthcare, and other items that were irregularly distributed (if at all) such as clothing and kitchen utensils, soap and firewood, can be seen as a form of social security. The transfer of humanitarian assets and resources may be comparable to natural resources: they represent things that are simply "there," part of the environment. In some places, the economic landscape revolves around oil, the car industry or tourism. In Kakuma refugee camp, the economy revolves around aid. Aid is often not seen as a resource but as a necessity at best, and it is only recently attention is beginning to emerge for the ways in which aid and the assets associated with it can form part of an economy in the environment of the protracted refugee camp. This "social security," in turn, allows for activities generating small revenues to be sustained by people who are not completely dependent upon aid for their survival, and also results in a clientele of people that have something to spend. Agency workers viewed it as such. The markets with businesses from Somalis and Ethiopians could only exist because of people were able to spend their cash, and they have cash because of their incomes, which are largely based on the aid economy.

### **Aid and dependency**

The long-term provision of assistance to refugees in camps has been recognized as contributing to refugee dependency on aid, known as dependency syndrome. Symptoms commonly associated with the syndrome are as lethargy, (domestic) violence and frustration. Through continuous dependency on assistance, refugees with time become incapable of taking care of themselves and become used to receiving handouts for survival. Kibreab, one of the earliest critical writers contesting the dependency syndrome, writes:

Dependency, conversely, can be understood in two ways. First it refers to the incapability of achieving economic self-sufficiency, resulting in indefinite reliance from outside. Second, it implies the lack of capability to function independently and to take initiatives in order to attain short and long-term self-sufficiency *even in the presence of enabling interventions* or when the opportunity to earn an

income exists. It is mainly in the latter and not in the former sense that the concept of dependency is used in the available literature. Other expressions such as “dependency syndrome,” “welfare mentality,” “refugee mentality,” etc, are also used to describe the same phenomenon. A community that suffers from dependency is incapable of critically assessing its own situation and of working out solutions to its problems. (Kibreab 1993: 330)

Horst dismisses the relevance or even existence of dependency syndrome in the Dadaab camps for “there are no viable means to become self-sufficient” (2003: 252). Therefore, it is not a syndrome but real dependency. But are there really no viable means? What are the limits to self-sufficiency – time? And are not all forms of self-sufficiency always dependent on external resources (oil, fertile soil, water, clientele, etc)? When we regard self-sufficiency as being able to eke out a livelihood from outside resources, whether these are natural, financial, or stem from manpower or other factors, then where is the consideration of aid as a resource in this argumentation? Is any livelihood that involves a component of aid unviable? During my time in Kakuma and visit to Dadaab, although years later than Horst’s, I found viable economic initiatives that drew people out of total dependency all over the camp, in every national and ethnic group.

To a large extent, dependency syndrome represents a managerial perspective. Horst writes: “the refugee hosting agencies have made it their concern to promote sustainable livelihoods in camp settings partly because ‘handout based assistance’ is expensive, and long term refugee situations risk suffering donor fatigue, and are potentially harmful for the host environment” (Horst 2006: 6). The rationale is that “refugees should be ‘assisted to assist themselves’, and become agents of development in the regions that host them” (ibid). Dependency and the notion of dependency syndrome thus take on a normative quality, and become something to be cured. The very architecture of refugee camps, where the permission to work is curtailed, presents some problems for the notion of dependency syndrome. As I will argue later, attempts to become self-supporting or partly so, are sometimes met with hindrance or other restraints, not from the refugees *per se*, but from the nature of the camp structure, host country arrangements, humanitarian disapproval, or simply insecurity or other inconveniences. As van Uffelen writes: “camps deprive refugees of access to networks of social and economic support and there is evidence that over the long term even those camps deemed self-sufficient become destitute” (Van Uffelen 2006: 25).

Arguments such as these, however, deny the networks and circumstances that are created and maintained in the camp. And although the geographical locations of many refugee camps may be severely limited in what they offer, people somehow make do. It is thus important to consider what forms of “creative subversion” (Malkki 1995: 237) are forged in this specific context, and in what ways these “emergent social forms” (Long

1989: 231) are embedded in the refugee camp economy. It is for this reason that it is important to critically assess the discourse of dependency in the specific context of the camp, and to withdraw it from discussions of the victimization or plight of refugees, moving instead towards the identification of both constraints *and* enabling factors and phenomena of a more structural nature. In many ways, refugee camps and humanitarian aid create nodes in networks and livelihood opportunities.

When I was discussing the extensive markets in the Dadaab camps with the program manager of Care International, he remarked that were the Kenyan government to extend freedom of movement to the refugees, these camps would in fact already be cities, to a large extent able to cater for themselves. The linkages that emerged between the Dadaab camps, the regional capital of Garissa,<sup>3</sup> Nairobi, Mogadishu and Kismayu, made trade a viable alternative to aid for a considerable part of the camp population. Due to collapse of the Somali state, no import duties are levied on goods that are imported into Somalia from Dubai and elsewhere. Campbell (2006) argues that this results in an opportunity for competitive pricing for Somali trade networks once these goods are transported and retailed in Kenya, most notably the area of Eastleigh in Nairobi. The markets were already there and informally, illegally or otherwise, refugees moved around all the time. Moreover, an important output of those networks were remittances that many refugees received from relatives abroad or elsewhere in Kenya, using the Somali telephone banking system known as “Xaliwaad” in the camp (Horst 2003; Lindley 2007). This leads Horst to remark that in refugee discourse there is limited focus to view assistance within refugee networks as comparable to humanitarian aid (Horst 2008).

In my view, we need to take two things into account with regard to refugee camp economies. First, from the perspective of the refugee who renders it into a livelihood, aid is a resource rather than a form of assistance, a necessity or hand-out alone. Second, in order to understand self-sufficiency and livelihoods in camps, we need to focus on informal activities and arrangements. Aid, in this way, is one among many livelihood assets and resources, on the basis of which other forms of income generation and socio-cultural phenomena in the camp are built.

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<sup>3</sup> Garissa, the capital of the North Eastern Province in which the Dadaab camps are located, symbolizes the transition from Christian, Bantu, sedentary and agricultural Kenya to desert, Islamic and nomadic Kenya. According to many Somalis, the region of Garissa in which Dadaab is located is part of the greater Somalia; Somalia starts in Garissa. In that sense, the Somalis’ presence in northern Kenya is not exceptional, and the difference between Kenyan-Somalis and Somali-Somalis in many respects irrelevant (see also: Lewis: 2002).

## Campital

In the beginning of my fieldwork I realized that part of the socio-economic stratification in the camp could be seen as a clash of capitals: some people have access to resources and some do not. It is a combination of social, human and financial capital that in a large part determines what room people have to maneuver, such as access to authorities, relevant others, networks, resources, and so on. I thought of the term “campital” to denote this phenomenon in the specific setting of the camp. It indicates the skills, networks and approaches that are needed to navigate the camp environment in a beneficial way.

There are three basic categories of campital: status, wealth and being “campwise” – the equivalent to streetwise in informal sectors (note the notion of being streetwise as an idiosyncratic urban feature). The first category (status) concerns *Big Men*, elders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, political leaders, and their kin. The second category (wealth) concerns people with resources, and can have some overlap with the first category. The third category (being “campwise”) concerns the what Turner (2001) named “liminal men,” and Hilhorst (2003) “interface experts”: people who are knowledgeable of the systems of governance, the actors involved and who are, to a certain extent, able to navigate in this space where different systems meet. Utas refers to the same practices as “tactic agency.” (2005). The position of these [luminal men/campwise persons/interface experts] is not straightforward but derives from a variety of power giving assets, which range from knowledge of their environment to money from incentives, other forms of income or remittances, or membership of influential families. Campital refers to the combined assets, relations and skills that one is able to use in the process of social navigation and maneuvering, and which are specifically rooted in the refugee camp environment.

Sommers refers to a social class in camps he calls “refugee-elites” (Sommers 2005). In Kakuma I found this to be a relevant label too. One young man that fits this this label was the 30-year-old son of a Sudanese chief of police. He moved between Nairobi, Kakuma and Juba, where at the end of 2005 he obtained a job in the Ministry of Finance. In the camp, his status as the son of a powerful man in Sudan provided him access to the agencies via the camp leadership and the Movement, as well as resources for entertainment. He acted like a gatekeeper for people in his community. Others were resourceful in other ways, like a Congolese salesman named Alan who traversed between Nairobi, Kakuma and the Congo to buy and sell clothing items, and was so successful in doing this that he was allowed and able to hawk his goods within the compound walls to agency staff, thereby enlarging his network to include humanitarian workers. Another was a Sudanese secondary school teacher who attended the Face Foundation schools in

Equatoria and was sent to Kakuma by the SPLA to pursue a secondary education before there were secondary schools in Kakuma camp. He became a “small big man” in his community. What they had in common was the ability to liaise with the agencies, the community leadership, the police, the church or mosque, the Turkana or other Kenyans and Kenyan institutions, businessmen, family and friends overseas and the SPLA, as well as the ability to move in and out of the camp.

Systems of patronage were based on clanship or ethnicity but also on new forms of solidarity, for instance between Turkanas and refugees, or Somalis and Sudanese, or Kenyan-Somalis and Somali refugees. These patronage systems meandered through all areas, spaces and sectors of the camp. Patrons were chairmen or part of the refugee administrations; businessmen or people with access to cash; people with incentive jobs or with good relations with agency staff. They were predominantly men. Some of them would move between cities in the region and the camp. They adopted strategies for becoming eligible for options arising in the camp, such as taking courses or becoming part of the community committees.

It is interesting to narrate the surprise of one of the fresh expats who came to the LWF compound to start his new job with JRS. Shortly after his arrival, he explained that each day he was able to get approximately one hour of effective work done, since he was constantly called for “emergency” meetings by UNHCR and other agencies – a frustration that was often expressed by staff was that a lack of planning resulted in day-to-day meetings that disturbed ongoing work (for an interesting analysis of policy dysfunction in humanitarian settings, see Walkup 1997). He said that when he was not in meetings, refugees were coming into his office all the time, and wondered how that was possible since his office was in a compound with gatekeepers that was generally difficult to get into – or so he thought. These people came in to the other offices to lobby on their own or someone else’s behalf for any number of things: donations, sponsoring, resettlement, jobs, scholarships, equipment and machinery, and so on. Once in the compound, they could freely move to the other NGOs. Versions of the above were an everyday reality in the camp. Refugees sought travel permits, education, scholarships, specific treatment, new facilities in the camp, protection, or simply tried to enhance their room to maneuver in any other way. The program manager in the above example, like many other NGO workers, judged this from the perspective of the restraint that it put on their daily effectiveness and output. For the refugees it was an active pursuit in digging aid.

The new expat told me that he saw this as a symptom of the dependency syndrome, because he saw the refugees acting aggressively but also out of need and dependence, making their behavior an expression of vulnerability. Indeed, as mentioned, refugee syndromes like these are often place the refugee as either victim or crook, as Horst (2003)

also recognized. Instead of expressing their vulnerability, however, these refugees were actively employing their camp capital in the humanitarian camp economy. They were dependent on the refugee camp economy, but simultaneously entrepreneurial, and in this entrepreneurship aid, the refugee hosting system and the identities and labels as refugees were all useable resources.<sup>4</sup> They were digging aid, their successful entry of the NGO compound a first sign of camp capital, obtained either through jobs, a network or cunning. In the next paragraphs, I will explore two specific ways of accessing opportunity that can be seen as camp capital: negotiating with corrupt elements of the refugee regime, and utilizing the refugee label.

### *Tuheshimiane kama polisi na busaa*

“Let us respect each other like police and *busaa*.” This phrase refers to turning a blind eye for a small bribe, in this case when the police want to ban, arrest or fine someone for producing the illegal Kenyan alcoholic homebrew *busaa*. Some refugees used the above as a proverb when they discussed the benefits of corruption. “TKK” – “*toa kitu kidogo*” in Kiswahili, which translates to “bring something small,” was the phrase people used to hear when the opportunity of a bribe was announced by a police, humanitarian or other authority. Corruption was endemic in the camp, as it was elsewhere in Kenya (Schechter 2004: 125-6; Campbell, D'arc et al. 2006: 96).<sup>5</sup> From small to large transactions and effects, corruption exceeds the rumor, and is an essential feature in the camp. The same applies outside of the camp, for instance at the police roadblocks on routes to and from Nairobi, where refugees pay “something small” to be permitted to pass.<sup>6</sup> It remains a grey area, however, that is hinted at in camp reports but seldom openly acknowledged, arguably because the agencies are part and parcel of the system. Some of my informants, for instance, were able to name exactly those employees that could be approached for and were amenable to “assist” by providing an additional food ration twice a month, which

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<sup>4</sup> I met many Turkans who had been sponsored by missionaries, past visitors and humanitarian employees for long periods of time. Some of these relations were long-term commitments, and its effects in terms of enabling the payment of school fees, and allowing people to complete their education were well known and considered important. Trying to approach visitors and humanitarian employees for sponsorship, not only in the camp but also in town, was thus a strategy that was based on precedent.

<sup>5</sup> A very interesting book about a recent corruption scandal that reached the upper echelons of the Kenyan government and the entrenchment of an atmosphere of lawlessness is *It's our turn to eat, the story of a Kenyan Whistleblower* by Michela Wrong (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Whenever I took the communal *Matatu* to Lokichoggio or Lodwar, I witnessed how refugees would have to pay the police 50, or 100 or more shillings in order to pass the various roadblocks. Sometimes, Kenyans were mistaken for refugees who wanted to travel illegally, and were forced to pay as well.

they were able to do by entering a larger family size in the administration records in exchange for some cash.

A Kenyan man who came with a bid in response to an LWF tender requesting a taxi service to ferry teachers from town to the camp and back explained how the LWF employee asked him for a 20,000 KES (approximately 200 Euro) kickback, in order to be awarded the contract. Another man from central Kenya explained that when he came to Kakuma as a qualified teacher in search for work, he had to pay an LWF staff member 20,000 KES to get the job. Among refugees, the organization gained the nickname “Looting Without Fear / Dinkas Will Suffer,” after their acronym LWF / DWS (Lutheran World Federation / Department of World Service). In a similar vein, UNHCR became “United Nations High Corruption.”

When I arrived in 2004, I visited and interviewed all the head offices in Nairobi of the agencies that worked in the camp. I went to World Vision (WV), and left after one hour or so with their programmatic information in hand. When I arrived in the camp barely a month later, they were gone, including all signposts and other forms of visual representation. WV had only started working in Kakuma in 2003, and was tasked with the construction of shelters. Conspiracy surrounded the matter, and the official story mentioned that a peace deal between North and South Sudan was near and that new shelters would no longer be needed. Another reason given to me by refugees was that WV had proven incapable of doing the work with which it was tasked. On the “street” however, yet another story circulated. It had to do with alleged sexual abuse of employees – refugees or Turkana – by humanitarian personnel. The solicitation of sexual favors in exchange for jobs was hardly a new phenomenon, and I heard many similar accounts from various local and refugee (would be) employees of other NGOs.

One of WV’s former National staff who remained in Kakuma after the NGO left simply called it corruption, as she did not see much difference between kickbacks in the forms of money and those requested in the form of sexual services. Although the real reasons for WV’s departure from Kakuma remain unclear, the use of NGO positions for soliciting sexual favors or engaging in corruption were so much a part of the everyday workings of the camp that these were plausible explanations.

On a smaller scale, forms of corruption were everywhere. An employee who had come from central Kenya and who worked with food distribution explained that she had the power to favor one refugee over the other, and that she regularly decided to give more to people she knew or liked. Some refugees thus made it their point to befriend or to get to know humanitarian staff. On “complaints day,” the last day of food distribution, refugees could come to try and get additional rations if there was any stock left over. During these days, personal relations and the goodwill of the distributor became



important. In a similar vein, a trader I knew quite well had developed the habit of bringing gifts to the chief of police and inviting him over for chicken at his house in the camp. In town, he bought drinks for humanitarian staff in the bars around Kakuma on a regular basis. In this way, by being on friendly terms with people in the humanitarian agencies and the police, he was able to get into the compounds during parties, and he often used the police for a lift between town and his house in Kakuma One.

All forms of corruption denote the power of job-givers, service providers, or “Big Men” (humanitarian personnel, police or refugees) over dependants and potential beneficiaries. A Congolese painter who sometimes got a job painting signposts and billboards for the agencies described it as a “chain,” explaining that whoever became a part of the refugee service structure could not abstain from becoming part of a system of patronage and kickbacks. He had been in the camp since 1993 and saw this happen all the time. A businessman told me that the police had stopped his goods that came from Nairobi to enter the camp. They had confiscated his stash, and only released it after he had paid them something small – *kitu kidogo*. Others would refer to practices like this as informal taxes. Vendors in the refugee markets had to make, similar forms of payment to leadership, ranging from gathering collective reserves to a semblance of mafia-like protection schemes. The businessman however, was only able to import goods into the camp and travel to Nairobi in the first place because the possibility to bribe existed. This denotes what refugees referred to as a chain: to deal with powerful people, to maneuver and navigate the camp systems, one may need to join the chain of bribery and corruption. Interestingly, some refugees indicated that they understood very well that this was chain also applied to humanitarian workers and the police.

The Congolese painter acknowledged that the ability to join the chain might be profitable. This meant that such corruption and cheating was not limited to Kenyans, police, or agency personnel, but as the example of the market vendors in the camp illustrates, extended to refugees as well. Informants often complained about corruption among the refugee leadership. One of the chairladies was implicated in taking the handouts of her constituency, while others acknowledged receiving some cash or goods in exchange for favors in their dealing with the refugee regime. Some chair people appeared to fit the label of what Davis (2007) calls “slumlordism.” This refers to how powerful actors in the limited environments of slums find ways of extorting resources from people. Other refugee leaders simply explained to me that they would sometimes take cash to forward a complaint of a member of their respective communities. Although some refugee leaders had a business or an incentive job on the side, they were simultaneously important gatekeepers vis-à-vis those who had resources to distribute, such as the allocation of plots to build houses, or to start a business. Bypassing the

refugee leadership to get assistance meant going to a UNHCR field post and many refugees complained that, apart from their near permanent exclusion from these sites, s/he would be asked for something small, TKK, there too.

### **Humanitarian cheating**

A specific form of camp life concerns refugees' ability to cheat. Refugees "are forced to negotiate livelihoods from the opportunities and constraints posed by that economy" (Bascom 1998: 164). Humanitarian cheating should be understood in this way, as a form of negotiation (Jansen 2008). More than a mere form of assistance, generosity, necessity or life-saving intervention, aid is a resource and forms the backbone or at least the stimulus for aid-based or humanitarian economies, which have a number of idiosyncratic characteristics. One of those characteristics is that aid is delivered, in the eyes of refugees, by a large powerful international conglomerate with indefinite wealth. It is here where Kibreab's (2004) comparison to welfare cheating in the west, which depicts refugees as utilizing agents, becomes relevant. The aid regime is amorphous and manipulating it is not necessarily perceived in a moral context, and in that sense, is not considered wrongdoing *per se*. Comparable to Kumsa's (2006) view of refugee cheating as a form of entrepreneurship, cheating a technique that, it should be emphasized, is very much socially embedded. As Kibreab observed in refugee camps in Somalia:

Members of the group had to be able to trust and co-operate with each other before they could engage in any concerted activities of deceit. Without this, they would not have been able to cheat powerful organizations such as the UNHCR and NGOs which in comparison to the refugees had massive resources at their disposal. (Kibreab 2004: 12)

In response to Kibreab's unusual attention for refugees as cheats, Harrell-Bond notes that: "the ubiquitous welfare cheating of the aid regime that occurs in refugee camps could perhaps be interpreted as evidence of the re-development of "solidarity" among these populations" (Harrell-Bond 2004: 28). This is particularly interesting when studying protractedness as it exists in Kakuma, in relation to the end of the emergency or crisis phase of refugee hosting. During the fieldwork, I often thought about a statement made by Hyndman already quoted in chapter one, namely that "populations that make up refugee camps are not 'communities,' they are made up of groups of individuals which are hierarchically positioned and partitioned" (2000: 138-147). The more I learned about the camp, the less I agreed with her. Similarly, the almost paradigmatic notion of the necessity to "re-develop solidarity" that Harrell-Bond seems to imply adds to an undertone of the

camp being an anti-social environment. Yes, there was opportunism and sheer power politics centered on individual gain among the refugees, but there was also social inclusion and refugees helped each other all the time. I cannot see why this would not have been the case from the very beginning of the camp's existence, even if it might have taken place in different constellations or smaller groups based on ethnicity, neighborhood, or family. Then, when the camp gradually moves out of crisis mode, solidarity may grow with it. The fact that people collaborated instead of selling each other out or giving each other away suggests solidarity too. The more the camp moved out of crisis mode, the more development created livelihoods in a variety of ways, and these contributed to a sense of community, although different people might identify with different communities, and various communities can be said to coexist.

The element of fraud or cheating is thus an integral part of the refugee environment (Crisp 2002: 17). Just as corruption among NGOs, the government or the UN is nothing exceptional in the refugee environment, neither is refugee cheating. I agree with Nuiten and Anders when they write that “what is defined as corrupt according to one legal order conforms to another set of rules. Practices are never per definition corrupt, they are labeled as corrupt by reference to a set of legal or other norms that draw a boundary between conformity and transgression” (Nuiten and Anders 2007: 13).

Refugee cheating can take place in a number of ways, the most common being the misrepresentation of family composition by adding non-existent or temporarily “borrowed” children, or by changing or claiming a different nationality or ethnicity to be considered a member of a target group for a specific humanitarian program. Kibreab (2004) names different strategies that refugees employ to maximize benefits from UNHCR and other agencies:

Collusion with host government officials; inflating numerical sizes of families for purposes of registration; withholding of information on deaths; registration in different sites in order to obtain multiple ration cards; double or even triple registration; splitting of families between different camps; and exhibition of physical helplessness in the presence of aid givers (Kibreab 2004: 1).

A much-used technique was refugee recycling, which means re-registering as refugee to receive a second ration card. Another but a less researched form of refugee cheating is the use of narratives and constructions of insecurity to claim vulnerability in the camp setting. This is where the state of exception introduced in chapter two becomes relevant, for refugees are well aware of the near sovereignty of the agencies in camp management, and are also knowledgeable of the policy categories of vulnerability that agencies apply. This

means that the refugees have a great deal of power to intervene on their own behalf, after agencies advocating norms and setting expectations (i.e. human rights, child rights, women rights) for security in the camp. Feigning insecurity, in its most extreme form by “creating” sexual, gender or ethnic violence or child abuse to become eligible to specific aid programs or resettlement, is like striking the refugee regime at its very core. As these strategies are mostly tied to resettlement opportunities, I will come back to this topic in the next chapter. At this point, I only want to remark that these practices, too, should be understood as livelihood strategies in the specific economic environment of the refugee camp.

### **Socio-economic stratification in Kakuma**

Agier distinguishes between four levels of social stratification in the Dadaab camps: a small group of Somali “notables”; “voluntary community workers”; a group of small traders, occasional craftsmen and unofficial employees; and lastly, recipients of basic minimum aid (food, healthcare, shelter, firewood, water) (Agier 2002: 331-2). I found these categories too narrow to describe the realities in Kakuma. This may be because he and I focused on different camps, or perhaps the five-year difference between Agier’s research and my own has led to the development of some essential changes, but these four categories fail to consider a number of other relevant socio-economic positions in the camp setting. For instance, people who receive remittances from abroad on a regular basis, as well as those who live in the camps but are excluded from basic minimum aid, are not represented in this classification. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis should also include forms of non-monetary asset transfer, such as educational opportunities or trainings beneficial to livelihood creation. I have identified the following livelihood categories in the camp:

**Figure 10: Livelihood categories in Kakuma refugee camp**

<b>Businesspeople</b>	Independent business owners of shops, restaurants and bars, those engaged in trade activities or services requiring some degree of material organization and investment.
<b>Incentive workers</b>	“Civil servants” of the aid regime; covering a wide range of types of work as well income scales and secondary benefits.
<b>Employees</b>	Unregulated private sector employment, albeit of a more or less regular nature: waiters, shop workers, tailors, mechanics, <i>bodaboda</i> drivers, cleaners, cooks, etc.
<b>Remittance receivers</b>	People who receive remittances from abroad from relatives, husbands or wives, friends, or other through networks.
<b>Shifters</b>	People who secure an income or other opportunities from Kenyan cities such as Nairobi or Nakuru, who partly shift between their homelands, other locations in Kenya and the camp, in varying family compositions.
<b>The poor</b>	Refugees whose only source of income is aid handouts, and who constitute a type of poor “underclass,” analogous to the “urban poor.” Trading rations or other assets may be way for this group to gain limited amounts of cash on an irregular basis.
<b>Entrepreneurs</b>	Occasional craftsmen and women who run small home-based grocery shops or prepare food for road-side tuck shops, or who are engaged in weavery, cloth making, stamp making, and so on.
<b>Refugee “elites”</b>	People who are able to obtain assets and cash from other sources due to their status or position of power in the camp; many of whom were already elites in their home countries; while others have positions in the camp in the (unpaid) refugee administration system that allow them certain privileges.
<b>Hustlers, crooks and petty thieves</b>	People surviving on small criminal activity such as theft, stealing, drug trading and gambling schemes.
<b>The dependants</b>	Family members and offspring in the camp that benefit from the resources of their providers. This means that it is important to focus on households, or even extended households, and not only on individuals.
<b>The targeted</b>	People who are able to make use of schemes, funding and other arrangements designated specifically for them on the basis of vulnerability or another social label, such as the handicapped, illiterate women, the elderly, those who become eligible for micro-credit after completing vocational training programs, the insecure who are given special protection arrangements, or those who are eligible for scholarships.
<b>The unrecognized</b>	People who are unrecognized in the camp, whose refugee status is denied and are excluded from basic minimum aid. They have the status of <i>sans-papiers</i> or illegal residents in the camp.

The categories overlap and cut across the many layers of the informal economy (or the visible and the invisible economy), various actors (refugees, Turkanas and Kenyans from elsewhere) and miscellaneous social networks (ethnic groups, families, camp communities or neighbors and so on). Levels of income are highly diverse and sometimes fluctuating, just as opportunities are subject to conjuncture. Employment itself is characterized by a high rate of turnover due to its unregulated nature in the camp, which leads to swift firing of staff, but also because of the on-going resettlement processes and active recruitment of

camp employees for jobs in Sudan, continuously leaving gaps in the labor market that need to be filled.

The result is the development of a substantially differentiated economy. Aid resources gain an economic life of their own that extends far beyond the initial gift transaction. One who has an incentive job with an agency receives training and gains experience, gets a promotion, a job offer with another NGO, or resettlement partly on account of this human capital, leaving behind a space for someone else in the incentive scheme. The resettled refugee, however, does not necessarily become altogether removed from the categories of the camp economy. He/she may now start sending remittances to kin in the camp, leave behind a business or other goods, or start supporting others' claims for family reunification in a non-monetary way. These others, in turn, are also dependent on the financial situation of the receiving family with whom they are to be (re)united. These manifold overlaps and the vast diversity of actors and networks are of great importance in understanding the camp economy.

Some incentive workers become businessmen after investing the earnings of their work. I interviewed incentive staff who simultaneously owned video shops, stores and/or bars and *hotellis*, or sometimes a combination of these. In this way, they became employers. For instance, a Rwandese I knew worked as a schoolmaster at one of the secondary schools in the camp. He made an average of 4,800 KES per month, in addition to which he received a bicycle, and while working, tea and lunch. He lived outside of the camp, due to complex matters of insecurity he experienced in different communities in the camp in which he lived before. He rented a house in a neighboring compound of the old Kenyan Forestry Department.

This Rwandese was an interesting example of how small initiatives merged the aid economy and the wider camp economy. His incentive salary and bicycle were forms of direct aid input. He used these to invest in other income generating activities. He rented out his bicycle to a *bodaboda*-boy for 100 KES a day. The *bodaboda*-boy (until he ransacked the bike) brought the owner approximately 3,000 KES a month as income on top of his incentive salary. But the boy had an income too; on average, *bodaboda* drivers earned around 300 KES a day. The Rwandese began to invest in meat. He bought a goat once every few days on the market, had it butchered, and hired a young boy to sell it as *brochettes* in the *hoteli* of a befriended bar owner in the Rwandan community – his “original” community. Consequently, the boy had a job, a Turkana sold a goat, and the bar got a share of the profit. The Rwandese mostly ate in restaurants in the camp, thereby injecting cash into the camp economy in this way too. He had a houseboy who he paid some money to bring water to his house so that he would not have to fetch it himself or wait in line at the water tap, and sometimes, he sold his food rations to others.

The incentive salary of the Rwandese was an input to a long chain of micro-enterprises and income-generating opportunities for others, independent of agency or formal recognition. They may have been small in scale, and did not involve large amounts of money, but they are nonetheless evidence of an economy. Moreover, in the camp environment, relatively small amounts of cash went a very long way. To indicate the difference in the value of money inside and outside the camp, in the Guesthouse where I stayed, the manager (who received the highest salary) was paid 3,000 KES a month. This is comparable to the salary of a primary school teacher in the camp. The second best paid staff member received 2,700 KES a month, for which he worked seven days a week and thirty days a month. He slept outside on the floor and received tea in the morning and a simple meal in the evening. Others, sliding down the scale of responsibility, made less. On the other hand, one of my informants from the camp worked in a *boteli* earning 3,000 KES a month. Before that, he had worked at a restaurant where he made 1,000 KES plus daily food, but all this was earned on top of his refugee handouts, which he was able to sell. He later became a primary school teacher, earning 3,000 KES a month, plus a meal and privileges such as a bicycle and access to the compounds.

Apart from people who generate resources, the categories above also represent social strata within the refugee community. Businessmen are able to provide loans to others in the community, community leaders have the power to redistribute houses or plots for cash, and this trickles all the way down to the man who distributes firewood, and takes a large share himself for resale. In general, these networks are centered on ethnic configurations, families, clans or neighborhoods. As the incident of the Ethiopian strike in the previous chapter showed, businesses and economic activity are often closely linked to the communities of the owner(s), or to the place where the business is located.

## **Entrepreneurship**

An UNHCR/ILO report lists income generating activities in Kakuma as identified by Sudanese community leaders (UNHCR/ILO 2005: 15): sale of casual labor; *bodaboda* bicycle riding; the brewing and sale of alcohol and sale; tuck shops and butcheries. To say that this is an incomplete listing of income generation would be an understatement. The list concentrates only on small entrepreneurial activity. Businesses in the camp represent a wide variety of visible and invisible activities. Although it is debatable where this category ends, I suggest that it requires some form of material organization (buildings / machines & tools / shops, etc) in combination with the recruitment of employees (or in case of a family-run business, the coordination of activities). Another category concerns small

income generating activities, comprised partly of business, partly of petty trade, and partly of hustling. I therefore distinguish between business as a visible, public organization with assets, space, and employees, and other types of small-scale entrepreneurial activities.

Businesses range from restaurants and bars with pool tables and satellite TVs, to the *Sarafina* supermarket, which sells virtually everything (electric fans, batteries, mobile phones, jewelries, bicycles, kitchen and household utensils, suitcases, medicines, etc.). There were butcheries and groceries, small kiosks and stands scattered around the camp at various locations. There were shops selling shoes, new and used clothes a wide variety of household items. There was also an entire subsector of beauty and cosmetic parlors and barbershops.

Within the communities are other forms of entrepreneurship and income generating activities that are not bound to shops or location *per se*, and are more independent and often invisible or home-based. These include stamp making, catering, painter, photography/filmmaking (an interesting business because many people who were resettled took movies with them, depicting their life in the camp, greetings from their friends and relatives and so on), writing, handicrafts, traditional medicine, brewing and sale of alcohol, and the trade in marihuana and (this was rumored, but I have not seen it myself) cocaine and heroin.

A typical Kakuma business was a videoshop. One Equatorian woman owned a video shop since 2003, which she started with a one-time financial injection from her brother in Nairobi. She rents the hall from somebody whose business in the same location was failing, as well as a video shop with a satellite TV. She pays 3,000 KES rent per month. In addition, she pays 3,000 KES for electricity from a generator. She has five children and takes care of four orphaned relatives. The children, together with a few members of her community, assist her with the running of the video shop. Another Ethiopian informant, Fidel, used to work for Araris, the owner of one of the restaurants in the Ethiopian community. In 2006, he was able to buy his own plot in the camp for 32,000 KES and opened a *hoteli*, a tea and coffee house that served Ethiopian *injera* and rice dishes and provided satellite TV. He borrowed money from Araris to start up the business. Fidel was able to hire employees, most of whom were Ethiopians and friends who helped out because they had nothing to do, but also a few Turkana boys. He bought products from the Turkana. Both Fidel and Araris were Amharics, and it was on the basis of this ethnic relation that Fidel was able to get the loan. In other instances, the Ethiopian Orthodox church in the camp provided credit to people in the Ethiopian community, loans and other types of assistance.



Interestingly, these jobs provided other forms of livelihoods as well. An Ethiopian student worked six days per week in a restaurant, aside from which he was able to follow an English language course. He did not make a lot of money, but he received three meals a day, drinks, and was not “pushing time” – the term that people used to refer to being idle. A Ugandan former restaurant employee told me about the time he used to work in one of the restaurants in the camp. He complained about the low pay. He received 1,000 shillings per month, but this included food and drinks. The same held for many incentive job holders, but even for school going people, as people with jobs either in the private sector or with the agencies also typically received secondary benefits.

Aside from these examples, there were also many small and low-paying activities that people pursued that also contributed to the economy of the camp. One man explained that after he just arrived, before he had a job he traded very small bags of flour, sugar and tea. He sold part of his ration and used the money to buy packs of sugar, flour and tea in Zone Five, where products were cheap. He repacked these into very small portions, and sold them on the other end of the camp, in Kakuma Three and Four. In this way he made a small profit, and so he could supplement the basic aid items he received with other goods like toothpaste and clothing. Another man traded in plastic bags, which he found in the camp, cleaned and then tried to resell. Still others were selling small perfumes, items of clothing, food and other items, which they did by walking all over the camp and town with their merchandise. Even though the activities in these examples were only able to generate a very small income, according to the narrators, it was an income nonetheless.

