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Angry young men in camps: gender, age and class relations among Burundian refugees in Tanzania

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Introduction

This paper sets out to explore how life in a refugee camp affects gender, age and class relations among Burundian refugees in Tanzania.¹ More specifically, it focuses on how the relief operation's policy of equality challenges older hierarchies of authority. Through an analysis of refugees' representations of gender relations, relations between generations, and relations between peasants and 'big men', it is shown that there is a general feeling of social decay in the camp. In this situation young men are particularly challenged, as they are at a stage in life where they ought to be finding their place in society as fathers, husbands, protectors and providers; in short: as men. However, I also show that many of the young, adult men use the opportunity to find other ways to survive, both materially and in terms of identity creation.

Inspired by the work of Victor Turner, I argue that all refugees find themselves in a kind of 'liminal phase', while it is the young men that have unique opportunities to trespass into new roles, leaving older generations behind. It is further argued that gender ideals do not change significantly, and that the young men are seeking to recuperate the masculinity that they perceive to have lost in the camp.

The paper is based on more than a year's fieldwork in Lukole Refugee Camp in North Western Tanzania. At the time of fieldwork, 1997-98, around 100,000 Burundian Hutu refugees lived in Lukole. They had fled Burundi since 1993 and had through very varied trajectories ended up in Lukole, where they have limited mobility and limited possibilities of activity. They all depend on the rations from UNHCR.² It is the intention of this paper to explore what happens to a community and its entrenched social hierarchies, norms and ideologies when it is so abruptly transferred and put into such an alien setting.

Equality and hierarchy

In the camp, food and other resources are distributed on the basis of all people being equal and having equal rights. This policy of equality is further promoted by special programmes for women and other disadvantaged groups. However, this ideology is not directly compatible with the ideologies that the refugees brought with them. These ideologies were based very much on hierarchic relations: between the sexes, between generations and between 'big men' and others.³ Relations that are built on authority and respect. What happens to the old structures of authority? How does this effect gender relations? How do perceptions of an 'ideal Hutu woman' and an 'ideal Hutu man' change? How are these transformations interpreted and represented by the refugees? These are some of the questions that I set out to explore in this paper.

¹ I would like to thank Steffen Jensen, Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat for comments on earlier versions of this paper and Jeff Crisp for helping me find an adequate title.

² In fact the rations come from WFP (World Food Programme), and are distributed by an NGO but the refugees refer merely to UNHCR.

³ It is not my intention to criticise UNHCR's policy of equality. I merely state it as a factor that influences refugees' room for manoeuvre and coping strategies.

Specifically, I will focus on young men in the camp because I was surprised to find a significant number of young men holding prominent positions that I had not expected (as street leaders, NGO workers, political leaders, and successful businessmen). Originally, I had imagined that young men, in spite of not classifying as ‘vulnerable’, would be having great problems finding a sense of purpose in the camp, no longer being able to provide for and protect a family, for instance. I was therefore rather surprised at first to find these young men that appear to have conquered territory from an older generation that traditionally held the ultimate authority. How does one explain this shift of power and the apparent ‘success’ of these young men? Are they merely strategies for gaining material advantages in the camp, or are there other issues involved? Can one, for instance, imagine that these young men are not only taking advantage of the transitional situation that they are in, but are also attempting to make some sense and find an own identity in the camp, where old values are challenged by the administration of the camp? In other words, is there a link between young men’s feeling of loss and their (successful) attempts to find an identity as men and regain a position in society?

In order to answer some of these many questions it is necessary to explore firstly how refugees in Lukole interpret and represent life in the camp. How do they represent their hopes and frustrations? Who do they blame for their predicaments? Secondly, I will attempt to conceptualise the camp by using Victor Turner’s idea of the ‘liminal phase’, and relate this to young men and their way of manoeuvring in liminality. Finally, we will take a closer look at the coping strategies of successful young men in Lukole, and relate this to shifts in power relations between the sexes and between generations. Does their new position open up for a new ideology of gender, or is the old one reinforced in the camp where, ironically, young men get the greatest advantage of UNHCR and NGOs in the camp?

‘UNHCR is a better husband’

Doing fieldwork in a refugee camp can be a daunting task. The Hutu refugees in Tanzania are naturally suspicious towards any outsider asking questions. However, this reluctance and suspicion depends on the subject of the interview. Politics, for instance, is a very delicate issue. When the discussion touched on gender relations, on the other hand, everyone, young and old, male and female, joined in with great enthusiasm. Often, heated discussions between men and women would occur.

