

Refugee Studies Center,
Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford
Public Seminar Series, 28th January 2004

Coping in Exile

Urban Refugees and Social Networks
in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Roos Willems, Ph.D.

What ?

- Focus: coping and networking strategies of self-settled urban refugees
 - in Dar es Salaam majority illegal, hence undocumented
 - fled from D.R.Congo, Burundi and Rwanda in 1990s
- Objective: de-essentializing the refugee experience
 - countering notion in the literature that
 - “*to become uprooted . . . is automatically to lose one’s identity, traditions and culture*” (Malkki 1995)

How ?

- key assumption
 - human beings continue to apply previously learned behaviors in situations of crisis
- conceptual tool
 - “cultural tool kits” (*more later*)
- contextualization
 - findings gathered at the micro level
 - situated in the historical, cultural, political, economic structures at the macro level

Methods

- combination of qualitative and quantitative methods
 - compatibility and consistency of data
- sample of 300 persons
 - snowball sampling because “undocumented” population
 - avoiding pitfalls of “convenience sampling”
 - preset quota for gender, nationality and age categories

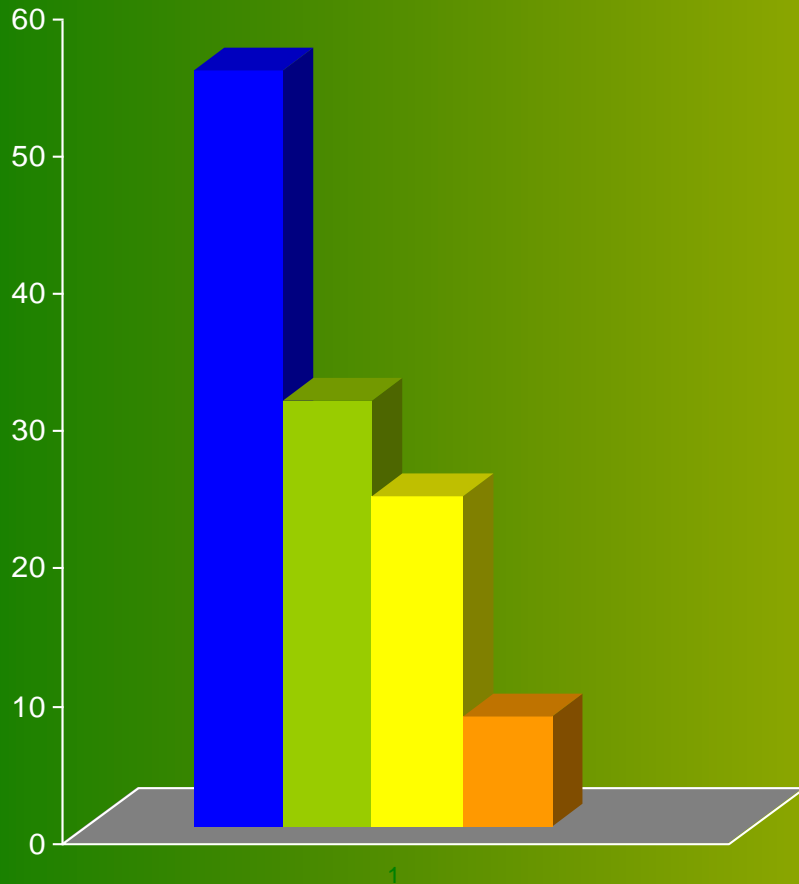
Collecting Data

- quantitative social network data
 - collected through refugee survey (n=300)
- qualitative data from ethnographic interviewing
 - to illustrate and contextualize quantitative findings
- avoiding refugee-centric approach by including
 - survey among Tanzanian host population (n=216)
 - prevailing discourses on refugees in media and among governmental and aid agencies





Heading for Dar es Salaam



food shortage, general lack of infrastructure in refugee camps (quoted by 1 in 2)

insecurity, sexual violence, forced recruitment by rebel factions, and settling of scores (1 in 3)

