

**International Association for the Study of Forced
Migration Biennial Conference**

Sao Paulo (Brazil), January 9-13, 2005

“Kupata Riziki”
or
Making Ends Meet in Urban Tanzania

Roos Willems
IMMRC, Dept of Anthropology
Catholic University Leuven, Belgium

Based on recent research among Congolese, Burundi and Rwandan urban refugees in Tanzania, this article illustrates their economic resilience and determined resistance against demeaning official policies which would require them to depend on humanitarian aid provided solely in the rural refugee camps. Despite the lack of documents legalizing their residence in Dar es Salaam (even as they are eligible to a status as prima facie refugees), and of any form of institutional assistance, many of these forced migrants have obtained a certain level of economic self-sufficiency despite living scattered among the Tanzanian population and running the permanent risk of being arrested by the immigration authorities. Relying on their social and cultural abilities, they survive by performing a wide variety of jobs, mostly in the informal sector, based on individual negotiations and arrangements with Tanzanian residents. In conclusion, the paper recommends that, following the official position of international refugee agencies -- namely that refugees should rightly be considered potential economic assets to their country of asylum instead of just a burden -- steps should be undertaken to lobby at the international level and with the relevant state authorities to advocate more flexible and humane urban refugee policies.

Introduction

Following the violent events of the 1990s in the Great Lakes region in Central Africa,¹ hundreds of thousands of men and women from (Eastern) Congo, Burundi and Rwanda sought a safe haven in neighboring Tanzania. At the time of research (2001-02),² over a half of million officially registered refugees resided in Western Tanzania's "designated areas" (i.e., refugee camps), the overwhelming majority (99%) of which originated from the Great Lakes region: 69% from Burundi, 25% from (Eastern) Congo and 5% from Rwanda.³ The total refugee

¹ The 1993 assassination of the Burundi president Ndadaye, the 1994 assassination of the Rwandan president Habyarimana and the subsequent genocide, and the outburst of armed conflicts in Eastern Congo in 1996 and again in 1998.

² The nine months of field research was funded by a Field Research Dissertation grant from the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

³ The remaining 1% consisted of a variety of nationalities, such as Somali's, Ugandans, Ethiopians, Sudanese, etc.

population in the country, however, was estimated by the Tanzanian authorities to be over one million. Because of a persistently high level of insecurity and subhuman living conditions in the camps, increasing numbers of men and women resisted the official Tanzanian policy (prescribing all refugees to reside in the “designated areas”) and either self-settled among co-ethnics living across the border, or, in increasing numbers, headed for one of Tanzania’s urban centers. In addition to having to cope with the daily fear of being denounced to the immigration authorities and possibly face *refoulement* to their respective country of origin, these forced migrants⁴ can also not count on any type of humanitarian assistance which is provided only to those refugees residing in one of the designated areas in Western Tanzania.⁵

In the early days after independence, the Government of Tanzania had issued legal notices stipulating that persons from certain nationalities entering Tanzania after a certain date automatically acquired refugee status. As such, Congolese entering Tanzanian territory after June 1st, 1964, Rwandan after January 1st, 1961, and Burundi after April 29th, 1972 automatically fell under the Refugee Act of 1965 and were exempted from the provisions in the Immigration Act of 1972 (GOT 1973; 1966). Today this *de jure* automatic recognition of the refugee status of nationals from certain countries no longer applies. The 1998 Refugee Act insists that *all* persons who enter Tanzanian territory wishing to claim refugee status must “immediately and not later than seven days after entry . . . present or report to the nearest authorized officer . . . and apply for recognition as a refugee” (section 9(1)).

Upon being recognized as a refugee by a representative of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the person will be assigned to reside in one of the “designated areas” defined by the 1998

⁴ For the purpose of this paper the terms «refugee» and «forced migrant» will be used interchangeably.

⁵ Exception are a few dozen high profile politically sensitive individuals and their families, who have the Tanzanian government’s permission to live in Dar es Salaam and receive a monthly living allowance from UNHCR.