A recurring subject would be the men lamenting that the women no longer respect them. The reason allegedly being that the men no longer can provide for their wives and children. It is the UNHCR – or merely the *wazungu* (white people) – that provides food, medicine and plastic sheeting for building *blindés* (huts). And UNHCR provides the same amount to men, women and children alike. ‘The UNHCR is a better husband’ the women say, according to the men at least.

Through interviews with UNHCR and NGO staff, by attending meetings between UNHCR, implementing NGOs and Tanzanian authorities, and by reading UNHCR publications of various kind, I found that an ideology of equality was actively being

promoted in the camp – with gender equality being specifically emphasised.⁴ This marks a significant shift from Patricia Daley’s findings in the 1980s (Daley 1991). I will not criticise this policy here, merely state that gender equality was an explicit aim of the relief operation. And, as we will see, promoting gender equality does not automatically imply that anything like equality between the sexes has been achieved, whatever the refugee men may say.

Apart from all refugees in theory being equal in terms of right to food, shelter, protection, democratic influence, etc., UNHCR and its implementing partners have various programmes to promote women’s livelihood possibilities (e.g. vocational training) and their influence on decision making (e.g. women’s committees). In Lukole, for instance, I attended a street leaders’ meeting where a young, female UNHCR worker was ticking these men off (99 per cent of street leaders are men) for being reluctant to produce lists of candidates for women’s committees. Equally, I experienced a woman from UNHCR busy encouraging refugees to vote for a woman at elections for a new street leader. In spite of her propaganda, the most successful woman received eight votes!

As a supplement to qualitative field data a questionnaire of 464 refugees was carried out.⁵ The final results of the questionnaire have not as yet been analysed. In the following I will, however, venture to use some simple data to highlight a few points that I also had confirmed time and again in group interviews, individual interviews and casual discussions in the camp. When asked ‘Do you see any changes in the relations between men and women, after coming to the camp? (state which changes)’ the most common response from male respondents was that women no longer obey or respect their husbands (97 responses). Of these, 45 mention directly that women believe UNHCR is a better husband. Naturally, women had another view on this and would be less inclined to blame women for the evils of the camp. However, a considerable amount of women would in fact suggest that wives are losing respect for their husbands due to UNHCR feeding all irrespective of sex or age (ca. eight per cent of responses). In group interviews I would often confront the women with the men’s statements and the typical reply would be that it depended on the wife; whether she would be understanding of her husbands predicaments. A woman NGO employee explained that it was best to give half of her income to her husband so that he will not be humiliated by the fact that she is the principal breadwinner in the family.

That UNHCR takes the place of the father/husband is quite revealing for Burundi society where the father/husband is ideally the breadwinner.⁶ This means that it is the

⁴ This ideology was more heavily emphasised by expatriate staff than by Tanzanians. Although even Tanzanian staff would complain about male dominance and lack of democracy in the camp.

⁵ The objective of the questionnaire was to be able to correlate attitudes towards social changes in the camp, the nature of the conflict, and the importance of education with ‘objective life conditions’ including age, sex, education, time and route of flight, former occupation, and present location in the camp. Furthermore it seeks to unveil what activities various kinds of people have in the camp and how they make use of various leadership structures. The questionnaire contained 40 questions, and a team of 12 carried out the interviews, covering the camp as broadly as possible geographically. Through random sampling it was attempted to find a representative section of the adult population in the camp.

⁶ As Sarah White (White 1997) points out, the fact that the wife contributes with half of the household economy does not necessarily change the shared perception that the man is the provider.

man who gives the orders in the house but it does not mean that he is allowed to treat his wife badly, according to what refugees would explain. On the contrary, a good husband and father would give gifts – usually clothes – to his wife and children, and take the right decisions for the family’s well-being as a whole. The ideal Burundian Hutu wife, on the other hand, should obey and respect her husband. As one street leader explains:

In Bible men and women are equal and also with UNHCR laws. But it is not good. A man has to give some orders in his house - and when woman is equal to the man that means woman also has to give orders in the house; some orders to the man. In Burundi it is forbidden woman to give orders to the man. (Q: ‘Is that Burundi law of the government or..?’) It’s Burundi customs. (Village leader, February 2nd, 1998).

A good wife is quiet and shy and obeys her husband. Loud mouthed young women are considered as prostitutes and will find it difficult to find a husband. A good husband, on the other hand is expected to provide for his family. This is highlighted by giving nice clothes to his wife. At parties or ceremonies in the camp men would show off their wives, so everyone could see how expensive the cloth in their dresses had been. Finally, men’s failure to be a real man and provide for his wife leads to women failing to act as a woman ought to, and she stops obeying her husband. The only law they obey is ‘UNHCR law’.