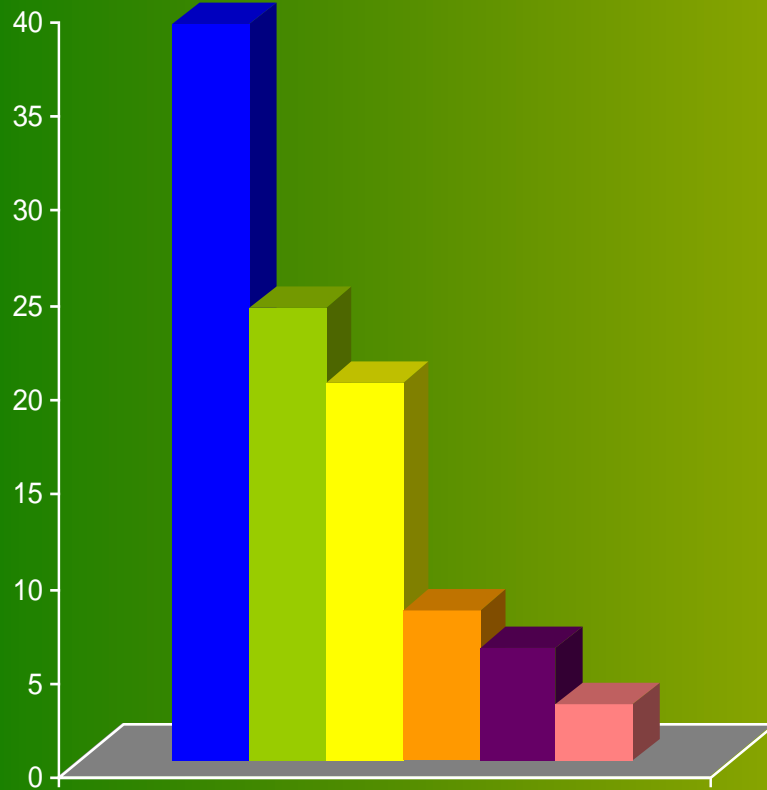
existing contacts in Dar es Salaam (1 in 4)

lack of opportunities in camp (1 in 6)

Some Characteristics

- urban background (e.g. from Bukavu, Uvira, Kigali, Bujumbura); higher education levels
- three quarters never resided in refugee camp before heading for Dar es Salaam
- two thirds never contacted UNHCR
- close to 90% arrived in Dar es Salaam less than five years ago