Refugee Act, that is to say one of the refugee camps in Western Tanzania. Failure to comply means that this person shall be treated as an illegal alien falling under the Immigration Act of 1995 instead of the Refugee Act, thereby becoming eligible for forceful repatriation to his/her country of origin.⁶ Notwithstanding, increasing numbers of the urban refugees, either do not apply for refugee status, having heard it is virtually impossible to obtain residence permission for Dar es Salaam, or when rejected and assigned to one of the refugee camps, refuse to comply. Despite the lack of refugee status or entitlement to any type of humanitarian assistance, the general consensus among government officials, aid workers and the local Tanzanian population is that the numbers of urban refugees in Dar es Salaam have increased sharply in recent years.⁷

This paper will first briefly situate the research project in the literature on urban refugees in Africa before describing the research setting and presenting the sample of respondents. After explaining why these forced migrants avoid the refugee camps, it documents how the refugees make ends meet. The next section deals with the strategies applied in order to cope with their illegal status and the implications thereof, while the conclusion offers recommendations for a possible role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the redesigning of national policies vis-à-vis urban refugee populations.

Research Background

Despite the recognition of ever increasing urban refugee populations on the African continent by researchers and practitioners alike (Rogge 1986; Kibreab 1996), there remain significant “lacunae in knowledge about African urban refugees” (Kibreab 2002: 328) resulting

⁶ Refugees who do not reside in one of the refugee camps areas and who do not have a permit allowing them to reside outside of the “designated areas” are considered illegal immigrants under the 1995 Immigration Act, that stipulates much heavier penalties and sanctions than the 1998 Refugee Act.

in “a dearth of data on their demographic structure, socio-economic background, treatment and survival strategies”(1996: 132). Many of the findings of my research project are in line with the data generated from the research done on Ethiopian and Eritrean urban refugees in Khartoum, Sudan, in the 1980s and 1990s (Kibreab 1996; Goitom 1987; Karadawi 1987), such as the urban background of the majority of urban refugees, the diversity of reasons to flee the home country, the bypassing of border towns or refugee camps in heading straight for Dar es Salaam (i.e., Khartoum), the on average higher education levels and the proliferation of urban-based, professional skills, etc (Kibreab 1996; Willems 2003).

Yet very scant information is available on this particular urban refugee population in Tanzania with regard to its size, demographic structure, survival strategies, etc.⁸ Malkki (1995) described her brief encounters with Burundi young men in Kigoma in Western Tanzania in the 1980s and Sommers (1994; 2001) did research among a limited number of young men belonging to, what he calls, the "second Burundi refugee generation" (2001:7) in Dar es Salaam in the early 1990s. Recently, however, in the wake of the events in the Great Lakes region from 1993 onwards, the numbers of Congolese, Burundi and Rwandan refugees who found their way to Dar es Salaam have increased significantly. According to my research data more than four out of every five survey respondents arrived in Dar es Salaam after 1996 only, the year the new Rwandan (Tutsi) government invaded Eastern Congo and raided the Rwandan and Burundi Hutu refugee camps, causing both Rwandan and Burundi refugees as well as Eastern Congolese to seek refuge in neighboring Tanzania. Estimating the configuration by nationality or by place of

⁷ Another reason for the continuing increase of urban refugee populations, is the rise in urbanization rates worldwide, but particularly on the African continent (UNDP 2001).

⁸ Other researchers have studied African urban refugee populations in Sudan (Kibreab 1996; Goitom 1987; Karadawi 1987; Kuhlman 1990; Weaver 1988), and in Benin (Kpanou 1989).

residence of the number of self-settled refugees in Tanzania's urban centers proved to be impossible, mainly because, for lack of any legal status and/or residence permits, they are forced to live a clandestine life.

Hence, because of their overwhelmingly illegal status⁹ and subsequent lack of statistical information on their composition or whereabouts, respondents for this research project in Dar es Salaam could be located through snowball sampling only. In order to deal with possible biases related to this method¹⁰ and with a comparative objective in mind, I set out to locate one hundred men and women of each of the three nationalities, each group gender balanced and representative of different age categories. The final sample of three hundred refugees surveyed was located through multiple points of entry into the refugee community, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR office), Umati,¹¹ the University of Dar es Salaam, the French Cultural Center, the Congolese school (*Groupe Interscholaire des Grand Lacs*), etc, but above all through personal contacts.