Other subjects, that the refugees always mention in group interviews and in the questionnaire, concerning changes in the social structure,⁷ are old men marrying young girls and old women marrying young boys, people generally marrying too young, infidelity, polygamy and prostitution.⁸ All these indicators of social disintegration relate to gender relations. Many of them also relate to age. Other changes in relationships between age groups are also often mentioned; i.e. that the youth no longer respect the elders or that parents no longer bring up their children properly. As the village leader above explains:

And in Burundi you can’t see a boy wearing a hat and stand up with the hat when he’s in front of elders. (Q: That means he doesn’t respect?) Yes impoliteness. But here they do so. Everything has changed. (Village leader, February 2nd, 1998)

Whether infidelity, prostitution, divorces, polygamy, selfishness and dishonesty have actually increased is virtually impossible to estimate. There is no doubt that the structural conditions for the family unit have changed drastically since leaving Burundi. With these changes the family as it (ideally) was is threatened, and this threat is felt very strongly by the refugees, as these testimonies reveal. In other words, there is a feeling that things are not as they used to be, and an insecurity about what the

⁷ In the questionnaire the question was phrased as follows: “Are there other changes in the way people behave after coming to the camp? (state which changes).”

⁸ It is interesting to note how women’s infidelity or casual sexual relations are depicted as prostitution while men’s extra marital affairs are depicted as polygamy.

future has to bring. The general feeling of loss; loss of certainty, of absolutes, of taken for granted structures of authority, reminds us of the general ambiguous feeling associated with the 'juggernaut of modernity' (Giddens 1991). Moving from a village in Burundi to a refugee camp is similar to instant urbanisation with all the pros and cons that go with it. When asked about life in the camp, many refugees would simply say "it is like a city".

It is interesting to note that this sense of loss of order is most often represented by the refugees in Lukole in terms of a breakdown in gender and, to a lesser extent, age relations. However, this overwhelming focus on gender relations does not necessarily mean that only gender relations are being challenged. Rather, gender appears to be the perspective through which most refugees attempt to understand social change. Later, we will see whether attempts to regain order centre around gender and/or age relations as well, as we see whether young men's strategies are attempts to recuperate their lost masculinity.

The threat to authority is also perceived in other fields of social life, although not so often mentioned. Class positions are difficult to maintain in the camp where everyone is equal before UNHCR. As a young school teacher explained to me, 'big men' in the camp cannot maintain their authority vis-à-vis the 'small people' because they live side by side with them without any fence between.

But in Burundi teachers lived in their home and children came little to visit that area. Here we live together, and maybe children are my neighbours and then they don't respect me well. I can give an example. When we go to get food, I go there, and I meet my pupils, and they say this is my teacher. (Young school teacher, June 18th 1997)

The children can see into his *blindé* and discover that he is eating the same food as they. Again we see that equality is not a desirable state. And furthermore, the physical structure of the camp does not permit men/'big men'/ elders to maintain the illusion of their superiority. The teacher can no longer hide the fact that he also eats beans and maize. The father can no longer allude that he is the main provider by controlling cash incomes and occasionally buying a nice *kanga* for his wife. Finally, the elders' knowledge and experience of local history, customs and families is of no use in the camp.

One might say that we are witnessing a challenge to the unquestioned authority of the patriarchy. A challenge that in many ways resembles processes associated with urbanisation and modernity elsewhere. However, refugees in Lukole are experiencing these changes over an extremely short period of time. In addition, the process is to a large degree controlled by external actors, or rather; there is a detectable actor, UNHCR, who can be blamed for the 'evils of social decay'. This is most obviously seen by the fact that refugees in Lukole depict UNHCR as the father or husband; it takes the place of the patriarch and it deprives people of any control over their own lives. This is illustrated in the following response in the questionnaire to the question on changes in people's behaviour:

There is a change. People are not taking care of their own life. They are just living like babies in UNHCR's arms. (Man, 27 years)

In the following sections we will see whether and/or how young men seek to recuperate their lost masculinity through various strategies, thus ironically undermining the attempts of the UNHCR to promote equality.

Young men as liminal experts

The impression we get from the above is of a community in despair. Old values and norms about essential issues such as relationships between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between rich and poor are being challenged by the camp regime. Old authorities are losing their grip and a new authority – represented most strongly by UNHCR – is in control of resources, livelihoods and ideological formations (e.g. the ideology of equality between men and women).