Making Ends Meet

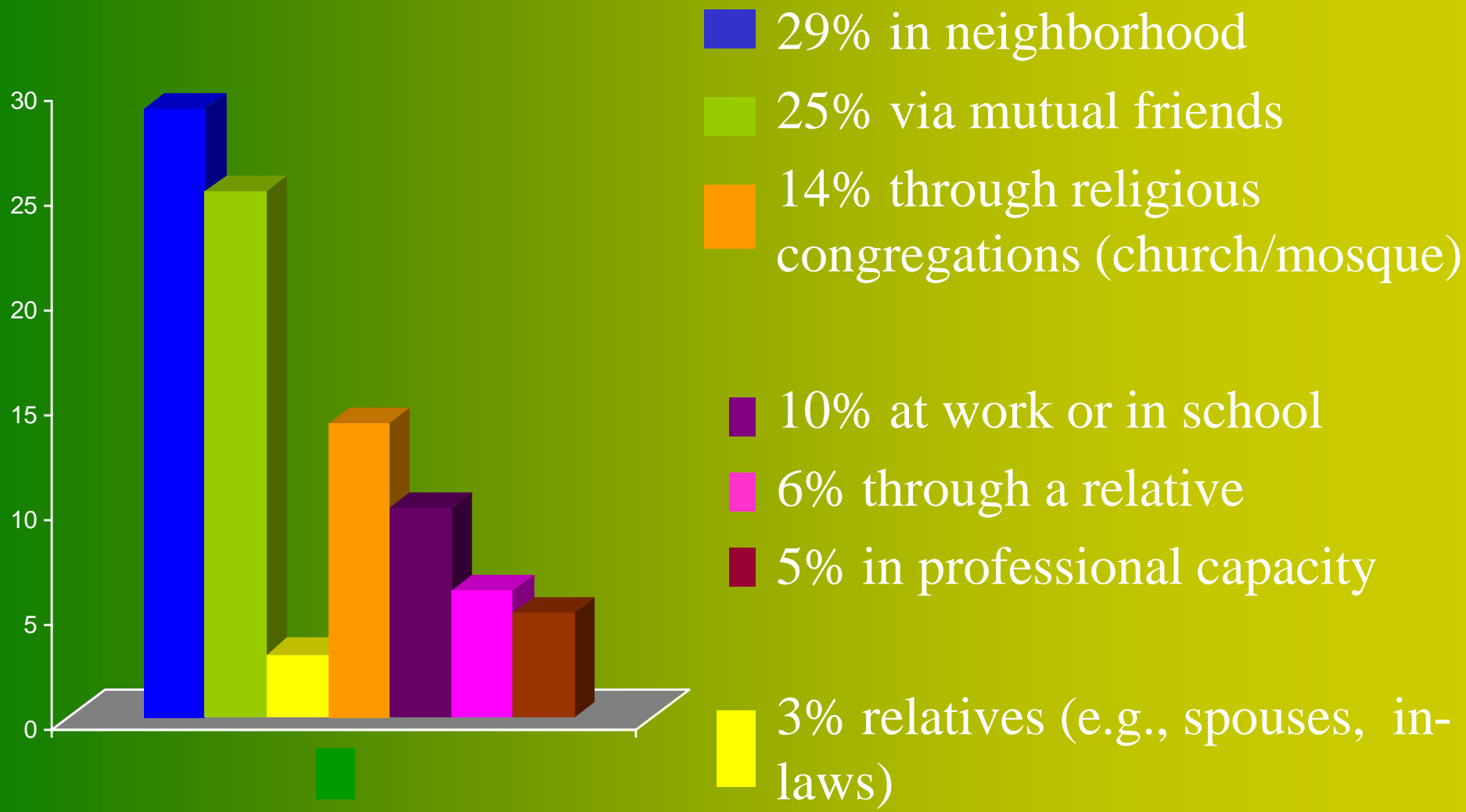


- 40% self-employed [12%]
 - e.g. hair-dressers, tailors, car mechanics ...
 - work on commission
- 20% trading activities [18%]
 - lack of starting capital
- 8% paid employment [16%]
 - e.g. housegirls ...
- 6% housewives [8%]
- 3% students [35%]
- 0% agriculture [6%]
- 23% unemployed [5%]