Analysis of the survey data shows that Congolese, Burundi and Rwandan forced migrants in Dar es Salaam are three times as likely to be urbanites compared to the general populations in their respective countries of origin. Whereas, for example, the average urbanization rate for Congo was 30% in the year 2000 (UNDP 2001), nine in ten Congolese refugee respondents reported being prior inhabitants of one of the three major urban centers in Eastern Congo (Uvira, Bukavu and Goma). A similar trend was observable among Burundi and Rwandan refugees surveyed. Only 8% of the Burundi population is urbanized (*ibid.*), and yet 39% of the Burundi

⁹ In all, only one in three respondents (36%) had at one time registered with UNHCR, whether at the camp level or with the UNHCR office in Dar es Salaam.

¹⁰ See in particular Jacobson and Landau 2003.

¹¹ A Tanzanian NGO and UNHCR's implementing partner in Dar es Salaam.

respondents in the sample resided in the capital Bujumbura before the flight.¹² The same holds true for the Rwandan respondents, among whom 34% originate from the capital Kigali, compared to a national urbanization rate of only 6% (ibid.). As urbanites, the refugees in Dar es Salaam are also considerably more educated than their compatriots in the refugee camps: barely 1% of the camp refugees has a university degree, compared to between 8% of the Burundi and 18% of the Congolese urban refugees.¹³ In addition, as mentioned earlier, close to nine out of ten respondents (88%) reported having arrived in Dar es Salaam less than five years before the time of research, i.e., from 1996 onward, confirming the recent sharp increase in the numbers of refugees in Tanzania's urban centers observed by local residents, Tanzanian government officials and aid workers alike.

Kupata Riziki¹⁴

When solicited to explain why they had decided to avoid the refugee camps where all the humanitarian assistance is provided, more than half of all respondents (55%) mentioned (having heard of) intolerable living conditions in the refugee camps, such as insufficient food rations, the prevalence of illnesses, or the general perception of camp life as miserable. While many refugees based their decision to avoid the refugee camps on the hearsay and testimonies of fellow refugees, others had had first hand experience. One Congolese informant, for instance,

¹² These data show that the Burundi refugees who arrived in Dar es Salaam over the past 10 years are considerably more urbanized than they may have been in the past. The first — and so far only — research study on Burundi refugees in Dar es Salaam (Sommers 2001) focused solely on the rural-urban migration of the children of the 1972 refugees, who had grown up in the settlements in the 1970s and 1980s, and decided, as young adults to head for Dar es Salaam. The findings of my research project contradict the author's contention that "nearly all the Burundi youths in Dar es Salaam were raised in the refugee settlements" (348).

¹³ Based on statistical information from Muyovosi, Mtabila 2, Kanembwa, Karago, Mtendeli, and Nduta camps, representing a total of 95,114 Burundi refugees, and Nyarugusu, Lugufu 1 and Lugufu 2 camps representing a total of 47,332 Congolese refugees. Unfortunately, no similar information for the Rwandan camp refugees was obtainable (Courtesy of UNHCR Dar es Salaam — Mr. Kwakye, Senior Program Officer).

¹⁴ Loosely translatable from Swahili into English as "providing in one's daily needs."

recounted that during his 1996-1998 stay in a Western Tanzania camp, one of his children had died, in his opinion, «due to lack of medical attention» from the camp's infrastructure. This person, together with his family members, had repatriated to Congo in 1998, when after a few months the Rwandan/Ugandan invasion took place, prompting them to leave their home again. This time, however, husband and wife and three children headed straight for Dar es Salaam, determined never to set foot in the refugee camps again.

Security concerns for politico-ethnic reasons was the second major motivation cited by one in three respondents (31%) to avoid the refugee camp.¹⁵ Only those refugees whose security concerns are considered “genuine” or “serious enough” by UNHCR are eligible for a permit to reside in Dar es Salaam and a monthly living allowance.¹⁶ Many however, find their concerns not taken seriously by the refugee agency and are told to go to one of the refugee camps when turning to the UNHCR office for assistance. A Congolese ex-military had just such an experience.