In many ways young men are heavily effected by these changes. They are at a junction in life where they are supposed to be creating a family that they can protect and provide for. They are also expected to find a place in the hierarchy among the other men in their community. As Gilmore (1990) and White (1997) show, men's relations to other men are extremely important for understanding male identity. Around the world, the state of being a 'real man' is always precarious and uncertain, a 'state that boys must win against all odds'. (Gilmore 1990, p11). One does not automatically become a man, one has to fight for it, one has to prove oneself to the group – always with the risk of being labelled 'unmanly', 'effeminate' or 'child-like'. Thus, not being able to live up to manhood ideals, one risks being stripped of one's gender identity as such. However, this process of identity creation has been disrupted at a vital stage by flight and life in a refugee camp.⁹

Usually men's gender is either taken for granted (White 1997, p14) or seen as the opposite of women's (Gilmore 1990). As Judith Large comments: "That women's positions, interests and choices are influenced by their gender is recognised; the fact that men's situations are similarly affected by gender is not." (Large 1997, p25). However, as Susan White reminds us, when shifting focus to men we must be careful not to fall into a mode of saying 'poor men' or 'men have problems too' (White 1997, p21).¹⁰ Rather, an understanding of men's gender identities must be included if gender analysis is really meant as a tool for understanding political, social and cultural dynamics in society.

Before going on to explore the ways in which young men attempt to cope with their situation in the camp, we must shortly conceptualise this state of social decay that the

⁹ David Newbury (Newbury, 1998, pp 91-92) also sees this junction as important, and its disruption as one of the reasons for young men to join the *interahamwe* in Rwanda in 1994.

¹⁰ That can only lead to an unfruitful battle between the sexes about who has the largest problems; who is most 'poor'. In the case of refugees in camps in Tanzania women would most probably 'win' such a battle since the structural problems that women are up against are immense (cf. Daley 1991, Benjamin 1998).

refugees perceive; their feeling of belonging to Burundi while physically being in the Tanzanian bush. As Finn Stepputat points out (Stepputat 1992), refugees find themselves in a kind of limbo that resembles what Victor Turner describes as the liminal phase in *rites de passage* (Turner 1967). The initiands or neophytes in *rites de passage* are 'betwixt and between', they are in an 'interstructural situation' (Turner 1967, p93) where they are neither here nor there, neither this nor that, they cannot be classified as boys or men. Usually such persons, who do not fit into structures of society, are perceived as polluting and potentially dangerous (Ibid. p97) and are secluded from the rest of society. They are stowed away in a hut far from the village. Similarly, Malkki argues that refugees do not fit into the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995, p5). Also using Turner's concept of the liminal phase and Douglas's (1966) ideas of pollution, she shows that refugees are considered as polluting and hence dangerous and, like the neophytes in *rites de passage*, they are sought categorised and secluded in refugee camps.

So what are the effects on a population of being 'put in brackets' for an unknown length of time? As Turner argues, this phase of being 'betwixt and between' also contains certain positive elements:

Undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns. (Turner 1967, p99).

Another element of liminality, Turner argues, is the comradeship that occurs between neophytes due to them being stripped of all previous social status and thus being totally equal during liminality.

If we apply these thoughts on the situation of refugees in camps we must be aware that there are a few fundamental differences between liminality in a controlled and time limited rite de passage and the involuntary, uncontrolled and unfixed situation of refugees in a camp.¹¹ I certainly observed that refugees strongly resisted the equality imposed on them in the camp. Old hierarchies persisted, new ones were created and there was no sense of general solidarity or comradeship.

Liminality is the suspension of taken for granted social structures and norms thus making 'room for alternative interpretations and potentially dangerous freedom from the convention of society.' (Stepputat 1992, p35). In order to avoid these dangers in the case of ritual liminality and make sure the neophytes are re-integrated into society, it is essential that the authority of the 'instructors' is absolute. However, when liminality is the result of social rupture, such as is the case of refugees, there is no such absolute authority and no guarantee of 'aggregation'. In this manner, the refugee camp opens up certain possibilities for transgressing taken for granted norms and customs and for new social values to emerge. This is exactly where I found the roles of some young men intriguing.

¹¹ In later works Turner also distinguished between 'ritual liminality' and 'crisis as liminality' (Turner 1974, quoted in Stepputat 1992).