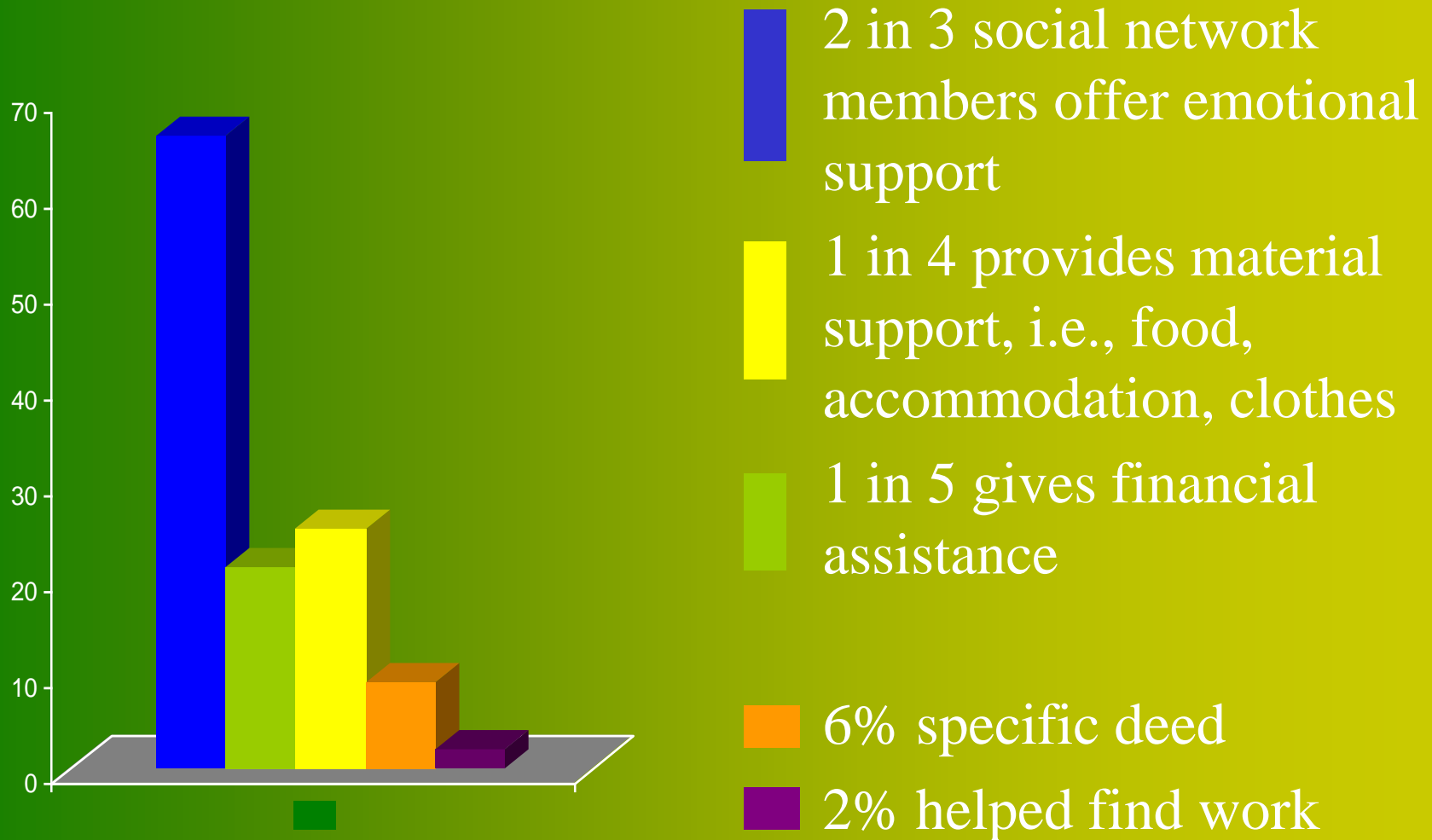
Social Networks of Support

- name generator used:
 - *“Could you give the names of ten persons who have helped you from the moment you fled your home until now, here in Dar es Salaam?”*
- composition of social networks (n=3,000)
 - 60% men, 40% women
 - 1 in 2 compatriot, 1 in 3 Tanzanians, remainder mainly from other Great Lakes countries
 - with 60% of network members, social relationship was established *after* arrival in DSM

Ways of Meeting



Types of Support Received



Cultural “Tool Kits”

- *“image of culture as a ‘tool kit’ of symbols, stories, rituals and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems”*

(Swindler 1986: 273)

- contents of ‘tool kit’ determined by past experiences
- emphasis is on historical, economic and political background at national level

Congo-Kinshasa

- economic background of Eastern Congo
 - whole region virtually abandoned by the state for decades
 - few remaining state officials prone to bribing, thus little respect or fear for institutional structures
- reliance on individual initiatives and social networks
 - replacing state structures: e.g., schools, hospitals, import of consumer goods and export of minerals, etc.

Congolese in Dar es Salaam

- embedded in larger, supportive networks
 - social networking is way of life
- more inclined to take economic initiatives
 - e.g., Congolese tailor shops and barbershops are very popular in Dar es Salaam
- high level of assertiveness vis-à-vis institutional structures
 - e.g., UNHCR

Burundi

- Tutsi minority rule since independence:
 - Hutu majority oppressed for decades, occasional genocides ('72, '88, '93)
- institutionalized discrimination of Hutu
 - particularly in the area of education, hence low level of political participation
- little if any economic space for individual initiatives
 - political elite (Tutsi) holding onto public sector as a source of accumulation

Burundese in Dar es Salaam

- lower level of embeddedness in social networks
 - recent arrivals rely on relatives who arrived as refugees in 1970s
 - fear of being denounced to Tanzanian authorities prevents establishing new ties with unknown persons
- Burundese refugees more prone to economic exploitation in Tanzanian context
 - lowest levels of education
 - lack of assertiveness

Rwanda

- Hutu majority rule for decades
 - until 1994 when Tutsi-led opposition took over power
- 1994 genocide of hundreds of thousands of Tutsi and moderate Hutu
 - as members of the pre-1994 political elite, the Rwandese refugees are suspected of active involvement in genocide
- Rwandese state-led economy
 - the pre-1994 Hutu elite accumulated economic resources and established international contacts

Rwandese in Dar es Salaam

- receive financial support from more social network members
- pre-1994 international contacts allow easier access to Europe, US and Canada
- lowest level of local networking
 - fear of being arrested as *génocidaires* (Arusha tribunal)
 - relative high level of financial independence

Concluding Remarks

- “refugee-experience” de-essentialized
 - coping strategies applied in crisis situations are a function of our past experiences (*here*: at national level)
- “to aid or not to aid?”
 - humanitarian agencies invoke budgetary constraints for not extending assistance to urban refugees
 - urban refugees advocate UNHCR lobby with Tanzanian authorities for issuance of work permits
- refugee communities increasingly transnational