In some cases businesses in the camp were started by Kenyans. The cyber café in the Somali community was started by a Kenyan woman I met a couple of times, because during her trips to the camp, she would spend the night in the guesthouse where I lived. She had invested in her business together with some Somalis who managed the place. This was officially illegal, since Kenyans were not allowed to do business in the camp, but it was like a public secret. Moreover, the former Chief of Police himself had invested in a generator to supply the Ethiopian market with electricity for a fee per subscriber. In this way, the formal economy also entered the refugee camp. For instance, the Coca Cola Company maintained around 70 refrigerators in the camp that were filled with its produce. According to a Coca Cola representative, the company delivered 4,200 crates of soda to wholesalers in town on a monthly basis. From town, it was distributed in the camp.

UNHCR and the agencies also stimulated entrepreneurship by hiring people for small jobs on occasion. For example, they hired artists and painters from the camp to make the many billboards and signs. I knew two of them, one Ethiopian and one Congolese. The Ethiopian had almost single-handedly filled the art gallery in Zone Five near the LWF compound, where art was on sale for visitors as a way of raising funds for UNHCR. One

day, I met him when he was just returning from the UNHCR compound, where he had been paid 10,000 KES (approximately 100 Euro) for a painting.

Franco's restaurant in the Ethiopian community, which had a very good reputation among refugees and aid workers alike, managed to open a second restaurant inside the IOM compound in the camp in Kakuma Three, for its employees, and visitors. Similarly, UNHCR and other NGOs sometimes hired their microcredit "companies" for services such as catering, for instance. A Congolese women's catering group was hired to cook for UNHCR on a regular basis. Instead of buying soap, LWF supported a factory inside the camp to produce soap bars to distribute (which led some people to complain because the soap was apparently of inferior quality, and many people bought soap on the market).

Another linkage with the formal economy outside of the camp concerned the recruitment of incentive workers. A doctor who worked for IRC explained that among incentive staff, there was a turnover of 30-40 per cent. Incentive workers kept leaving, but the total number of incentive workers remained more or less constant. According to the doctor, many people did not return from home leave, indicating that perhaps they had found another job, while others went for resettlement. Many incentive workers were recruited for work with another NGO in Sudan or elsewhere. He received requests for employees from other NGOs on a daily basis, and sometimes NGOs recruited people in the camp directly from their communities, bypassing the refugee regime altogether. Later in 2006 when repatriation was nigh, UNHCR voiced the idea of trying to link vacancies among the humanitarian community in South Sudan to Kakuma. I will come back to this in chapter six.

## **Safety nets**

Refugees who had no additional income mostly relied on others. Most people were part of families, clans or tribal units, and as such belonged to groups that could assist and functioned like a type of safety net. Abdi is one such example. He came from Mogadishu in the early 1990s, having spent time in different refugee camps along the Kenyan coast before these were closed and he was ultimately relocated to Kakuma in 1997. He used to be an athlete, and still was. His specialty was the 100-meter sprint. He used to participate in a sports program organized in Kakuma by the Dutch Olympic Committee (NOC-NSF) in the late 1990s. He was part of a pool that competed to become part of a select group of refugee athletes who would be trained at the Kenyan marathon center at Iten, near Eldoret, where many of the world's top-runners train and come from. He did not make it,

however, and became a little resentful about it, claiming unjust treatment and corruption. It was indeed a bitter rejection for Abdi. One time when we were walking in the Ethiopian community, we ran into an Ethiopian refugee who had been part of the same sports program, and who Abdi still knew. This man, however, had been selected and when we saw him, was only visiting the camp. He now lived in Iten and traveled the world, competing in running contests around the globe. Abdi's house was demolished due to neglect and he stayed with friends all over the camp, some days here, some days there, living from "friend to friend," he said. They fed him, and at times, he also slept sometimes in the Mosque that he used to attend, until a sheikh thought it was inappropriate and sent him away.

Abdi did not have work, although just before my fieldwork ended, he had begun training, for a fee, a Kenyan-Somali wholesale owner from Kakuma town who wanted to lose weight. Every morning, Abdi trained in the empty riverbed of *Tarach* or elsewhere in the camp, on the sports grounds calculating the distance by running the edges of the football fields, keeping up his condition. Abdi had difficulties, but he slept, he ate and he drank. Sometimes, he even sometimes got hold of a portion of *Miraa* (qat), which he chewed in the night. This, too, was a part of the economy of Kakuma – Abdi's friends and his network that was able to support him. He still knew a lot of people from the camps at the coast, and was also acquainted with the leaders of the overall Somali refugee administration.

I knew some others in comparable situations. One was left by his family, which went to the US during the Somali Bantu resettlement scheme, while IOM declared him a fraud. His family did not wish to start the whole process again and went anyway, leaving him alone and vulnerable, as these support networks were very important. But even he, jobless and still in school, was included in a group of youth who had jobs in the calling centers of the Somali community in Zone Five and helped take care of him.

"This camp is only good for meditation," said a Congolese from Lubumbashi. He was a rapper who sometimes performed in the camp and wrote his own poetry and lyrics for his music. He arrived in Kakuma not long ago with his cousin-brother who is his neighbor in Kakuma Four. They both had no income but their neighbor, who was a Congolese from a different tribe, worked with LWF. They shared food and ate together, and the neighbor sometimes gave 500 KES for necessities such as clothing or toothpaste, which were not provided by the aid regime. Because they had no jobs or additional income, both brothers were completely dependent on assistance, but they managed to get by with the help of their neighbor. I met many people who were included in support systems like this, especially in the beginning of their stay in the camp when they were

alone as new arrivals, but also after losing their house, job, or family, in one way or another by friends, relatives, tribes-mates or the churches or the mosques.

One Ethiopian came to Kakuma in 2004 as a student from Addis Ababa. Although it was not a mass influx, from 2004 until I left in 2006, young educated Ethiopians, some of them politically engaged, came to the camp as a result of fear of persecution following a series of student riots. We often went for a game of pool in the bar of a friend of his, where he also worked. This Ethiopian had been in Kakuma for less than a year when he left for Nairobi, where he had some contacts and stayed somewhere in Eastleigh. Many people left for Nairobi occasionally, and would spend varying lengths of time in the Estates of Eastleigh, Zimmerman, Donholm, or Kawangware. Another Ethiopian I knew went to Nairobi for a break every now and then, and after a while he moved there. As he and others like him would tell me, to survive in the city illegally they needed friends or relatives with some money and a place to stay.

### **Education, microcredit and livelihoods**

As I wrote earlier, citing Horst, refugees invested in education and training as a livelihood strategy. Education was linked to microcredit and other secondary benefits. The most elaborate vocational training programs in the camp were organized by Don Bosco. There were four vocational training centers in the camp, which opened in 1993, 1997, 2000 and 2005 respectively, the largest one was located near Napata secondary school in Kakuma One. It was situated on a large school ground dotted with decorated buildings, workshop areas and a beautiful flower garden. Don Bosco offered courses (which they referred to as “formalized informal education”) in carpentry, masonry, welding, motor vehicle repair, plumbing, computer (advanced desk top publishing), electronics, agriculture, tailoring and dressmaking, as well as secretarial and typing courses. Most courses lasted one year, and some had an advanced follow up studies for an additional six or twelve months.

On average, the school had between 700 and 800 students per year (in 2006 there were 760 students, of which 25.7 per cent were women.) The courses were also open for Turkana.<sup>7</sup> A number of other NGOs in the camp also offered vocational training. LWF did tailoring specifically for women with children and provided day-care and meals. IRC offered training for approximately 80 women a year, teaching tailoring, typing, and dressmaking. IRC had a proposal to start up training with speech recognition software for

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<sup>7</sup> Interview, Program Manager Don Bosco, Kakuma: September 7, 2006.

the blind and handicapped, although they already taught Braille reading and typing for the blind in the “Multi-purpose center” in Zone Five in Kakuma One.

Attached to Don Bosco’s trainings were microcredit schemes funded by Caritas and UNHCR. These were exclusively accessible to people who had followed one of the courses given by Don Bosco. The loans ranged between 20,000 and 25,000 KES, which was roughly the equivalent of a sewing machine at most. UNHCR ran a microcredit scheme open to small groups of refugees with amounts ranging between 5,000 and 80,000 KES. In 2002 there were 375 groups benefitting from this scheme, each consisting of between three and five people. The scheme included a system whereby the communities of the borrowers were involved in the promise of debt servicing. In this way, the community became responsible when one of “their members” was unable to repay, and the refugee administration would be addressed accordingly. For the same reason, Turkanas were eventually excluded from the program, as they repeatedly failed to repay, and unlike the community structures in the camp, in town and beyond there were no communal administrations that could account for these loans.

Other NGOs recruited incentive staff from among the alumni of these courses; in the recent past, World Vision and the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) had recruited 55 and 25 people respectively for work in Sudan. Private microcredit alternatives were also organized in the camp. Among the Somali community in Zone Five, there were five women groups supported by the businessmen from the community. When one group had repaid their loans, another would become eligible for another credit opportunity. Among the Ethiopians similar schemes operated.

Private schools were another feature of the camp in which business and education came together. A primary school teacher with one of the refugee schools ran a private language school in the afternoons in the Ethiopian community. He had asked me before to assist him in his English class with a pronunciation lesson. I had been teaching about geography and Dutch land reclamation in a form four class in Bor Town Secondary school, so these invitations were not unfamiliar. On the day of the lesson, we entered a small building that looked like a remodeled refugee house. Inside was a classroom with tables and chairs, and maps on the wall. Ten students were waiting. Except for one Eritrean, they were all Ethiopian. In the afternoons, the camp schools were closed, which meant that children were free to attend additional education. The teacher explained that he and the parents of the children did not find the schools in the camp or in town satisfactory, half of the students in this class attended schools in Kakuma town). This tells us something about the children’s parents’ income, for in town they had to pay for school fees and uniforms, while in the camp education was free. The teacher had the children

recite their English, and corrected them when necessary. Each of the students brought him a small financial contribution, which rendered his school into a business.

It is hard to assess where business starts and socially motivated initiative begins. For instance, there were many Madrassas/*Dugsi* (Koranic schools) in the camp. These schools were considered very important in the social and religious upbringing of children in the camp. They were located in non-descript houses, and largely went unrecognized. I visited another private project in the Nuer community, where the members had raised money to hire a professional Kenyan teacher, who already worked for LWF, to teach English to uneducated mothers. The school was made to fit their specific needs and circumstances that made it difficult for these women to attend more formal education in the camp. Here, the women were allowed to bring their young children, and could remain in class while breast-feeding their babies.

What matters is that these schools were largely invisible. Schools had no signs and no advertisements, and were owned privately or by communities, similar to some of the religious organizations. Although financial gain might have been minimal in some respects, as I explained earlier, in the camp economy, small amounts of money could mean a lot. More importantly, the existence of these initiatives indicates the desire and demand for education, which was not only visible in the domain of formal education, but in this way, also in the informal. The popularity of education was so high that demand exceeded supply. The Advanced English Language Program (KAELP) of Windle Trust was one of the most popular courses, in part because candidates from this group were selected for the WUSC scholarships in Canada. Previous graduates started the Shakespeare Learning Center, designed for people who were not qualified for KAELP, or who were not admitted because of over-application. The learning center was supported by Windle Trust and had a building in Zone Five. Independently from the agencies, a Sudanese group started the Kongor Student's Association, which assisted and provided extra educational support for its members. Several others started private computer classes in the camp, in which they taught the basics of word, excel, internet and desktop publishing.

### **The camp as a cosmopolitan place**

On June 5, 2005, a ceremony was held at *Napata Grounds* in celebration of the UN's World Environment Day. The theme of the day was "Green cities, plan for the planet." The UNHCR Head of Sub-Office said in his speech that there was only one city in Kakuma, which was Kakuma One. He said that he wanted 60 per cent of the people in

Kakuma One to be relocated to Kakuma Two, Three and Four, because Kakuma One was overly congested. Too many people continued to move to Kakuma One, resulting in overcrowding, putting a strain on public amenities such as schools and water, and increasing the prevalence of health hazards like cholera, to which a recent outbreak testified. In Kakuma Two, Three and Four, there was better infrastructure for fewer people. The speech showed the extent of migration within the confines of the camp. Many people preferred to stay in Kakuma One, contravening the planning of UNHCR, which preferred refugees to remain in their allocated plots. Such movements, therefore, were the result of refugees' own preferences and initiatives to re-order UNHCR's initial settlement designs.

UNHCR's attempts to control the crowding of Kakuma One came in the form of its refusal to allocate new plots to rebuild refugee houses after destruction by flood or storm in places other than Kakuma Three or Four. If refugees did not want to move to these locations, they would not get any assistance from the agencies to rebuild their houses and would have to negotiate their access to a new plot from their own or other communities. Two Congolese I knew were able to buy plots from the Somali and Ethiopian community to rebuild their houses after these were "eaten" by the flooding of river *Tarach* in 2005, as it swallowed parts of the camp every year. Ordinarily, they would have received a new plot and house from UNHCR close to their previous location, but due to the decongestion program they were given new plots in Kakuma Four. They refused to go there, and so, they constructed new houses, which they designed according to their own wishes – with a separate kitchen and bathroom – using their own money for materials and hiring Turkana to do the construction. Another Congolese whose house was destroyed started renting a place in Kakuma town. Similarly, some new arrivals that were given plots, materials and assistance in Kakuma Three or Four, knew how to find their way into the center by using their ethnic or family networks, financial resources, or by negotiating access with other communities (rental houses in the Ethiopian community were priced between 500 to 1,000 KES per month, and could be shared).

The inner migration that took place in Kakuma was problematic for the governing of the camp, but it was also an expression of ordering and place making, in which a center and periphery were (re)defined. Zone Five in Kakuma One had the most elaborate markets and was located closest to the agency compounds, the hospital, the police and town. This was where the liveliest street scenes emerged, hosting bars, restaurants and other places of entertainment, supplemented by more fundamental services such as shops and grocery stores, as well as employment opportunities. Moreover, because it had more to offer and was close to town, Kakuma One was better protected than other parts of the camp. The Kakuma Two market was considered second best.

In a modest way, the camp was a cosmopolitan place in which people from various cultures and countries influenced each other directly and indirectly, as people became exposed to each other's backgrounds. This applied to different people in different ways, however. For Sudanese Nuer or Dinka from the "bush," the camp represented a different environment than for Congolese from the city of Bukavu or Rwandese from the capital Kigali. In general, the Congolese, the Rwandese and Burundians, the Ethiopians, and the Bantu-Ugandan population in the camp had different backgrounds than most Sudanese and Somalis. These differences were also represented in entrepreneurship. The *posho* mills, electrified grinding mills to grind maize, for instance, were all operated and owned by Burundians and Rwandese. Shoe shops and barbershops, in a similar vein, were the domain of Congolese, Burundian and Rwandese merchants. The success of the Ethiopian and Somali markets respectively had a lot to do with their vendors' and organizers' backgrounds and experiences in the cities and towns in their respective home countries. In these entrepreneurial activities, the diversification of labor took its place in the cosmopolitanism of the camp.

The vast majority of the refugee population in the camp was of pastoralist origin, in 2005 constituting 75% of the total (UNHCR/ILO 2005: 9). For the majority of Dinka Bahr-al Ghazal and Dinka Bor clans in the camp, their home towns have a far lower concentration of facilities than Kakuma. This is not only due to a combination of war and chronic underdevelopment, but also simply the result of the pastoralist livelihoods of the Dinka. Somali and Sudanese pastoralists found(ed) a camp where educational, health and other facilities developed over time, and where the Francophones from the Great Lakes and urban Somali and Ethiopian communities acted as sort of development agents in bringing alternative modes of livelihood generation to the camp, setting in motion processes of social change. People from Mogadishu or Hargeisa, or from Kigali, Addis Ababa, Bujumbura or Kampala, carried with them skills and social capital that were distinct from those of the main pastoralist groups, and the latter became exposed to the former.

The coming together of all these people expressed itself in little things: food, clothing, music and religion. This was visible in the public spaces in the camp, such as the bars and video shops, but also in the pool halls and on sports fields, which were like cosmopolitan spaces, mostly situated in Kakuma One, Zone Five and Kakuma Two market. Many of the bars had satellite TVs showing sports, news and movies and music programs. Different *hotelis* were known for airing CNN, BBC, or Al Jazeera news, and attracted clientele accordingly. This was a form of ordering in itself, in that people knew where to go for which channel. Some had plastic or wooden chairs and tables, others had benches built from mud and concrete. There were two huge Italian billiard tables (they were



referred to as “Carambole”) that somehow made their way into northern Kenya. The Ethiopians brought a complete library to the camp, which was housed in a building with a garden with some statues and art, and where people from every nationality were allowed to study and read beneath the trees.

A Somali girl wrote something in her student’s composition, in Palotaka primary school in the camp, that I want to add in this section because of the argument above about the coming together of the pastoralist background of most refugees, and the reputation of the camp that spread in the region (admittedly, I also add it for her nice prose).

*In Northern Kenya, there is a camp called refugee*

It was three years back in the month of July when my uncle organized my process to Kakuma, Kenya. My uncle was looking for a good place so that he may keep me there for study and for my life. We heard that Kakuma is a very good place for dwelling. Food is distributed after fifteen days and the things they give the people include wheat flour, maize, beans, oil, fish, meat and vegetables. Salt is also given and the education is 100 per cent. They say the only problem is the climate but my uncle said, “one finger cannot kill a louse.” Therefore, on hearing all those advantages, my uncle made a booking. He told me to get prepared for a journey. I went to bed as usual. How long could I sleep? Questions were flowing in my mind as water in River Tana.

Within a couple of hours, the white and black dotted cock gave ruffles of wings and crowed several times. Birds were singing joyfully as if they were welcoming the New Year day. I woke up at dawn and visited the frog’s kingdom and dressed myself. I took the toothbrush and brushed my brown teeth, which resemble my grandmother’s yard broom. Within a fraction of a second, I found my mother had cooked some food and ate it hurriedly as a hungry hyena who wants to go to Mombasa for hunting. Suddenly, the airplane arrived and landed down. The pilot called me into the plane and put on the engine and within the tinkling of an eye, the plane flew up into the sky. It took us two and a half hours to reach Loki.

As soon as I arrived I spent two days and came to Kakuma. I was given a card and went to distribution center to get food. I was well pleased with the news that I felt happy like a king. On doing that I found people lining up for food, beans, salt and even firewood. In fact, I realized that people had lied to my uncle that life in Kakuma is good. I found an organization (UNHCR). It is an organization which helps the head not to pass away but it does not give enough to grow buttocks. There is no security in Kakuma. People are being killed by Turkanas innocently like animals. The wise men were not wrong to say that a traveler is a pauper even though he may be a king.

The narration of deception and disappointment is striking, but it also is also a sign of a camp with a reputation for its level of organization and development. Moreover, the girl who is sent by plane from Somalia is arguably not from a very poor background. As

mentioned earlier, the camp hosted a wide variety of people with various different backgrounds, and although many were pastoralists, others came from cities. As such, the camp is a cosmopolitan place to some, but not to others. Some people preferred or remained isolated and confined to their own group or community to a large extent, and in this way remained relatively unexposed to the multicultural and cosmopolitan change in the camp. Girls who were pulled out of school for instance were less exposed to change than those who were not. Still, going to the markets or moving through the camp meant exposure, at the very least, to visual signs of life other than one's own. In this sense, cosmopolitanism is one of the distinctive urban features of this accidental city, as is the fact that, as in other cities, people are exposed to its multitude of representations in a variety of ways, and as such can experience the camp very differently.

On another note, a Sudanese Dinka told me about one of his uncles who was with SPLA/M and went to Japan. There, he was given musical equipment, such as electric guitars, bass guitars and drum kits, to provide to youth centers in South Sudan. So he came back with the equipment to Sudan, but found no viable way of dispersing it. He then brought the material to Kakuma, with the message "there are no very clever youth in Sudan, I'll give this to Kakuma, there are clever youth there." Although I can't verify the truth factor of this narration – for instance, I did not come across this specific equipment, nor did I hear this story from others – it does underline a message that I found among many people, namely, that Kakuma is more than just a desolate temporary waiting place. The following section presents further evidence of this.

### **Emerging civic organization**

The camp grew to accommodate plans for a workers union. The union is an interesting case, because it highlights the way in which refugees claimed political space. The case is an example of the camp as an emerging economy and a cosmopolitan place derived partly from that economy.

The Refugee Aid Workers Union of Kakuma (RAWUK) was established as an organization claiming workers' rights for refugees. Although the rationale behind the "incentive" in "incentive salaries" is clear, it is understood by many refugees as a *de facto* underpinning of their extraordinary status, which somehow clashed with the time many of them had already stayed in exile. Refugees have been working on equal footing – in their words – with Kenyan staff in schools, but with their incentive salaries were paid a great deal less. The notion of an incentive salary as a temporary measure was also hard to

accept when the temporary stretches to encompass years on end. Hence, RAWUK sought to make workers out of the incentive workers.

The steering group (soon to be the board of RAWUK) used to meet in Bole Hotel, on the Ethiopian Market, opposite of the Ethiopian administration blocks and the library. This restaurant drew a lot of “politicos” who spent time there after work, watching BBC world and CNN, playing chess, reading, and talking over tea or coffee. The four men who started the initiative were all teachers and involved in the refugee administrations of their respective communities: two Ugandans, one Sudanese, and one Ethiopian. In secret, they had been planning the union, organizing members and writing statutes, approaching sponsors and exploring legal requirements to become formalized over time

RAWUK’s organizers had counterparts in the Dadaab camps, who were also organizing themselves. The significance of the K in RAWUK was therefore changed from Kakuma to Kenya. This was a requirement for the Kenyan Ministry for allowing registration under Kenyan law, and that was what the organizers wanted – to be a union recognized (and protected) by the Kenyan government, thereby circumventing UNHCR. The last time I spoke to the organizers, they had “offices” covering the whole camp and over 120 paying members, but they were still underground. They had already made a trip to Nairobi and were planning a second one, in which they wanted to try and contact international and local NGOs to look for funding and to meet with the Ministry. They had included a woman in the board and finished the statutes, of which they gave me a copy. RAWUK was nothing less than a democratic civil society movement, but it existed in an environment that stimulated democracy and participation in words, but in practice limited civic initiative on a political level. This is why they thought they had to keep the initiative underground and secretive, until the registration was complete, thereby legitimizing its existence under Kenyan law, so that UNHCR could not forbid it.<sup>8</sup>

RAWUK was an initiative that brought politics into the unfolding polis. A workers’ union in this context represents change in the environs of a camp deemed temporary. The initial aim was to create a civic-political body that could lobby and negotiate for better working conditions for incentive workers and in its conception, therefore somehow opportunistic. But in a more long-term perspective, the founders thought that once the system was in place and accepted by UNHCR and the agencies, for better or for worse, the organization could be used to address wider issues such as water and food scarcity and other general governance issues in the camp, benefiting a broader audience than the incentive workers

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<sup>8</sup> There have been various refugee initiatives that were banned or severely hindered by UNHCR. Regardless of UNHCR’s motives for doing so (for instance, a radio station was forbidden because of fear of inciting hatred among the refugees), which may be realistic, refugees knew which activities required a sensitive approach.

alone. It would become a platform through which people could participate, in democratic tradition, in ways extending to forms of civil disobedience, for example through strikes, in the governing of the camp.

In the opinion of RAWUK's board members, the blueprint of participation that was already present in the camp was nothing more than lip service to the agencies. Earlier expressions of participation and initiative were routinely being subjected to censorship by the UNHCR, and there is a history of initiatives that have been forbidden or banned. On several occasions in the past, democratically elected refugee leaders were rejected – one such rejection caused an earlier “Ethiopian strike” than the one I described in the previous chapter. A Somali initiative to launch a radio station was forbidden by UNHCR; the Kakuma News Bulletin was routinely subjected to censorship.<sup>9</sup> The people of RAWUK tried to circumvent this censorship by getting registered as an official union, which if they were successful, would add substantial leverage to their voice. More importantly, it was an example of claiming space to enjoy their right of political association.

The case of RAWUK can be seen as an example of organizing the camp, and represents an interesting development. First, it was multi-ethnic and multi-national both in its organization and membership. This initiative did not claim rights or improvements for the Nuer, Dinka, Ethiopians or Ugandans alone; it strived for bettering the positions of *workers* camp-wide, thereby crossing boundaries of ethnicity. Herewith, it was less concerned with gaining resettlement or benefiting the own group *per se*, than it was with improving the position of people within Kakuma, confirming their place or even their sense of belonging, even if these were temporary.

Furthermore, RAWUK depended on resources collected from the members of the union. In this sense – although funding was being sought from outside NGOs – the union was essentially independent. As with “normal” unions, members paid contribution, and a system to organize, report and account membership dues was prepared, and mentioned in the statutes. The union then was sustained by the camp economy. The organization was democratic in principle, in line with the teaching of UNHCR and the NGOs; rules and regulations formed the basis of the union and were institutionalized in its statutes. The governing body, including the Chair, was selected through periodic elections. It was intended to be sustainable when members of the board were either resettled, or returned to their home countries.

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<sup>9</sup> KANERE ([kakuma.wordpress.com](http://kakuma.wordpress.com)) is an online newspaper that saw the light at the end of 2008. It claims independence, and a status of the Kenyan government, but has run into problems with UNHCR, which seeks control over the contents of what is published.

Lastly, RAWUK claimed the right to participate in the governing of the camp; it claimed both voice and autonomy. Because of the experience with the governing bodies of Kakuma, the organization knew it had to move very sensitively, since giving real voice to the refugees regardless of the narration in funding appeals and advertisements, in reality is very limited. With this initiative, instead of revolting, RAWUK was challenging the very basic rules of refugee hosting as it exists in Kakuma and other refugee camps.

The story of RAWUK is what this research is about. The union is a product of the camp, born out of actors' behaviors, desires, capabilities, interpretations and strategies in relation to the specific space of Kakuma, its power relations, its norms and roles. The case of RAWUK is a perfect example of the emergence of an accidental economy in an entitlement arena.

### **Dropout pastoralists and the impact of the camp on town**

Refugees built lives in the camp and sought employ within its contours and the refugee hosting system. Local Turkanas and other Kenyans sought employment and livelihood opportunities in the camp economy as well. In this way, Kakuma camp as a whole became as economic asset for the local population, which also began to share in some of its cosmopolitan aspects.

In town, near the river along the highway, an Ethiopian Orthodox Church was being built. When the Ethiopians came to the camp, they constructed a large Ethiopian Church in Zone Five in Kakuma One. Slowly, Turkanas started to go there, and the Church welcomed them. The Chief of Kakuma converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and with money from the church and the help of an architect who I met regularly at Franco Hotel, construction of the church began near the bridge. It may well become the most aesthetical building in Kakuma town. More than that, the church symbolized change and the coming together of people. It raised the question however, of who was more in need of assistance, the refugees or the locals, if the former were able to "donate" a church.

The tarmac road through town, lined with shops, restaurants and wholesalers on each side, represented many lifelines over the years. This is the A1 Pan-African highway, connecting Kenya from Tanzania in the direction of Sudan, and beyond. The fuel supply for Operation Lifeline Sudan came along this road, as did Kakuma's generators and boreholes, and the relief food for both Sudan and Kakuma.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Increasingly, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, others ventured in the direction of the new frontier where business was expected to take off soon. I hitchhiked to cover the stretch between Lodwar and Kakuma, and was given a lift by two businessmen who were driving from Mombasa on the way to Sudan to inspect

Kakuma town was already a trading center – as Turkanas referred to it – before the refugees came. The mission hospital was built in 1962. Arid Zone Primary School came in 1986. In 1977, there were four shops. Approximately 10 kilometers out of Kakuma along the road to Lodwar was a small trading center called Lochoree. There were a few “permanent” shops along the road; small shacks of mud walls and corrugated iron sheets that sold little grocery items and sodas. There was a boys’ primary boarding school, which several refugees I met used to attend before schools were established in the camp. Then there were some Turkana homesteads, *tukuls* made of twigs and plastic and kraals for the cattle. According to people from town, this was what Kakuma used to look like, not long before the refugees came.

The camp itself was a resource, and as such presented opportunities for Turkanas and other Kenyans, many of whom felt drawn to it for this reason. The camp was like the urban, while the pastoralist rural landscape was provided urban migrants who were attracted to the camp as a source of food, employment and trade (Okoti, Ng’ethe et al. 2004: 87). In Turkana, the people who were drawn to the camp and (partly) gave up their pastoralist lifestyles had a name: “dropout pastoralists.”

Every morning, groups of Turkanas trekked into the camp from town and surrounding villages for work. This resulted in the remarkable comment of LWF’s camp commander that he saw all these people moving there in the morning, but did not know what they were up to. In general, these commuters found themselves in the lowest echelons of manual and unskilled labor; they worked as cleaners, cooks, builders, houseboys or girls, porters and other forms of personnel. At first, I did not notice it so much, but later I saw them everywhere. While staying overnight with a Somali family in Kakuma Two, I found out that they had two Turkana children doing household chores on a daily basis. The children normally left around six in the evening and returned around six in the morning, and sometimes, they spent the night. Apart from in households, Turkanas worked in the restaurants, kitchens and butcheries of refugee-owned businesses.

Parents sent their children, or children went themselves, to stay with refugee families to work in their households, sometimes for as little as a meal a day. The Overall Somali chairman estimated that 90 per cent of the Somali and the Ethiopian families in the camp had at least one house help. The chairman of the Somali Dagle/Merifle estimated, when I asked him, that of the 250 families in his community, everybody had at least one Turkana househelp.

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the condition of the road. They were awarded the job of transporting 90 containers to Juba and Rumbek for the UN from the port of Mombasa, and they expected more after this first assignment. In a similar vein, in a period of a few days, more than 200 military lorries passed through Kakuma – a spectacular sight. It was said to be a donation to the SPLA from an unnamed donor that we could not identify then, nor was I able to later, probably due to the arms embargo that was part of the CPA.

As a side effect, local children were exposed to the relative modernity and cosmopolitanism of the refugee camp. It is relevant to stress that many dropout pastoralists came straight from the bush. They were referred to as *Raja*, and were dressed like in the traditional Turkana garb, complete with wrist knives, spears, and the idiosyncratic stool. They had barely even been exposed to Kakuma town, and I was told that on Sundays, there were separate services in church for the Raja. Exemplifying the cosmopolitan function of the camp is how one of my informants from Congo, who was a priest, cycled to the Raja villages surrounding the camp every Saturday to preach Christianity. He was, in effect, a missionary among his hosts.

According to the local councilor from Kakuma town who was responsible for education in Kakuma division, there was no real figure of how many children stayed in the camp for work, but he found the phenomenon problematic because it constituted child labor and the children worked instead of going to school. However, both the councilor and the refugees who employed them told me, Turkana children *wanted* to be exposed to the life of the refugees. A Congolese refugee who employed two Turkana house helps explained how he demanded that they go to school in the camp during school time in the morning hours, and that after finishing, they would come back to work for him. On some occasions in the past there have been reports of sexual abuse, which had led to various policies prohibiting girls to work as household helps in the camp after sunset, but this seemed not all too rigorously enforced. It all depended on who you talked to. As usual, multiple actors claimed ownership over policy suggestions and initiatives. The Somali and Ethiopian administrations claimed it as their own, stating that their community administrations made sure themselves that no Turkana girls strayed in their community after six o'clock, to prevent claims of abuse.

Turkanas found employment in different sectors of the camp environment. For example, some were employed directly by humanitarian agencies, mostly on a local tariff that was comparable to what was paid to refugees as “incentive” wages. In addition, GTZ gave out tenders for firewood. Locals were able to go and collect large amounts of firewood from allocated spots sometimes as much as 50 kilometers away from the camp to avoid environmental degradation, and came back to sell the wood in the camp. Other people started business independently with the camp and its structures. Trading took place in the form of selling – sometimes very small amounts of – natural resources from the area: firewood or poles for building; water from the shallow wells in river Tarach in times of scarcity; tobacco and small garden products; and a lot of animals such as goats, camels, cows and chicken for meat. Cattle was brought from great distances to be sold, after which the owners would walk back again into the bush to the places where they had come

from. I met ten young men who had herded around 150 goats from Lokitaung to the camp, a distance of approximately 150 Kilometers as the crow flies, and they explained that they earned between 1,500 – 1,800 KES per goat.<sup>11</sup>

Protracted refugee camp situations can have a positive impact on regional economies. The presence of international agencies and their material, social and political resources – what Jacobsen (2002a) names “refugee resources” – has elevated camps above regional standards of facilities and infrastructure in many respects. In Ethiopian camps in the *Gambella* region, for instance, it was common for refugees to work for the locals (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000), and Kibreab notes:

In the Lower Shabelle and Hiran regions in Somalia among the refugees and the local population [...] the establishment of the refugee camps breathed a new life and dynamism into the regional economies of the area. [...] the towns of Jalalaqsi and Qoryoley had, as a result of this, grown from small and stagnant villages into important regional markets with relatively thriving economies. [...] the goods they consumed were not limited to augmenting their diet; it included transistors, modern furniture, watches, bicycles, farm implements, imported clothes and shoes. [...] The diverse economic activities are not typical of a society which has low want schedules, given the severe environmental constraints of their milieu. As a result of these diverse economic activities, and due to differential access to rations, the population in the camps was considerably stratified. The population enjoyed various standards of living, from comparative comfort to abysmal poverty. (Kibreab 1993: 341)

In the citation above, the economic input was centered and created in towns that were originally Somali. The same applies for cases from Northern Tanzania, Nepal and Ghana. In Kakuma, as Dadaab, however, it was not the surrounding towns that thrived as a result of the camps’ presence in the vicinity as much as it was the other way round. The camp economies have taken on regional importance, whereby the center of activities has shifted from the hosting town and its population to the refugee camps and its refugees.