I found that a large amount of street or village leaders were very young (down to the age of 20). Other young men appeared to enjoy a lot of influence through working for NGOs and UNHCR as security guardians, medical assistants, social workers, teachers. Yet others started businesses, ranging from hairdressers to bicycle taxi drivers to buying and selling food rations, while others were active in clandestine politics. This does not show that life in a refugee camp is less disruptive for young men than for elder generations or for women. They are equally in a state of limbo. Their sense of loss is at least as great. But whereas women seem to try carrying on as things were in Burundi, cooking, child caring, fetching firewood, etc., in other words trying to avoid the de-structuring powers of liminality, and elder men appear to be paralysed by being in limen, (some) young men make use of this suspension of social structures and try to change things to their own advantage.

Coping strategies

We can now take a closer look at the coping strategies of young men in Lukole refugee camp and see how these relate to the challenges that the family faces as well as the general feeling of a breakdown of norms and values.¹² Before describing some of the more ‘successful’ coping strategies, I would like to emphasise that a large group remains – probably the majority – who do not become ‘liminal experts’; who merely pass their time playing cards or *urubugu* (a game played with stones or seeds and holes in the ground) or just hanging around the blindés. The reason for focusing on the successful refugees is thus not due to their numbers but rather due to their possibility of changing existing power structures and perhaps even dominant ideologies.

To let oneself be surprised by the unexpected, to not close one’s eyes on it and instead to pursue these fault lines must be the anthropologist’s duty, his or her *raison d’être*. Similarly, the following strategies started off by me being puzzled at their existence. When I first arrived in the camp I was surprised to see very young men among the street and village leaders. Street leaders in Lukole A and village leaders in Lukole B¹³ constitute the main link between refugees and others such as UNHCR, NGOs and Tanzanian authorities (normally the Camp Commandant and the police). They attend meetings with these actors on a regular basis, where they are meant to present the problems of the refugees. They also make sure communication goes the other way. Information on anything from how to build pit latrines to encouraging people to restrain from political violence has to be disseminated to their constituencies. In theory they are elected by everyone in their street/village above the age of 18. A leader does not receive a salary from UNHCR. Their other main task is to solve disputes involving people in their constituency. Below them are the ‘block leaders’ and above them is the ‘camp chairman’. Parallel to this set-up we have the *abashingantahe*; the traditional council of elders who solve problems between neighbours. Furthermore, I observed an informal network of ‘big men’ whom one could address if one had

¹² I have discussed coping strategies at a more theoretical level in *A Place Called Heideveld: Identities and strategies among the Coloureds in Cape Town, South Africa* (Jensen & Turner 1996).

¹³ Lukole B is a new part of the camp, established in January 1997, after the Rwandans left.

problems. As we will see later, this network combined political leaders, NGO employees, and to some degree street leaders and businessmen.

In a survey of 62 (out of a total of ca. 100) street and village leaders¹⁴ I found that 17 were between 24 and 29 years old while only two were above 50. The rest being in their thirties (26) and forties (17). I have also met some that were even younger. In fact, one looked so young that the UNHCR representative, present during his election, doubted whether he was eligible to vote, let alone be elected. He claimed to be 21.

The refugees give their own explanations to this phenomenon. They say that it is necessary to be mobile in order to reach the offices of the UNHCR and the NGOs or the police post within short notice. One may also have to give a message to the whole community which involves walking through the whole area shouting people up. Old men cannot manage that, they argue. Similar reasons are given for women not becoming street leaders. They cannot manage that while carrying a small child, taking care of the household and often being pregnant.¹⁵ Furthermore, leaders have to be literate to some degree to be able to take notes during meetings. Some of these young men would constantly carry a notebook and a pen with them, as if to mark their superior position. Language is also mentioned as an asset. As opposed to Burundi, where Kirundi and French are the official languages, knowledge of English or Swahili is a great advantage in the camp in order to communicate better with Tanzanians and foreigners working for NGOs, the UN, and the Tanzanian authorities.¹⁶

These young leaders grab hold of the liberating aspects of liminality rather than being paralysed by its disintegrating side. Young men would explain how they had learned in the camp not to be 'shy'. They are no longer shy to approach a *muzungu* or to say their opinion in a meeting, in front of elders, officials and foreigners. Just as women are supposed to be shy and timid towards men, so are young men supposed to be shy towards their elders. There is also an ethnic twist to this as shyness is often related as a Burundian Hutu trait. Tutsi are 'good at speaking', dishonest and cunning, while Hutu are honest, modest and shy.¹⁷ The refugees clearly have an ambivalent relation to these Hutu virtues as they realise that they are constantly losing out and being cheated due to their naïve timidity. Rwandan Hutu on the other hand are proud. Not that the Burundian refugees particularly like the behaviour of the Rwandan Hutu, who generally are considered impolite, pushy, and selfish. "Burundese and Rwandese were different in customs because Rwandese if they don't have permission they do what they want. But Burundese can't do so." (Village F2, January 1998). But the Burundian refugees can also see the advantages of such behaviour. And after spending some time with Rwandans in the camps or as refugees in Rwanda, they claim that they are learning to be assertive like the Rwandans. 'Because Burundese used to live with

¹⁴ The objective of the survey was to get a profile of the leaders in terms of age, educational background, length of stay in the camp, etc.