In Dar es Salaam...I first went to the UN. UN [UNHCR] told me to go to the Ministry [of Home Affairs]. At the Ministry they gave me forms to fill...and the UN decided to provide assistance for the next six months... After that, they decided that I should go to the camp... But I refused to go... I wasn't going to live there with these people, because you can never be sure that there is no infiltration... That is why I refused to go. But the UNHCR didn't accept my refusal and cut the assistance I was receiving. They told me to go fend for myself, and so I did...

Fending for oneself in a situation of forced migration, particularly where the refugee lacks any type of legal documentation or entitlement to humanitarian assistance is quite a challenge. While, in general, one's educational level is often indicative of one's occupation, in a situation of forced migration, this direct link is blurred by the lack of employment opportunities as a result of

¹⁵ Among young men, so I was told by informants, an additional important motive for avoiding the refugee camps was the fear to be (forcibly) recruited into one of the rebel factions.

the restrictive refugee policies of the asylum country. The occupations held by respondents at home, *before* coming to Dar es Salaam, were reported as: students (36%), trade (18%), paid employment (16%), and self-employment (12%). Compared to the professional occupations reportedly held by respondents *after* coming to Dar es Salaam, the proportion of self-employed tripled (39%) to become the most important one, while roughly the same number of people as before engaged in trade activities (20%). Paid employment decreased by half to 8%, and unsurprisingly, only few refugees (3%) were able to continue their studies in exile.

Two-thirds of the self-employed respondents were engaged in just two types of activities: hairdressing or hair braiding (exercised by 16% of all respondents, mostly young women), and *mission towns* (10%, and mostly young men). *Mission town*¹⁷ is a typical Dar es Salaam term, translatable to “middleman” in English. They are persons, usually young men, who basically bring sellers and buyers of any type of goods or services (e.g., landlords and tenants) together and make a living of the commission. The remaining third of self-employed respondents earned a living as tailors, carpenters, mechanics, plumbers, etc. Not allowed to start up their own workshop for lack of the necessary legal documents, self-employed refugees (except for the *missiontowns* whose “office” consists solely of a cell phone) needed to locate a Tanzanian-owned shop in their respective area of expertise, and to agree with the owner to work on commission rather than receiving a fixed salary at the end of each month. One Burundi young man remembers:

As soon as I arrived, I started to learn the trade [of tailor] in his workshop (*atelier*) . . . I started to make trousers, shirts, and skirts. When I had learned to do all this, I told Jacques [the Tanzanian shop owner]: "Well, the time has come to give me something, because now

¹⁶ At the time of research, less than 50 refugees were receiving a living allowance for Dar es Salaam for themselves and their close family members (UNHCR 2001a).

¹⁷ In French often called *commissionnaire*. There exists no Swahili translation for the term.

it is no longer a matter of learning." Until then he was providing lunch only. Usually, in other tailor shops, you get 40%. So, if you make a blouse for 10,000, he [the shop owner] has to give you 4,000. Jacques proposed to give me 2,000, or 20%. I accepted.

Other respondents, mostly older women, managed to make a living by preparing *mandazi* or *chapatis*, which are local types of pastry, or other food items, such as smoked fish, which they subsequently sell to passerby's in the street. A Congolese refugee woman well into her fifties explains:

Those people who sell fish, do so in open air. So you observe them to learn how they set the price. The first day, I asked someone to buy fish for me, and I repaid him afterwards [after frying and selling the fish]. The second time I went there, same thing. After that, I decided to buy myself and participate in the bidding . . . [After frying the fish] I put a table outside, and piled the fish on it. When someone comes by, you tell him the price and he goes with it. I was selling from home right here .

Trading activities, on the other hand, involve the buying and selling of any type of goods, from precious stones and African art objects (e.g., Central African masks are popular with tourists) to women's wear, including the West and Central African fabrics (such as the *basin* or the *superwax*) which are very different in quality, fashion and price range from the ones produced locally in Tanzania (such as the *kitenge* and the *kanga*). Under *paid employment*, self-reported by one in twelve respondents as main means of survival, were included not only jobs in the formal sector (e.g., pharmacist, shop attendant, school teacher or receptionist) but any type of activity for which a respondent received some type of salary: e.g., housegirls, private teachers, drivers, and even a football trainer.