### **Pastoralist social networks**

Many Turkana I met came to Kakuma specifically because of the camp. Some came to stay on a more permanent basis, first starting a village somewhere on the outskirts, others came to town. Mothers sent their children for work or education, and for survival. It is important to keep in mind the many droughts and occasional famine that made people

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<sup>11</sup> Some people from town suggested that the market for meat in the camp resulted in an opportunity to sell the animals that were stolen in cattle rustling raids in the wider region of north Turkana.



search for alternative livelihoods. There were both a drought and famine-like conditions during my fieldwork, and many people came to town because their animals had died.

Some found jobs, while others roamed around. Extended families were often large, and many people were somehow included in them. Others sent their children to live in the care of friends who stayed in the camps. Sitting in a bar in town with two local employees, one AGK security guard for UNHCR and one IOM clerk, they pointed out a Turkana woman on the road and explained that she was registered as a refugee, but lived in town. During the headcount in 2004, they met several people from town who posed as refugees in order to receive rations – approximately a hundred of them – but they did not say anything. These were their people, searching a livelihood and accessing opportunity. In the camp too, informants would occasionally point out where Kenyans lived, most of them married to refugees.

Okothi, Ngéthe et al. describe the ways in which the existence of the camp has contributed to the Turkana in and around Kakuma:

It has provided a number of employment opportunities, training, schooling opportunities, and medical services which otherwise could not have been readily available, and increased marketing opportunities for livestock. Partly it has a negative environmental impact, of which the most significant is the cutting / burning of the large mature trees to obtain the raw material for charcoal. The camp offers a market for the charcoal and fuel-wood. The majority of the people that burn charcoal around the camp are destitute women who are not able to cope well with the pastoral system, others are the families who have their traditional homes there and have lost too many animals to be able to provide for themselves. (Okoti, Ng'ethe et al. 2004)

As with refugees with incentive jobs with the agencies, Turkana from town also came to occupy influential position due to their status and income. One of them worked as a driver for UNHCR. I met him for the first time in 2003, when I was on a short first visit to the camp. He was a fascinating man. Before the camp, he had been with the SPLA in Sudan, and as a result he spoke Dinka and some Arabic. On some occasions when I met him together with Dinkas, they would say things like “he, he is one of ours.” He bought a big truck from his earnings with UNHCR and used it to harvest and bring firewood to the camp together with his Turkana kin, a job that was given out as a tender to Kenyans. With this, he became an employer in Kakuma town and a big man – in the literal sense as well – who maintained good relations with the Turkana, UNHCR and other agencies, and the Sudanese Dinka.

He is a good example of the emergence of a “class” of Kenyans that works for the agencies. They were visible when they sat in bars with their hand-held VHF radios on the table, which they seemed to place there partly as a display of this status. These radios

became symbols of their affiliation with the refugee project. Turkanas that just got new or temporary jobs with the agencies would all of a sudden emerge with handheld radios that they took everywhere, with cracking voices updating their surroundings of the agencies' communications. Some of these locals had been working for agencies for many years, hopping from job to job. They thereby employ their own form of camp capital in trying to connect to economic opportunities opened up by the refugee camp. Eaton, in an interesting article on the business behind peace programs targeting the pastoralist cattle raiding communities in the region, writes: "peace work represents one of the few positions available to an educated Pokot, Turkana or Karimojong" (Eaton 2008: 249). The linking up to aid programs, then, is not exclusively linked to the refugee camp, although in Kakuma there is simply a very large concentration of aid to dig.

Another Turkana from town began working for UNHCR in the early 1990s. Like so many of his colleagues, he job-hopped within the refugee industry and went on to become a clerk with IOM, which was his position when I met him. Although he had not climbed to a managerial position, he was part of a larger group of young, local (Turkana) employees who have been part of the operation for a considerable length of time. His uncle worked with the LWF /OXFAM Emergency Operations (EMOP) food relief, and had worked with the Turkana rehabilitation project before. Another woman was a clerk with UNHCR, and another man held the same post with IOM. Theirs were regular faces in the bars of Kakuma. They came with the hand-held radios they placed on the table and arrived in Jeeps with large NGO or IOM logos, but they didn't live on the compounds, and were paid local salaries (and, under the good circumstances, had no problem gossiping about/discussing the latest happenings within the compounds).

Those locals with jobs had the resources to build houses and start businesses on the side. A former UNHCR driver had a compound with residential housing compound called Pentagon<sup>12</sup> and an adjacent video shop. He founded the "Bull's Eye Nightclub," near the beginning of the camp. It was modeled after the famous clubs of Lokichoggio where the expats, visitors and employees of Operation Lifeline Sudan would go to dance and drink, and where Turkanas and Sudanese refugees would go during their travels to and from Sudan, and spoke about with a kind of affection. In the Bull's Eye – by some called the Bull's Dance, for the limited representation of girls – residents of Kakuma, refugees and employees and the occasional expatriate mixed in the open air and danced

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<sup>12</sup> These names used for businesses in Kakuma were very interesting: Pentagon, the White house – they represent places of power (oddly, the owner of Pentagon carried the name of former British Prime Minister John Major). The video shops that were used for football matches from the English Premier League were dubbed after the stadiums of the big three: Anfield Road of Liverpool, Highbury of Arsenal, and Old Trafford of Manchester United. There was great uniformity in name giving in town. Likewise, all three wholesale shops were named after Turkana mountain ranges; Todenyang, Mogila and Pelekech.

well into the wee hours of the morning. Compared to the walled and compounded environment of Kakuma, the club was remarkable. Located between the police station and the LWF compound, it was close to Zone Five and the UNHCR compound. Inside the Bull's Eye the walls were temporarily gone, although the “elites” tended to sit on their corners on plastic chairs with their radios on the table, somewhat standing out.

Social networks were equally important among the Turkana in accessing the livelihood opportunities created by the camp. Krätli refers to a “pastoral social network,” and argues that in recent times in Turkana, this network has “constantly expanded and may now include a wide range of figures from the ‘outside world’: educated and semi-educated people in town, soldiers and the police, government officers, politicians from as far as [...] Nairobi, nuns and priests of various denominations, NGO staff and even expatriates” (Krätli 2001: 53). I would add refugees to this list.

The cousin-brother of the above-mentioned nightclub owner was sent by his mother from the reserves in 2004 after an attack by raiders from Ethiopia, to go and join the nightclub business. Others came under similar circumstances, leaving behind the violence of cattle rustling to go where there were schools, relatives or the job opportunities. And so, Kakuma grew. One of those who came to the camp was a girl from Lodwar who organized beauty pageants in the region, and here she started “Miss Kakuma Beauty Contest.” She met a Congolese who was the chairman of a small collective called “We Are Refugee Stars”, with the – given the circumstances – fitting acronym “WARS.” WARS was a group that organized hip-hop and rap music events, and facilitated musicians with equipment and other forms of assistance. The joining of the two was brilliant: a combined hip-hop talent show and beauty pageant.

The catwalk and the stage would take turns: 20 minutes of rap music, then 20 minutes of beauty contest, for both refugees and Turkanas. I witnessed one event in the Bull's Eye Nightclub and another one later when Franco Hotel was hired for an evening of WARS. They were multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan events, but also a business opportunity, for the Ethiopian restaurant sold drinks, food, and rented out the space to WARS. Security was organized by the Ethiopian community, which linked up with LWF security and the police even though although UNHCR had forbidden the event. In a display of creative subversion, several Ethiopian Big Men stood guard.

The mix of nationalities, styles, experiences and languages was fascinating. Musicians teamed up like a small Wu Tang Clan in the desert, the American syndicate of various artists who perform in ever shifting combinations. One song would be a mix of a Ugandan girl rapping in *Luganda*, followed by a Sudanese in English and a Somali in Kiswahili. Other songs were mixes between Kitarukana and English. Events such as these instances would take place in the private enterprises of Franco Hotel, Kakuma Guest

House, the Bull's Eye nightclub, or elsewhere. Refugees obtained the resources and equipment from the camp economy, and the musical talent from WARS members. The singers, and the audience, were accustomed to the music and forms of entertainment from the hip-hop youth culture, spread by TV, CD, tapes and popular media, but derived from the camp economy too. They were affectionately referred to as “Yoyo boys” – because they say “Yo” all the time, like the hip-hop stars they watched on *Channel O* or *MTV*. The WARS contests, beauty pageants and the nightclub are good examples of the impacts of the refugee camp on Kakuma town, and how the two have become intertwined on a social and economic level.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored how a diversity of livelihood categories and strategies build on aid. Aid is a resource – it is something that is there and that one can vie for and harvest, theoretically until it is depleted. For that reason I termed the process of seeking access to a variety of aid related assets ‘digging aid’, comparable to subsistence farming. The analogy to gold digging with which I started this chapter puts into perspective how the area developed following the “discovery” of aid in Kakuma following the arrival of the refugees and the humanitarian regime. From the starting point of aid, a more diversified economy developed.

Viewing aid as resource rather than restrictively interpreting it as a necessity alone opens up new ways of understanding how people relate to that resource in a productive manner. It is, in other words, a way of seeing how refugees create space to maneuver in the camp environment by creating livelihoods. I introduced the notion of campital to analyze the combined strengths that some refugees had in maneuvering in the camp economy. These strengths are status, wealth and being campwise – statuses that are firmly rooted in the social organization of the camp. I have described some of the strategies that refugees used to dig aid and the ways in which resources were spread, shared and invested among families or groups based on ethnicity or nationality. Most of these strategies and refugee livelihoods are informal. Small maneuvering within the camp structure and forms of everyday corruption create opportunities for some, while limiting them for others. One fairly specific component of the camp economy can be understood as an economy of insecurity, in the sense that resources and opportunities and special programs are directed towards the vulnerable.

The analogy with the city serves to emphasize the creation and negotiation of transactions and livelihood opportunities, resulting in social differentiation and diversity.

To some, the camp represents a cosmopolitan place where people of different backgrounds come together, meet each other, and adapt to each other, and this is new and challenging. The majority of the camp's population is of pastoralist origin and comes from rural areas in Sudan or Somalia. For others, the camp is a bleak holding space where people are desperate. These contrasting views are part of the diversity that is interesting in light of the urban comparison. The poor in the camp for instance, are not necessarily worse off than the urban poor in Nairobi's slum settings.

Although the camp may be isolated and its people blocked from opportunities in many respects, they were also linked to the outer world, to Nairobi and to other places further away. From the camp, the lure of the outside world is immense. The cosmopolitanism of the camp and the world outside it contributes, in a general sense, to processes of social change that make it unlikely for most people from the camp to go back to their respective (or imagined) rural villages. Instead, it is more realistic to believe that they will move to towns and urban areas, following their exposure to aspects of modernity and opportunities in the camp. In the very least, most people I knew did not want to go back to "less" than what they had in Kakuma. This awareness forms the background of the next two chapters, which will deal with third country resettlement as a linkage to the outside world and with the prospect of repatriation.



## Chapter Five: Airlift from the desert - the camp as portal for resettlement

On the road in town, elevated above the landscape like a small dike, Ibrahim walked amidst the thinning crowds after the end of a football match in “Highbury” video shop. Mzee Ibrahim was a tall Kenyan-Somali man in his 50s with a grey beard. He is a *Sijui*, a colloquial label indicating Kenyan-Somalis, for they often don’t know things when Somalis ask them in Kisomali, and have to reply *I don’t know* in Kiswahili: *sijui*.

“Bram,” he says, “we are the new Jews, do you know that?”

“What?” I say.

“We are the new Jews,” he repeats, while his brown teeth reveal his habit of chewing *Miraa*.

“We Somalis are spreading all over the world, we have relatives everywhere, even in your country.” He continues: “my family was brought here from Somaliland by the British more than 60 years ago, and now I meet my relatives in the camp, they came yesterday, and from tomorrow they move everywhere, from here they move to America. We are like Jews.”

Mzee Ibrahim’s comparison between the Jewish diaspora and the Somali is telling. Somalis have settled everywhere in the western world since the late 1980s, maintaining business communities and social networks spanning the US, UK, mainland Europe, and Australia and Somalia and its neighboring countries of refuge such as Kenya, Uganda and Yemen. One of the ways in which Somalis found and continue to find their way into this diaspora is via third country resettlement as part of refugee protection and humanitarian programming. Resettlement as a durable solution to refugee crises has received considerable attention, particularly when it comes to the receiving end of the resettlement process. Research has focused on questions of integration and adaptation in the new countries of residence. In the case of resettlement from Kenya, this mainly holds for the cases of the Lost Boys and the Somali Bantus (Bixler 2005: 11; Riak Akuei 2005; Shandy 2007). Less attention, however, has been directed at the effects of resettlement upon those still living in camps, and the effect these programs have on camp organization in a more long-term perspective (Horst 2006; Sagy 2008; Sandvik 2008).

Resettlement has become a defining feature of the camp. Various strategies are employed to become eligible for resettlement. Through these strategies, various aspects of ordering and power come to light. Since the first resettlement programs began, transnational linkages have been strengthened, adding to the landscape of the camp and its development in various ways, most importantly through remittances, but also by the

nurturing of dreams to move abroad. Opinions on the practice differ; for most refugees it is an opportunity after an often long stay in exile, but some aid workers see it as disrupting the ongoing processes and prospects of repatriation to refugees' countries of origin or as a pull-factor that erodes the capacity for refugee reception and protection. Regardless of how it is seen, it has become an ordering mechanism in Kakuma. In this chapter the ordering of the camp is explored in the context of resettlement. I will examine how desires for resettlement came about and how UNHCR's and other agencies' rights-based approaches and messaging have influenced the ways in which people perceive opportunities to become eligible for this opportunity. The warscape as introduced in chapter three is important to take into account, for the various insecurities that will be discussed are rooted in conflict rationales that play an important role in eligibility criteria.

## Resettlement from Kenya

Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status. The status provided should ensure protection against *refoulement* and provide a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. It should also carry with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country. (UNHCR 2004a: 10)

UNHCR has identified three durable solutions for the resolution of refugee crises: voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement to a third country.<sup>1</sup> Repatriation is considered the most preferable by UNHCR, but since many crises last longer than expected, this solution is not always possible. Local integration is strongly dependent on the will and ability of host countries. Kenya does not allow local integration for any refugees registered after 1991. Resettlement is a third option, and for many nationalities in Kakuma the only one, since repatriation to their own countries at the time of my fieldwork was unfeasible in the eyes of many refugees and UNHCR.

Third country resettlement depends on the willingness of third states to accommodate refugees. It is expensive and considered to be an option of last resort, which means that often it is only employed in situations of need: insecurity, gender based violence, medical reasons, or an absence of possibilities for repatriation and local integration in the foreseeable future. Increasingly however, UNHCR seeks to stimulate western countries to support resettlement as a form of burden sharing with refugee

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<sup>1</sup> Resettlement is sometimes referred to as synonymous with repatriation. Here it refers solely to the transfer of refugees to third countries.



hosting countries in the developing world where most protracted refugee situations are located.

Resettlement may be necessary to ensure the security of refugees who are threatened with *refoulement* to their country of origin or those whose physical safety is seriously threatened in the country where they have sought sanctuary. Resettlement is also used for other refugees at risk, such as survivors of torture and violence, the disabled and other injured or severely traumatized refugees who are in need of specialized treatment unavailable in their country of refuge. It is also appropriate for refugees without local integration prospects, for whom no other solution is available. Furthermore, resettlement is often the only way to reunite refugee families who, through no fault of their own, find themselves divided by borders or by entire continents. (UNHCR 2004a: 11)

Between 1991 and 2006, a total of 84,240 refugees were resettled to third countries from various locations in Kenya.<sup>2</sup> To put this in a more global perspective, from 2001 to 2005 there were 134,800 resettlement cases worldwide. Within that same period, 27,450 refugees (20.4 per cent) were resettled from Kenya (UNHCR 2007a: 38).<sup>3</sup>

The largest numbers of refugees resettled from Kakuma have been part of two organized programs from the US targeting a specific part of the refugee population. In the end of the year 2000 the resettlement of 3,800 Sudanese Lost Boys commenced under the United States Refugee Program (USRP) (UNHCR 2004a: 20). In 2003 the resettlement of 15,000 Somali Bantus began, the single largest group ever resettled from Africa (*ibid*). This was not unprecedented, however. Between 1991 and 1998, almost 35,000 refugees were resettled from Kenya (Kagwanja and Juma 2008: 228). From then onwards, things in the camp began to change on various levels. Remittances started to flow back to the camp on an unprecedented scale, the resettlements resulted in a demand and possibility for family reunification, and groups in the camp started to organize themselves in order to become eligible for this desirable durable solution. Furthermore, the combined features of educational facilities and resettlement opportunities available in Kakuma contributed to many new people entering the camp. The acting head of IOM Kakuma remarked in the beginning of 2006: “for every one going, ten are coming in.”<sup>4</sup>

The head of UNHCR’s resettlement unit in Kenya mentioned the following as the main reasons for resettlement policy in Kenya: to ease the burden of the host country; to create more space for refugee hosting; and to stimulate local integration by leaving small

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the accumulated figures of consecutive UNHCR annual statistical reports: UNHCR Global Report 2006 and UNHCR statistical yearbooks 2002 and 2005, accessible on [www.unhcr.org/statistics](http://www.unhcr.org/statistics).

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, it was impossible to obtain more aggregated statistics on resettlement destinations, ethnicity or nationality of resettles. UNHCR denied having such data, JVA – the agency tasked with resettlement screening by the US government – told me in an e-mail communication sent by its coordinator in Nairobi that they refused to grant interviews to non-US citizens, and IOM had only limited data which is represented here.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Program Manager IOM, Kakuma: May 24, 2006.

caseloads behind, which are relatively easy to integrate. On a more pragmatic level, the option of resettlement leaves UNHCR the option to resettle “problematic” individuals away: refugees who are considered to be a nuisance for the refugee regime, for instance because of their political activities, may be sent away from camps on a resettlement ticket.

Receiving countries may have other reasons for agreeing to resettlement than the mere willingness to taking up their share according to international agreements. Western countries push for resettlement for non-humanitarian reasons. The large processes of resettling Iraqi refugees from Syria and Jordan in the aftermath of the US invasion are partly guided by political motives and the war rationale.<sup>5</sup>

Although it does not officially count as a form of third country resettlement, another way for refugees to travel abroad is via scholarships. The World University Service of Canada (WUSC) scholarship program, which is operated by Windle Charitable Trust, offers four-year university grants and temporary residency. However, it is possible to apply for permanent residency once in Canada. Finally, there are private forms of resettlement that are hard to pin-point, but I met one Australian couple that came to Kakuma to try and select people for resettlement themselves, on humanitarian visas that they said they had pre-arranged in Australia.

### **The nurturing of resettlement desires**

*Buufis* is a word the Somalis use for a sickening longing. In the context of the camp it means a sickening longing for resettlement, as Horst (2006) found in Dadaab. *Buufis* is not just the product of the search for security; by now it is also a desire instilled by the many examples refugees have seen from others leaving the camp, and the images they receive in the media of the west, and the imagination that exist about that place. The following illustrates this longing for resettlement and one of the ways in which it is nurtured.

Two American women visited Kakuma in the beginning of 2006. One of them had started an NGO called the Pittsburgh Refugee Center. She had experience with resettled refugees from Kakuma in Pittsburgh, most notably, with the Somali Bantus. This particular resettlement scheme was riddled with corruption, conspiracies and stories about enduring malpractices in the camp that was referred to as the issue of “the lost files.” Resettlement cases that had been approved were sold to other people, who would take on

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<sup>5</sup> During a fieldtrip to the Dadaab camps, humanitarian officials referred to US programs targeting Kenyan-Somali pastoralists in the border area between Kenya and Somalia as “operation make good,” which in the era of the War on Terror, aimed to smoothen the American image among Somalis after the failed military mission “Restore Hope” in Somalia in the mid-1990s.

the identity of the original applicant (ECRE 2003). An internal investigation by the United Nations Office for Internal Oversight exposed the existence of a “cartel involving refugees, UNHCR current and former staff, and resettled refugees in the Diaspora” (Juma and Kagwanja 2003: 324). Remarkably, the methodology section of the internal evaluation states that the research team did not visit the camps but remained in Nairobi, and interviewed people from there (United Nations General Assembly 2001: 7). Referring back to the position of UNHCR as a state of exception as discussed in chapter two, one involved expatriate UNHCR employee was never sanctioned by the Kenyan police, as expatriate employees were immune for national legal prosecution by law. Instead, according to a staff that joined later, he was transferred or simply left the office.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, several Kenyan UNHCR employees, and other staff were arrested by the Kenyan Police and charged for their misconduct (Ibid: 2).

One of the goals of the Americans in visiting the camp was to collect ration card numbers of those who were still in Kakuma, so they could run them through the computer of a befriended UNHCR staff member in Washington to find out whether these numbers corresponded with resettled cases in the system. If so, this would prove corruption in the process, and they would be able to make a case for those who were left out to be included in the scheme.<sup>7</sup> The second goal of their visit was to collect information about other cases in need of resettlement from among the remaining (also non-Bantu) Somali communities in order to be able to lobby on their behalf. They had come independently, and stayed in the same guesthouse where I was living. I was able to get to know them a bit and to observe their ways with refugee representatives. One of them took the initiative. In the US she ran a local NGO called the Pittsburgh Refugee Center. She was half Somali herself, which was important in the way she related to the people she came to visit, as well as part of the reason for it.

The first day they spread the word of the purpose of their visit to refugee leaders, saying that they were there to help fight corruption and to work on the cases of the refugees. Immediately, large numbers of people rushed and came to the guesthouse with application letters, copies of ration cards, copies of flight motivation and stories, insecurities faced in the camp, and so on. One evening, we were in their room and I was allowed to browse through the pile of documents that were, in essence, like applications for resettlement delivered to a private person. The attention the women aroused was so intense that one of them broke down. They decided to leave earlier than planned, stating

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, Head of Resettlement Unit UNHCR, Nairobi: March 29, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The “lost files” presented many mysteries in the camp. For instance, when walking with a Congolese informant, we saw a list on which nine Congolese were summoned for a resettlement interview, of which seven were already abroad. The most common answer refugees had was corruption, although UNHCR explained this as bureaucratic complexities and indeed “lost files,” so that cases had to be done over again.

“that people were crowding them,” and “what do all these people want from us?” Upon leaving for Loki, they were taken away by UNHCR security and the Kenyan police for questioning, and right at the end officially expelled. Simultaneously, I observed some of the reactions on her presence and program in the camp. *Wazee* in one of the coffee shops on the Somali market asked me: “is she real?” They already had their fair share of promises and do-gooders. After having spent time going through her pile of collected case material and discussing her methods, I didn’t know for sure what to answer to their questions. Later in the evening the other woman expressed she did not know either, for she too was shocked by what they had caused among the Somalis in the camp.

Was this a case of capitalizing on a job opportunity in the field of assisting integration in the US, as Bixler (2005) suggested happened with other NGOs established in the wake of the Lost Boy resettlement scheme? Or was she honestly intending to “do good?” Sommers writes that the Lost Boys became celebrities on America’s stage, their resettlement a rescue mission, attracting a huge amount of sympathy (Sommers 2005: 139). The American’s reason for coming was because she thought that people had a “right” to resettlement, taken from a vague notion of human rights as an ideology rather than a mere set of operationalized ideas covered by laws. On the other hand, what if she would find the lead to yet another big corruption scandal? I have repeatedly checked her website, but there is no mentioning of the whole exercise.

People in the camp knew when someone was visiting. The word got out fast, especially when resettlement was concerned. Over the period of my fieldwork a variety of such visits reaffirmed the possibility of resettlement for refugees. One day, two elderly Australians set foot in the guesthouse. They told me they were from a church and that they had collected money to resettle two or three families. They wanted my advice on how to go about it: could they just walk into the camp asking people “if they were in need of resettlement?” Did I know any families who needed resettlement? I advised them to go to UNHCR to announce the purpose of their visit, but they said they had been waiting for days to speak to one of the agency’s staff members. They felt (probably rightfully so) that UNHCR was trying to prevent them from doing their work.

Ugandan refugees mentioned a man by the name of Walter Lam from an organization called the Alliance for African Assistance. He was Ugandan living in the USA and was ostensibly working on resettling the Ugandans in the camp to the United States; at least, that is what refugees told me who corresponded with him via email or post, or who had met him in person during his previous visit to Kakuma. It is not unusual that refugees convey power to visitors, who they believe to be rich, able foreigners coming in to help the needy, as with the woman from the Pittsburgh Refugee Center. In a similar way,

visitors such as foreign journalists, moviemakers, missionaries and a variety of “dignitaries” from NGOs and UN contribute to the nurturing of the desire or possibility to go abroad. Polman (2010) uses the notion of a “tourist camp” to emphasize that some humanitarian localities become hotspots for visitors, donors, researchers and journalists, or, more generally, for the quintessential “disaster tourists” (De Waal 1997). I think this applies to Kakuma camp and has strong implications for people’s desire for moving to that world where the “tourists” come from.

Apart from people with direct intentions to assist or organize resettlement, the camp was visited all the time by foreign missionaries, youth groups, Christian activists, and so forth. To prevent malaria, a South Korean evangelical group went around the camp with a huge machine that kills mosquitos. They held theatre performances in Kiswahili about preventing HIV/AIDS and domestic violence, improving hygiene, promoting peace, etc.. An American missionary group of more than ten people came to teach about Christianity, hanging around in the camp to meet refugees. They visited a missionary training school in the Nuer community as part of a youth program, somewhat comparable to a summer camp for 18-year-olds. They exchanged presents, gifts, images and dreams. There were also African-American youth groups, Japanese activists, Flemish and French Filmmakers, German NGO consultants, UN volunteers, UNHCR youth groups,<sup>8</sup> journalists, researchers, and even the odd tourist. Many stayed in the guesthouse, so I became acquainted with them too. The camp was therefore a portal not only in the sense of people flying out, but also people flying in.

Horst (2006) mentions two reasons for the existence of a resettlement dream among Somalis in the Dadaab camps: the poor quality of life in the camps and the need for peace and security. She fails to mention the visibility of the practice: the sheer reality of it, which can be seen in the form of daily screenings and airplanes taking off for Nairobi. The vast numbers of people who were resettled in the past few years have generated expectations among refugees. Living in Kakuma next to the airstrip, I witnessed many of the flights going out to Nairobi with people on their way to the new world, sometimes twice a day, usually three times a week. The buzz it created in the camp through the continuous listing of names and ration card numbers on information boards was an ever-present topic of conversation. While it is said that resettlement is only an option for a few, in the environment of the camp the number of people going abroad was high and very visible.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2003, 70 youth from western countries came to Kakuma as part of “Camp Sadako.” This program was named after former High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata. The initiative was launched by UNHCR in 1993, and was aimed at acquainting young people with the realities of life and work in the refugee camps. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3b55ad0b4.html>

In fact, many of the respondents and informants on which this research is based have since been resettled.

Some resettled refugees returned to visit Kakuma. Most of those I met were Sudanese young men who were coming for a bride or a family visit. Some of those who came back were now affiliated with humanitarian agencies or human rights organizations. They brought school materials and showed photographs of their lives, neatly filed in photo albums: pictures of their cars, kitchens, shopping malls, etc. I noticed that some of those albums contained magazine clippings, of kitchens, cars and houses with lawns and interiors. The growing body of material available on the “new lives” of the Lost Boys and the Somali-Bantu in the USA reveals that some resettled refugees hide or lie about failures, frustration or disappointment.<sup>9</sup> Higher education was a particularly important preoccupation for the Lost Boys. After five years, many of them still had manual jobs, and were still trying to accomplish entry into academic institutions (Bixler 2005). Sometimes, I was around when one of my informants received a phone call or text message from somebody who was resettled. During such phone calls from resettled friends and kin, some complained about loneliness, the individualistic societies in the west, and their difficulties in finding work. Some indicated that they missed life in the refugee camp. In general however, the taboos surrounding the perception of “failure” and problems of difficulties in adapting to a new life in the countries of resettlement was widely overshadowed by stories of success.

I watched the documentary “the Lost Boys from Sudan” with some of the Lost Boys who remained in the camp. Some of the viewers saw relatives or brothers. Although they were surprised by the material goods that their resettled kin has acquired relatively easily, such as cars, stereo sets and clothing, their slow enrollment in universities made them more skeptical. In the movie, the boys are shown to call the telephone companies asking them to block all incoming calls from Africa, because the requests for aid often made during such phone calls are such a burden (see also: Riak Akuei 2005). They made the filmmaker promise never to show the movie in Kakuma because of this and other sensitivities about their new lives.<sup>10</sup> This is partly a matter of shame, as in many cases

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<sup>9</sup> Books: Mark Bixler (2005) *The Lost Boys from Sudan, an American story of the refugee experience*. London: University of Georgia Press; Dave Eggers (2006) *What is the What? The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, A Novel*. San Francisco: McSweeney’s. Films: *The Lost Boys from Sudan* (2003, Megan Mylan and Jon Shenk); *Rain in a dry land* (2006, Anne Makepeace); *God Grew Tired of Us: the Story of Lost Boys of Sudan* (2006, Christopher Dillon Quinn).

Or general websites: <http://www.redcross.org/news/in/africa/0108lostboyspage.html> or <http://www.lostboyschicago.com/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> This was discussed as a dilemma by the filmmakers themselves during the premiere at the International Documentary Film festival in Amsterdam (IDFA) where I first saw the movie in 2003. I took the liberty of showing the movie in the camp because I did not agree with the promise made by the director – one which, after the release of the film, he would not be able to keep. I was able to order the documentary over the internet – as could anyone

family, friends and communities have contributed to their resettlement process, either by providing financial support or through referrals. During a going away party organized for a Sudanese who went to Canada, one elder made it very clear in his speech that the youth was only going there temporarily, saying “You are Sudanese. Go and study hard, after that, come back and build the New Sudan.” The failure to get into college and the low-skilled jobs were regarded as a taboo that should not be seen by those who put so much trust and/or effort in those who had gotten the chance to go abroad. In this way, negative experiences of refugees resettled earlier did not necessarily lower the expectations of other refugees in the camp. Instead, for many, resettlement had become the ultimate resource in the camp.

In general, there were three forms of resettlement and associated eligibility criteria. The forms are referred to as the “three Ps”: P1 cases are individual resettlement referrals as a protection measure on the basis of insecurity or vulnerability in first country of asylum; P2 represents group resettlement on the basis of a specific group vulnerability or to end a given refugee situation by resolving a remaining “case load” (the strategic use of resettlement, in some cases to end protracted refugee situations); and P3 is the category for family reunification cases. Because the American resettlement program is the largest and most relevant to the people in the camp, I will stick to this categorization for this chapter.

### **Resettlement on the basis of individual insecurity**

Resettlement as a durable solution in the context of a refugee crisis is, in principle, intended to target vulnerable people and groups in the camp setting, or, in the case of P2, to solve caseloads that are often similarly targeted on the basis of shared minority status and vulnerabilities in the home country or in the camp. Some of the categories of people considered vulnerable for the purpose of resettlement as a protection tool include victims of torture, victims or those at risk of sexual and gender based violence, single mothers and people who face other forms of insecurities in the camp (Sandvik 2008).

A young Somali shows me around a part of Kakuma One that people refer to as “Jerusalem.” I had just come from the Buna café, where I discussed issues of resettlement with the men present. One of them noticed my interest in Jerusalem and offered to walk me through it. Because of the sensitivity of prostitution, and perhaps sexuality in general,

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else – so it was not the filmmaker’s power to withhold the movie from a particular population segment or group. The movie was, in other words, out in the world for everybody to see. Later, Filmaid also screened the movie in the camp and in town.

I had waited for some time before attempting to inquire into the matter. I knew that there were Ethiopians who employed Turkana girls as prostitutes in their *hotelis* and bars, and some even acted as their pimps. I also knew of women who solicited around “robber’s ally,” just off Kakuma Highway, but Jerusalem was a more imaginative place. Jerusalem: “many prostitutes, or those of that name we don’t pronounce,” said the young Somali upon entering. The area had only two entry ways. This is where it derived its name from, since “it is difficult to get in,” referring to the difficulty for a Muslim to get into Israel. Another explained it as a metaphor for the Israeli occupation of the holy Temple Mountain, that is, something bad in the land of the good, namely, alcohol and sexual pleasure.

Jerusalem was a small corner of a Somali block near the main road. It was more or less deserted since most of the women and their offspring had been resettled, according to the Somali because of their being prostitutes, hence “being insecure” in the camp. The young man laughed about it. As we walked he named the women that had been living there and showed me some of their remaining offspring – “bastards,” as they were born out of wedlock – that had somehow not been included in the resettlement process.

Jerusalem was a place that existed between acceptance and resentment, a type of twilight zone. Since it was not hidden and located near the center the Somali community, some authority must have allowed it to exist. Sexuality is a sensitive issue in the context of the camp. The agencies regard prostitution as a negative survival mechanism for women in the camp. They view the as “forced” – like the forced in “forced migration” – to prostitute themselves for income.

An interesting phenomenon then occurs. The normal social sanction for violating a norm turns out to be perceived as *creating* insecurity instead of combating it. Virtue turns into vice, and vice versa. Instead of being sanctioned for what the community considers antisocial behavior (the sanction being just), one receives the first prize – resettlement – with the argument of vulnerability (a prize awarded, then, for engaging in socially unacceptable behavior). Benda-Beckman and Pirie write that a change in normative orders and the existence of multiple and different understandings of those orders, “highlight the presence of ambiguity and the space this allows for maneuvering and negotiation” (2007: 12). This maneuvering with norms regarding insecurity and vulnerability was presented to me as one of the paths to resettlement. Referring back to the idea on an entitlement arena, the “promised” rights and protection become entry points in negotiating with those who are supposed to provide that protection. Sally Engle Merry (2003) uses the term “rights-defined self” to explain how people come to see themselves and their problems in terms of rights. In the camp, attempts to create “right-defined selves” by the agencies, which simultaneously decide on when and to whom to



apply the label of vulnerability and its associated remedies such as resettlement, thus created entry points for social negotiation.