¹⁵ The idea of the father taking care of the baby or cooking while she attends meetings does not occur to them.

¹⁶ Another explanation could be that there are fewer old men in the camp. Many old people prefer to stay (and die) in their home country, while young men often are targeted by the army.

¹⁷ This makes up part of a typical 'salt of the earth' discourse, recognisable around the world. For a brilliant analysis of this construction of the Hutu self see Malkki 1995.

Rwandese some have adopted their behaviour. Because Rwandese are not shy. So some Burundese now are digging outside the camp. They began to act as Rwandese. (Village F2, January 1998).

Another strategy for young men is to find a job in one of the relief agencies, operating in the camp. With limited education these young men (and quite a few young women) get the opportunity to hold quite influential posts which would have been reserved for people with higher education and better connections in Burundi (read: Tutsi). To get these positions much of the same abilities are needed as for street leaders: i.e. mobility, adaptability, 'not being shy', languages, and literacy. Here the emphasis is, however, more on language and literacy and less on good relations with the community as a whole, as they are not elected. On the other hand, it is useful to have good relations with the right people in the right places. I have been told that a person who can get another person a job with an NGO sometimes gets to keep half of that person's salary as payment for the favour!

NGO employees receive meagre salaries (called 'incentives') of between 14,000 and 22,000 shillings per month (US\$ 23–36). In addition to the wage, they have the possibility of various windfalls. To work in the feeding centre for malnourished children is, for instance, considered very attractive, as much of the meat, fish and milk ends up in the stomachs of staff. Others have been involved in selling blankets, that were supposed to be distributed to the elderly (a few Tanzanians were caught being involved in that particular affair). Apart from direct corruption, the jobs have other indirect benefits. The employees occupy strategic positions as intermediaries between relief agencies and the beneficiaries. The camp population's access to essential recourses like medical help, education, and security against theft and robbery, goes through these intermediaries. Thus it becomes important to be on good terms with an NGO employee who can ask favours in return, thus creating the basis for a classical patron-client relationship. However, these strategies are not merely avenues to self enrichment, as the following example illustrates.

Jean (fictive name) is 21 years old and works as a 'community mobiliser' for AEF (African Education Foundation). He used to hold a supervisory position and invested most of his wages in bicycles that were used as bicycle taxis. In this way he managed to increase his income and was able to fund his younger brother's school fees at the refugee run secondary school. He also saved up to go to Nairobi where he wanted to continue his studies. His trip to Nairobi and Kampala had been a failure. At the time of the interview he was saving money again, and trying to find a way of getting a Burundian or a Tanzanian passport. When asked how other refugees reacted to his attempts to leave the camp, whether they would think that he was running away from the problems, he gave the following reply:

Yes as you know all people are not to the same level of understanding. There are some who can understand that, as you say, that I am running away from problems. But there are others that see that it's better to try because later I can be someone who can help to solve the problems. (Jean , September 1997).

We see here how it is important to relate to the expectations of other refugees; his strategy, that at first sight looks like an entirely selfish one, is legitimised through its relevance to 'the struggle'. In other words, Jean's choices are subject to peer group evaluation, and furthermore he feels a certain belonging to the group and its broader objectives of supporting the 'Hutu cause'.

A third strategy to get out of the feeling of loss and finding a new sense of purpose for young men is to get involved in politics. All political activity is strictly prohibited in refugee camps in Tanzania, something that the Tanzanian authorities reiterated many times at meetings with refugees while I was in the camp. However, it is an open secret that Lukole is saturated in politics, and that the main 'problem' is the rivalry between the two main parties in the camp; Palipehutu (*Parti pour la Liberation de la Peuple Hutu*) and CNDD (*Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie*).¹⁸ This political rivalry has at times culminated in political murders. People from the wrong party (or merely assumed to belong to that party) have had to move from one part of the camp to the other for fear of their security.