Throughout people's testimonies on their coping strategies to make ends meet, it became increasingly clear that a certain level of cooperation, albeit friendship, develops with Dar es Salaam's Tanzanian residents at the individual and personal level. Many of the urban refugees in Dar es Salaam were able to circumvent the officially required work permits or business licenses by making arrangements with established Tanzanian businesses or workshops and working on

commission. At other times, Tanzanian friends offered a place to live, introduced refugees to church communities or assisted them in acquiring new professional skills . In trading activities as well, Tanzanian contacts appeared indispensable. However, rendering the challenge of making a living under these circumstances even more insurmountable than for the local residents of Dar es Salaam is the eternal problem of residence and/or work permits, without which the urban refugees remain an "easy prey" for police officers or immigration officials.

Coping with an Illegal Status

In order to obtain a work or residence permit, a multitude of strategies had been devised, such as, following the official application procedure, intermarrying Tanzanian citizens or locating Tanzanian "adoptive" parents. If all has failed, the only option to stay out of prison is to pay off the arresting officials. The following testimonies illustrate the different coping strategies applied to what is one of the foremost pre-occupations of the urban refugees in Dar es Salaam. One Burundi refugee remembers how, in 1995, it was still reasonably easy for a refugee to obtain the work permit for Dar es Salaam. In order to apply for a work permit to be able to teach French,

I went to the Ministry of Home Affairs, they gave me the work permit without a single problem, I don't know how God helped me. I went without a problem . . . in 1995 . . . I didn't even pay a single cent. . . I think they weren't strict [at that time].

From 1995 onward, however, Tanzanian policy stipulates that refugees need to apply for work permits that costs \$600 yearly. Considering that an average salary is less than \$100,¹⁸ this means that applicants are expected to spend half of their yearly salary to be allowed to work. Clearly, a

¹⁸ This is an estimate for Dar es Salaam, salaries in the rest of Tanzania are even lower.

work permit is not affordable on a local salary, and those very few refugees having work permits are usually sponsored by close relatives in Europe or the USA with well-paying jobs.

An alternative method to obtain a Tanzanian residence and/or work permit is by marriage to a Tanzanian citizen. While, in practice, residence permits are issued fairly easily to non-Tanzanian women married to Tanzanian men, non-Tanzanian men married to Tanzanian women have a hard time obtaining the same legal document. One of the Congolese informants came to Tanzania in 1995, subsequently married a Tanzanian woman and has been struggling ever since to receive the resident's permit. At one point, he received a letter from the Ministry for Home Affairs telling him to go to one of the refugee camps and take his Tanzanian wife with him, while UNHCR in another letter had stated to him that "your marriage gives you the right to reside anywhere you want in this country." The contradictory statements of the relevant official agencies, have left the man in an (il)legal limbo.

Up until now, I'm still here illegally. The temporary permit that had been given to me [by the Tanzanian Refugee Department] is no longer extended . . . At the legal level, there is even a trial pending at the court . . . Regarding the problem of my residency, work permit . . . Really, there is no local integration and what about protection? At any moment, I could be arrested. And what about the future? I have a family to provide for, my children need to go to school.

The court case he is referring to was initiated by the lawyers of the Legal and Human Rights Center in Dar es Salaam, who sued the Tanzanian government for gender discrimination in the application of the law pertaining to residence permits for non-Tanzanian spouses.¹⁹ A Burundi refugee woman explains that:

Our men marry here in order to find a way to make ends meet more easily. Although we, as women, may be married to Tanzanians, our husbands give us a hard time, call us

¹⁹ The Guardian, May 25, 2000. The court's decision was still pending at the time of writing.

*mkimbizi*²⁰ . . . More men, whether Burundi and Congolese marry Tanzanian women [than vice versa]. [A refugee man] who is without documents, he'll decide to marry a local woman. For example, those Congolese with a salon, they'll marry a Tanzanian so that if they are arrested, their wife will be there to defend them. At the same time, our brothers tell us "We live with her [our Tanzanian wife], but the day we go back home, she's not coming along."