The overall Somali chairman and his assistants explained that their administration receives insecurity claims approximately five times a week, of which they find no more than one every month to be true. They referred to the Peace Committee, a collaborative effort between UNHCR, police and refugee leadership, which found twenty-two rape cases in the camp in 2005. They did additional research on this figure and concluded that nineteen out of these twenty-two concerned “creations” of insecurity for the purpose of becoming eligible for protection measures. For instance, a woman “invites” a man from another place in the camp and they have consensual sex – a one-night stand. The next morning, the woman can claim rape since, as doctors explained, proof of rape under Kenyan law requires physical evidence of intercourse and struggle. After intercourse, symptoms of struggle can be self-inflicted.

One day when I was sitting at the police station in June 2006, I witnessed the reporting of a defilement case of a child by its parents. They talked and talked until the OCS (Officer in Charge of the Station) shouted in their faces: “but there is no evidence!” The interaction illustrates the complexity of such claims. The OCS affirmed that some issues fall outside of his reach, for instance Sudanese affairs that are kept within their own community as described in chapter three. “And,” he continued, “you know how difficult Somalis can be,” referring to the practice of these groups to take care of their own disputes, meaning that claims of sexual violence may never reach the Kenyan police. However, he later explained that he had some issues with UNHCR figures when it came to rape.<sup>11</sup> In his opinion, rape was created for purposes of protection and gaining resettlement. Stories of rape “creations” were abundant in the camp.

One such story revolved around people who accused each other, but who I knew independently of each other. This put me in an interesting position as a researcher, for I could compare and verify aspects of the different narratives that each party told me. A Kenyan woman used to work for one of the NGOs in the camp, until the NGO left, rendering her unemployed. She decided that she would have more opportunities if she stayed in Kakuma – her logic was that it was better to be unemployed in a humanitarian setting than in a “normal” Kenyan city, – and so she remained beside the camp in a former Kenyan government house, where she lived together with her son and two

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<sup>11</sup> In official statistics UNHCR shared with me, the agency recorded sixteen rapes in 2003 and six in 2004, while the Kakuma police station recorded 1 and 2 respectively in the same period. Arguably, these figures are inaccurate given taboos and other reasons, but given the apparent ease by which sexual violence is seen as a problem and the importance of gender programming to combat this, it is a remarkably low number for the size of the population of the camp.

daughters. Then, her 14-year-old son was accused of raping an under-aged Ethiopian girl. While the boy, by the time I spoke to her, had been in police custody in Lodwar for about a year, the family of the girl received protection. The stigma of rape and associated problems in the Ethiopian community were found to be considerable, making life difficult for the girl. The family was resettled on the basis of the girl's insecurity, who because of her age needed to be accompanied by her family.

Later, the Kenyan woman's son was released of all charges and returned home. Some time thereafter, the Kenyan mother herself accused a refugee who was the deputy headmaster of one of the secondary schools in the camp of raping her own under-aged daughter. According to the deputy headmaster, this was her revenge for his refusal to enroll her daughter in school, as she didn't have the necessary diplomas from her primary exams in the south of Kenya, which the family had failed to collect before coming to Kakuma. The headmaster was released from jail after three days and a few blows on his head with the butt of the gun of the Kenyan police officer who arrested him at night, a police officer who, not unimportantly, was from the same tribe and home area as the Kenyan woman.

The chief of police explained that by now, rape cases were nearly all reported solely for the sake of gaining resettlement.<sup>12</sup> He explained how he once arrested a mother for cutting her own child in the genital area with a razorblade in an effort to "prove" violent rape. Similarly, women have been found by agency workers and police while wounding themselves with big needles and sticks to prove attacks and/or rape, or inserting a mash of over boiled spaghetti into their vaginas to simulate sperm. Others explained how some women tried to provide evidence of rape, especially of children, by applying *Pilipili* (chili pepper) to the vagina to make it swell and turn red.

Later in 2006, UNHCR's Protection Officer in Nairobi estimated that only one or two per cent of security claims were true.<sup>13</sup> The methodological problem that arises lies in the reports of the extreme incidence of sexual violence in the past in both Dadaab as Kakuma camps (Crisp 2000; Kagwanja 2000; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005). Most research, however, has been conducted prior to 2003, and one can argue that taken the agencies' efforts to curb the prevalence of (sexual) violence and the general settling down of people in the camp, its occurrence may well have been brought down. However, empirical evidence derived from my fieldwork suggests that the narration of insecurity and vulnerability due to sexual violence, while not ignoring or trivializing its occurrence, has partly become a strategy. This results in a phenomenon recognized in other

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, Officer in Charge of Kakuma Police Station, Kakuma: June 13, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, National Representative UNHCR Kenya *ad interim* and Assistant Representative Protection UNHCR Kenya, Nairobi: August 28, 2006.

resettlement countries such as Uganda as a “commoditization of sexual and gender-based violence as the basis for resettlement” (Sandvik 2008: 236).

Over the course of the fieldwork I found many stories like the above, and some people were very open about them. This was the result of the sheer length of time I spent in the camp and the rapport I built with many of the people who lived there, which have had important effects on my ability to gather data. On one occasion, Mahmud, a Somali man I knew via one of my informants, told me how a Somali gender worker with LWF offered to support his wife and her three children in their claim for protection. What was required, however, was for him to play the role of perpetrator of domestic violence. Then, once the woman and the children would be resettled, they would apply for family reunification. With a laugh, the Somalis called this “agreeing to disagree.” Since domestic violence had been brought to the attention of the agencies as a serious problem in the camp, people took up the room this created to use it to claim insecurity. But this also had a flipside. Marriages were made and broken because of the resettlement wish – one disillusioned Somali saw two of his wives/fiancées move abroad without him.

### **Resettlement on the basis of group identification**

The movie “*Va, vis et deviens*” by Radu Mihăileanu depicts “Operation Moses” - the clandestine airlift of around 8,000 Ethiopian Jews, called *Falashas*, from refugee camps in Sudan to Israel in 1984. In the movie, a Tigrean mother sends her son along with the Falashas when they set off on foot from Ethiopia to Sudan from where they will be flown out by the Israeli government. In adverse circumstances, Operation Moses and even more clandestine operations undertaken before it since the end of the 1970s, guided by the Mossad (Karadawi 1991), were a prelude to the trek of the Lost Boys in the opposite direction under guidance of the SPLA. The boy in the movie is able to make it to Israel because he successfully poses as a Falasha, is young enough not to give himself away, and also young enough that he would not yet have been expected to speak Hebrew. He is able to remain in Israel by “becoming” Falasha, learning the language and the culture of Ethiopian Judaism; hence the title: “go, live and become.” Posing as a member of an eligible social group for the benefit of migration was one the methods of accessing resettlement in Kakuma as well.

When the Somali Bantus were scheduled for group resettlement, a certain precedent was set, at least in the eyes of many minorities from the Somali community. When word got out that in the wake of the Somali Bantu resettlement, other groups would be screened as well, the old clan affiliations became a major “gateway to resettlement” as one

Somali leader called it. Identity became an asset for access opportunities. The other groups from within the Somali community that were being screened were the *Madiban*, *Barawa* and *Asharaf*. In 2004, there was a headcount. The chairman explained that the headcount presented an opportunity for Somalis to change their ethnicity, and many of them reported to be Madiban, Asharaf or other groups said to be under consideration for resettlement.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the *Midgan*, the abusive nickname for the Madiban (the word came from *meat and gun*, since the Madiban were regarded by the British as hunters) were a minority among other clans. They highlighted their minority position and the abuse they faced, their customs hidden in the name Midgan, to emphasize their status as a minority clan within Somali society, and the fact that they were subject to discrimination much like that experienced by the Somali Bantus. Their argument, therefore, was that they needed additional protection.<sup>15</sup> Many within the dominant Darood clan of the Benadir sub-tribe changed their identity also, since people understood that being a minority created opportunities by opening up the possibility of claiming protection. I also met people who came from Somalia once the resettlement screening of a specific minority group began, in the hope that they might be included in the program. They were informed about the process via relatives or friends, at whose beckoning they would come to the camp to apply for or attend a resettlement interview, after which they would go back home, to Nairobi,<sup>16</sup> or would stay in Kakuma for some time to await the start of the process.

Different Somali groups erected their own community buildings and administrations. They began writing letters to embassies, the UN and other groups, claiming minority status and discrimination just like the Somali Bantu, and some groups either managed, or saw their efforts coincide with evolving UNHCR policy. From my first visit to the camp in 2003 to the end of the fieldwork in 2006, various signposts denoting different clan areas were erected within the Somali community. Leadership structures followed, with each of the new communities forming representative bodies that could forward their collective claims to resettlement.

Various sources reported that some 2,000 Somali Bantus came from Tanzania and settled in a place in the camp that was referred to as *Tabora*. According to some the name was chosen after the town of Tabora in Tanzania, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, which was once a famous halfway house for the slave caravans where the Zanzibarian slaver drivers like Tibbu Tip met up with their human merchandise from the interior

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<sup>14</sup> Digital fingerprinting only became available in 2006. UNHCR was now trying to introduce retinal scan machinery, after good experiences with this in Afghanistan. Interview HSO, Kakuma: May 5, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> A report by ECRE (2003) states that the reasons for many rapes in the Somali community in the past were the direct result of clan animosity, it was, in that sense, used as compared to an act of warfare.

<sup>16</sup> In the predominantly Somali neighborhood of Eastleigh in Nairobi, some (refugee owned?) businesses offered short courses on how to prepare and conduct resettlement interviews.

(Pakenham 1991). The Somali Bantus claimed decades earlier, they had been brought to Somalia as slaves. They left Tanzania, their first country of asylum, in an attempt to join the Somali Bantu resettlement scheme in Kakuma. UNHCR, however, screened them out as irregular secondary migrants who were ineligible for refugee status. They were not recognized as refugees in Kakuma, and they were told to return to their first country of asylum.

In general, UNHCR can and does not force people away. UNHCR can choose not to provide a particular person with protection due to their failure to meet national or international standards for refugee status, but it does not force people out of a refugee camp, which is the task of host countries' law enforcement structures. In Kakuma, the police did not actively attempt to force anybody out. The "Tanzanians," as they were referred to, settled in Tabora unassisted, but nevertheless managed to survive in the camp economy. This created a rift within the Somali Bantu community, since the "official" Somali Bantus from Somalia did not want to lose out on their resettlement scheme because of the newcomers taking their places. The rift manifested itself in competing community structures with different leadership. It was backed up by threats of violence.<sup>17</sup> The rumor was that the police was protecting the Tanzanian Somali Bantus because the latter were able to grease the hands of the police, that is, they had money to pay them "something small." Although the truth of this rumor remained unclear, the chief of police confirmed the leadership struggles between the Tanzanian Bantus and the Somali Bantus in Kakuma Four, which, according to him, had to do with the vacuum left after the overall Somali Chairman was resettled to the USA. It is clear, however, that the prospect of resettlement contributed to the rearranging of leadership structures and an increase in violent threats and occurrences, one example of which was a shoot-out involving Tanzanian Somali Bantu leaders.

Other groups that were screened for resettlement at the time of my stay were the Oromo and the Congolese. The Ethiopians felt excluded. A small group of them brought some money together to hire a lawyer in Nairobi to investigate rumors that urban Ethiopians were favored because they had money and were able to obtain resettlement slots by paying for them. They argued that those who were able to stay outside of the camp had resources, and hence, were able to buy resettlement tickets – a theory that, as mentioned, was not altogether unreasonable in view of the corruption case of the "lost files" mentioned earlier. Various refugees reported on the matter stating that resettlement

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<sup>17</sup> In addition to my sources among UNHCR's staff and refugees, I once sat with a sub-chief of the Administration Police at night when his radio spread news of a shooting in the camp. The shooting was part of a conflict between the two competing Somali Bantu groups, the proceedings of which we were able to follow from a distance via the reports that came in through his radio.

was “UNHCR’s business,” hinting that this was how its employees could make money on the side and given the many examples of fraud in the history of the resettlement, its prevalence may not be exceptional. The purpose of the Ethiopians and their lawyer was to make a claim for the transparency of public institutions and to look into the UNHCR records – a bit like the attempt of the Americans who came to the camp – although to my understanding, their project failed.

### **Resettlement on the basis of family reunification**

The third main criterion for resettlement is family reunification. This form of resettlement does not relate to vulnerability *per se*, but is dependent upon the ability of relatives abroad to sustain and receive their kin on a humanitarian visa and the willingness of the receiving country. This form of resettlement does not necessarily involve UNHCR, other than as a messenger or facilitator, and not even necessarily then. What happened in the camp was that those who received resettlement would later try to send family reunification forms to their relatives who were still in the camp. With the assistance of UNHCR and IOM or the embassies of the respective resettlement countries, these family members would be screened and “processed.” In theory, family reunification was straightforward because it did not involve vulnerability on the basis of identity or ethnicity, requiring only that the applicant was a member of the family already in the country of resettlement. However, there was some room for maneuver here also. Accusations and rumors of fraud were widespread, and I encountered some cases by which one part of the family was resettled, while another part was rejected on the basis of suspicions of fraud. Also, family composition was complicated because resettlement countries did not accept polygamous marriages or extended families but instead focused on the nuclear family, thereby disrupting existing social arrangements.

The desire for resettlement as an opportunity for migration had also spread to the Kenyan population in the neighborhood of the refugee camp. Hibak was a Kenyan-Somali girl from Lodwar. In 1996, two years before her mother died in 1998, she, her mother and her brother tried to register in Kakuma. She was too young though to remember what happened, whether they were caught or her mother backed out, but either way, their attempt to be resettled failed. Later, when Hibak stayed with an uncle in Lokichoggio for some time, she was introduced to a Somali mother who had resettlement papers for a family of five, but was missing a daughter. In all probably, she inflated her family size to increase her household’s food rations. One of the ways for doing this was by “borrowing” children and presenting them as one’s own upon registration in the camp.

When screening for resettlement occurs, earlier household registration data needs to be matched. This meant that there were cases where mothers required an additional child to qualify for resettlement. Hibak moved to the camp, where she went to live with the woman who had promised to take her as her daughter, and here she was taught the family history. In the end, she stayed a week but was nonetheless found out, because the child who had been registered was older than Hibak could ever have been.

A Somali caseworker with IRC explained this mechanism as follows (he was resettled shortly after):

You have a family of eight children, but two live somewhere else. You kept the same ration size as when they were still here [in the camp]. Now, you are being called by UNHCR or IOM for a resettlement program. You need to have two extra children. You arrange two that physically match your family and you let them pay for their chance, say 3,000 or 5,000 Kenyan Shillings. You teach them as much as possible about the family and the family history. Sometimes IOM finds out, and does not accept the children, but sometimes IOM makes a mistake and sends a real child away. That is sometimes problematic. A second round of selection [screening] takes place in Nairobi. Sometimes people come back from Nairobi, and here they have given up everything, they gave away their things.

As Hibak and I strolled through the camp, she met many Kenyan-Somalis on the way who were registered as refugees from Somalia. One girl she knew from Lodwar was registered in the camp with her family, but went to school in Lamu herself, on the Kenyan coast just south of the Somali border, and was just on holiday in the camp. Hibak explained that sometimes, people would pay up to US\$ 5,000 to become part of a family with resettlement papers. According to her, there were many Kenyans staying in the camp, and everybody [refugees] knew. They were mostly Issaq from Somaliland. And indeed, while most of the Somali refugees are said to come from South and Central Somalia (ECRE 2003), in the camp I met quite a number of Issaq. According to the Somali Kenyans in town, about half of the Somalis in the camp are in fact Kenyans. Although difficult to verify, it has also been acknowledged to occur in the Dadaab camps (Horst 2003). One Kenyan Turkana who was working for UNHCR at that time told me that he had been offered a ticket for resettlement as a Lost Boy by another UNHCR employee.

During a walk through the Congolese community together with one of its inhabitants, we saw on the notice board that nine Congolese were requested to come to the UNHCR compound for a resettlement interview. When he saw the names of the nine, he remarked that seven of them were already abroad. Strolling on, he showed me where they used to live, and told me when, approximately, they had left. This was nothing new to him, and over the course of the field work, the story of the “lost files,” would continuously return as refugees were confronted in the offices of UNHCR with the “disappearance” of their

files, an occurrence that in the camp was understood to mean that someone else had gone abroad under their name.

### **Implications of resettlement on camp organization**

The large resettlement schemes of the past years in Kakuma have contributed to the desire of many refugees to go abroad. The impact that the various flows of people, finance, and cultural material have had on the remaining population is immense. From an ethical and organizational perspective, large resettlement schemes like these have their effects on the camp population in terms of a rapidly expanding repertoire of ways and strategies to become eligible for them. In this way, insecurity and “women at risk” categories create an additional complexity for agencies conducting refugee status determination or engaged in resettlement screening, since these agencies are largely dependent on the narratives of individuals and confirmations from community leaders and implementing partners in determining the truth of a person’s insecurity claim.

Some Ethiopians used the expression “life or knife” when discussing their chances for resettlement and their life in the camp. They hinted that some people committed suicide after having been rejected for resettlement. Although some must have been saying “life or knife” for a decade without ever carrying out their threat, it nonetheless indicates the importance of the resettlement processes going on around them.

Where resettlement is not an option for refugees, UNHCR must provide clear messages to refugees that this is the case, in order to dismantle unrealistic hopes (UNHCR 2004a: 39).

The country director of CARE International in Kenya described the resettlement program as offering false hope and said “it should be stopped immediately.”<sup>18</sup> The JRS mental health program officer called it very problematic for those who were ineligible, and referred to psychological problems and even suicide. From this perspective, it is interesting to refer to De Waal who suggests that offering false expectations in a humanitarian context can be (or should be) seen as a form of cruelty (2010).<sup>19</sup> In the camp resettlement expectations are nurtured and created. The case of the minority claims of different Somali sub-clans is exemplary. For agencies, determining how identities are molded around opportunistic ideals is a time consuming and near impossible practice. It is therefore very complicated to determine whether those who get resettlement are, in the

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, Country Director of Care International in Kenya, Nairobi: September 4, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Program Officer JRS, Kakuma: January 5, 2006.



end, those who are most in need. On the basis of my findings, it is fair to conclude that a rather large portion of people resettled, are those who are able to secure the possibility of putting themselves in a favorable position. Once out of the camp, initial reports on the wellbeing of the refugees in their new countries of residence raise questions too. Promises of education, work and a new life often seem difficult to realize (Bixler 2005; Riak Akuei 2005; Simich, Hamilton et al. 2006). As Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) suggest, this may in part be the result of a phenomenon whereby resettled refugees stick to their earlier adopted or ascribed “victim roles,” thereby marginalizing themselves in their countries of resettlement from the first moment of arrival.

An (for agencies) unintended consequence of the resettlement program is that the way it takes place in the camp in practice has come to deviate considerably from the rules and criteria officially set out in UNHCR’s resettlement handbook. This delegitimizes official humanitarian governance and results in the creation of a new category of vulnerable people: those who are unable to access resettlement programs, who may become disillusioned or even ill, and those whose insecurity claims are wrongly perceived as fraudulent. Moreover, for many, the whole idea behind resettlement is rather vague. In extreme cases, there were stories of people who did not want to go but did not understand that they did not, in fact, have to. Some elderly people, for instance, thought that they would be forced to join the resettlement programs when these came along, a belief premised on misinformation.

Mahmud asked me:

Do you know what people say at Buna place? [Oromo coffee house, Mogadishu Street, Somali market] They say we are indirect slaves. And the Sheikh in Mosque asks: why do the Christians help us? Did anybody explain this to us?

People wondered why they were being brought to the west. Was it to work? If so, then why did they also take handicapped people? Was it on humanitarian grounds? If so, then why did every male refugee have to sign an agreement form expressing his willingness to serve in the American army?

These were good questions. First, most obviously, the reason that refugees are kept in camps in their regions of origin is a direct result of the unwillingness of western countries to permit them to migrate onwards to their own environs. But then, why did these countries accept people for resettlement at all? In the camp, the story of a Lost Boy who joined the US army and was killed in the Iraq war had a strong impact on many Sudanese. They recognized the irony of the story of a boy who fled so long ago, spent many years in

exile, but whose “durable solution,” in the end, resulted in his death. Second, the resettlement of refugees on the basis of humanitarian reasons becomes a very arbitrary activity, since humanitarian reasons can be found anywhere, and where they are not, they are otherwise acquirable among the entrepreneurial experts in the writing of flight stories, and above all, through corruption. Third, refugees said realistically that the US, the country with by far the largest resettlement program in the world, and others would never take in thousands of people if the carrying capacity of their domestic economy weren’t strong enough to accommodate them. Did this mean, perhaps, that refugees were necessary for their a labor forces? Some even wondered if resettlement could be considered a modern form of slavery, whereby resettled refugees ending up in low skilled, underpaid and undesirable jobs in the bloated economies of the west. Moreover, in some cases resettled refugees have to repay their airfares to IOM, for instance in the case of resettlement to the US, which in effect means that their new life starts with a debt.<sup>20</sup>

From the stories I presented above, various patterns emerge. Whereas the practice is not necessarily arbitrary *per se*, it is evident that whether one is granted resettlement or not can be explained by other factors than by official criteria for resettlement alone. Some of the factors I have set out above are the importance of campital, merits and social networks; the creation of insecurity and violence; traditional values; and discrimination by host countries and agencies.

### **Resettlement on the basis of *campital*, merit and social networks**

Two young Equatorians referred to each other as “Solowing.” They once heard the term in a movie about the Vietnam War. When the Vietnamese had to run away because of bombs and airplanes; they would scream “Solowing, Solowing” to inform the others. It became like a *nom de guerre* for the young men, since they had run away as well, although their story had a twist. In reality, they came from Kampala, the capital of Uganda, where they completed their secondary education before coming to Kakuma in search of opportunities. Both had come only recently. Within a little over two years, they both made it to Australia.

Solowing One was born in the Equatorian region of South Sudan, which he left when the war started. He was from the Madi tribe. The Madi are geographically spread over Northern Uganda and Sudan. He attended primary school in Adjumani, Uganda, and from there went to Kampala to finish secondary school. When he graduated in 2002, he

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<sup>20</sup> See refugee resettlement information documentation: <http://www.immigrantconnect.org/?p=10485>;  
<http://www.immihelp.com/gc/refugee.html>

came to Kakuma to try and find a way “to get along with life,” as he referred to it. Solowing Two was a Kakwa who went to the same school in Kampala, but who hinted that he was not Sudanese but Ugandan. This could very well have been the case, for the Kakwa are also a border crossing tribe, spread over DR Congo, Uganda and Sudan.

When Solowing One came to the camp he realized that to improve his chances for resettlement, he would need to become an active and contributing member of the refugee community. First, he followed UNHCR’s/LWF peace education course. He subsequently found work as a volunteer trainer in the peace education project. He attended various other courses and workshops on topics that ranged from community organization to leadership. He collected certificates, which he had plasticized and kept in a portfolio to show to officials, or for future use in other circumstances. Due to his education in Uganda, his English was good. He soon became a youth leader in the Equatorial community, and in the end, found a job with IRC’s Community Based Rehabilitation program. When I accompanied him on one of his rounds, visiting patients from the community (a child with an amputated leg due to a Sudanese government army bullet who needed new crutches; a rebel whose prosthesis was broken; a Ugandan new arrival with legs that looked like arms) he showed me another effect of resettlement.

There were five incentive workers doing the same work as Solowing One, covering Kakuma Two and Three. One of them had been resettled some time ago, another just recently, and a third would be leaving that month. He himself was also departing in a couple of months, and of the five names of workers in the project on a list hanging on the wall of his office, there was only one who was not in a “process.” He explained that this had implications for the running of the camp. These incentive workers had all been trained. They had all been selected on the basis of a certain merit. And it seemed that it was people like these in particular who were moving abroad: the assertive, the qualified, and the ones with access to or were part of the refugee administrative structures or NGOs.

Solowing One called himself an expert in the writing of flight stories, since he knew that if he would tell the agencies that he completed his secondary education in the capital of Uganda, they might start wondering what he was doing in the camp in the first place. He sometimes assisted others with their flight stories too. UNHCR’s criteria for eligibility for resettlement are clear on this: one needs to be a “real” refugee, and one who is in his/her first country of asylum. In February 2006, I came across some new arrivals in Solowing’s group in the Equatorial “community.” One of them went from Yambio in Southern Sudan to DR Congo in 1990. When war broke out there, together with his family, he went to a refugee camp near Adjumani in northern Uganda in 1993. He met Solowing One in the first year of secondary school in Adjumani town. Solowing One left

for Kampala a few weeks later. Solowing Two went to Narus in Southern Sudan to work as a teacher, but lost his job and came to Kakuma in December 2005 to try to get resettled from the camp. In Kakuma, he met Solowing One again. Although he did not have a job (yet), seven of his friends were in Australia and they often sent him money when he asked. They had also sent him the papers he needed to file a request for family reunification. The men shared their opportunities. Whenever someone left for resettlement, they agreed to send a P3 form to one of the remaining men for them to fill out: “then, this one can try.” This is how the two Solowings were both resettled to Australia. Interestingly, most members of this group ended up in Australia, something that has a lot to do with the chain of family reunification. These Madi boys were not among the Lost Boys, who were predominantly Dinka, which meant that their network in the US was less developed than in Australia, where they were able to go on humanitarian visas.

Later, in early 2006, a Dutch resettlement mission came to the camp. They had pre-selected cases – mostly women at risk – and came to Kakuma to conduct the final verifications of the candidates’ flight stories and insecurity claims. Normally, UNHCR puts forward cases for resettlement to particular resettlement countries, from among which these countries decide who to admit. I knew one of the women who had been pre-selected by the Dutch mission. She was an Oromo from Ethiopia. She was married to an Oromo man who, during a visit to Nairobi, “disappeared”. According to her and others, the man was taken by the Ethiopian government because of his alleged membership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). On top of that, she was a Christian, while the Oromo are predominantly Muslim. This caused problems for her within the community, and since her husband was gone, she was left unprotected (in other instances, couples with mixed marriages between different tribes and nationalities were similarly submitted on the basis of vulnerability).

I visited her a few times. She was also the chairlady of the Oromo community, and worked as a teacher with the Shakespeare learning center. Her English was good, as were her contacts with some of the NGOs. Informants from the Somali community suggested that she was, in fact, a Kenyan from the Borana tribe that lives along the border between Kenya and Ethiopia. This might explain why she used to carry a copy of an ethnography of the Oromo history and culture.<sup>21</sup> The possibility exists that she used the book to learn a fictitious background. The woman left for the Netherlands in April 2006, leaving her shop on the Ethiopian market to her brother, who remained behind in the camp. Some

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<sup>21</sup> I found it surprising to see that a copy of an academic study of the Oromo had found its way into the camp. I was able to borrow it: “Knowledge, identity and the colonizing structure: the case of the Oromo in East and Northeast Africa” by Gemetchu Megerssa (1994).

time later, her husband emerged in South Africa, and a family reunification brought him to the Netherlands also.

The Dutch selection mission was headed by a man who had experience with the process of resettlement from missions to the Balkans, Columbia and elsewhere. He was very pragmatic about the issue, stating that although they were focusing on people at risk, they also took into consideration refugees' ability to integrate successfully in The Netherlands. Former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers (himself from the Netherlands) criticized the Dutch government in 2006 when they resettled some 240 people – among them refugees from Kakuma – by stating that the country had denied many people because they were not found to have enough potential to integrate successfully.<sup>22</sup> Knowledge of the English language, the ability to read, examples of having taken “initiative” in the camp and work experience were all considered important indicators. Noll and Van Selm (2003) refer to these indicators as “integration capabilities.” The woman in question fulfilled these requirements in flying colors. While resettlement is generally proposed as a solution for those who faced specific risks, I could not help but wonder whether this woman fell into that category, or whether she had instead successfully facilitated her own migration by “creating” reasons for it.

An IOM official in Nairobi told me not to misjudge the difference between the assertive and the non-assertive refugees.<sup>23</sup> She meant that some assertive refugees are indeed able to construct a viable protection case, while others who aren't may nevertheless have a genuine need. Whereas to some degree, the extent to which individual refugees were able to organize their own resettlement may have been a mistaken belief held by refugees, as was also reported from Uganda (Lammers 2006: 24), as the Dutch policy shows (and that of other nations too) it could well be that the assertive sometimes do have better odds.

Individual insecurity and vulnerability become part of the social system in the camp because of the way in which cases are brought to the attention of UNHCR or the NGOs. It is difficult for individuals without connections to present a case to the police or agencies, for these typically ask for the support of one's claim from refugee administration. A prominent member of one of the Somali clans explained to me that he sometimes took a few thousand Kenyan shillings to bring forward the case of a young woman in the chain of agencies. Chairmen don't receive incentives, but as I observed some of their lifestyles and possessions, many of them they seemed to have money (this specific individual owned a satellite radio). To submit a claim of vulnerability or a case for resettlement, one needs the support of the chairman or other relevant authority. This

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<sup>22</sup> (In Dutch) Resettlement op basis van ‘integreerbaarheid’, Ruud Lubbers, NRC handelsblad, October 24, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, Head of Cultural Orientation IOM, Nairobi: March 16, 2006.

adds an additional complexity to the understanding of insecurity claims. Hyndman writes that “the legal, medical, and therapeutic practices that name, authorize, and organize the treatment of sexual violence, are the transfer points of power in the camps” (2000: 79).

I knew one Ethiopian man who arrived in 2004. He had been a second year student of history in the University of Addis Ababa. He got a job with Filmaid, and had news: he had finished his exams for the advanced English course of Windle Trust, and had applied for a WUSC scholarship. He made it to the third round when Canadians came for the selection somewhere around May 2006. They told him that to be eligible for the program, he had to be registered as a refugee, and it turned out that he had still not been given refugee status although his eligibility interview was conducted a year ago. I asked him whether he went to UNHCR. He answered: “And then what? To whom can I talk? I went more than ten times.” If the Ethiopian would have had a point of entry with UNHCR, or had known somebody else who could forward him, he might have made it. Another Sudanese informant was more successful in gaining access. When he noticed there was an error on his family’s resettlement application form, he realized that he needed to correct it before the interview. Otherwise, there would be problems and he might be labeled a fraud. In order to get access to the compound, he had a Kenyan friend who worked with JRS write him a referral note, which allowed him to enter the official channels. His strategy worked, showing that social networks can indeed play a crucial role. Some of my informants explained that they gained or tried to gain access via a friend who worked as a translator with UNHCR or through an NGO employee from whom they had followed a course earlier and who was able to write a letter of recommendation and a referral to the humanitarian regime.

### ***Warscaping, or creating insecurity for resettlement***

Another strategy that refugees mentioned they used to try and gain resettlement was by creating insecurity. At times, stories went around in the camp that were classified by my informants as fabrications and staged events in order to prove insecurity and take a short-cut into the resettlement program via a protection arrangement. An IOM employee wrote about the Somali Bantu resettlement scheme that “going to America is the holy grail of refugee life. People will cajole, bribe, threaten and kill for the opportunity” (Chanoff 2002: 3).

Some men in the Madi group in the Equatorian community said to me: “We don’t want to create insecurity in our community for resettlement.” They implied that others did. Some of the examples in this chapter are illustrative of this practice. One such story,

narrated to me by a wide array of informants, was the creation of actual violence by hiring Turkana to shoot over or at the houses in a specific community, thereby supporting or sustaining a claim of insecurity. Another, which was confirmed by UNHCR security staff, was the torching of houses in a given community. These were expressions of the belief held by many refugees about their own role in obtaining insecurity and the ability to thereby make themselves eligible for resettlement. Due to space constraints I have limited my narration to a number of specific examples in this chapter, but during my fieldwork such stories were abundant, and the phrase “he’s just creating insecurity,” became more and more widespread and complicated.

In the beginning of September 2006, one of the leaders of Southern Ugandans told me the following story. A group of twelve Ugandan Bahima had arrived in the reception center a few weeks earlier. The Ugandan politicians checked them out and tried to include them in their community. Not long thereafter, four of the boys were abducted by armed men with a car. They went to Lodwar and turned right, in the direction of the Ugandan border. Once at the border, the men unloaded the boys and tried to force them into another vehicle that was waiting for them there. The boys protested and were rescued by armed Turkana pastoralists who were nearby and who handed them over to the Kenyan Police. The police brought them to Lodwar, and from Lodwar they were returned to Kakuma. By the time I heard the story, they were back again in the reception center. By now, they did not dare leave the reception center for fear of abduction. I had no time to look into it carefully because I was on my way to Juba, but when I asked a prominent member of the Ugandan community – one of several who told me about the event that day – about the truth regarding the abduction, he said that he did not know. He did know, however, that stories were made up all the time to claim insecurity. Although he liked to try to find out the truth of such stories, he did not know about this particular case.

Traditional values that were challenged by camp or other circumstances became part of the insecurity arrangements people brought forward in their attempts to obtain resettlement on the basis of protection. The following case presents the complexity of determining what is created and what is not, and more importantly, to what extent local authorities could influence or orchestrate cases, or withhold support or intervention.

When I interviewed Father Mike, who began working with the refugees as a Catholic pastor after he was declared *persona non-grata* in Sudan, I asked him what his working day looked like. He answered: “I roam around like a goat.” I often felt that I was doing the same. On one of these days, in early 2005, I met Abdel while I was browsing around in the Somali community. He worked with the ICRC as a tracing officer in the camp, employed by the Kenyan Red Cross. He asked me if I was aware that there was a Dutch

boy living in Kakuma. I said that I was not. We then scheduled an appointment to meet the boy and his mother Amina. A few days later I entered the house where Amina lived together with her brother Abdel. There were two other Abdels, one community caseworker employed by JRS, and one community security chief employed by LWF. Amina was home, as were her mother, her brother, her sister and a friend. Also, squeaking around was a little boy. They had given him shoes that made sounds when they touched the ground so that they could monitor his whereabouts.