It can at times be difficult to detect the difference between the two parties and to comprehend why they are so busy fighting each other, instead of focusing on their common enemy; Buyoya's Tutsi dominated government in Burundi. Likewise, it can be difficult to detect whether an armed robbery in the camp is actually politically motivated and vice versa. There are some ideological and strategic differences between the two parties, namely that Palipehutu uses a more radical ethnicist discourse while CNDD attempts to coin its ideology in more tolerant terms of democracy and human rights. However, these ideological differences seem to matter little in people's 'choice' of party. Rather, political alliances appear to concern internal competition for power and access to resources in the camp. In order to gain legitimacy among the population these power struggles over access to resources are fought under the guise of the noble struggle for a future Burundi, while often more profane motives are the driving forces for the involved individuals.

Mousa is a very good example of a successful young man who has managed to build up an informal network, giving him a sense of belonging and a sense, not only of being in control of his life in the camp, but also of contributing to the future of his country. He was out of work when I first met him. He had previously held various high positions with the different agencies that had operated in the camp, and had a very easy-going way of interacting with Europeans (he speaks English) and Tanzanians (being an urban Muslim he speaks very good Swahili also). Furthermore, his interaction with refugees of any social status is equally easy-going. This led another young man, and good friend, to say admiringly one day that Mousa would surely make a good politician. In Burundi he had worked as an accountant and secretary. He had been active in Frodebu and was appointed burgomaster when the elected burgomaster fled the country in 1993. He was 30 years old when I met him and was contemplating starting up some business. The income would be higher and he would have more time to discuss politics with his friends.

¹⁸ I analyse these two parties and their role in the camp in more detail in 'Representing the Past in Exile: the politics of national history among Burundian refugees', in *Refuge* (forthcoming).

Although he held no official position in the camp (he was not a security guardian,¹⁹ he had no job with an NGO, he was not a block or street leader) he was often called upon when people in his neighbourhood had problems; be it a lost ration card, an armed robbery, or a fight between neighbours. He also attended meetings, called by the Camp Commandant when the latter wanted to address serious problems such as the security situation in the camp. There was no doubt that Mousa had influence and knew people the right places. Once I took a *maybobo* (street child) with an infected foot to the hospital. With a lot of handshaking and chatting with the staff, Mousa made sure we skipped all the queues and the little boy got a royal treatment.

Mousa is an example of how the political leadership constitutes a tight network with the elite, that works for NGOs, and to some degree with the street leaders. It is in this way that the political leadership has such an influence in the population. Especially the CNDD leadership has managed to find many jobs with NGOs for various reasons. Their privileged access to UNHCR and the NGOs means that their version of events becomes the accepted truth, thus dismissing Palipehutu's version and reinforcing the picture of Palipehutu as a bunch of extremist hooligans. Palipehutu sympathisers would complain to me that it was virtually impossible for them to get a job, in spite of qualifications, due to CNDD nepotism. Their 'appeal' to the population lies less in their strategic positions in NGOs and more in their promise to fight the Tutsi with any means. And equally important; they will fight the corrupt, self serving NGO workers of the CNDD who are living the easy life, mingling with *wazungu*.

In conclusion, membership of a party gives access to resources such as jobs. The two parties in the camp are struggling to gain access to the resources that exist in the camp. Being member of a party is also more than that. It is a way in which young men gain a sense of purpose. One persistent complaint about the camp is boredom and laziness. And as the quote earlier in this paper shows, there is a feeling that refugees are not controlling their lives; 'they are just living like babies in the arms of UNHCR'. Again we must remember that UNHCR is not necessarily to blame for this. It merely becomes the focal point on which they can concentrate their frustrations. This sense of not being able to act is equally caused by being unable to influence the course of events in Burundi, so vital for their eventual return. By joining a political party and perhaps even doing some kind of physical exercises or military training²⁰, these young men show that they are not just being fed by the UNHCR or being 'like someone buried' (Mandazi Baker, February 1998). They are taking their future in their own hands, they are acting, and they are showing strength. Politicians are treated with respect and even fear in the camp. They dare defy the laws of the Tanzanian government and the UNHCR and play by their own rules. In other words, they are recuperating the masculinity, that was taken away from them by UNHCR.