Marriage to a Tanzanian woman, even as it does not produce the necessary permit to the non-Tanzanian husband for reasons explained above, obviously does provide a social connection that has frequently proven useful in dealings with the Tanzanian authorities. Often, so I was told, it was possible to convince the arresting authorities to release the refugee by involving his/her Tanzanian friends and/or relatives. The same principle of social and/or familial local connections lies at the root of an alternative strategy, namely finding an "adoptive" Tanzanian father.

Wealthier refugees often resorted to locating an older, needy Tanzanian man and paying him to testify to being their father, in order to obtain the necessary documents from the authorities. However, as one refugee woman warns, this *modus operandi* is not without difficulties.

Refugees agree with a poor man from here, one that doesn't have any business or money. But once you have used him, and you have a job or a business, for him to extort money (*escroquer*) from you is very easy. If you have money or a car, you think that man is on your side, but then you find out he's doing everything possible to have you arrested.

In other words, the scheme may backfire when the Tanzanian starts initiating the arrests by informing the authorities. Each time, the refugee will have no option but to have the Tanzanian testify on his behalf as "his relative," a gesture necessarily handsomely rewarded lest the refugee goes to jail.

²⁰ Swahili word for refugee, considered to have derogatory connotations.

While only 9% of the respondents reported having actually been arrested and taken to court since arriving in Dar es Salaam, many said being regularly harassed by the Tanzanian immigration officials or police officers. For lack of Tanzanian relatives or friends, usually a little "gift" may suffice to solve the problem. One of the Rwandan refugees recalls that:

One day, the landlord took me to the police. . . Apparently someone had informed the police that I was there. And as I had never gone to report my presence to the police,²¹ they had threatened the landlord, that's what he told me. So he was forced to take me to the police station to explain why I was here. So he comes in one morning "Come, let's go to the police station." We arrive there, they ask me to show all my documents, the [UNHCR] letter that shows that I am a Rwandan refugee. They told me I do not have the right to reside here, in Dar es Salaam, so I explained to them that my wife was pregnant and ill . . . and that really, I couldn't go to the camp, and that I was waiting for the reply from UNHCR. They understood, they let me go . . . Of course not without asking for money, how can they leave you alone without asking for money?

His compatriot says he saves his hard earned money for just such an occasion:

I knew a bit of Swahili, now it is better. But even when I speak to a Tanzanian from the accent he'll immediately tell I am Rwandan. Unfortunately, I met with the police and immigration officers, they arrested me, not once, but four times, because I don't know Swahili well. [Q: Were you taken to prison ?] No, when I have worked, I save my money, and then, when I am arrested, I give them that money.

Even as the urban refugees from Congo, Burundi and Rwanda seem to succeed through a myriad of strategies to fend for themselves and make ends meet in spite of the absence of any humanitarian assistance, it is obvious that their lack of legal status as a result of national refugee policies renders their survival much more difficult than it could be. Already meager resources are being depleted even further because of the continuous harassment by government officials and/or police officers. The last section of this paper documents the position of the UNHCR in this matter at the national and international level and offers a strategy of action to be followed in order to improve the current situation of the urban refugees.

²¹ As mentioned earlier, Tanzanian law stipulates that all non-Tanzanians entering the country must report to the nearest local authorities within 7 days after their arrival.

The Role of UNHCR

Conversations I had with UNHCR officials and other staff members of the UNHCR branch office in Dar es Salaam were all too often replete with elements of a discourse portraying urban refugees as “demanding” and “too expensive.” The general perception is that

there is a growing tendency whereby refugees prefer to reside in the urban areas than going to camp [sic]. The obvious reason is that life in town, especially when paid for is better and easier than camp life. (UNHCR 2001a: 2)

And yet, the refugees who decided to come to Dar es Salaam in spite of the official refugee policy, are overwhelmingly well aware of the fact that material or financial assistance is generally not obtainable from the UNHCR office in Dar es Salaam. In fact, instead of material assistance, informants expressed their need for the UNHCR office to provide them with “protection.” The provision of protection is stipulated in the first paragraph of chapter one of the 1950 *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, namely that the UNHCR shall first and foremost “assume the function of providing international protection²²...to refugees” (UNHCR 2000: 41). Providing protection usually (but not exclusively) takes the form of a so-called “Protection Letter,” confirming one's status as an asylum seeker or refugee. Its function is to protect the bearer from being arrested by the Tanzanian authorities as an illegal alien and face possible forced repatriation. This letter does *not* involve the providing of material assistance, for which separate criteria are used, and as such carries no financial or budgetary implications for UNHCR.