The boy was three and a half years old, and looked a bit like an Italian, clearly *nusu*, “half” in Kiswahili, or .5 [point five], as they called it in Kakuma: a half-caste, which was a taboo in the Somali community. Amina came from the Marehan sub clan of the Darood clan. This Marehan clan was the clan of former Somali president Siad Barre, and her father had been employed by the government and was therefore declared an enemy when the war broke out. Amina was twenty-one now, and had fled with her relatives from Mogadishu, traveling in government vehicles via Ethiopia. In 1991, she came to Utange refugee camp near Mombasa. In 1997 the camp was closed and she and her family moved to Eastleigh in Nairobi. In 2002 they moved to Donholm, another estate in Nairobi. This is where she met Hans, a Dutch man who, judging by the picture she showed me, must have been approximately fifty years old. He was her neighbor in Donholm, and later became her lover. She found out she was pregnant just after he left without a trace, probably back to The Netherlands. Because she was now in danger in Nairobi, Amina was sent to the camp by her mother. Somali community norms did not allow girls to have a half-caste children without a man, especially a non-Somali, and even worse, a non-Muslim. Moreover, some of the brothers of her father in Somalia and Nairobi had vowed to restore their honor by forcibly taking Amina back to Somalia to “educate” her.

The three Abdels and Amina’s mother said that she and her son could not stay in Kakuma any longer, and wanted to get in touch with Hans, but more importantly, they wanted me to negotiate a way with UNHCR to get her into a protection arrangement that included the possibility of resettlement. When I met people for the first time, they often tried to use me as a broker, and I regarded this as a necessary *rite de passage* that I needed to undergo with my informants, so this was not unusual. But I was able to follow Amina’s case over a period of time, getting to know the context and some of the people involved. Was she really in danger? The three Abdels told me that people would throw rocks at Amina and the child, and that they would be beaten at the market place. She showed me the marks of beatings on her son’s face. To hide, Amina sometimes wore a *burqa* when she went outside, but when she was walking with the child everybody would obviously know. One time, when I was sitting in the *buna*-place, an Oromo coffee house on the Somali market, I saw her pass by on the road with the boy, *burqa*-less, smiling and



greeting people (including me), leaving me with the impression that there was nothing wrong.

In my meeting with her, Abdel the chief of security was present, as was Abdel the caseworker, so why couldn't they use the proper channels of referring the case to LWF Gender or UNHCR Protection? They said that they had tried numerous times, but had received no response. They gave me a letter written by the Somali chairman, first in line to report the matter, addressed to the UNHCR protection office and copied to eight other relevant offices, including the LWF gender unit. The suggestion was made by others that perhaps the chairman did not completely disapprove of the situation that Amina was in, since she violated a cultural norm, meaning that repercussions were legitimate. Moreover, it is known that sometimes chairmen, like other influent people, try to protect their communities and customs from "bad reputations," as was acknowledged by a staff member from JRS' mental health program.<sup>24</sup> After that, Amina would sometimes disappear. I was told she left for Nairobi, and after some weeks she came at night to bring the child back to her family after which she left alone, until somebody would come to bring the child back to her again. This happened several times.

People knew about her. Most people in the rumor circuit did not mind that the child was a *nusu*, but that she delivered a child out of wedlock, *and* from a non-Muslim was considered a major problem. She brought shame on the community, on her clan, on her family and on all Somalis in general. What happened with the referral and contacts of the chairman and the three Abdels, I cannot know. But it is possible that they organized a non-intervention. Later, when I was in Nairobi and presumed Amina to be in Kakuma, I received a phone call from her. She was crying and shouting and she said she was in danger, and it was difficult to understand what she meant because the connection was bad. I made a phone call to one of my informants, asking him to check on her. It later turned out that she had moved to Nairobi the evening prior to her call because her uncles were looking for her. Via a Kenyan friend who worked on refugees with a local NGO, I arranged an appointment for her with the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK), which runs a safe house for women in Nairobi, telling them that I didn't know the exact details of her story, since I thought it wise not to accompany her but to direct her to one of the counselors instead. She was admitted and was consequently allowed to stay in the safe house in Nairobi for a period of nine weeks. After that, she had to find her own way.

The last time I met her in Nairobi, she had found a job that paid 9,000 Kenyan shillings a month and a house in the Somali neighborhood of Eastleigh. Instead of moving away

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, Program Manager JRS, Kakuma: January 5, 2006.

from Somali social control, she was living right in the center of it. She delivered the child to her family in Kakuma one more time, and once more, the child was returned to her. In March 2007, I received an email from her informing me that she had made it to Canada. She had been resettled with her child to a small town, where she attends school while he goes to day care.

Amina's case is interesting because it shows that social norms were upheld in the camp, but at the same time subject to change and sensitization by the agencies. Humanitarian assistance, in that sense, challenges gender roles, thereby empowering women or minorities to protect them from "harmful traditional practices" (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004). In Amina's case, the stigma she carried has been acknowledged by various people and was denied by others. The chairman of the Somali Dagle/Merifle in Kakuma Two and the people in his household all knew about the case. According to the chairman, there were ten similar cases in the Somali community – Somali women with children from non-Somali and non-Muslims – and most of them stayed in Nairobi. They did face problems, but within society this stigmatization was culturally justified, and also culturally controlled.

A story told by a Sudanese man who worked with the South Sudanese diaspora network Gurtong and was visiting Kakuma where he used to live before, emphasizes the role of leadership in the camp. He narrated the tale of a woman who lives in his old group in the camp. Sometime during the war, this Dinka woman was abducted by Arabs. She was taken to the Darfur region, where she was kept as a slave and raped by her "master" at the age of thirteen. She managed to escape. She gave birth to a child, but was captured again at the age of sixteen, and raped by thirteen men. After this, she delivered another child. Then, the war in Darfur started. She escaped and fled "footing" to Kakuma (I take it he meant this metaphorically, for that is an enormous distance to walk, but also not unheard of). Here, she lived in the community but was being ignored. In the opinion of the narrator, Sudanese tradition did not have a taboo on rape or children from mixed ethnicities as such, but rather, on living without a husband.

With regard to repatriation, the woman felt that she did not have a country to go home to after all that had befallen her. She wanted to be resettled, but because this has to be organized through the local leaders who ignored her, this did not work. This example highlights the power of the community leadership and refugee administration, which simultaneously act as gatekeepers. Although according to the story the woman was ignored because of a taboo, it is also possible that the community leaders simply did not see a need for her to go. In other words, perhaps it was the narrator or the woman herself who was creating a story, using it to create insecurity for resettlement.

The negotiation of either the normative order in the community or access to resettlement was played out on the level of gender, an issue that was – as described earlier – a primary area of focus for UNHCR and the agencies. Gender related issues did not only pertain to women however; I also met men who claimed and had experiences with discrimination and taboos in their respective communities because of their gender. Gender and sexual violence was an even bigger taboo when the victims were men, and for this reason, agencies also focused on men and male issues when seeking to change refugees' norms and to protect people from victimization. Power constellations were thus challenged and constituted partly on the basis of which gender norms and relations were deemed legitimate, but these norms and relations simultaneously became access points for intercontinental migration as a result of resettlement for the reason of perceived vulnerability.

### **Group discrimination**

In order to become eligible for resettlement, disguising one's membership of a particular group or label can be as important as trying to become part of a targeted group. Some communities were associated with past violence and war crimes, even though their countries were no longer at war. The Francophone nationalities in Kakuma were generally treated with mistrust by resettlement countries and UNHCR, partly due to the large distances between Kenya and their home countries. It was believed that many of them had moved on from their first country of asylum (ECRE 2003), which would logically be either Tanzania or Uganda. For this reason, they were suspected to be extraordinary refugees with something to hide. Many people, including aid workers and refugees themselves, suggested that people from the Great Lakes were exempted from resettlement because they were or could have been complicit in the Rwandan genocide or its long and enduring violent aftermath in Eastern Congo. I knew people who were on *Gacaca* lists, which are the local tribunals in Rwanda where lower level accomplices to the genocide are tried, and therefore were unable to go home. While their fear of persecution might be a valid one, being on such lists was a probable liability for their chance of resettlement.

The leader of the Dutch team that came to the camp to screen candidates for resettlement informed me of the limits of the Dutch selection criteria. Anyone who could be linked to participation in the Rwandan genocide was ruled out. This basically meant that all the refugees from the Great Lakes, especially men, were excluded, since it was assumed that identities were relatively easily interchangeable between Rwandans,

Congolese and Burundians. Similar group exclusions were rumored to apply to northern Ugandans, and Ethiopians. As UNHCR and host countries are skeptical to resettle military personnel and ex-combatants, the Ethiopians thought this affected chances of “their” resettlement. In the Ethiopian community, various suicides were reported over the years that were said to be related to resettlement rejection. One woman that I know of during my stay killed herself while in the protection area, after her resettlement application was rejected.

One additional complication is that rejection letters do not explain on what grounds someone is rejected. A Somali informant gave me his rejection letter from the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It states: “It has been determined that you are ineligible for the United States Refugee Program. We have notified the UNHCR of this determination. You are encouraged to return to the Kakuma Refugee Camp.” I saw more such letters, which kept people in the dark about the specifics of the rejection: was it suspected fraud, did they not belong to an ethnic target group, or were they excluded on the basis of suspected war crimes?

As explained, resettlement had a large impact on the desires and expectations of refugees. It not only affected their desire to go abroad, but also the perceived possibility or desire to return home via repatriation. The real or imagined reasons for people’s exclusion from resettlement programs as argued above were the same as the reasons for which people remained in the camp instead of going home. The stigma and possible fear of retribution among the Francophones and the Ethiopians, rooted in the past conflict and their presumed participation in it, made that they did not want to leave the camp except onwards via resettlement, even when their countries had not been in conflict for some time as was the case for the Rwandans and Ethiopians. Among others, even before peace could break out, the idea of return or even longing for the homeland was undermined by these fears.

One afternoon while discussing the advance of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Somalia with some chiefs and youth in one of the *Buna* places on Mogadishu Street, one young man simply stated that it did not concern him because he was going for resettlement; he would not have to go “back” to Somalia. Many older men had political opinions on the matter. One said: “it is good because it brings stability, but I don’t care, I am not going back.” Another stated: “They are the new Taliban, it is not ok, but I am not going back either.” Equally, the young man, speaking English, Kisomali and Kiswahili fluently, expected that he too would be resettled as so many had been before him. As I hope this chapter has illustrated, resettlement became so much more of a reality than a mere exception that a whole new category of refugees emerged. This category consists of migratory refugees; people who seemed to have given up the notion of home because of a

viable alternative in resettlement. Age is an important factor here. Youth have less recollection of Somalia than do elder refugees, and many youth were born in Kakuma. Moreover, they have experienced the lifestyles and situations of the Kenyan Somalis in Nairobi's Eastleigh and also in Kakuma town, which adds to a recognition of a Somali diaspora as the way forward; a Somali nation spread over the globe, but large enough to remain Somali.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, third country resettlement has become an important feature of Kakuma refugee camp and has played an important role both in the reasons for people to come to the camp, and as a phenomenon that has greatly contributed to its development. Resettlement can therefore be seen as both a highly desired opportunity and as a solution to which people seek access. With this, resettlement became an important organizing principle for people in the camp.

The idea that resettlement was something that people could actively seek access to was revealed by the stories and examples of people who used the various rights and norms, set against understanding of the camp as an insecure place, which they used to apply to the label of being vulnerable. Identity thus became an important tool to maneuver with, while insecurity became a resource in itself. This, then, coincided with the “normal” processes of social change and the growth of rights awareness among refugees. As argued, rights awareness creates vulnerabilities too, and standing up for those rights challenges traditional authorizes and norms. Most cases of insecurity in the camp took place in this space of change. Women rights, child rights and minority rights all made that customary norms, behaviors and sanctions came to be construed as rights violations, and these in turn became grounds for vulnerability in the context of the camp as a warscape and an entitlement arena. Added to this were other strategies used to become eligible for resettlement, such as those that were designed to highlight a person's active involvement and participation in the camp, education or knowledge of the English language. It is important to note, however, that there was a large difference between assistive and less assertive refugees. Moreover, forms of group discrimination and the stigmas or pasts of refugee warriors, led many people to hide or alter their identity.

As in the previous chapter, the issue of campital as the combined skills or assets enabling one to maneuver in the camp was very recognizable in people's attempts to create, prove or “forward” their claims of eligibility for resettlement. It simultaneously highlighted the lack of the skills or assertiveness that some people had in using the system,

as well as the reservations that agencies developed against refugee narratives and claims. Power and authority played a large role in the attempts to negotiate resettlement. Refugee administrations act as gatekeepers, not only for the refugees but also for the agencies, and they became the interfaces that were able to withhold or support claims of insecurity, identity or need. This is the entitlement arena in its clearest sense. The vulnerability and insecurity that have become resources in accessing resettlement are subject to negotiation by refugees, refugee leaders and the agencies. These negotiations are played out, for an important part, by referring to the social norms that are nurtured and even created in the camp as refugees are taught about their human rights.

The urban-like processes of social change that take place for a large part instigated by agencies' rights and empowerment programming, but also because of the coming together of people with different backgrounds and the relative cosmopolitanism in the camp, have become part of this warscape rationale. Deviations from communities' rules – in various forms, but often gendered – resulted in customary sanctions or the reasonable assumption of this imminent threat. Both were found to be possible material that could be used to claim insecurity for resettlement, as long as there were ways to organize access to a platform for reporting. The result was that vulnerability due to insecurity became subject to negotiation. Consequently, “real” claims were obscured by refugees' desire to get resettlement, for in the economy of insecurity, the same campital to some extent determined which claims were deemed true by UNHCR and the NGOs.

In a final reference to the urban, the sheer magnitude of resettlement from Kakuma contributed to the camp as a transitory space. Many informants came to Kakuma not so much to return “home” again, but hoped to move forward instead. As a portal, Kakuma offered migratory possibilities to those who manage to be considered eligible according to the agencies and receiving countries' qualifications. In this way, resettlement connected the camp to the wider world. Kakuma was a nodal point, a characteristic that also brought other influences into the camp. For example, the large number of people who were resettled resulted in a steady flow of remittances, visitors and images from the western world that continuously entered the camp.

## **Chapter Six: The politics of repatriation**

On January 9, 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA/M was signed in Nairobi. Celebrations erupted everywhere among the Sudanese groups in the camp. Many people partied all night long. In the morning they marched to the UNHCR compound with representations of church groups, women groups, boy scouts, and simply very many exited people. The CPA stipulated a six-year period of autonomy for the south, ending in a referendum for independence in 2011. In the camp, it gave birth to a nervous anticipation of possible repatriation among the refugees. During the first one and a half year after the signing, I was able to observe how repatriation became part of the refugee project and the camp environment. Nevertheless, it was far less easy to entice refugees to go “home,” than was initially portrayed by some stakeholders. Instead, the implementation of the repatriation program became another arena of negotiation between the different actors involved.

This chapter sets out the politics of repatriation. It analyses how repatriation became subject to negotiation between the refugees, the refugee hosting apparatus, and SPLA/M. The timing and implementation of repatriation was weighed by comparing situations in the camp and Sudan, and the importance of preserving access to Kakuma. For other groups, it meant a reconsideration of their place in the camp order.

The prospect of Sudanese repatriation meant different things to different actors, and expectations, rumors and prognoses tumbled over each other. For the other nationalities in the camp, the repatriation of the Sudanese was seen as a prelude to the closure of the camp, or a possible increase in insecurity, as explained in chapter three, the dominance of the Sudanese provided others with some sense of security as well. For the other nationalities, the political situations in their respective home countries did not make return feasible. The Somalis, Ugandans, Rwandans, Congolese and Ethiopians voiced the fear that they would be sent home. Others expressed their worries and fears of the closure of facilities and termination of services in the camp, which they were afraid might leave them unassisted and in the end, force them out of Kakuma altogether. Most Sudanese explained that they wondered what in Sudan they would be returning to. There were no schools, no hospitals, no roads, no jobs, no clean water, no facilities, and the list went on. Instead, the country was awash with landmines, small arms, active and former but not yet demobilized rebels, land disputes and most importantly, an insecure future with a referendum that was expected to be mired in violence. Moreover, the prospect of resettlement to a western country was ultimately tied to one’s presence in the camp, and being registered as a refugee kept that chance open.

For others the New Sudan was a dream come true. For a large part, this dream was imagined for a large part, for many did not have a clear remembrance of Sudan, or even any memories at all, other than the knowledge that this was the place from where they came. Nevertheless, they could not wait to go there and rebuild, or better, build. This was, in part, a generational issue. Older people with a clearer recollection of Sudan had a greater desire to return, while for others “the new Sudan” was little more than an imagined homeland. All these opinions were mediated, manipulated, contested and idealized, and considerable importance was attached to these opinions by UNHCR and other stakeholders. Repatriation, more so than the hosting of refugees, is the ultimate sign of success in the humanitarian management of displaced populations. To retain people in limbo may be well managed, but getting them out of that situation and back to “normality” is the ultimate goal.

In this chapter, I describe the politics of repatriation of the Sudanese in the camp. It does not reflect on the specificities in Sudan, but focuses instead on what happened and changed in the camp itself. What remains of the accidental city, the place that is made by temporary humanitarians and refugees, when conditions are being molded for them to go “home”? How did other nationalities perceive the coming repatriation, and what were its effects on the camp as a whole? Which processes of power, agency and identity construction are brought to light by the repatriation exercise, and how do other actors relate to this?

I analyze one and a half years of repatriation politics in the camp, which I describe by first discussing the policy and practice of the refugee hosting organizations, after which I set out the perspectives of Sudanese refugees, the involvement of the Sudanese leadership, and the perspectives of other nationalities in the camp and Kenyans in town.

### **Repatriation exercises**

On December 17, 2005, a convoy of buses, trucks, UNHCR Jeeps and police left Kakuma with destination *Chukudum* and *Kapoeta*, South Sudan. Some days later, the IRC was informed that repatriates wanted to come back to Kakuma, and sent out a truck to collect them. Although the program manager of LWF – the lead agency implementing repatriation – expressed that he did not know about this, or possibly tried to downplay the story, I met the IRC driver on the evening he returned from across the border to pick them up. As it turned out, when the convoy left earlier, the buses were filled with people, but the trucks carrying luggage were only partially filled. The LWF logistical manager



explained (when I met him again after he job-hopped to a large development agency in Lodwar) that workers witnessed how refugees boarded the bus carrying little more than a plastic bag. Many refugees regarded the repatriation as a trip, a go-and-see visit for themselves (or a “reconnaissance mission”, as one called it), similar to the one that had been organized earlier for selected camp leaders. From that first repatriation group of 135 people, everybody came back, and they brought with them additional people they met in their respective home villages. Moreover, they began spreading stories about the poor conditions in Sudan. This was a prelude of the steady flow of Sudanese who were arriving in Lokichoggio, numbering approximately 200 a week, right after the official start of repatriation. That number would grow for some weeks to come.

The return of the returnees became the talk of the town in the camp. For most refugees, it confirmed their hesitation to go. For others the event pointed out the perceived inappropriateness of UNHCR’s repatriation plans, which was either instigated too early, or with blind spot for recyclers – the program enabled “repatriated” refugees to return as new arrivals, thereby increasing their food rations. Most non-Sudanese simply laughed about it, explaining its lack of success citing a combination of the reasons set out above, perhaps with a sense of relief that the camp would not close overnight. The much-mediated kick-off for the resolution of one of the longest running refugee situations in the world was marred by refugees who used the event for their own intention of going to have a look-see.

That the repatriation of the Sudanese was a showcase for the world became clear when UNHCR kept mentioning from the very beginning of 2005 that “the Sudanese want to return home.” However, that same UNHCR, by voice of many of its Kenyan employees endowed with organizing the exercise, explained that hardly anybody in Kakuma was interested in repatriation at this stage. This discrepancy sometimes took on rather strange forms. On the same day, I could meet a Kenyan official of UNHCR or an NGO in the camp who stated very clearly that nobody was registering, whereas later in the office his/her expatriate manager would tell me that the Sudanese were ready to go. The official message was “Happy Sudanese going home,” although most refugees, and especially the youth, had little idea what or where exactly that meant.

The convoy of December 17th was the first UNHCR-organized repatriation effort in the region after the signing of the CPA nearly half a year earlier. It was, in other words, the kick-off for one of largest and arguably most complicated refugee and IDP repatriation exercises in recent history, with an estimated five to six million IDPs inside Sudan, and more than seven hundred thousand refugees in Uganda, DR Congo, Chad,

Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya.<sup>1</sup> That the first UNHCR organized repatriation took place from Kakuma turns out to be quite ironic: the first people to go were from one of the best developed camps for Sudanese refugees in East and the Horn of Africa. Perhaps this was another effect of Kakuma being a model camp: officials could be flown in, toured around the camp, wave the returnees goodbye and be back in Nairobi for an evening of Carpaccio and fine wine. As the logistical manager of the exercise explained, the kick-off location for such regional and multi-agency repatriation efforts is in part chosen on the basis of accessibility and safety for press and officials, not for the repatriates *per se*.

Refugees themselves had three main interrelated concerns that stood in the way of an enthusiastic attitude to repatriation. First of all, the initial happiness among the southern Sudanese in the camp evaporated when John Garang was killed in a helicopter crash twenty-two days after his inauguration as president of the newly formed Government of South Sudan (GoSS) and vice-president of Sudan. This accident was shrouded in conspiracy – nobody ruled out an assassination – and it increased people’s doubts about the reality of the peace agreement and the possibility of a return to war. Moreover, although most rumors about the intent behind the “accident” were geared towards involvement of the Sudanese government in Khartoum and the government of Uganda, the *Dinka Bor* (Garang’s own ethnic/regional group) whispered about the possible involvement of *Dinka Bahr al Ghazal*, as the new leader Salva Kiir came from that area. Apart from the usual belligerents as the Arabs vs. the black Sudanese, this accident opened up an interethnic dimension between the Dinka themselves. These issues directly related to John Garang’s death, and the power vacuum he left behind in the newly formed GOSS had a strong effect on refugees’ eagerness to apply for repatriation (see also: Eidelson and Horn 2008). One of my informants admitted that he considered enlisting for the SPLA, in the sudden tension that surfaced in the camp.

The CPA laid down a referendum for people to decide on separation or unity with northern Sudan in 2011. Many people voiced concerns over this event, and especially its aftermath, since there was near unanimity among the refugees in the belief that the people of southern Sudan would vote for separation and that Khartoum would never agree to this. In other words, a future war was thought to be very likely at the time, which tempered the hurry to go back. Among refugees, there were serious doubts about the stability of Sudan after the CPA, an uncertain future heading towards election, referendum and possible break-up. People were still entering the camp, some with stories

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<sup>1</sup> See for statistics on displaced populations, the archives of the US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI): [http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications\\_&\\_Archives/WRS\\_Archives/2005/guinea\\_sudan.pdf](http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications_&_Archives/WRS_Archives/2005/guinea_sudan.pdf)

and wounds from fresh violence between various militias and rebel movements and occasionally between the SPLA and the Sudanese Armed forces (SAF). News reached us in the camp about fighting along the disputed border in Abyei, a region with major oil reserves, and clashes in Malakal and other places, but also localized insecurity. During one interview, we got a message by phone saying that an uncle of the interviewee had just been killed in a crossfire in Sudan. Another time I met a Sudanese who went to Upper Nile in Sudan after the peace agreement, had his lower leg shot off and came back to Kakuma a cripple. On top of that, the LRA was still marauding the Equatorial region, and initial reports from the rest of the south indicated that the “big peace” opened up new forms of insecurity as a result of cattle rustling, inter-ethnic and land conflicts.

Furthermore, refugees considered southern Sudan deplete of infrastructure and resources after twenty-two years of war, while the camp had education, training and prospect of resettlement, on top of other services and facilities. Younger refugees went as far as calling Sudan “backward” in comparison to the camp. In the beginning of 2005 many new arrivals reported that part of their rationale to come to the camp was because of food insecurity in Sudan. As such, an additional problem was that many people, especially the younger generations, were unlikely to return to the pastoralist or even rural existence from which most refugees had come “originally.” Repatriation to Sudan may thus contribute to a rapid urbanization, leading to an even more strenuous distribution of limited resources in the few towns in the south that have to accommodate all these IDPs and refugees.

For UNHCR and the agencies, two additional problems soon manifested themselves. First, the newly established Government of South Sudan (GOSS) expressed that its first priority was in the repatriation of the IDPs, of which there were an estimated four million, many of whom had strayed around Khartoum and who needed to be brought back to the south. Second, while the lack of all basic infrastructure in Sudan might have been problematic for refugees, for UNHCR it meant they had to start building reception facilities from scratch, apart from which, roads were only passable half of the time due to flooding, landmines, and rebels.

For the Sudanese the option of repatriation represented not so much an end to the refugee cycle as a next step on the road of being tied between war and the Sudan. As the first one and a half years of “paper peace” progressed, it turned out that repatriation was going to require some persuasion. One not overly enthusiastic Sudanese leader remarked: “what if I want to see the *Premier League* in the village, no way!” He explained that expectations have been raised in Kakuma, and these need to be answered in Sudan. Before they could go, amenities such as health care, education and infrastructure need to be established. He added that many people were vulnerable for manipulation by UNHCR

and community leaders who had additional agendas in the repatriation game. With this, he pointed to the politics that surfaced behind the story of refugees going home after exile.

### **The marketing of repatriation**

As the 1990s were labeled the “age of repatriation” by the then High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, it was also realized what a political quagmire repatriation had become. UNHCR was regarded as promoting repatriation on the short term, instead of waiting for conditions to become conducive for voluntary repatriation (Black and Koser 1999). Donors were found to pressure UNHCR to repatriate quickly, to such an extent that UNHCR has been criticized as being “dictated more by hand-to-mouth response to donor pressure than a set of established principles or detailed knowledge of the local situation” (Pottier 1996: 404).

“Voluntary repatriation” is one of UNHCR’s three durable solutions, next to local integration and resettlement. It is a highly politically charged concept, for it directly mirrors the essence of refugee protection in the idea that assisting people to go back to their countries of origin can be understood as approaching *refoulement* (Black and Gent 2006). When repatriation starts, protection may be jeopardized in the enthusiasm and bureaucratic arrangements that are implemented to bring people home. As Gilbert notes, “UNHCR should monitor a not too hasty repatriation, as this falls under its mandate to protect refugees from *refoulement*. UNHCR, like ICRC, should condemn a hasty repatriation” (Gilbert 1998: 378-380). Yet, in practice UNHCR takes on the governmental role of persuading refugees to return, and to facilitate and organize their repatriation. As such, the question “how voluntary does repatriation have to be,” is answered as well as executed by the same body. This may be complicating UNHCR’s responsibility to protect. Pressuring or even facilitating return among people who may not be able to have a fully informed or balanced opinion about what it is that they are returning to, may be considered or even constitute a form of *refoulement*.

In the new millennium, refugees are increasingly being seen as agents of change. In addition to being protected from persecution and assisted to go home when it is safe, they are considered to be responsible for rebuilding their countries as well (Zieck 2004; UNHCR 2004e: 36-37). UNHCR and NGOs have broadened their mandate for refugee protection to include activities that would otherwise be understood as reconstruction or even development. With this, repatriation is merged into the discourses and policies of reconstruction and rehabilitation, strongly emphasized in UNHCR’s 4 Rs approach that seeks to align the processes of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and

reconstruction (UNHCR 2004d). Mattner argues that this is partly a way to attract long-term funding by adding a developmental component to a traditionally humanitarian domain (Mattner 2008: 115). On the other hand, in the camp aid workers and even Sudanese elders repeatedly remarked that without returnees to rebuild Sudan, it would take even longer for the country to develop. In UNHCR's discourse of repatriation that commenced in 2005, this was a way to market repatriation: go home and rebuild, the New Sudan awaits you. That is a step away from the organization's main priority of protecting refugees, which will become more clear when I discuss the process of scaling down services in the camp to relocate them to Sudan in the context of the 4Rs.

Donor pressure, host nation pressure, and agencies' hopes that if some refugees would repatriate, others would follow their example, led to the adoption of persuasive measures in an effort to enhance repatriation. All of a sudden, as instantaneous as the PSEA billboards and T-shirts appeared, I saw refugees walking along the roads in T-shirts that read: "It is only in Sudan that we can prosper – LWF"; "A peaceful Sudan awaits me for development – LWF"; "Sudan: there is no place like home – LWF"; and "I am an asset to Sudan: I know my rights and responsibilities – IRC." It is debatable to what extent such forms of persuasion become forceful, and thus when voluntary repatriation ceases to be strictly voluntary. As Gilbert notes, repatriation places "competing pressures on UNHCR: to ensure that refugees truly wish to return and yet, simultaneously, to decide when repatriation will be safe and then to promote it" (1998: 379). The risk is that agencies' enthusiasm in stimulating repatriation can indeed compromise refugees' feeling of being protected.

The Kenyan government spokesman for refugee affairs in Nairobi estimated that it would take fifteen to twenty years for the camp to vacate, although he acknowledged that this might be overly pessimistic.<sup>2</sup> UNHCR representatives thought it would take ten years to repatriate all the Sudanese in the region, but they added that this expectation could be unrealistic in light of the coming referendum.<sup>3</sup> The IOM program manager estimated that repatriation of the Sudanese was not possible within five years, but they planned for 10,000 a year.<sup>4</sup>

In the coming sections, I analyze the politics of repatriation from three mutually reinforcing angles: first, the formalization of return movement; second, the scaling down of services in the camp and relocating them to Sudan, thereby creating a pull factor in the

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<sup>2</sup> Interview, Director of Department of Refugee Affairs, Nairobi: August 30, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, National Representative *ad interim*, UNHCR Kenya and Assistant Representative Protection UNHCR Kenya, Nairobi: August 28, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Program Director IOM, Nairobi: August 29, 2006.

home country; and third, the perspectives and involvement of the Sudanese community and its leadership.

### **Formalizing refugee return movement**

Dolan writes that in voluntary repatriation the “individual’s movements are essentially determined by macro-level events (e.g. the signing of a peace accord), and have little room for the complexities of micro-level decision making. It thus conflicts with the notion that return should be “voluntary,” or in other words involve some element of individual agency on the part of the refugee” (Dolan 1999: 93-94). This notion of individual agency can be found in the occurrence of “spontaneous return,” as opposed to organized voluntary repatriation. Spontaneous return takes place when refugees return independently, often without informing the agencies, without the facilitation of agencies. In Kakuma, spontaneous returnees typically left without informing the agencies of their departure.

UNHCR tried to limit “spontaneous return” for a variety of reasons, among which the possibility of people returning with preservation of their ration card, factually retaining a refugee “passport,” which enables a “return from return.” Another reason was that when repatriation was managed, UNHCR could control to which areas people were repatriated and be certain about the reception capacity and security situation on the ground. Above all, UNCHR wanted to avoid refugee recycling – re-registering as a “new” refugee to receive another ration. It was only in 2006 that digital fingerprinting and retinal scans were being introduced in the registration process in Kakuma, which meant that it was still possible for people to be registered in the new way for the first time. The paradox was that “spontaneous” return was cast as informal, and in the camp context gained the connotation of something almost illegal – a form of wrongdoing against the agencies. To stress this point, UNHCR began campaigning against spontaneous return and arranged that returnees would only be assisted in Sudan if they could show their repatriation forms, which would simultaneously become travel documents and took on the function of ration cards for the receipt of rations in Sudan.

The official repatriation program was riddled with uncertainties. One of the often-heard problems was that refugees had been approached to register for repatriation on two different previous occasions that had not been pursued, and on which no action followed. Refugees were not necessarily unwilling *per se*, but first wanted to make sure that UNHCR was indeed prepared, and knew what it was doing. This may sound strange, but in the camp refugees had no clue about what was going on, throughout the whole of 2005 and

well into 2006. Their experiences with the two earlier registrations were explained as a preparatory exercise in anticipation of peace prior to the signing of the peace agreement. It may well have been that the exercises were simply surveys to find out what people's wishes were regarding repatriation, their desired destination, etc. The result, however, was that many Sudanese now had to register all over again, which among refugees significantly weakened the idea that there was a clear repatriation plan.

At the end of 2005, UNHCR and LWF constructed a departure center next to the reception center in Kakuma Three. It was a fenced area and people would literally be locked in between registration and departure. It looked more like a prison than a sensible space for ending the long period of exile in the camp, surrounded by long stretches of barbed wire. It was announced that refugees who registered for repatriation had to remain inside the fenced compound for at least 48 hours, or three nights, after which they would be transported by LWF buses straight to the airstrip.<sup>5</sup> After the initial debacle of the repatriation kick-off, UNHCR had tasked IOM with repatriating the refugees by air (at a cost of 250 USD per head), partly because the road conditions were bad. However, rumors circulated in the camp that another reason was to bring people so far away that they would be unable to return to Kakuma easily, as they had after the first repatriation.

The rationale behind the departure center remained a mystery to many of my informants. Why did it have to be a rigid camp with barbed wire and closed gates? Was it to prevent refugees coming back, and thus to ensure that they left properly? In order to avoid people coming back, thereby in effect closing the refugee cycle, and to verify consent, people had to sign Voluntary Repatriation Declaration Forms in the departure center upon repatriation. These forms were regarded as proof that refugees consented with the renunciation of their refugee status. The center was also functional in that the agencies were able to medically screen people for fitness to travel and reception in Sudan. People were informed on how to deal with landmines and unexploded ordinances (UXO's) and matters of hygiene and diseases such as the Guinea Worm, prevalent in southern Sudan. Moreover, returnees received some items such as a new kitchen set, blanket, and plastic sheet. The content and delivery of the repatriation package, as it was labeled, was subject to constant reports of changes and irregularities. While UNHCR was initially very clear about the content of the package, all of a sudden, the packages were finished. As one of the measures to ensure that people did indeed leave Kakuma, and to get repatriation going, UNHCR decided that people would receive their package in Sudan upon arrival. UNHCR explained that they had 4,000 packages in Kakuma and once these were

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<sup>5</sup> "Information for Sudanese refugees in Kakuma refugee camp on UNHCR activities in support of voluntary repatriation to and reintegration in southern Sudan" (UNHCR information booklet published in October 2005).

depleted, people would be assisted from within Sudan. Another persuasion was the promise, subject to many rumors, of a cash donation upon arrival and/or a food ration for up to three or six months.