Finally, the camp has a substantial number of 'businessmen' who are engaged in all sorts of business. Some buy extra rations of oil and maize and resell it to Tanzanians. Others brew *mugorigori*, beer made from maize. Some invest in a bicycle and drive

¹⁹ Refugees employed by UNHCR to keep law and order in co-operation with the Tanzanian police

²⁰ The borderline is fluid. Large numbers of young men do physical training. The Tanzanian government distinguishes between military training and physical exercises by whether or not they use sticks or other dummies that resemble guns.

goods and people from the junction at the main road to the refugee camp. There are hair dressers, maize mills, brothels, bars, cigarette vendors, butchers, tailors. Young and old, men and women, are active in business, but here again young men tend to dominate. As these young men testify:

Here in the camp they adapt their life hardly but they support it. For young women it is very bad because for young men they can do different works such as bring some people from here to the junction and get 200 shillings on bicycle. And just they get money to eat during the day and for the family. Specially for the young girls they do nothing when they don't have a job in NGO. They just spend the day in their *blindé*. And also men can do some business in order to get money such as to sell bananas, soap, clothes and other possible business.

Many of them have no experience with business in Burundi. Their parents were peasants and they were expected to become peasants as well. In the camp, however, where old authorities, expectations, and taken for granted norms no longer hold the same power, young men are free to try out new ways of making a living; or rather of supplementing their meagre food rations. In other words, the inter-structural space of the camp, so like Victor Turner's liminal phase, liberates them from their pre-structured place in society and permits them to make alternative interpretations of society.

New opportunities – new ideologies?

So far we have seen how UNHCR's ideology and practice of equality together with the nature of living in a refugee camp as such has seriously challenged notions about structures of authority. We saw how this feeling of upheaval, similar in many ways to the experience of modernity elsewhere, was often interpreted in terms of gender and, to a lesser degree, in terms of age and class by the refugees. The main understanding being that UNHCR has taken the place of the father, thus leaving refugees as helpless women/children who obey the UNHCR and have no control over their own life (in spite of UNHCR promoting democracy and participation for all refugees). Finally, we have seen how some young men have managed to take advantage of this liminal situation and create a new space for themselves that they would not have been able to achieve in Burundi where they were under the control of elders and Tutsi.

The question is firstly whether these 'liminal experts' will be able to retain their positions in the future; i.e. when and if they return to Burundi. Although there, for various reasons, is a tendency for the refugees to emphasise the negative effects of life in the camp, they would after some time, in casual discussions, also mention the advantages of having this experience. Businessmen would explain how they were sure to have an advantage when returning to Burundi where other people lack the entrepreneurial spirit of the camp. This relates to the whole idea of learning to be more assertive, less shy, and to take matters in one's own hands. If they had stayed in Burundi, they would merely have done what was expected of them as poor, young, Hutu peasants. In the camp the 'community' has no power to control them and restrain

them from pursuing their goals. NGO workers would also explain, when we would discuss their hopes and fears for the future, how they reckoned that they would apply for a job with an international development or relief agency if they went back to Burundi. After all, they speak a bit of English and they have experience. They know the developmentalist jargon and are not shy to approach a muzungu. Some would hesitate between this option and becoming a politician, since the latter surely is the most desirable, while the former pays better! In a study of Guatemalan returnees Finn Stepputat found that they often would act as 'development' catalysts in the areas where they returned.

The recently returned [...] construct themselves as developers, as modern 'formal' people who are different from the backwards, or even uncivilized neighbours. [...] due to the language and techniques that they have incorporated in the refugee settlements in Mexico, the returnees have privileged access to many 'institutions' in the area. (Stepputat 1997, p17)

So there is a great chance that the changes that have occurred in the camp will actually perpetuate into the future. We can imagine that refugee returnees will have an advantage vis a vis their fellow Hutu who remained in Burundi. We can also imagine that the old men will not be able to regain their previous power. The question of these young Hutu men's opportunities for upward mobility in competition with a better educated and so far favoured Tutsi elite, is much more complex and beyond the scope of this paper, as it depends amongst other things on what kind of political solution is found in the country.

The question of gender relations is also complex and deserves some more attention. It appears that, in spite of UNHCR and NGOs encouraging the 'empowerment' of women and in spite of refugees complaining that women no longer obey their husbands, men still dominate decision making authorities. Street leaders are still men, influential NGO employees are men, politicians are men, etc. Furthermore, and more importantly, the ideology on gender relations does not seem to have changed much. It is still considered shameful for a man not to be able to provide for his family. Women are still supposed to obey their men. In fact the break down of the authority of the patriarchy (consisting of old men and 'big men') in the camp and the following sense of social decay has given young men the incentive to fight back, breaking the monopoly of 'old men' and 'big men' to some degree, while maintaining a male identity on the other. The goal of these young men's strategies is to regain control of their lives and to take back their place as providers that UNHCR had taken from them. Ironically, they often use the avenues created by UNHCR in their struggle.

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