As one among many other informants, this Congolese informant, in Tanzania since 1995, bitterly complains about the way the UNHCR Office in Dar es Salaam has been receiving refugees and asylum seekers that come to seek their protection.

²² In view of the fact that a refugee can no longer avail upon the legal protection of his own state through one of its embassies.

Going to UNHCR? The reception you get when you go there, they leave you standing outside, and even one time...the police came, they entered into the compound of the UNHCR to arrest people. This was in 1997. That event made us even write to the representative at the time, to say that it was not normal that police officers came, entering the [UNHCR] compound and arresting people inside. This shows that we are not really protected here, we have no protection.

From talking to both refugees and asylum seekers on the one hand, and UNHCR and its implementing partner Umati on the other, I found their interactions to be rife with tensions, misinformations and misunderstandings mostly from a lack of communication. While the refugee agencies are pre-occupied with budgetary arguments based on the conviction that urban refugees first and foremost seek material assistance, the refugees themselves are concerned by the inability (unwillingness?) of the UNHCR office to issue them legal documents and/or residence permits that would protect them from the Tanzanian police and immigration authorities. The recurrent argument from UNHCR officials that there is insufficient funding to assist urban refugees -- whose cost *per capita* actually does exceed by far that of a refugee in the camp²³ -- becomes obsolete in a situation where the large majority of informants emphasized that they are not seeking UNHCR's financial assistance, but are instead relying on the international organization for documents that would legalize their stay in Dar es Salaam and possibly allow them to exercise their profession. In fact, if more self-sufficient urban refugees were to be issued with work permits, there would automatically be fewer requests for financial assistance directed at the refugee organizations.

Ultimately, the decision to allow refugees to reside in urban centers and engage in gainful employment is dependent on the authorities of the country of asylum. The motivation of the

²³ Around \$48 per camp refugee annually, or 1% of the annual cost of an urban refugee \$4,800 (UNHCR: personal communication).

Tanzanian government to deny legal residence and the right to work to refugees in Dar es Salaam is based on the assumption that local integration is a disincentive for repatriation. And yet,

the pattern of repatriation to Rwanda after the genocide in 1994 and to some extent that of South Africans in the early 1990s suggests that educated and economically well-off refugees might be the first to repatriate when conditions allow since they are empowered, and have better prospects of playing a key part in the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation in the country of origin. (Rutinwa 2002: 23)

In addition, there have been proposals by the Center for the Study of Forced Migration at the University of Dar es Salaam to the Tanzanian government to issue a separate class of work permits affordable to refugees. Given the policy guidelines, as well as academic arguments, in favor of treating the urban refugees in Dar es Salaam as “assets” rather than “the problem” (UNHCR 1997: 17), it is regrettable that UNHCR Dar es Salaam continues to invest so much effort in counseling urban refugees to go to the refugee camps, instead of redirecting their efforts towards lobbying with the Tanzanian government for a change of the national refugee policy.

While it is true that UNHCR at the level of the Branch Office in Dar es Salaam have in the recent past undertaken a few modest attempts to sensitize the Tanzanian Refugee Department to the advantages of issuing work permits to urban refugees,²⁴ I believe that UNHCR, as an international organization could and should make more high level efforts to advocate their policy with the Tanzanian authorities. In view of the fact that in a number of countries -- such as India, Egypt, Kenya, Macedonia, Russia, Syria, Yemen and others (UNHCR 2001b: 3) -- thousands of refugees are UNHCR registered and, in certain instances, have been allowed to work, it is recommended that expertise gained and arguments collected in the afore-mentioned countries is shared with UNHCR offices in other countries, so as to allow for an effective lobbying of a more

²⁴ A 1998 letter from the former UNHCR Senior Protection Officer to the Head of the Refugee Department in the Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs recommended the issuance of work permits to refugees.

humane approach to urban refugees in general. Advocating at the level of the Executive Committee that

employment, educational opportunities and a certain measure of economic and social integration in the country of asylum are important for refugees' well-being, including their psychological and physical health (UNHCR 1994: 23)

is ineffective, when not accompanied by directives for country offices to advocate among reluctant host countries the right for self-sufficient refugees to legally reside and be gainfully employed in urban centers. Involving the urban refugees in the process, through local refugee committees and elected representatives, would enhance a worthy and respectful dialogue and exchange of experiences and expectations, and as such, avoid the current, unnecessary misinformation and frustrating gaps of communication, contributing in the end to the development of a more workable urban refugee policy and a more dignified life for Africa's forced migrants.