There were stories and some skepticism about the repatriation center, but it was in the camp, where it was visible for everybody. With regard to the receiving end, rumors were spread that returnees would be “held” in returnee camps in Sudan. Considering how people felt about being locked up in the departure center for three days, and the way it looked with its fences and barren interior, the idea was not altogether unfeasible – in other words, nobody doubted that UNHCR might consider organizing repatriation like this. The returnee camps of which people spoke were UNHCR’s way stations, where returnees would be received and from which they would be transported onwards to their final destinations. Although the establishment of these camps was announced and confirmed in the camp, when I went to Sudan in September 2006, they were not ready yet. In fact, UNHCR had only just arrived in the area, and had to start from scratch. Although it was understandable from the perspective of UNHCR, which had to jumpstart repatriation, in the camp people were told that these facilities were already in place. On the other hand, it was also only in September of that year that UNHCR installed a repatriation manager and office in Kakuma, and this office had to start a new year again, much to the frustration of the newly appointed Repatriation Manager who explained that only 2,000 people had registered so far.<sup>6</sup>

These were all indications of the lack of capacity to receive returnees, and with it, the fear of having to keep people in camps again due to hick-ups in the returnee pipeline. In the tripartite agreement between UNHCR, the government of Kenya and the Government of Sudan, which assured freedom of movement and settlement, it was laid down that returnees were not to be forced into returnee camps.<sup>7</sup> IOM argued that although it was able to fly returnees all over Sudan, where would they go from there? In those early days, the available returnee locations were thus in part determined by the infrastructure in the hubs in Sudan.

The turbulent start of the repatriation process generated confusion and conflicting understandings about the procedure among refugees. One of the topics of debate among the Sudanese, and a worry among non-Sudanese as well, was the idea that facilities in Kakuma would be closed when the Sudanese would go, or even before that, to stimulate them to do so.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, Repatriation Manager UNHCR, Kakuma: November 7, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> See: “Tripartite agreement between the government of the republic of Kenya and the government of the republic of Sudan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the voluntary repatriation of Sudanese refugees in Kenya back to the Sudan,” January 12, 2006: Clause 6.



## Scaling down for relocating to Sudan

### *Clause 2: Status of refugees who do not make the decision to repatriate*

Refugees who, for the time being, do not make the decision to return to Sudan under the present Agreement or in any other manner, shall continue to be recognized as refugees by both the Government of Kenya and UNHCR. Their status and treatment in Kenya shall also continue to be governed by the principle of international refugee law.<sup>8</sup>

UNHCR's complex maneuvering between refugee protection and stimulating repatriation became apparent when the phrase "scaling down" started to be used in the camp over the course of 2005. The term scaling down applied to a lot of measures that were rumored or planned to take place in order to persuade the Sudanese to enlist for voluntary repatriation. From the beginning of 2005 until mid-2006, rumors were nurtured by the unclear and vague nature of UNHCR's repatriation plans. The first rumor was that newly arriving Sudanese would no longer be eligible for refugee status. This belief was fed by measures taken against refugee recycling and refugees' return from return. Banning southern Sudanese from refugee protection was marred by complexities and sensitivities. For instance, as IOM explained,<sup>9</sup> new arrivals started to come in from Darfur – half a world away. Some came by airplane to Lokichoggio, but no one knew how and who paid for this. UNHCR explained that they were going to ban Sudanese new arrivals from education, with the exception of Darfurians.<sup>10</sup> Sudanese would still be able to receive refugee status but they would not be entitled to education to create a push factor for repatriation. The Equatorians protested that this measure would be bad for them, as their areas were still under threat of the LRA. This policy would therefore mean that UNHCR would have to distinguish among new arrivals and to decide who would be granted the full range of facilities that normally accompanied refugee status in Kenya. One of the results was that the Anuak – another border crossing tribe – from Sudan posed as Ethiopians in order to escape exclusion. Stories of humanitarian measures travelled fast.

UNHCR's strategy to persuade the Sudanese to go included scaling down or closing camp facilities and services. By the end of 2005 two secondary schools were closed: the Somali Bantu and Bor Town secondary schools respectively. This coincided with the resettlement of the Somali Bantu, and as one of the schools was specifically built for them and closed down when their resettlement scheme approached finalization, this could not be attributed to repatriation of the Sudanese. Although UNHCR and other NGOs

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, Head of Sub-Office IOM, Kakuma: May 24, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Repatriation Manager UNHCR, Kakuma: September 7, 2006.

announced that scaling down in the camp was mirrored by building up facilities in South Sudan, for refugees, including the non-Sudanese, this resulted in worries.

Apart from formal education, vocational training and its linkages to microcredit schemes also became subject to return programming. It was announced that microcredit would only be given to Sudanese who registered for return, and Don Bosco would change its approach to provide grants and in-kind assistance instead of loans. The returnees would receive a start-up grant that would no longer be given as credit, but a gift that some explained as another offer to get people out of the camp. Other NGOs created new vocational training programs that were geared towards repatriation and reconstruction in Sudan. Basically, the entire camp went into a return modus, as courses and vocational training became almost exclusively geared towards repatriation. Courses were given concerning hygiene, food preparation and health. A new NGO, Handicap International (HI), entered the camp to sensitize future repatriates on how to deal with landmines and other unexploded ordnance (UXOs), and new billboards arose and T-shirts were handed out explaining how to behave when encountering these explosive devices.

In 2005, the Teachers Training College (TTC) was opened in Kakuma Three. This was a form of tertiary education for Form Four leavers, intended to prepare them to be teachers. Many Form Four leavers became teachers in the camp, but received little training. The TTC was intended to resolve this problem. It had 270 students for a one-year course. At the end of the year, 220 passed the exam. That was the end of the TTC, for it was decided that the college would be relocated to Sudan. The establishment of the TTC coincided with the start of the repatriation exercise. Not only was it deemed more relevant in Sudan, but its relocation further added to the scaling down of the camp. It was not only the Teachers Training College that relocated to Sudan. Don Bosco closed one of its centers and also started the process of relocation. Windle Charitable Trust opened its first language training school in Juba, and its long time program manager – the only expat who had lived in town because he did not enjoy the “non-family duty station” that the compound was – followed to Sudan. From then on, other humanitarian workers from Kakuma also began job-hopping to Sudan.

Given the limited availability of public amenities in southern Sudan, there were rational arguments to scale down services in the camp and to contribute to the kick-start of education and vocational training in Sudan. However, during this time, almost every policy measure for repatriation was simultaneously understood as a way to get refugees out of the camp. The vague plans and policies were met with rumor and even fear. These rumors extended to fundamental provisions such as food. For instance, in the beginning

of 2006 it was announced that WFP had to cut food rations. Refugee leaders were informed by UNHCR that there would be food cuts of forty per cent (Vaguely, WFP said twenty per cent, and some wondered where the other twenty per cent went. There was gossip that food intended for refugees was sold to some Turkana villages for cash.) More importantly, a Somali chairman explained to me that he believed that the budget cuts were not made on behalf of the funders as such, but were implemented as a push factor to stimulate people to go back to Sudan. Similarly, in the spring of 2006, for two months in a row, only millet was distributed instead of the usual maize and beans. Many Sudanese did not like millet, and some also interpreted this as a persuasion to repatriate. Other groups feared that they might be starved out of the camp. Although this sounds unlikely, Harrell-Bond writes how UNHCR “starved out” a Salvation Army hostel in Kampala, as a means of forcing the refugee residents to leave (Harrell-Bond 2002: 74).

Repatriation measures by UNHCR and the agencies were unclear, except for their desire to stimulate the refugees to go back to Sudan. In the next section, I will discuss how Sudanese experienced the prospect of repatriation.

### **Happy Sudanese going home**

World Refugee Day, June 20, 2006. The humanitarian *Big Men* and the occasional woman are seated under an ad-hoc tarpaulin roof on *Napata Grounds* – the usual ceremonial meeting place in Kakuma camp – for the annual celebrations. Over the course of a few hours, there are speeches by UN, NGO and refugee leaders, traditional dances and performances by various tribes including the Turkana, and a few edifying short plays. One of these plays dealt with the main issue at hand: the repatriation of the Sudanese, who, according to the agencies’ logic, had no reason to remain in Kakuma now that peace had come to Sudan.

The play depicted some Sudanese Dinka youth coming home to “their” village after many years. In the village they are greeted by an old man in traditional attire. The old man is shocked by the boys and has a hard time recognizing them as Dinkas. The boys were dressed like young Americans, with earrings and other jewelry, wide and low-hanging clothes, and well attended haircuts. According to the old man, they looked like girls. They would be in danger of being given to a man, or else, simply taken as wives.

The play illustrated a new complexity. What were these youth going to do in Sudan? Were they going to go back to their villages or those of their parents? Or were they going to go and rebuild them? Would there be conflict or problems between the old and the “returning,” and what would that mean for many of the youth who had little to no

recollection of what Sudan was, let alone those who were born in the camp, which many were by now? One of the difficulties in the camp was that the younger generations would most likely not return to the hardships of the cattle camp, with its cattle rustling and other insecurities, nor would they be comfortable farming somewhere in the hinterland. There is no way “back” to the village.

The joke with the old man was not only about his being traditional or old-fashioned, for in the camp itself, traditions were also challenged. A Sudanese newspaper reported that girls were hesitant to go for repatriation due to fear of forced marriage in Sudan. The same article mentioned that girls in the camp were born “out of statistics,” that is, they were not reported to UNHCR, and were being sold to men in Sudan due to high bride price.<sup>11</sup> Although forced marriages were not unusual in the camp, as I discussed in chapter two, a girl could find redress in protection measures by the agencies, depending on her ability and desire to go against her own customs. The several pockets of authority, in other words, although sometimes sanctioned, also created possibilities for “forum shopping” and the choice of what to report to which office.

Somewhere in 2005 I was waiting along the road with a Dinka *Mzee* who I had just interviewed (he, towering over me while he explained that I was a child because of my lack of proper military training) when a Dinka girl passed us riding a bicycle, wearing tight jeans and a tight top. He shook his head in regret and disgust, explaining that this was not the way Dinka girls were supposed to behave. To evade these parental or elder protests, some of the programming of the agencies specifically aimed to challenge customary gender relations. Most of these initiatives took place in the educational sector, and the pro-active gender programming in distributing incentive jobs. But they also occurred outside of the agencies’ domain: gender roles were also challenged in socio-economic sectors such as the hip-hop contests during WARS events. Some people claimed that refugee life had exposed and taught these girls new moral codes and made them forget their norms, thereby neglecting more mundane forms of change. As they saw it, it was not the traumatic experience of flight and refuge that created this “forgetting of norms,” but the policies of the agencies, and the effects of media and opportunities as analyzed in chapter four. Change was deemed to be foreign and external alone. In a similar vein, I found that my informants in Northern Uganda were speaking of “moral decay” as one of the effects of the war – girls having sex without being married and boys stealing and using drugs and alcohol – as if these could only exist because of the war.<sup>12</sup> In the play, the boys were equally surprised about the old fashioned Sudan with which they were suddenly confronted, pointing out another concern voiced by various Sudanese

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<sup>11</sup> Sudan Tribune, 18 February 2005.

<sup>12</sup> In 2000 I conducted fieldwork in Gulu, northern Uganda, for my master’s thesis.

refugees: what was there to return to? One of the expatriates expressed his irritation at the “lack of will of Sudanese to go home and rebuild the country,” indeed it almost angered him. He saw all these “able bodied people,” and wondered why they would choose to remain in Kakuma hosted and fed by the international community instead of going home and contributing to their own future. He viewed this as a form of dependency syndrome whereby people were institutionalized and unable to do anything other than receiving rations, or even as spoiled beneficiaries that wanted the world to fix their home while they stayed in the camp and waited. Although institutionalization may certainly play a role, structural obstacles such as insecurity and the lack of development, and psychological issues such as fear may lead people to choose to wait and see.<sup>13</sup> Harrell-Bond writes how UNHCR uses strategies to legitimate a speed up of repatriation by defining refugees as undeserving opportunists (irregular movers, recyclers). As a result they may even “deny them medical treatment and cutting of support for refugees who were formally defined as in need of protection” (Harrell-Bond 2002: 74). UNHCR, in Harrell-Bond’s example, as well as that of the above mentioned expatriate, fails or is unable to recognize refugees as people who strategize, which may mean waiting a while before returning home, not so much due to a lack of initiative but as a strategy, as a result of weighing multiple options available to them.

There was little recognition of other forms of strategy too. Dolan writes how the major weakness in the repatriation of Mozambicans from South Africa was the estimation of the number of people who wanted to return. He writes that data gathering was based on simple yes/no questions that asked if people wanted to return, and not when or under which conditions, nor who would take decisions in the household, or whether the household planned to go together or in stages (Dolan 1999: 89-90). In Kakuma, the same applied. People simply wanted to have some control over their situation.

One of the reasons for this was the possibility to strategize their own return without losing access to the services and possibilities in the camp or possibility to return. Again, a generational difference played a role in the perception of repatriation. Sudan was for the largest part associated with the village and traditional life, ideas that the elderly longed for, but the youth not so much. Moreover, parents with young children wanted to make sure that they would receive education, and had access to health care and clean water. The

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<sup>13</sup> The IRIN news network made a short film about a Sudanese who returns via official voluntary repatriation from Uganda. He is delighted by the prospect of seeing his fellow villagers, family and the place where he grew up after having spent more than a decade in exile. When he arrives, he finds out that LRA rebels are still active in his area and feels insecure, and he begins to doubt his decision to repatriate. The movie is a clear example of how difficult it can be to make an informed decision about return after years in exile. “Between hope and fear,” <http://www.irinnews.org/film/?id=4113>.

extent to which these would be available in Sudan was not clear or not trusted, in part due to vagueness of the agencies' repatriation and information policies.

A Dinka *Mzee* who stayed with his family elsewhere in Kenya came back to Kakuma after the peace was signed, leaving his wives and children at home. He still had property and a business in the camp that was managed by his eldest son. He came back to explore the way ahead, and after some time in the camp, he booked a flight from Lokichoggio and went to explore the possibilities of starting a business in his home village, located somewhere near the town of *Bor*. He explained that he as *Mzee* did not have any objection to returning to the village, but that he could understand the hesitation of his children, who were still in Kenya awaiting reports from their father about the possibilities for income generation in Sudan. He had not responded to UNHCR's repatriation registration exercise. He had the resources to be able to take some time, and if he did not like what he found in *Bor*, he would come back to Kenya. Otherwise, he could start something up, and gradually bring his family back "home."

Other people, especially the young and educated, jumped on the possibility of employment in the humanitarian reconstruction effort that was now starting in Sudan. One Lost Boy who had been in the camps in Dimma in Gambella had worked as a teacher in one of the primary schools in the camp, but felt that he had to go back to Sudan; he had missed out on resettlement and was tired of the camp. He went to Nairobi to lobby with his relatives – some of them lived in Nairobi, others in the camp, and still others in Sudan – for the necessary funds to go and get a trucks driver license. He graduated in Nairobi and moved on to Juba to find a job as a driver, first with one of the demining companies and later with GTZ/UNDP, which was building roads near Kapoeta. Here lies an interesting parallel between aid as a resource in the camp and aid as a resource in Sudan. Other people I knew in the camp were recruited by NGOs and started to work in reconstructing Sudan.

After the completion of my fieldwork, I started to receive messages from people who went to Juba, which became a boomtown after the CPA where they found jobs in the reconstruction effort. They were able to continue digging aid, only now "at home."<sup>14</sup> None of them freely gave up their refugee status, so they preserved their "right to return." The above examples are perhaps not the most ordinary, for, as in the classification of chapter four, many of the people in these stories are refugee elites in one way or another.

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<sup>14</sup> "Skills for Southern Sudan" was the name of an NGO in Nairobi that specifically focused on liaising between the Sudanese diaspora and the reconstruction effort. To indicate the enormity of the process that was starting, the program manager explained that in August 2006, the GOSS requested approximately 3,000 lawyers and judges to kick-start the establishment of a government and its ministries out of the blue, while the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) also had close to 3,000 vacancies. Interview, Program Manager Skills for Southern Sudan, Nairobi: August 31, 2006.

Nevertheless, they were also not unusual. The first *Mzee* had a son in Canada and an extended family in Nakuru, where one of his daughters had married a Kenyan man. He was making a base in Sudan enabling others to follow later, but none of his plans were fixed. He could return to Kenya at every moment, for like the others, he had not given up his refugee status. Moreover, his family had an income of its own and would not have to move for the time being. So, while spreading family members over camps is a strategy for refugee families during exile and during war, it is also a strategy in the direct aftermath. After some time, when it is proven that it is safe, there is some form of livelihood opportunity, and conditions are deemed appropriate, wives, children and other dependent relatives can follow to Sudan.

Indeed, many families strategized in a comparable way. Several of my informants got jobs with NGOs in Sudan, where employment opportunities grew considerably after the peace was signed, and where the function of the camp as a rear base for the training of educated cadres was confirmed to some extent. Others were directly recruited in the camp by NGOs who similarly sought employees that had some education, experience with humanitarianism, and command of the English language.<sup>15</sup> Those who were recruited (most of whom were men) left their wives and children or parents in Kakuma to either prepare the way and confirm what conditions were like in Sudan, or to have their children finish their education in the camp. Families were also broken up for this reason, for example when two younger brothers would remain in the camp to finish their schooling while the rest of the family would move to Sudan.

Dolan describes how UNHCR refused to accept individuals in the repatriation from South Africa to Mozambique. When UNHCR found out that some returnees had traveled on the repatriation wagons more than once, they decided that they would only support family wise return. “This effectively made it more difficult for a household to repatriate strategically in the sense of leaving some household members in the host country to maintain whatever structural advantage was to be derived from exile while at the same time sending other members to the place of origin to re-establish a base there” (Dolan 1999: 92).

Moreover, the basic assumption that people want to go home is perhaps too easily accepted as a result of the idea that people are “rooted” in a natural order and have a clear place of belonging (Malkki 1992). Chimni refers to this as the “Nostalgia Model,” in which “the refugee condition is, regardless of the cause and what transpires afterwards, viewed as a climb down from a period of hope, progress, and individual or family development. It follows that the future, unless it means walking down the road which

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<sup>15</sup> Several resettled refugees started to study humanitarian related topics. One of my Sudanese contacts started a course in humanitarian management in Australia, as did a Ugandan in Canada.

leads back home, can only mean the worsening of the condition” (Chimni 1993: 457). This is a simplification of the experience of refuge and processes of social change that may transpire within that period. Moreover, it fails to take into account the perceptions of second and third generation refugees.

Hesitation to rush into repatriation, or the desire to feel free to organize it personally may also have another reason. As Kaiser notes, “it is critical that we remember that people’s needs and aspirations may have changed during their period of protracted exile, transforming previous expectations about durable solutions for them” (Kaiser 2008: 266). A report mentions this specifically for Kakuma and Dadaab:

The assumption that the majority of the returnees would want to go return to their previous occupation and lifestyle is misconceived because it disregards the considerable degree of social and economic transformation the refugees undergo during exile. During this considerably long period of isolation from their original communities, not only has the vast majority become inactive and sedentary, but they managed to pluck their livelihoods in a variety of ways including restricted crop production on practically barren soils, participation in labor markets both in formal and informal sectors in urban, semi-urban and rural areas, and self-employment in diverse off-farm income-generating activities, which activities they were not previously engaged in. A large number of refugees have become accustomed to public utilities such as access to health care, education clean water and sanitation, and transportation. Most of the facilities in the refugee camps are also perceived to be superior to those the refugees expect to find in rural South Sudan and Somalia. (UNHCR/ILO 2005: 55)

This argument was put forward by one of the UNHCR managers too, stating that amenities and life circumstances would probably be better in Kakuma than in Sudan for the coming five years. According to a prominent Sudanese, there were large differences between how Sudanese felt about returning to Sudan. He argued that those who had nothing more to do, and who had finished Form Four, wanted to go back. And then, most of those who were educated would go back to towns. On the other hand, those who have something to do in Kenya, such as business, education, or prospects for resettlement, found reasons to remain in the camp, and took it easy as long as the situation suited them. One man said that they had been in so Kenya long that he could easily wait a little longer.

### **Sudanese leaders and the repatriation game**

I am standing with two Sudanese Dinkas from Bahr Al Ghazal in front of the Ethiopian administration office near the Ethiopian Library and Bole Hotel. The UNHCR Deputy Head of Sub-Office comes walking towards us. He is an Ethiopian expatriate who



sometimes comes to the Ethiopian market, where he drinks coffee with his countrymen (note the arbitrariness of labels – two people with the same nationality in a foreign land; one a highly paid UN-expatriate, the other a refugee). He joins us briefly and one of the Dinkas asks him: “why don’t you repatriate Dinkas to Bahr Al Ghazal?” The UNHCR man replies: “because we don’t like you very much.” After an initial awkward moment, everybody laughs – as if they only slowly realize that the UN official is capable of making jokes. Then, in a more serious tone, the deputy explains that there is no clearance yet from the SPLM for repatriation to the Bahr al Ghazal region. He continues that only Nuer are returning there. The Dinka then contributes: “Yes, get them out of here; we want those people to be removed.”

Among the Sudanese, the various fault lines between the different ethnic groups became important as the warscape indeed also played a role here. As in the quote in the beginning, when it was not feasible to resettle Dinkas, they themselves said that the Nuer were able to leave without any problems, in fact, they considered this a positive development. The underrepresentation of the Nuer in the camp then contributed to their being the first Sudanese group that began to go back to Sudan, both organized and spontaneously. Out of the 1,141 people that joined UNHCR’s organized repatriation in 2006, almost all were Nuer.<sup>16</sup>

Inside Sudan, the political landslides of the transition from rebel army to government were another reason for ethnicities other than the Dinka to be worried. For instance, there were numerous stories concerning the Dinka-dominated SPLA having taken cattle and properties in Equatoria during the war. Recent cattle raids that were blamed on pastoralists in the south were seen in conjuncture with SPLA soldiers who were said to have assisted in moving the cattle back to Dinka land.

It was difficult to evade or ignore the dominant position of the Dinka. Some refugee leaders became Members of Parliament in Sudan directly after the CPA, and not only did they know the camp, they also communicated directly with the refugee leadership. Somewhere in May 2006, I met a Sudanese Dinka who worked with SPLA. His area of coverage was the area between Kapoeta, Narus, Chukudum and he was stationed in New Site – one of the wartime head quarters of the SPLA where John Garang lived, not too far from the Kenyan and the Ugandan border and nearby the site where Garang’s helicopter crashed. He stayed in Kakuma between 1995 and 1998. When I met him, he was on R&R for a few days. He explained that SPLA/M advises the Dinkas not to go home yet. They thought it was too early and that there were still too many problems in

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, Program Director IOM, Nairobi: August 29, 2006.

the south. Moreover, returnees arrived from other locations and countries of refuge every day, or so he said, resulting in a straining of the already limited reception capacities.

I went to visit one of the Dinka leaders in December 2005, a few days after he returned from a go-and-see-visit to Bor that had been organized by UNHCR. He said that he “simply found nothing.” There was not even a UNHCR office, which is interesting since this was one of the promises that were made in leaflets and media. There was no development. Although there was one secondary school, the language of teaching was Arabic. There were still very many Northerners / Arabs in Bor, and many Dinkas had converted to Islam. There was no clean drinking water, which had to be imported from Uganda. There was a lack of health care. The primary school that he had once attended had been bombed to ruins, and primary education was given next to the old school “under the Mango tree” that he had once planted as a child.

Moreover, he said, recent clashes between tribal groups had led to the presence of new IDPs arriving in Bor, adding to earlier IDP presence in the area. This was related to another concern for the Sudanese authorities regarding returnees, for if there was no reception capacity for them, especially when most moved to towns, they could become IDPs themselves after return, increasing the already existing tensions and pressure over resources and space among existing IDPs, returnees and local populations. As a visualization of the lack of development, he explained how the five MPs for Bor slept and worked in the same house. The MPs commented that it was too early for repatriation and that the local population might not understand the returnees, which could result in conflicts. Nothing was planned to sensitize them and the MPs suggested that the brochures that UNHCR spread in the camp should be mirrored in the home country so that people would know who these returnees were. Most importantly, UNHCR had promised that returnees would not be put into new camps, although now it seemed that the returnee stations would be like camps again.

On this basis, he was very much against mass repatriation at the moment, and said that he felt it should be postponed. He voiced what nearly everyone said: “we are ready, but Sudan is not.” The members of the go-and-see visit had made a list of demands that UNHCR needed to look into before repatriation could be implemented. The list included the usual: education, health and clean water. Not on the list, but equally important, were job opportunities.

Remarkably, the leader was warned by UNHCR not to make any public comments about his trip until some days later, after the team had met and agreed upon a common statement. The leader suggested that this was a form of censorship, as refugee leaders had previously been sanctioned for speaking out without UNHCR’s consent. Interestingly, the overall UNHCR security officer joined the go-and-see visit. In a similar instance but

during a different repatriation exercise, Rwandan refugees in a Tanzanian camp who returned from a cross border trip were not allowed to say anything negative about conditions in Rwanda, so as not to discourage refugees from repatriating (Joint Commission for Refugees of the Burundi and Tanzania Episcopal Conferences 2008: 57). The particular refugee leader to whom I was speaking had previously experienced some issues with UNHCR censorship as well. He claimed that he was fired from his incentive job after he had read out a speech on a World Refugee Day celebration in front of the public and officials, and had refused to use the corrections to his speech made by UNHCR. It was customary that speeches and lists of demands or general comments delivered by refugee leaders during these events had to be submitted to UNHCR some days before, after which they would be returned with “suggestions” and changes. Instead, this leader had read his original statement. He feared this form of control yet again and demanded that the agency not change a single letter in his report.

The leader also told me that a movie had been made during the go-and-see visit. He wanted the movie to be shown in the camp. Filmaid had a large screen and the facilities to process the movie and show it everywhere in the camp. He thought it would be good for the Sudanese to see for themselves what the conditions looked like. Furthermore, as schools and hospitals were promised, people could see how they looked. However, due to some unforeseen reason this was not planned, nor allowed. To him, it indicated that the schools and hospitals were not there and that UNHCR did not want to jeopardize its operation. As the Repatriation Manager would explain later in 2006, there was a risk that refugees from Kakuma would miss the momentum. They were expected to be relatively successful in finding jobs due to their education and exposure in Kakuma, but that meant they would have to return, for if they waited, others might take their place. This indicates the pull factor in repatriation exercises. Dolan writes that the repatriation from South Africa to Mozambique was tight, that there was hardly any time for information about conditions and reception capacity to trickle back to the refugees (Dolan 1999: 92). He continues that some people simply did not believe that the war had ended. Similarly, there were many reservations to the expectation of a lasting peace also voiced by the Sudanese in Kakuma.

Instead, it was understood that not only did SPLM prioritize the return of the many IDPs that had settled around Khartoum, but in the camp Sudanese explained that the SPLM had developed a strategy to try to find ways to keep Kakuma open as a future facility. The function of the camp as a rear base thus becomes clear once again, and it could be valuable in the event of a return to violent conflict in the run-up to and aftermath of the referendum in 2011. On another note, in Kakuma, relatively developed as it was, the condition of refugees was relatively good. Compared to other target groups,

the repatriation of refugees from Kakuma was not a priority for SPLM. In chapter three, I quoted Lisher (2005: 25) who wrote about state-in-exile refugees and the ways in which their leadership tries to control the information that reaches the camp. This also happened in Kakuma. Some SPLM officials came to the camp to inform the refugees about the conditions in Sudan, but according to UNHCR they “were all cronies of SPLA,” who were not speaking for the benefit of the refugees, but for the movement.

This approach, however, was rumored to be secretly shared by some of the agencies. One of the NGO chiefs explained that without refugees, the donors would demand the dismantling of the camp, and then, after some time, they would have to build it all over again, while it was likely that the region would continue producing refugees on a large scale. This view coincided with the position of the non-Sudanese in the camp.

### **Perspectives of non-Sudanese refugees on the coming repatriation**

Although the majority of the population in Kakuma was Sudanese, there were many thousands of others who could not or did not want to repatriate. I knew one man who returned to his home country, although his return was not entirely voluntary. He was a Somali man who, according to his friends, became an alcoholic after his wife died. (The story went that his wife lived in Nairobi when she died, and that the man was denied a travel permit by UNHCR to attend her funeral, while he did not have the means to risk travelling by himself by bribing the police. This had a negative impact on his mental health and made him a bit mad). I sometimes met him when he was at work as a sign painter for some business in town or in the camp, or on other occasions when he would roam around the Equatorian community, drinking their homebrews. When he was drunk he would spend the night in that community too, for Somalis would most likely sanction him. When his mother in Somalia heard about her son’s behavior, she sent money to his Somali community in Kakuma to bring him home. Sometime in 2005, three men took him to Nairobi and put him on a plane to Mogadishu. His departure, thus, was not entirely voluntary, although it was comparable to other occasions where people moved in and out of the camp for various reasons, as part of normal movements between home and refuge. Later, when I was already back home in the Netherlands, I was informed by a Congolese and a Ugandan respectively that they had become tired of refugee life, and had gone back to their countries. These three were the only ones I personally knew of other nationalities than Sudanese, who returned to their countries of origin (although I would learn in 2010 that the Congolese had returned to Kakuma again).

When I left at the end of 2006, I thought that the process of scaling down in the camp and relocating resources to Sudan might result in a problematic future for the other nationalities in the camp. There were many stories going around, also among the agencies. One of these was that either Dadaab or Kakuma would close, and that one would absorb the “caseload” of the other. Most likely in this scenario, the other non-Sudanese of Kakuma would go to Dadaab. Having last been in Kakuma in the beginning of 2010, I know this has not been the case, and in fact, at that time the camp was growing again, and services were returning. I will discuss this further in the epilogue. For now, it is important to briefly discuss the impact of the start-up of repatriation for other nationalities in the camp as well as the Turkanas.

Repatriation of the Sudanese brought uneasiness for the other groups. For the Somalis, it was clear that the agencies had agreed that they could not go home, although during 2006 Somalia experienced a period of stability. At that time, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) was making headway in Somalia, and had basically conquered the entire country with the exception of Somaliland. Many Somalis were horrified by the prospect of integral rule of the UIC, but simultaneously stated that it did not concern them because they would never go back – they would go to the US instead, or to another western country, or else they would stay in the camp. And thus, the Somalis became the new Sudanese. The existence of the camp was hung on their country’s fate of remaining in war, at least in the eyes of many non-Sudanese and non-Somali refugees.

Many Somalis in Kakuma came from urban areas such as Mogadishu and Kismayu, and the older ones in particular had grown up with education and some form of prosperity before the 1970s. Many non-urban Somalis voiced similar concerns to those expressed by the Sudanese about the idea of returning to pastoralism: they would not do it. They too had grown up within the camp; they had been educated up to Form Four and desired to continue their education. Moreover, more than the Sudanese, the Somalis had a strong base in Kenya in the Nairobi suburb of Eastleigh. People were continuously moving between the camp and Eastleigh, weighing opportunities and possibilities.

Other groups had other issues with regard to repatriation. The Ugandans, Ethiopians and Rwandans were mostly seen as former rebels or military forces and their dependants, as discussed in chapter three. Many of them feared persecution in the home country, on account of former acts of violence. UNHCR tried to persuade them by creating favorable conditions for return there, too. For instance, over the course of my fieldwork a tripartite agreement was drawn up between the Rwandan and Kenyan governments and UNHCR for the voluntary repatriation of the Rwandan community. Many, however, understood the spread of the message of the tri-partite agreement as a prelude to *refoulement* and a confirmation of the undesirability of anyone who could possibly be associated with the

genocide. The amount of distrust towards UNHCR and the agencies could be extreme in some cases. Many Ethiopians, for instance, refused to take nutritional supplements distributed by WFP to mix with their food. They explained to me that they believed that UNHCR was trying to make them infertile, so that the burden of their presence would be solved over time by preventing their procreation. This was surprising, given that an Ethiopian incentive worker was tasked with convincing his community to take the supplement for health reasons. He had a very hard time persuading people of the contents of the supplements as well intended nutrients.

Similar tri-partite agreements were reached between Kenya, Ethiopia and UNHCR and between Kenya, Uganda and UNHCR. But refugees did not trust these agreements, or did not want to lose out on opportunities to migrate, probably knowing the language and practice of resettling “caseloads” away to solve refugee problems. That is, if a certain protracted refugee group becomes small enough, the prospect of local integration or targeted resettlement increases. UNHCR mentions in its Convention Plus initiative – a policy reorientation of the early 2000s – that to relieve the burden of refugee hosting, a durable solution for remaining caseloads may be resettlement, referred to as “burden sharing.” Another option refugees had heard of, and which some desired, was local integration in Kenya, which was considered more viable if the large groups were repatriated first.

In Kakuma town, the buzz going around was the loss of humanitarian opportunity and economic ties that had developed between town and the camp over the past fifteen years. This partly coincided with the gradual dismantling of Operation Lifeline Sudan in Lokichoggio, from where the NGOs and UN organizations were moving to Rumbek, Juba, Wau and other towns in South Sudan. Although many Turkana thought it would take some time, some already started complaining that after “they” had hosted the refugees for so long, what would now remain for them? UNHCR had promised that some of the structures built for refugees would remain and be transferred to the local community. The Angelina Jolie boarding school, the Teachers Training College, the Don Bosco center and the new school in the Somali community would be handed over to the Kenyan government, and would find a Kenyan purpose (although one might wonder what a small place like Kakuma would do with more than one school, training center or hospital). More important to the Turkana were the direct input of cash, resources and jobs in the local economy that they stood to lose with the closing of the camp.

However, the opening up of South Sudan left a number of expectations among Kenyans in general, and also among those in Kakuma. On a national scale, the post-conflict reconstruction and start-up of education and health facilities became a magnet for Kenyan workers to such an extent that it created some tensions with Sudanese who

thought they lost out on employment opportunities, and resulted in the expulsion of a number of Kenyans from Sudan. In Kakuma, there were widespread expectations of the future of A1 Pan African Highway, of which the Sudanese side was being demined and tarmacked, and which would become the main route between the harbor in Mombasa and the capital of the New Sudan, Juba. Moreover, discussions were under way to build a new deep-sea harbor in Lamu, with a railroad and pipeline connecting the oil producing regions of South Sudan to the coast, bypassing northern Sudan. This would open up northern Turkana, and Kakuma within it, to the rest of Kenya. By now, these projects are partly underway, built by and financed by China.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the prospect of repatriation became part of the landscape of Kakuma after the signing of the CPA in Sudan. From the perspective of social ordering processes, repatriation is an interesting domain because the characterization of the camp as an accidental city becomes relevant in people's choices to stay or go. Refugees' lives, opportunities, and circumstances were weighed against a Sudan that was lacking in virtually everything, was still insecure, and had an uncertain future with regard to the sustainability of peace. In addition, the larger interests in the camp, which by different actors was perceived as a facility for refugee reception (UNHCR / SPLM), recuperation and rear base (SPLM), and education and resettlement/migration opportunities (refugees), also became tied to the implementation of repatriation. Refugees from other nationalities were concerned about the possible closure of Kakuma. Many of them had a rebel or military past and saw limited opportunities to go home, even if their countries were nominally at peace. Also, people from Kakuma town were not sure what would remain of Kakuma in the event of the camp being closed. As such, questions about the possible closure of the camp, the downsizing of services, and the amount of force that accompanied attempts to send people back home were voiced by many refugees when the whole refugee operation entered into a return modus at the end of 2005.

Whereas UNHCR and the agencies tried to entice and stimulate refugees to repatriate to Sudan, they simultaneously wanted refugees not to go to their countries of origin without informing them. The result was that voluntary repatriation had to take place on the agency's terms, and that the voluntary took on a rather pressuring quality with the

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<sup>17</sup> 'Lamu Port "dream" on the way to reality.' *The Standard*, 12 May 2010: <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/InsidePage.php?id=2000009469&cid=4>

announcements that services would be transferred to Sudan and education would be banned for Sudanese. On the other hand, the SPLM, which now became conflated with the new Government of Southern Sudan, tried to persuade refugees to remain in the camp and simply refused to allow UNHCR to repatriate certain groups of people to particular areas. They, too, sought to control return movements. The relative development of the camp made that these particular refugees were not considered a priority in comparison to the millions of IDPs around Khartoum. Moreover, the anticipation of a period of possible flare-up of war between the north and the south meant that Kakuma camp as a facility was likely to be valuable in the near future, whereas overly hasty repatriation was believed to increase the possibility that the camp would close soon.

Most importantly, individual Sudanese refugees strategized their return, and as such, they also sought control over the process. For a large part, this was the result of the characteristics of the camp that make the city analogy so relevant. The camp as a place where livelihoods in the form of digging aid, social change, and connections to the wider world are created and available, imply that it is not straightforward for people to return hastily, or even at all. Strategic, spontaneous return took place while relatives remained in the camp. They used their networks to identify benefits and possibilities in Sudan. UNHCR's one-way-ticket approach was too strict for many refugees in the first repatriations, as they were not yet willing to lose the possibility of returning to the camp. More importantly, expectations had been raised in the camp, and social change among the refugees proved complicated for the assumption that people want to return to their old lives, primarily as pastoralists in the bush. The nature of the camp as an accidental city comes back in that its facilities were weighed against the lack thereof in Sudan. It is this comparison, of which people were informed by increased movement between the camp and Sudan in the first year after the signing of the CPA, that similarly led new arrivals from Sudan to come to Kakuma for education or for basic amenities and food.



## **Chapter seven: Conclusion**

In this ethnography I have approached Kakuma refugee camp as an accidental city, describing different domains in which social ordering processes come to light. In this conclusion I will discuss the relevance of the frame of the camp as an urban environment and present the main findings of this research. I will end with some comments on conducting research in humanitarian settings, and on humanitarian governance.

### **City by accident?**

The frame of an accidental city serves to highlight the processes of place making that occur in a refugee camp that is deemed temporary, artificial and insecure. This book contributes to an understanding of some of the possible effects and principles of long-term refugee hosting in camps, by describing these in a given region, at a given time, and concerning a given population. In many ways, ethnographies are always particular, and this one can be seen as a history of Kakuma camp and its impact on Kakuma Town, focusing on a timeframe beyond the initial emergency phase of the camp, but nonetheless incorporating that past. This recognition of a camp history is a first import of the frame of urbanity; it signifies the habitation and alteration of a place. The protractedness of refugee situations has opened up the possibility to study these processes over time spanning decades.

But the approach also extends beyond the particular in that the reference to an accidental city serves as a frame to bring together and build on earlier works on governance, transnationalism, livelihoods and violence in refugee camps. Over the years, Kakuma camp was never just the site where processes of humanitarian management, links with rebel wars, entrepreneurship, education, or transit via resettlement occurred or took place. It was the site where these phenomena co-existed, were interlinked, and reinforced each other.

The sequence of chapters represents the domains of ordering in this research. They show a certain chronology of development of the camp throughout its protracted existence. First, there was humanitarian governance of a new refugee site. Shelters were made, schools were built, food distribution systems worked out, boreholes dug and piping laid for refugee communities that settled in zones, groups and phases. Gradually, the first layer of humanitarian organization was met by the development of a warscape; by people who came from war zones with fresh memories of violence and war, and with links to

rebel and military groups. This carved boundaries between communities in the camp, in part as a result of violent clashes and older antagonisms and in part as contemporary struggles over space and authority. Another layer was added with the gradual emergence of a refugee camp economy that with resettlement to western countries increasingly began to involve remittances, adding a relevant resource to the camp economy. The camp became a resettlement hotspot after six to eight years of existence, instigated by sympathy for the plight of the Lost Boys. An airlift from the desert, as I termed my chapter five, is not an excessive expression to denote the impact and largesse of the resettlement of nearly 4,000 Sudanese and 15,000 Somali Bantus afterwards. In the camp, this resulted in far-reaching desires and subsequent negotiations with identities and vulnerabilities to attempt to access similar programs. Finally, repatriation to Sudan became the expected, natural resolution of the existence of the refugee camp, but its implementation was similarly rooted in the foregoing aspects of camp organization, and refugees weighed the possibilities or return against the benefits of the camp.

These domains reinforced each other but also continued to evolve and change separately. The warscape did not supplant humanitarian governance, but became part of the same place in a configuration that was dynamic and changed over time, as did humanitarian governance itself. New eruptions of violence in countries in the region led to new arrivals, while new political antagonisms in home countries led to altered affiliations in the camp. These domains were connected to each other in the humanitarian governance of the camp, and also in the way refugees related to this governance. As such, people's understandings of resettlement and repatriation were based on earlier organization, history and developments, as I elaborated in chapters five and six. The warscape informed structural or perceived vulnerabilities for resettlement, but also the settlement and re-ordering of different groups in the camp according to real or perceived conflict rationales.

The references to urbanity captured in the notion of the accidental city are both metaphorically and physically relevant. Metaphorically, the analogy to the city places refugees and their negotiation and habitation of space into the realm of the "normal," or the possible, in contrast to most problem-oriented notions of the camp as an abnormality. As I have described, refugees inhabit the humanitarian space, thereby altering and transforming it, albeit in ways that do not necessarily correspond to "modern" ideas of development in western discourse or to humanitarian expectations. Instead, the camp as an accidental city is characterized by "rebelization," tribalism, informality, poverty, corruption, gender inequality, insecurity, and a partial reinforcement of "traditional" practices. These features, however, do not reject the idea of social organization, as if the

camp is dysfunctional *per se*. Instead, they are specific manifestations of ordering and organization.

Some people were better able to adapt to camp life and engage in entrepreneurship, or to access vital resources, than others. This resulted in another feature of urbanity: diversity and social differentiation. This diversity meant that the camp became a cosmopolitan place, consisting of different nationalities, religions, ethnicities, languages, ideas and forms of sustenance and livelihoods. This, in turn, resulted in social and spatial differentiation. The camp was carved up according to these differences, but this simultaneously created places where people with different backgrounds would meet each other (or evade each other), like in the markets, bars and playgrounds in various sections of Kakuma. This sharing of space, by which people came into contact with other cultures, shared education, and attended programs for social change stimulated by the agencies, challenged gender relations and ethnic stereotyping and contributed to the transformation of normative orders and general cosmologies.

The physical analogy of the camp as a city is based on its function as a center of facilities and concentration of education, a rebel rear base, and a portal to third countries exemplified in remittances and the facilitation of migration in the form of resettlement. It is a site where infrastructure (i.e. healthcare, water, markets, training opportunities, migration and travel) and entertainment (i.e. sports, arts and youth culture) are concentrated in a densely populated space that is demarcated from its exterior in the desert (which metaphorically encapsulates the protracted crises and wars in the hinterland, also across the border). The camp as a “situation” should thus be measured against the things with which it contrasts. Kakuma camp contrasted with Kakuma town and the wider region of northern Kenya, which predominantly consisted of marginalized and impoverished desert, as well as with the various warzones in the region.

### **Social ordering processes in the camp**

Although refugees as a category are excluded from the Kenyan state, in Kakuma they find a site of inclusion, in which they are cared for and morally uplifted by the humanitarian government, away from the desert that is the outside of the camp. I used the concepts of bio-governance and Agamben’s discussion of the state of exception to analyze how refugees are included in a bureaucratic care by a pseudo government that exceeds local norms of government in the wider region. The state of exception then denotes not so much the exclusion with which refugees are confronted but the system of inclusion propagated and decided upon by a near-sovereign UNHCR. The camp became a nodal

point connecting people in the different non-*urbs* outside it, also for Turkana “drop-out pastoralists” who, like urban migrants, began to settle around the camp. And with time, this nodal point grew, consolidating the contrast with the wider region that makes the comparison with the city so relevant.

This consolidation was the result of UNHCR’s and the agencies’ refugee hosting, that refined refugee protection in such a way as to make the camp like a city-state (or a state within a state) with a welfare system. UNHCR and the agencies had substantial “power to govern,” and although some commentators see services and aid in camps as minimal, in comparison to the region and its geographical limitations, or even the endless slums of Nairobi, I found it to be quite extensive. This power to govern is elemental in the idea of the camp as a city in that it is a *de facto* separate entity, to which people require access. Once admission is formally granted, a legitimate resident (in theory) gains access to a wide range of services and facilities.

Refugees were skillful in altering and adapting camp regulations and were able to carve out pockets of authority, in part based on the very empowerment practices of the agencies. There were two organizing principles that I came to view as essential in the social organization of the camp: the entitlement arena and campital. The entitlement arena denotes the setting where humanitarian governance and refugees as beneficiaries meet. This meeting occurs through interfaces along which continuous negotiation between aid workers and refugees at gates, offices, desks, and other access points takes place. Agencies seek to order and control the refugees with aid and social programs, uplifting them to become model residents. Simultaneously, refugees try to enter humanitarian programs or to seek additional entitlements accorded to them as a result of the rights-based rationale of the agencies. But refugees *and* aid workers also tried to dodge and evade UNHCR’s and the agencies’ control and rights-based camp rules. In this setting, these attempts to evade are simultaneously forms of negotiation. The set of skills and resources enabling refugees maneuver in the camp environment are theoretically comparable to capital. To stress the specific nature of the camp environment, I have called this “campital.” Campital is brought about by a combination of status, wealth and being “campwise,” and is highly instrumental in camp navigation.

An important conclusion, however, is that the settlement and habitation of refugees in the camp can differ considerably from refugee to refugee. As I wrote citing Hannerz, the city is softer to some than to others. This is for a large part dependent on one’s skill to maneuver in refugee space or to have others maneuvered on one’s behalf, and the backgrounds and previous lifestyles of refugees. To start with the latter, as in all social spaces, there is a differentiation between social groups. The largest group in the camp arguably consisted of (former) pastoralists from Sudan and Somalia, who were not as

exposed to “modern” forms of life (in fact, in this day and age, the Turkana pastoralists represent the idiosyncratic anthropological subject) as people from more urban backgrounds or from the Great lakes, and Ethiopia. Moreover, many of them were very young when they came, and grew up or were born in the camp. It is largely with regard to the meeting of all these people with different backgrounds, that the characteristic of the camp as urban applies, as an alternative to the surrounding pastoralist desert and to endless war and forms of deprivation that are remedied or targeted in the camp in the form of specialized aid, education, livelihood programs and healthcare.

For most people then, it is important to be included in social systems that are maneuvered by others: leaders, elders, humanitarians, kin or relatives. Campital exceeds the individual’s interest in that respect. Moreover, it denotes the ability to negotiate in a *variety* of spaces and to be able to link up with *various* identity groups, but also to actively seek access to the agencies and to maneuver with labels that are accorded to target populations in humanitarian programming. Refugees were able to create, link up to and sustain different social arrangements that all co-existed simultaneously. The pockets of authority that were formed were, in one way or another, sub-authorities over constituencies that were thereby included in support systems, even if these forms of support did not subscribe to the agencies’ rights-based rationale. This leads to an important observation that may be interpreted as balancing on the edge of cultural relativity: in many cases, the upholding of social and customary norms were attempts at ordering communities more than they were signs of dysfunction or disintegration. These were localized arrangements, however, could be gender insensitive, based upon demanding systems of patronage, dependent on tribal and generational status and influence, and importantly, based upon a warscape. As such, the distribution of resources and assistance, responsibilities and decision-making power within communities or social groups may not be equal or non-violent in a pure sense. Willingly or unwillingly stepping aside and going against these social boundaries could be met with sanctions. The flipside, however, was inclusion – although from the aspirational rights perspective this may seem bleak. Nevertheless, if I compare social norms of the Dinka in the camp roughly to social forms among the Turkana, then these are not abnormal *per se*.

The agencies, however, promoted a rather unitary view of how life should be lived, almost comparable to the meta-narrative of modernity I criticized in chapter one. This view was based on an amalgam of rights that in the context of the camp became benefits, providing solutions for some and disturbances for others. As such, maneuvering in the camp environment meant gauging to what extent one could challenge the social norms and boundaries that were the subject of competition and control by communities and

refugee authorities, UNHCR and the agencies, rebel groups, and to a lesser extent, the Kenyan government.

The social phenomena that were the result of the above contributed to the cosmopolitan character of the camp. This cosmopolitanism was expressed by social networks that crossed ethnic or tribal boundaries, the “neighborhoods” that formed and simultaneously generated sub-communities not necessarily based on ethnicity, as well as more mundane forms of change in terms of livelihood arrangements, skills training and education, and the appropriation of elements of human rights. The camp as an accidental city thus became a place where a diversity of social arrangements or options emerged. People who fell out with their community could try to move, or be moved, to another place in the camp, to Nairobi, or to a western country via resettlement; either using their own resources or with the aid of the humanitarian system or another social network. Similarly, people who challenged their communities’, tribes’, or ethnic groups’ customs in terms of gender, religious, or social status, had other forums to turn to. Although these issues could lead to conflict and were not problem-free in that respect, they also represent the coming together of competing normative orders that so characterizes the camp.

It is very important to try and dissociate these processes from the camp as a humanitarian structure *per se*. The above-mentioned processes are all fairly normal processes in human congregations, although they may be shaped locally and take on specific forms. As such, the state of exception is not so much the position of the refugee as excluded, but rather, the position of UNHCR and the agencies as near-sovereigns seeking to order their subjects on their own terms.

### **A transitory camp**

A remaining issue is what we make of the analogy to the city in terms of the camp’s dependency on humanitarian aid and its possible future. The apparent paradox that resettlement and repatriation present is that the camp appears to exist only in order to be resolved. However, the camp is located in a region where people will continue to have reasons to seek protection or migrate for some time to come, so there is no end in sight yet. In 2009, after I completed my fieldwork, UNHCR began the relocation of 18,000 Somali refugees from Dadaab to Kakuma, and there were rumors of Sudanese coming back in the prelude to the 2011 referendum for independence. The camp is a facility for refugees, a fall back, a transitory place where people come and live and move on, or remain. The crux is that protracted refugee camps are often understood as places where refugees remain in a state of protractedness themselves. This research shows that this is

not necessarily the case. People move all the time, but the camp remains and is altered by their movements and organization.

This is very relevant: although many people may move, the camp remains. Some people stay longer, perhaps indefinitely, while many others move on. Michel Agier (2002), who inspired my notion of the urban analogy with his work in Dadaab nearly a decade ago, remarks that the camp shows signs of urbanity but yet cannot reach it. The answer might very well be that those who are able to make it a city are resettled or repatriated away before the camp can fully become one. For instance, three of the main organizers of the refugee workers union were resettled to the US and Canada respectively. In that sense, the camp presents a virtual city; it is strongly linked to other places. It is in part in the US, Canada and Australia, it is in the UK, Norway and the Netherlands. And it is in Nairobi, Juba, Gulu, and Mogadishu. It is a nodal point that connects those still in the camp or coming there in the future. Relatives, clan mates or country men and women do not come to empty humanitarian space, but to a camp with a dynamic system of “rules,” procedures, facilities and linkages to the outside world. The last time I was in Kakuma, I went to look for a Congolese who I used to visit during my fieldwork. It turned out that he was resettled to the US. I learned this from his brother, who had recently arrived in the camp and had settled in his place, with his own family.

By 2010, Kakuma was growing again, albeit with different people. It was altered by the refugee regime based on lessons learnt (for instance, building houses was banned in known flood zones, measures were taken to anticipate cholera outbreaks and refugee recycling, and the agencies had new ways of dealing with and settling antagonistic tribes), which means that newcomers will find different regulations and arrangements with the local environment. A new majority of Somalis changes the cosmology as well, with another religion finding prominence and affecting other refugees and Turkanas. As an illustration to the notion of development, the Somalis brought taxis to the camp as well as motorcycles instead of bicycles, and they were contemplating starting public transport in the form of a scheduled bus service. In my view, that indicated another phase in the camp’s development as an accidental city. In the epilogue, I describe what I found when I revisited Kakuma in 2010.

## **Some notes for research on and in refugee camps**

This ethnography is one among several threads that could have emerged from the refugee camp. Perhaps the metaphor of the city is applicable here on another level in the recognition of the diversity of urban lives and circumstances, and thus, of different stories to tell. This ethnography, in other words, is not conclusive for the camp in its entirety, but highlights some of the fascinating phenomena that occur within and around it. The five domains that I have captured – the entitlement arena, the warscape, the camp economy, resettlement and repatriation – represent in my view the most characteristic scenes of the interplay between governing structures on varying stages, and refugees' ordering and making sense of the camp. The relevance of this is that, although wasted to some and bleak to others, life in the camp simply continues to produce forms.

Recognizing this multiplicity, I think perspectives on humanitarian issues may benefit from a sense of modesty. This accounts for judging and bringing forward knowledge on the subject, coupled with the call for intervention and the creation of entitlements. The power to dismiss some forms of social life as dysfunctional, harmful or bad, while proposing others as normal, acceptable, or good, is a great responsibility that sometimes appears to be threaded with ease in the domain of humanitarian studies. Apart from a possible ethnocentric background to this (I myself, for instance, grew up in one of the most effective welfare states in the world, and I am perhaps an unlikely person to be sensitive to social circumstances and needs), in the refugee camp, vulnerabilities and insecurities are highlighted under a powerful humanitarian spotlight. There is nothing wrong with this, except that the highlighting and labeling of vulnerabilities by humanitarian aid actors leaves comparable situations outside that spotlight unaddressed. This was most clearly visible in some of the conditions or practices that were normal for Turkanas, but were labeled problematic when they occurred in the camp. Moreover, these are not only conditions; they have become resources. It is important to recognize that refugees partly react to the offered access points of the humanitarian governance structure: in other words, they do what is expected and in some respects demanded of them, namely being vulnerable. This calls for some modesty in declaring people in need or vulnerable.

On a second note, it is important for researchers to maintain some critical distance from direct humanitarian agencies' concerns and influence on data gathering. Agencies' influence is entrenched in the provision of respondents of their choosing or an all too obvious limiting of access to resources. The emerging field of humanitarian studies is to a large extent rooted and dependent on embedded research that, in extreme cases, more closely resembles agency marketing strategies than critical reflections of social phenomena.



Instead, humanitarian actors should be subjects of study, perhaps while they are simultaneously partners, but they should not be partners or facilitators alone. As this research has shown, the refugee camp exists as much through the everyday negotiations of aid workers and powerful humanitarians – that is, other than official police prescribes – as through the traditional beneficiaries of aid in the form of refugees.

I have studied ordering processes in refugee camps using a qualitative approach, because it is hard to grasp the idiosyncrasy of the stories and lives of so many people in a quantitative manner. This points out another reason for modesty in the presentation of research findings. To some extent, these findings may be inconclusive, for the real world in the camp is diverse, multiple, shady and evasive. There must be some room to leave doubt, unresolved questions and matters, because this is more representative of reality than a carefully crafted classification of possible truisms.

### **Some notes for humanitarian governance**

The refugee regime's function of governing the well-being of refugees under its mandate did resemble that of a state's government, with responsibilities that extended beyond meeting basic needs such as water, food, healthcare and forms of protection, surpassing this with the organization of education and vocational training and facilitated migration schemes to western countries. That pseudo-government, then, had the power to decide on several exceptions with regard to the above. A turnaround of the state of exception teaches us that its very invocation is the essential power of a sovereign. Indeed, that very state of exception that is the refugee camp is governed by a pseudo-sovereign that on the one hand has to teach its mandate and principles to its clientele, and on the other, has to keep people within that exception. It decides on who to allow and who to dismiss, something refugees are obviously very much aware of.

My focus on an entitlement arena has led me to perceive how refugees maneuver vis-à-vis the humanitarian agencies. First, the repertoire of seeking access to opportunity, what I have labeled as “digging aid,” leads to a blind spot regarding those who are indeed legitimate candidates for resettlement on the basis of individual insecurity. This obscures the individual vulnerability of those who are not skillful or successful in navigating the camp. Second, the UNHCR has been willing to pursue resettlement quotas, and for a part, resettlement processing is taken over by other actors – usually missions of the receiving governments that may have other goals than strictly humanitarian ones. As such, refugees feel they are “rewarded” if they play their “campital” well, and with this, a performative

vulnerability becomes not only a reason for protection, but a reason for migration, eroding the protective capacity of the refugee camp.

On a final note, linkages between armed actors and refugee camps are as problematic as they are unavoidable. What is or should be avoidable, however, is that the humanitarian apparatus becomes openly partial (I believe this should apply to researchers too). Looking back at Kakuma, this happened with the SPLA's status and interference in the camp. The linkages between SPLA and the Sudanese were so clear that this in a way legitimized the SPLA. Humanitarian aid, or following this research more appropriately referred to as humanitarian governance, should try to remain neutral in that respect. And this is important, although the insight on which it is based steps slightly into the future. Comparable camp rebelization and spillovers from Somalia are framed in a completely different way than those of the Sudanese. Although this is partly the result of time and the reframing and adaptation of an older Somali conflict with Islamist rhetoric and strategies, it means that refugees are now dealt with differently, and increasingly from a security perspective.<sup>1</sup> This partly reflects the donor base of UNHCR in western countries that operates in the frame of a global war on terror.

## The Real

A girl from Kakuma town comes to sit with me outside the guesthouse while I have my *ugali na sukumawiki*. It is February 2010, and I am back in Kakuma for a short visit. She is extremely skinny, her movements are slow. She asks for food, and I tell her to go inside and ask the men in the kitchen for a leftover. She knows she cannot. This is a guesthouse, they will chase her away. I give her my food, and when the guesthouse personnel come to chase her away, I tell them that she is there just to eat for a while, and they let her. She finishes the food in silence. Then, she tells me that she is literate. She has finished Form Four of secondary school. She knows me, she says, I once taped a song she sang together with another girl called Chacha. It is the song of the coming of the Lost Boys, *hasima hasima lobotolo*, that is quoted in the first chapter. Chacha delivered a child, but it died, which was not exceptional. They were both young women then, but the girl sitting with me seems to have returned to the physique of a child, with the face of an old mama. She resembles a twig, moving slowly due to fatigue and hunger, and not unlikely, a more chronic ailment that is still too much a taboo to pronounce.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Kenyan border with Somalia has been officially closed for people since 2007 – the only reason that refugees are able to make it to Kenya is because of its weak governance and porous borders.

There were more in town, people that begged silently, ate silently, left silently. Not for money, but for essentials, for bare survival. And it hit me again. The questions of the state of exception concern the defining of the norm: the ones in place, versus those displaced. Who determines who is in place and who is not? What is normal and what is not? Which entitlements are answered and which denied? The decision to mobilize resources to intervene or to assist, who to resettle and who not, ultimately leaves other people excluded. I have not seen girls in circumstances like this in the camp. The agencies seemed to be successful in preventing this, whatever official statistics might state. Indeed, to return to Agamben (1998), the city is that what bare life is excluded from. The hunger is like a form of bare life that I found to be abnormal in the camp, although many refugees sometimes went with one meal a day. To repeat an earlier observation, Turkana begged from refugees, and not the other way around.

That leads me to question the meaning of the state of exception as a means to analyze power. Are researchers as “interpreters of interpretations” not also like sovereigns in a metaphorical state of exception? Once I delved into narratives of insecurity to become eligible for this or that, in the vulnerability-demanding environment of the refugee camp (or perhaps humanitarianism in general), it was up to me to qualify the hunger of the girl mentioned above, or the story of a particular refugee. Anthropologists say that it does not matter, a narrative is a narrative, discourses derived from, embedded in, and reinforcing belief systems. Questioning issues like hunger or rape without falling into the pitfalls of cultural-relativism (or humanitarian-relativism) was perhaps the most complicated task of this research. In addition, this questioning is untimely, for the atmosphere regarding migration and refugee hospitality is increasingly tense in Europe and the USA. I hope this research does not contribute to this tension but that instead, it underscores peoples’ humanity by stressing their ability to maneuver and negotiate in productive and creative ways.

An “old Kenya hand” had warned me upon return that every trip to Turkana, people had died, young and old, for no specific reason but for age, some euphemism for a disease, famine, flooding or violence. And indeed, stories came along. One was of a refugee called Stephen who was killed in the camp, ostensibly when he was stupid or drunk enough to try and talk some alleged Turkana out of robbing him that night. Ironically, he died just after he had finally received permission to go to the US after a third attempt to qualify for resettlement with his wife and two children, after first fleeing in 1986 and living in Kakuma since 1993. He was an old Kakuma hand himself. He was a *Mwalimu* and an “odd-ball.” This book is for him. He would have liked it.



## Epilogue: Prevailing accidentality

February 2010. Franco Hotel in the Ethiopian community is deserted, except for staff, in the wee hours after lunch. The Big Man himself explains what I had already heard: that clientele has shrunk considerably with the departure of so many Sudanese; Somalis buy from their own. We have the place to ourselves. The Big Man sprained his ankle, has a hard time walking and is being massaged by a young Turkana employee as we sit and chat the afternoon away. Finally, after 18 years, he is in a process to get resettlement to the US, sometime soon he hopes. What remains is the interview with US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – the latest abbreviation of the responsible office, since it has changed names at least two times since I started this research.

A portrait of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam hangs on the iron fence that protects the counter. I did not see it before. It seems to symbolize that by now, everybody is allowed to know about the violent past of the Ethiopians – it is not a public secret anymore, it just is. Now that the Ethiopians are being profiled for resettlement, it is no longer relevant. Next to a poster of the Ethiopian tourist board proclaiming “13 months of sunshine” hangs the main rationale for the Ethiopians as one of the unresolved “caseloads” in Kakuma, and now, finally, they have joined the arrays of the legitimate candidates for resettlement. The unmasking of Meles Zenawi as one of the new breeds of leaders spearheading the 1990s “African renaissance”<sup>1</sup> perhaps nuances the “crimes” of his predecessor Mengistu and his army, or maybe they are simply out of date.

I am back in Kakuma for a follow-up visit at the end of February 2010 when it occurs to me: to study the effects of protractedness without spanning a part of that protractedness itself makes no sense. A deeper understanding of protractedness is gained when the researcher sees some of the changes that s/he is writing about. Some of my informants were literally lying down where I last saw them in 2006, resting in the afternoon shade. Although many had left, there were also many new arrivals. Old space was inhabited by new people, altering it, remodeling it, and perpetuating it.

Some of the national staff is still there, they are protracted almost similarly, and the security officers the “Colonel” of UNHCR (when he sees me he says, surprised: “huh, are you still here?”) and his colleague of LWF, who are even Bigger Men now, must be valuable administrators given the usual staff-turnover among employees (especially expats) working for the agencies. Some Kenyan staff has been here since 1992, longer than any

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<sup>1</sup> In the mid-1990s the notion of the African Renaissance pointed at “a new breed” of African leaders that were to spearhead democratic change after the (violent) overthrow of many a dictator. Among the new breed of leaders were Uganda’s president Museveni, Ethiopia’s president Zenawi and Rwanda’s president Kagame.

refugee. On the other hand, they are firmly entrenched in the governing of Kakuma, and I wonder how expatriate program managers can ever escape being managed by Kenyan staff instead of the other way around. Expatriates are usually posted for periods ranging from six months to two or three years, while their seconds in command have been there for fifteen years.<sup>2</sup>

I came back to Kakuma to discuss my findings with people from the camp and from town. I sat and talked about changes with old informants, borrowed a bicycle to bike through and view the camp, walked around chit-chatting with people, drove to the very far ends of the camp in a rented vehicle to the new “neighborhood” of the Darfurians and Somali new arrivals, visited the compounds of UNHCR and the NGOs and went to Lodwar and Lokichoggio. Some of the scenes and contexts in this book as observed between 2004 and 2006 have changed considerably.

This epilogue follows up, looks back and evaluates the main conclusions from the previous chapters. While the descriptions and observations are linked to the camp history and my earlier research work, the limited timeframe of my last visit did not allow for in-depth comparison and triangulation as my main fieldwork period did. This epilogue should therefore be seen as a glance, a reconnaissance with protractedness.

## **Rear base changes**

The joke a man from Kakuma had made before, about flying Palestinians in when the Sudanese go, has gained some reality in the relocation of Somalis from the overcrowded Dadaab camps. By February 2010, over 13,000 Somalis had been brought to Kakuma, while another 7,000 were expected shortly, after the rains.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, more and more Somalis started to arrive spontaneously from Dadaab, Nairobi or Somalia on their own, either in a bid for resettlement or to escape or evade Dadaab, which has seen a huge influx of refugees since the ousting of the Union of Islamic Courts by the Ethiopian army in 2007 and 2008. According to my Turkana driver, who holds incentive jobs with the agencies on a recurring basis, new Somalis arrive at the police station every morning, while some fly into Lokichoggio and, a novelty, into Lodwar with the new commercial airline service from Nairobi and Kitale.

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<sup>2</sup> Employees of LWF already mentioned this in 2006. The Kenyan employees of the expatriate program manager were far more informed and able. The chief even delegated the delivery of his speeches during official ceremonies to his subordinates.

<sup>3</sup> According to the deputy program director of IRC Kenya, the initial idea was to relocate 50,000 but donors held back this idea. Similarly, a fourth camp was proposed in near Dadaab to decongest the three existing camps, but this was blocked by the Kenyan government. Interview, Deputy Director IRC Kenya, Nairobi: November 8, 2010.

Kakuma is now a Somali camp. The atmosphere is different and the stigma of the “difficult” Somali is expressed to me by people from other nationalities who I asked about the changes in the camp. In the meantime, Somalis brought twenty-one – somehow, people are quite sure about this number – taxis to the camp, and replaced many *bodaboda* bicycles with *pikipiki* motorcycles. It symbolizes what can perhaps be seen as a new phase in the development of the accidental city. I heard of one Kenyan Somali who was trying to start a scheduled bus service in the camp. There are reports of private sector investment from Kenyan and international businesses in Kakuma as well as Dadaab, and the camps are described with labels such as “boom towns.”<sup>4</sup>

The continuation of the camp and its rebuilding takes place elsewhere, however. In the space between Kakuma Two, Three and Four, a large new refugee area was being built. People made bricks by mixing cement with mud that they dug from the ground and mixed with water from a truck brought by an NGO. The skeletons, waiting to be finished by NGO employees who built the roofs, were standing in rows, in various stages of completion. Next to them, the white tarpaulin tents – the ones that are usually shown in the media – are lined up as temporary shelters for new arrivals. A new school was being constructed, as was a new police station, in the treeless empty plain behind Kakuma Four. Turkanas were everywhere, delivering materials for building like poles of wood and twigs for building walls. Shops were in the process of being constructed along the road. A new system of latrines has been implemented in the camp. There were long, rectangular lines between rows of houses, as I saw in the rigorously straight and tight organization of shelters that characterized some of the camps that I visited in Nepal. The organization is based on an advancing insight, using the desired “German village structure” as the HSO called it, as the ideal type of refugee camp architecture; orderly, countable shelters that were accessible by car for health or security reasons, away from the seasonal flooding and congestion of Kakuma One.

Near Kakuma One, Zone Six, the river approaches the road. Small sand dunes are slowly encroaching. Next to the new park, further along the road behind the hospital, ruins of refugee houses await further demolition by people or by nature, their iron roofs taken by repatriates or thieves. Opposite of the hospital I found that what a now repatriated business owner had indicated earlier as the first “permanent” refugee structure in the camp, built of concrete instead of mud mixed with some concrete, was still standing. That is, the walls were still standing – the rest was gone, the roof taken and its supporting wood burnt. It stood like a ruin in a now Somali inhabited compound. I once saw

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/1034316/-/onj721z/-/index.html>, assessed 22-10-2010.

hundreds of IDPs building their dirt and plastic sheet *tukuls* in the ruins of bombed-out compounds is Hargeisa and Burao in Somaliland, which somehow resembled this (and I could not escape the idea that perhaps this had become normal for Somalis – living in and between ruins).

New refugees also brought with them new styles of building. I see houses built not with brick walls, but with small twigs that leave room for the air to pass through, and as I look at them I remember the style from my visit to Dadaab. Some houses are decorated with metal, crescent or circle shaped iron pieces that I had not seen before. New markets and shops are emerging: video shops, grocery shops, satellite TVs and generators, pool billiards. There are signboards indicating the new communities: “Somali Hawiye,” “Darfur community,” “Ethio-Ogaden,” and “Ethio-Oromo.”