Bibliography

Center for the Study of Forced Migration (CFSFM)

2001 Review of Refugee Related Policies and Laws in Tanzania. Internal document.

Goitom, Eyob

1987 Systems of Social Interaction of Refugee Adjustment Processes: The Case of Eritrean Refugees in Khartoum, Sudan. *In* Refugees: A Third World Dilemma. John R. Rogge, ed. Pp. 130-142. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield

Government of Tanzania (GOT)

1966 The Refugees Control Act, 1965. Government Notice N° 89 published 11/3/66. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

1973 The Immigration Act, 1972. Government Notice N° 95 published 25/5/73. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

1995 Immigration Act, 1995. Electronic document. [Http://www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch), accessed July 7, 2002.

1998 Refugees Act, 1998. Electronic document. [Http://www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch), accessed July 7, 2002.

Jacobsen, Karen and Loren Landau

2003 Researching refugees: some methodological and ethical considerations in social science and forced migration. *New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper N° 90*. Electronic document. [Http://www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch), accessed September 22, 2003.

Karadawi, Ahmed

1987 The Problem of Urban Refugees in Sudan. *In Refugees: A Third World Dilemma*. John R. Rogge, ed. Pp. 115-129. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield

Kibreab, Gaim

1996 Eritrean and Ethiopian Urban Refugees in Khartoum: What the Eye Refuses to See. *African Studies Review* 39(3): 131-78.

2002 *Review of Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15(3):326-328.

Kpanou, Tossou Bertin

1989 *L'Intégration des Réfugiés au Bénin: Cas de Cotonou*. Master's thesis. Cotonou, Bénin: University of Cotonou.

Kuhlman, Tom

1990 *Burden or Boon: A Study of Eritrean Refugees in the Sudan*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: VU University Press.

Malkki, Liisa H.

1995 *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Rogge, John R.

1986 Urban Refugees in Africa: Some Changing Dimensions to Africa's Refugee Problem, with Special Reference to Sudan. *Migration World* XIV (4): 7-14.

Rutinwa, Bonaventure

2002 *Prima Facie Status and Refugee Protection*. *New Issues in Refugee Research, UNHCR Working Paper No69*. Electronic document. [Http://www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch) accessed March 10, 2003.

Sommers, Marc

1994 *Hiding in Bongoland: Identity Formulations and the Clandestine Life for Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*. PhD thesis. Boston University.

2001 *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*. New York: Berghahn Books.

United Nations Development Report (UNDP)

2001 *Human Development Report 2001*. Electronic Document.

[Http://www.undp.org/hdr2001/back.pdf](http://www.undp.org/hdr2001/back.pdf), accessed November 25, 2002.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- 1994 Note on International Protection. Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme A/AC.96/830. Electronic document. [Http://www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch), accessed May 21, 2003.
- 1997 UNHCR Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees. Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR.
- 2000 International Instruments Relating to Refugees. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: UNHCR.
- 2001a Urban Refugees in Tanzania. Internal document, 15/10/2001.
- 2001b Evaluation of the Implementation of UNHCR's Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas. EPAU/2001/01. Electronic Document. [Http://www.unhcr.ch/epau](http://www.unhcr.ch/epau), accessed October 1, 2002.

Weaver, Jerry L.

- 1988. Searching for Survival: Urban Ethiopian Refugees in Sudan. *Journal of Developing Areas* 22(4): 457-75.

Willems, Roos

- 2003 Embedding the Refugee Experience: Forced Migration and Social Networks in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Florida. [Http://purl.fcla.edu/fcla/etd/UFE0002281/willems_r.pdf](http://purl.fcla.edu/fcla/etd/UFE0002281/willems_r.pdf).