In February 2010, twelve nationalities were officially recognized by UNHCR in Kakuma in a total population of 65,423 refugees: Somalia (38,533), Sudan (18,503), Ethiopia (5,650), Uganda (454), Rwanda (345), Burundi (383), DR Congo (1,444), Eritrea (93), Tanzania (14), Djibouti (2), Namibia (1), Zimbabwe (1).<sup>5</sup> *Prima facie* status – eligibility for refugee status on the basis of general circumstances in the home country – for the Sudanese and Ethiopians has been revoked. They now have to prove an individualized fear of persecution via the refugee status determination process. Somalis, however, are still recognized on “first sight” of being Somali.

During this visit, I found that many of my acquaintances had returned to Sudan, and many others have found resettlement to a third country. The camp, however, continues to exist and moves along. The relocation and arrival of Somali refugees results in both a continuation of development in protractedness and its associated phenomena, such as linkages with warring parties and the dynamics of a warscape, economic enterprise and the continuing forging of transnational linkages and the airlift from the desert, as analyzed in the preceding chapters. The development may even accelerate.

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<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Fact Sheet on the Kakuma refugee program, February 1, 2010.



## Another rebelization?

A Somali acquaintance, Abdi, who some years ago was a rebellious adolescent and educated youth, a “Yoyo boy” with a telephone business, now wandered around on Mogadishu street in Islamic fatigues, with a beard and a twig of Miraa between his teeth, the wailing of the mosques in the background. The camp changed, the people changed, but the camp was still firmly rooted in its prevailing accidentally. Nevertheless, there was one concern among aid workers, refugees and Turkanas: the possible influence of Somali rebels on the camp. This presented another rebelization, but now not from the “reasonable” Sudanese, but from the “problematic” Somalis. The war of Al Shabab and its apparent linkages to Al Qaeda against the hugely unpopular Transitional Federal Government (TFG) backed up by the international community has increased the already strong stereotyping of Somalis.

A group of GSU now resides in the IOM compound and new police buildings are being constructed. Although it is explained as an answer to the recent demonstrations of the Turkana at the address of the agencies and UNHCR in particular, it may have something to do with the politicizing of the camp by Al-Shabab. The war on terror looms around the corner. Recruitment and rear base phenomena such as hide-out and recruitment among refugees in Dadaab has been acknowledged, and the camp was referred to as a “human shield” (Kagwanja and Juma 2008). There have been instances of *refoulement* of Somali asylum seekers by the Kenyan government, and the border with Somalia – closed since 2007 – is still closed. However, the weak and porous borders make that many are able to enter Kenya anyway. There have been rumors and reports of hidden weapons caches in the North Eastern Province and of recruitment in the refugee camps and among the Kenyan Somali youth in Garissa, Mombasa and Nairobi (Pavanello, Elhawary et al. 2010: 14).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, there have also been indications that the Kenyan government recruited Somali refugee youth on behalf of the Transitional Federal Government (Ibid), and in 2010 the African Union and European military trainers started the preparation of 2,500 Somalis for the TFG army near the Kenyan town of Isiolo.

The role of the Sudanese SPLA in a Kenyan refugee camp is illustrative for the “usage” of humanitarian space, refugee camps and protection. Moreover, special government policy allowed SPLA members safe passage on Kenyan territory (Veney 2007). The status of Kenya as a frontline state in the War on Terror, makes the same exception impossible with regard to Al Shabab. This makes some sense from a Kenyan security perspective; I have not heard about any SPLA bombings in Kenya, while Al Qaeda is held partly

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<sup>6</sup> “Somalia’s wars swell a refugee camp in Kenya,” New York Times, November 11, 2010.

responsible for the bombings of the US embassy in Nairobi in 1998, causing predominantly Kenyan deaths. Rumors of links between Al Qaeda and Al Shabab and the concern of a spillover effect of the radicalization among Somalis in Kenya, makes any association with Al Shabab problematic. The result is an increasingly xenophobic attitude towards Somalis in Kenya, also towards Kenyan-Somalis (Jansen, 2010). Kenya is also a point of access for recruits, and on more than one occasion, youth from western countries have been found trying to enter Somalia from Kenya using or referring to their status as tourists or humanitarians. Although it is unlikely that Somalis will be able to use the Kenyan camps as rear bases in the same way the Sudanese were allowed or able to, it will be hard to prevent this entirely.

## **Akumai**

Upon entering Kakuma town, acquaintances approach me and explained – almost relieved – that the camp was growing again. Some believe it is bigger than ever, and they say the set-up has changed too. One Kenyan Somali with black teeth briefs me that the Kenyan Somali woman hotel owner where he used to take his tea left for America because she successfully posed as a refugee – he apparently remembered that I was interested in such stories.

The Ethiopian Orthodox church is now finished, and stands indeed as an icon of esthetics in the desert. However, since the death of the Turkana Chief, its clientele is said to have shrunk. He was the one who was instrumental in bringing the church to town in the first place, having been converted to Christianity by the Ethiopians in the camp. He is buried in the church compound. In the same way Turkanas became interested in Ethiopian Orthodoxy, I see some old Turkana *Wazee* dressed in Muslim dress where I did not see them before, while they move to the newly erected Mosque at the end of the airstrip.

In 2008, Turkanas attacked UNHCR. The – quite euphemistically called – “demonstrations” were organized by the Turkana leaders, one of whom I knew quite well. He told me that they had demanded a more equal share of employment opportunities between Kakuma residents, Turkanas and Kenyans from other parts of the country. The agencies used a distinction between national staff and local staff, the latter of which were comparable to incentive staff. National staff was brought in from the south, and it was yet another public secret that within UNHCR, the Luo from around Kitale called the shots, while in LWF the Kikuyu recruited amongst themselves. As a result, and according to the logic of a tribalized economy, the Turkana lost out, especially in the managerial positions.

Unlike in past eruptions of violence in the refugee camp, this time, the agencies were targeted instead of the refugees. The “demonstrations” were quite successful: now, every new job up to managerial level has to be advertised within Kakuma and the region. I saw vacancy notices signposted on the wall of Todonyang Wholesale in town.

It may be a sign of a recapturing of the refugee-hosting domain. The government of Kenya now has a Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA), symbolically located in an old colonial “castle” with walls complete with merlons in the posh suburb of *Kileleshwa* in Nairobi. This department has officially taken over the process of refugee status determination. Hence, the power of UNHCR as described in chapter two, may since have been somewhat restricted.<sup>7</sup>

The Kenyan government created a new district in 2009: Turkana-West District. Although bordering on a form of “gerrymandering” – maneuvering with constituencies for electoral gain – Kakuma consequently became a district headquarters, elevating its political status and increasing its resources from the central government. This is already visible in a surge in activity and offices around the old District Officer’s (DO) office, which used to be a sleepy place with Administration Police dozing behind dusty wooden desks, their weapons in their laps. The government of Kenya has stepped up its direct involvement and governance in the camp, most notably in the office of the refugee administrator. Before 2009, the DO was the highest government representative in dealing with UNHCR and the refugees.

### **Creating space in an accidental city**

In the Guesthouse where I stayed during the fieldwork, some young Somali men are lodging opposite my room. They spend days chewing Miraa until late at night, while watching movies on their laptops. They receive people from the camp, and sometimes they go there. Two are Kenyan-Somalis from Kitale, but one introduces himself as a British subject of Somali origin. He explains that he is in trouble and needs help. He tells me that his father brought him to Kenya four years ago. His father found that the boy’s life was going in the wrong direction because of his alcohol and drug use. His father took his passport, and he saw no way of proving his British nationality except for his fuzzy UK accent.

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<sup>7</sup> When I was in Nairobi in November 2010 however, the officers of DRA were at home pending investigations of corruption, and RSD was still being conducted by UNHCR.

As he explains, a girl from the UK who works as a volunteer in the camp is also present, and she listens carefully and proclaims sympathy with the boy's predicament. But his story changes all the time: first, he is a Canadian in the UK, then he is not, and then he is half Canadian. First, he was born in England, then in Canada, after which he went to England. He has no email because his account expired. He then explained that on the advice of a Kenyan officer, he has taken Kenyan nationality, whereby, according to his line of thought, he made it next to impossible to claim that he had had the British nationality before. The story was problematic, and he would never make it like this when sat in an office with the UNHCR protection officer. But who was he? A Kenyan? A Somali? Or British against all odds? After two days of meeting him irregularly because we were neighbors in the guesthouse, I wished him good luck with his attempt to become recognized and he smiles, as if I am now a part of his conspiracy. He says he will move back to Kitale to await his possibilities.

When I go and look for Allan the Congolese, I find out that he was finally resettled too, and that he moved to the US not too long ago. While asking around for him, a woman leads me to another family of which the man is Allan's brother, who lives in his old house. Inside the house, I find children watching cartoons on DVDs. The brother is here to attempt to migrate to the US too, and with Allan already there, he may play several strategies; group resettlement as a Congolese, or family reunification with his brother. In the meantime, he receives some remittances from Allan, and may be able to find a job.

In town, I met several Kenyans from the south looking for employment with the agencies. They too were drawn to the camp. As it turned out, one of my informants who tried to apply for resettlement with a narrative of constructed insecurity has since returned to Uganda to be enlisted with a private security contractor stationed in Iraq. We started chatting and all of a sudden, he says: "now I have made a lot of money in Iraq, how can I try to get into the UK to go to university?" He tried to get resettlement without success and he did not want to spend years waiting in the camp – now he tried a different channel.

I went to see Abebe from Ethiopia. The house of Abebe is like the compound of a leader – not a refugee leader recognized by UNHCR, but one recognized within the community as an elder. While we sit outside under the trees, people visit us all the time to seek advice and assistance. He is like an informal chairman. "Do you really think that all those people are students?" Abebe asks me, referring to how Ethiopians enter the camp with claims for protection from political violence. He ask this after I have explained the idea of viewing the camp as an entitlement arena to him, that one of my perspectives of the camp is that of an enduring maneuvering to become eligible to this or that, using

different forums, and strategies, identities and knowledge of the categories of refugee protection, as I discussed in chapter five. Agencies also maneuver, constantly in search of ways to have refugees behave the way they determine to be appropriate or otherwise desirable.

Abebe explains how he helps people with their flight stories or to construct their insecurities and vulnerabilities. From this, he receives some income, enough that he is able to give away his complete ration. He and two of his friends can relate to the idea of the entitlement arena and confirm its workings, and the preoccupation of refugees with seeking access using the criteria of vulnerability and need as set by the agencies. But they also warn that it is far from easy. Abebe talks about Ethiopian Tigray who arrive as new arrivals and try to be recognized as Eritrean, for these are profiled for resettlement. He tells the story of one of his acquaintances who was told by a female UNHCR employee that she understood that he was lying, but not that he was lying in a way that did contradict the earlier lies already contained in his archive. The UNHCR employee, in fact, helped the man to construct a consistent narrative. Another man Abebe knows about told three contradicting stories in three different interviews. He was consequently dismissed as a fraud.

We eat *injera* in his compound, cooked by a girl who just came over from Nairobi. She is Eritrean, but poses as an Ethiopian for some reason only she understands. Her husband is already resettled to the US, and she is waiting for her turn. We discuss all the people who already left, and how they experience their lives in resettlement countries. Some people are unhappy, he explains, some of whom I know from years before during my fieldwork. Indeed, walking through the camp I see relatives, friends and colleagues of resettled refugees, who all tell me that living in the west is not as easy as expected. Still, they all want to go too.

Abebe narrates a story about a researcher who became angry and frustrated because refugees were lying all the time. She could not handle it and left. This is indeed a problem with regard to the process of establishing “the truth,” as I discussed before in chapter one. However, it also indicates a system. People use ethnic, rebel, gender or cultural labels as resources in the humanitarian context of the camp. With that, the humanitarian, journalist, or researcher becomes a possible access point in the entitlement arena.

Kakuma is a portal: a place where people seek access to services, modernity, employment and migration. But the portal is reversed too. A German film crew came to Kakuma to recruit actors for a movie about the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>8</sup> The movie was

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<sup>8</sup> “Feuerherz,” or “Heart of fire” by Luigi Falorni (2008) is based on an autobiographic novel of former girl-child-soldier Senait Menari about her experiences in the Eritrean civil war.

filmed in Lodwar, and several of my former informants played a role in it. Interestingly, they were Ethiopians playing Eritreans. One received 4,000 KES for a small part. Another was given 50 USD a day for a leading role. Unfortunately for them, they had not received copies of the film in the camp.

Then, the Janus faced machinery as discussed in chapter two reared its head in the successor of Kakuma News Bulletin (Kanebu) the old camp news and poetry periodical. The new variant is called Kakuma News Reflector (Kanere), and it advocates a “refugee free press.”<sup>9</sup> It is an online magazine and blog, but also has a printed edition that is circulated in the camp. With the help of a Fulbright scholar, Kanere was launched as a Community Based Organization (CBO) in December 2008. It had to remove two contributions for articles after interference of UNHCR. Later, the District Officer revoked Kanere’s status as CBO, and as such it was in effect shut down after its first edition. UNHCR prohibited the use of computers and the internet by Kanere journalists, and the use of cyber cafés in the camp apparently could not compensate for this loss. Here, the confusing role of UNHCR was emphasized again (remember the concern of the workers union RAWUK). Later Kanere was allowed to or simply began to publish again.

The editor of Kanere was a young Ethiopian who was very active in attracting foreigners to appreciate the project – one afternoon I saw him touring a group of Japanese guests around in the camp to which he explained the project, and from whom he sought funding. He explained to me later that they were dependent on UNHCR because of their own lack of funding. In exchange, UNHCR demanded to have a say in the editing of Kanere.<sup>10</sup> After fierce resistance by UNHCR and even representatives from Geneva, a lawyer from Nairobi, Ekiro Aukot (a Turkana who earlier wrote a paper describing the humanitarian regime as a “conspiracy of silence” (Aukot 2004), who after finishing a PhD in law in the UK returned to Kenya to start an NGO advocating for refugee rights – Kituo Cha Cheria) declared Kanere a lawful CBO. However, the situation is still not yet resolved, although contrary to some years before, Kakuma camp is on the internet with a periodical, which depending on circumstances, is sometimes published online. The editor, however, claims to having been assaulted in the camp under dubious circumstances, hinting at his role as troublemaker.<sup>11</sup> Then again, on a skeptical note (but as some of my informants might have said), maybe he is just creating insecurity, waiting to be resettled away.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://kakuma.wordpress.com/about-kanere/>.

<sup>10</sup> See for a comprehensive chronology of events since the launch of Kanere in December 2008: <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/63143>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/63143>

## The politics of prevailing accidentality

I don't know about Kakuma, but a recent survey has found that in Dadaab, 6,142 grandchildren were born in the camp.<sup>12</sup> By population, Dadaab is now one of Kenya's largest cities after Nairobi, with a population of over 300,000 people and growing, simultaneously making it the largest refugee camp in the world.<sup>13</sup> This represents a new phase in the experiment of protracted refugee camp hosting. The phenomenon of children born in exile is not that surprising, as many have been born in the camps over the years, and I have touched upon this with regard to young people's relation to the camp and its effects on their notion of home, and on future perspectives such as repatriation and resettlement. Children born from children who were born in the camp however, gives another impetus to view these camps as accidental cities that will not only remain for some time to come, but that also are more than just the temporary waiting places for people in need. In fact, to many they are home.

In chapters three and six, I wrote how some refugees and practitioners explained that SPLA/M actively anticipated ways of keeping the camp open and its facilities running for the possibility of future conflict in Sudan around and after the 2011 referendum. Although the Somalis have interfered in this predicament by their arrival and relocation, the Sudanese have nonetheless succeeded in this. In February 2010, the big story in the camp was the return of the Sudanese in anticipation of violence, as a form of pre-emptive flight, but also in search of amenities such as health and education that are still largely lacking in South Sudan (Hovil 2010).

The economic importance of the camp for Kakuma town was mirrored by that of Operation Lifeline Sudan for Lokichoggio, and NGOs and UN started relocating to Sudan from 2006 onwards. Rumors had it that these NGOs were also contemplating coming back to Lokichoggio. The Mass Information Officer of UNHCR<sup>14</sup> explained that according to UNHCR, the chance of the Sudanese coming and remaining in Kakuma again was fifty-fifty. In fact, they had no clue, and how could they? More surprising perhaps was that they had no policy that anticipated this possibility. Since 2008, UNHCR implemented separate education systems, from which Sudanese were partly banned to prevent a pull factor. Now, however, they employed "accelerated" refugee status determination in Lokichoggio for the Sudanese on the basis of individual vulnerability, to accommodate for the new arrivals. I understood this as half a step away from reinstating a

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, Deputy Director of IRC Kenya, Nairobi: November 8, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> "Somalia's wars swell a refugee camp in Kenya," New York Times, November 11, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/12/world/africa/12dadaab.html>

<sup>14</sup> Interview Mass Information Officer UNHCR, Kakuma: February 2010.

*prima facie* arrangement. The Darfurians continued to represent an exceptional category and were granted refugee status on the basis of their being from Darfur.

By the time this thesis is submitted, South Sudan will have voted in the referendum. The precise outcome and its effects will become clear in the coming years. Kakuma will probably still be around for some time. I encourage researchers to continue exploring the development of this and other camps as accidental cities.



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## Summary

In this research I examine social ordering processes in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. I view the camp as an accidental city, by which I challenge the image of the camp as a temporary and artificial waiting space or a protracted refugee crisis *per se*. The reference to the city is both metaphorically and physically relevant. First, the metaphorical dimension of the city places refugees and their negotiation of space into the realm of the normal and the possible, contrary to prevailing notions of the camp as an abnormality. In this thesis, I analyze the ways in which refugees settle down in the camp and inhabit the humanitarian space. From a physical perspective, the camp has grown into a center of facilities in a wider region of insecurity, war and marginalized pastoral lands in a semi-desert. Compared to the region, the camp resembles a multicultural and cosmopolitan place, with various connections to the wider world.

I have analyzed five domains in which social ordering takes place: humanitarian governance, the camp as a warscape, the camp economy, third country resettlement and repatriation. In all these domains, refugees seek to organize themselves and their surroundings vis-à-vis the humanitarian agencies and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In chapter two, I describe how UNHCR *de facto* became the government of the refugee camp on behalf of the Kenyan government. In this capacity it operates in a confusion of roles; it is both implementer of aid and assistance in the general administration of the camp, and monitor and guard of States' obligations to respect refugee rights. This makes that UNHCR and its implementing NGOs not only offer, preach and teach entitlements, but are simultaneously for a large part responsible in their delivery and for the decision of who is granted inclusion in the camp's services. I have recognized this in the notion of an entitlement arena, which highlights how refugees maneuver in the grey area between UNHCR's camp governing and rights monitoring roles. The entitlements born out of refugee and human rights then translate into expectations and promises that become part of negotiations seeking to align, dodge or alter the camp's organization. For a large part, this negotiation takes places along the interfaces between UNHCR and its implementing partners, and the refugees. By employing participation strategies in the governing of the camp, UNHCR contributed to the creation of sub-authorities, which play an important role in the referral of refugees within the aid system, but also in the identification of vulnerabilities.

In the domain of the warscape, I analyze how boundaries between refugee leadership and rebel movements have blurred, adding and altering these sub-authorities. Apart from

the camp having a function in the broader war tactics of rebel movements in the past and in the present, the notion of the camp as a warscape highlights how the politics of war and the dynamics of conflict reach and partly order the camp. This warscape notion, instead of being problematic, is analyzed from a perspective of place making, through which refugees claim political agency and room to organize themselves vis-à-vis the refugee regime, thereby reshaping the living arrangements of the camp and organizing where people settle on the basis of ethnic and violent histories in the past and in the camp. This authority transcends into everyday forms of power and governance, largely because of an understanding of imminent and symbolic violence between the different groups.

In a socio-economic domain, I describe how refugees build on the resource of aid and create a diversity of livelihood strategies. Aid, more than just a handout or a necessity, is comparable to a natural resource in the contours of the camp. For refugees, once they are allowed inside the camp, aid is simply there. It is something one can vie for, and can harvest, until it is depleted. I describe this as a process of “digging aid,” comparable to subsistence farming. On the basis of this aid, a camp economy has grown, with linkages to informal and formal regional and international economies. The development of the camp economy has stimulated socio-economic changes. The local community has found a resource in the camp and “dropout pastoralists” have settled around the camp in a way that is comparable to the ways urban migrants flock to cities. The camp represents a cosmopolitan place where people of different backgrounds come together, meet each other, and adapt to each other.

The fourth domain, described in chapter five, concerns the camp as a portal for resettlement. The perspective of third country resettlement in Kakuma has both been a reason for people to come to the camp, and a phenomenon that greatly contributed to its development. Resettlement can thus be seen as both an opportunity as a solution to which people seek access. With this, resettlement became an organizing principle for people in the camp. The large volume of resettlement from Kakuma contributes to the character of the camp as a transitory space. Many informants came to Kakuma not so much to return “home” again, but to move forward instead. Kakuma as a portal offers migratory routes to those who manage to be considered eligible according to the agencies’ and receiving countries’ qualifications. Although imagined as a measure to protect those most in need, in reality, becoming eligible for resettlement involves a combination of factors, including access to the agencies and a vulnerability or a fitting identity. It is here that the warscape and the entitlement arena intertwine to become the system of resettlement.



Chapter six shows how repatriation becomes subject to maneuvering. Over the course of my fieldwork, peace broke out in Sudan and repatriation was initiated. The prospect was complicated, however. In Sudan, public amenities such as schools, health care, and water were scarce or lacking. Towns and urban centers were still largely under Arabic influence. The result was that the humanitarian government in the form of UNHCR and the NGOs sought to control return movements, while refugees sought to strategize and organize return in their own ways, and the Sudanese authorities in Sudan sought to keep the refugees in Kenya until further notice.

The notion of the camp as an accidental city comes back in that the camp was recognized for its facilities and weighed against the lack thereof in Sudan. New arrivals similarly came for education, or for basic amenities and even food. Refugees from other nationalities had concerns because of a possible closure of Kakuma. Many of them had a rebel or military past, or feared being regarded as rebels in their home countries, and thus saw limited opportunities to go home. Also people from town were unsure of what would remain of Kakuma in the event of the camp being closed.

This research contributes to earlier work in earlier stages of refugee hosting in other camps, and covering specific subthemes. With the analogy to the city, I bring together those subthemes in one common frame. The result can in part be understood as a history of the specific camp of Kakuma. This nicely captures the title of this research, for something that gains a history breaks free from the frame of temporality, perhaps by accident. With this approach, this book is not only relevant for social science or anthropology, but also as a historical record. Protracted refugee camps constitute an experiment in humanitarian action, but also in thinking about questions of governance and security in refugee hosting contexts in developing countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Nepal, Thailand and other locations where the content of this book may be relevant.



## Samenvatting

In dit onderzoek bestudeer ik sociale ordeningsprocessen in het vluchtelingenkamp Kakuma in het noorden van Kenia. Ik beschouw het kamp als een onvoorziene stad, waarmee ik het beeld van het kamp als een tijdelijke en kunstmatige wachtplaats in een continue staat van crisis bekritiseer. De analogie met de stad is relevant op zowel een metaforische als een letterlijke manier. Ten eerste plaatst de metaforische dimensie van de stad de vluchtelingen en hun onderhandeling over de inrichting en betekenis van ruimte in de context van het normale, of het mogelijke, in tegenstelling tot meer gangbare ideeën over het kamp als een abnormale plek. In dit proefschrift analyseer ik de verschillende manieren waarop vluchtelingen settelen in het kamp en de humanitaire ruimte gaan bewonen. Vanuit fysiek perspectief is het kamp uitgegroeid tot een concentratie van faciliteiten binnen een groter gebied van onveiligheid, oorlog en marginalisering in een halfwoestijn. Vergeleken met deze regio lijkt het kamp op een multiculturele en kosmopolitische plek die op verschillende manieren verbonden is met de rest van de wereld.

Ik onderscheid vijf domeinen of thema's waarbinnen sociale onderhandelingsprocessen bestudeerd kunnen worden: humanitair bestuur, het kamp als *warscape*, de ontwikkeling van een kampeconomie, herhuisvesting en repatriëring. In al deze domeinen zoeken vluchtelingen mogelijkheden om zichzelf te organiseren en hun omgeving vorm te geven ten opzichte van de VN-vluchtelingenorganisatie (UNHCR), humanitaire NGOs, de Keniase overheid, de lokale bevolking, en elkaar.

In hoofdstuk twee beschrijf ik hoe de VN-vluchtelingenorganisatie feitelijk de rol van overheid in het kamp is gaan vervullen, in plaats van de Keniase staat. Hierdoor treedt er een verwarring van rollen op: de organisatie is zowel een humanitaire hulpgever en algemene hulporganisatie, alsook de monitor en bewaker van de verantwoordelijkheden van staten bij het respecteren van vluchtelingenrechten. De UNHCR leert vluchtelingen waar ze in theorie recht op hebben, maar ze wordt ook voor een zeer belangrijk deel verantwoordelijk voor het uitvoeren van projecten en voor de beslissing wie er uiteindelijk toegang krijgt tot hulp en diensten in het kamp. Ik herken hierin een "entitlement arena"; de speelruimte die ontstaat tussen de uitvoerende en controlerende rollen van de UNHCR. De rechten gebaseerd op humanitaire- en vluchtelingenverdragen waar vluchtelingen aanspraak op kunnen maken worden vertaald in verwachtingen en beloftes die inzet worden van het onderhandelen met, het ontduiken van of het veranderen van de organisatie van en het beleid in het kamp. Deze onderhandelingen vinden voor een groot deel plaats op plekken waar directe verbindingen (interfaces)

bestaan tussen de UNHCR, haar uitvoerende humanitaire organisaties en de vluchtelingen. Met participatieprogramma's heeft de UNHCR zelf bijgedragen aan het ontstaan van subautoriteiten in het kamp, die een belangrijke rol spelen bij het (door)verwijzen van vluchtelingen binnen het vluchtelingensysteem, maar ook bij het aanwijzen en herkennen van kwetsbaarheid en hulpbehoefendheid.

In hoofdstuk drie beschrijf ik het kamp als “warscape” ofwel geweldslandschap. Hierin analyseer ik hoe de grenzen tussen vluchtelingenleiderschap, rebellenbewegingen en geweldsgeschiedenissen zijn versmolten. Los van de rol van het kamp in de tactiek van rebellenbewegingen voor en tijdens mijn veldwerk, duidt het geweldslandschap op de belangrijke invloed van oorlogspolitiek en conflictdynamiek in de sociale organisatie van het kamp. Ik gebruik dit perspectief op geweld om te kijken naar een productieve dimensie van geweld; het draagt bij aan de (re)organisatie van het kamp op basis van conflictgeschiedenissen, -dynamiek en etniciteit, niet zozeer als probleem, maar als plek waar mensen wonen, parallel aan, in tegenstelling tot, of in aanvulling op de initiële humanitaire ordening. Dit draagt bij aan de vorming van autoriteiten en vindt haar uitwerking in alledaagse vormen van macht en bestuur, grotendeels door middel van dreigend en symbolisch geweld tussen de verschillende groepen.

In hoofdstuk vier bespreek ik hoe vluchtelingen toegang zoeken tot en voortbouwen op humanitaire hulp als economische bron, waardoor er verschillende strategieën ontstaan voor de voorziening in levensonderhoud. Humanitaire hulp is meer dan een hand-out of een noodzaak en is vergelijkbaar met een natuurlijke hulpbron in die zin dat het er gewoon is. Als iemand eenmaal toegang heeft tot het kamp, speelt hij of zij met de hulp, of met de tot services verworven hulp, alsof die geogst wordt, net zolang totdat die op is. Ik vergelijk dit met “digging aid.” *Digging* is in de regio spreektaal voor de kleinschalige, zelfvoorzienende landbouw. Met deze hulp als basis is er een hulpeconomie ontstaan die is verbonden aan informele en formele regionale en internationale economieën. Als gevolg van deze economie vinden er tevens processen van sociale verandering plaats, en heeft het kamp een kosmopolitisch karakter waarin mensen met verschillende achtergronden tezamen komen.

In hoofdstuk vijf beschouw ik het kamp als een portaal voor herhuisvesting in voornamelijk westerse landen. De mogelijkheid tot herhuisvesting is voor veel mensen de reden dat ze naar Kakuma zijn gekomen, maar het heeft ook in grote mate bijgedragen aan haar ontwikkeling. Mensen zoeken actief toegang tot herhuisvesting. Hiermee is dat verworven tot een van de belangrijkste organisatieprincipes in het kamp. Het ruime aantal herhuisvestingen vanuit Kakuma heeft bijgedragen aan het beeld van het kamp als een *transitory space*. Veel informanten kwamen naar Kakuma niet zozeer om later weer naar “huis” terug te keren, maar juist om verder de wereld in te komen. Het kamp als portaal

herbergt migratieroutes voor diegenen die in aanmerking komen voor herhuisvesting volgens de kwalificaties van organisaties en ontvangende landen. Hoewel bedoeld om kwetsbaren te beschermen spelen in werkelijkheid meerdere factoren een rol bij de kwalificatie voor herhuisvesting, zoals toegang tot de NGO's en de UNHCR, een narratief van, of reden voor onveiligheid, of een passende identiteit. Hier komen de warscape/het geweldslandschap en de *entitlement arena* samen en vormen zij de ingrediënten en voedingsbodem voor kwalificatie voor herhuisvesting.

In hoofdstuk zes beschouw ik hoe repatriatie onderwerp van onderhandeling werd. Ten tijde van het veldwerk werd er een vredesakkoord gesloten in Soedan en begonnen de organisaties en de vluchtelingen aan repatriëring te denken. Dit vooruitzicht kende veel complicaties. In Soedan waren publieke voorzieningen zoals onderwijs en scholen, gezondheidszorg en schoon water, gebrekkig of afwezig. Bovendien stonden veel steden en centra nog onder invloed van noorderlingen en Arabieren. Het gevolg was dat vluchtelingen sceptisch waren over terugkeer op dat moment. Terwijl de humanitaire overheid van de UNHCR en de NGO's probeerden om terugkeer te stimuleren en te beheersen, wilden vluchtelingen juist zelf de controle houden en strategisch te werk gaan. De idee van het kamp als een onvoorziene stad komt terug in de wijze waarop de voorzieningen en faciliteiten in Kakuma werden afgewogen tegen het gebrek daaraan in Soedan. Tot aan het einde van het veldwerk kwamen nieuwe vluchtelingen aan omwille van onderwijs (voor hun kinderen), basisvoorzieningen en voedsel. Vluchtelingen met andere nationaliteiten dan de Soedanese maakten zich zorgen om een mogelijke sluiting van Kakuma. Velen hadden een rebellen- of militaire achtergrond, of vreesden om als zodanig beschouwd te worden in hun thuislanden, en zagen weinig mogelijkheden voor terugkeer. Ook mensen uit de lokale gemeenschap vroegen zich af wat er over zou blijven van het aanpalende dorp Kakuma als het kamp zou sluiten.

Dit onderzoek draagt bij en bouwt voort op ander werk in eerdere fases van vluchtelingenopvang in andere kampen, en dat betrekking heeft op verschillende subthema's. Met de analogie van de stad breng ik deze verschillende subthema's samen in een gemeenschappelijk frame. Het resultaat kan voor een deel beschouwd worden als een geschiedenis van het kamp Kakuma. Hoewel onvoorzien, een kamp dat een geschiedenis krijgt, verliest een beetje van haar tijdelijkheid. Met deze benadering is dit boek niet alleen relevant voor de antropologie of de sociale wetenschappen in het algemeen, maar ook belangrijk als historische bron. Langdurige vluchtelingenkampen vormen een experiment in humanitaire actie en hulp, maar ook in het denken over beleid en veiligheid in de gebieden waar deze kampen liggen; in ontwikkelingslanden zoals Kenia, Tanzania, Ghana, Nepal, Thailand en andere locaties waar de inhoud van dit boek relevant kan zijn.

## **Author biography**

Bram J. Jansen (1976) was born in Werkendam, the Netherlands. He obtained a M.Sc. in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht, where he specialized in Development and Conflict Studies and graduated on a thesis focusing on the reintegration and demobilization of child rebels in Northern Uganda. Currently, he is conducting Postdoc research with Disaster Studies Wageningen on humanitarian agencies' anticipation of conflict and violence in South Sudan.

**Completed Training and Supervision plan, Bram J. Jansen  
Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)**



Wageningen School  
of Social Sciences

<i>Name of the activity</i>	<i>Department/Institute</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
<b>Research related competences</b>			
CERES Orientation course.	CERES, Utrecht.	2004	4
CERES Presentation Tutorials.	CERES, Utrecht.	2004	6
Participation in the East African School for Refugee and Humanitarian Affairs (EASRHA).	Moi University, Eldoret.	2004	5
<b>Career related competence and development</b>			
Various academic skill training activities as part of a Marie Curie Humcricon Scholarship.	University of Deusto, Bilbao.	2008-9	4
Participation in conference organization IASFM 12.	IASFM / University of Nicosia, Cyprus, June 28 – July 2.	2009	2
<b>Presentation of research results</b>			
Preparation and presentation of paper 'Airlift from the desert: dreams and effects of resettlement in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya'.	AEGIS European Conference on African Studies, Leiden, 11-14 July.	2007	2
Preparation and presentation of paper 'The entitlement machine: power and identity in a Kenyan refugee camp'.	Conference Globalization: Migration, Citizenship and Identity', Ibadan, 6-9 November.	2007	2
Preparation and presentation of paper 'The entitlement machine: the refugee camp as an arena of negotiation'.	International Association for the Study of Forced Migration Conference, Cairo, 6-10 January.	2008	2
Preparation and presentation of paper 'The accidental city: capturing the urban in an East African refugee camp'.	CERES Summerschool, Amsterdam, 9-12 June.	2008	2
Preparation and presentation of paper 'When research enters the politics of aid: dealing with strategic accounts from informants in humanitarian settings'.	Conference on Humanitarian Studies, Groningen, 4-7 February.	2009	2
Presentation and preparation of paper 'When exception approaches 'normality': the refugee camp as an entitlement arena'.	Workshop Camps as spaces of exception, Münster, 8-9 May.	2009	2
<b>Total</b>			<b>33</b>

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