



## Positive energy

### A review of the role of artistic activities in refugee camps

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Policy Development and Evaluation Service  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Case Postale 2500  
1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland

Tel: (41 22) 739 8433

Fax: (41 22) 739 7344

e-mail: [hqpd00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqpd00@unhcr.org)

internet: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

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# Introduction

1. Anecdotal evidence and some limited studies have shown that artistic activity is playing an important, though often overlooked, role in the lives of refugee camp residents. Despite the challenging conditions which most refugee camps present, many of them are nevertheless sites for artistic activity, according to reports from across the globe. Professional performers and artistic exhibits have made tours to camps to entertain residents and raise international awareness about the ongoing international refugee crisis.<sup>1</sup> Other artists have come to camps to draw artistic inspiration from the lives of refugees.<sup>2</sup>
2. Among the most intriguing phenomena, however, are the artistic activities in camps in which refugees themselves have been actively engaged as initiators, participants and/or participatory audience members. Such activities may provide useful tools for improving the quality of life for camp residents: principally, as a vehicle to address psychosocial issues; as an educational tool; and as an effective medium for behavior change communication.
3. Such activities are in harmony with the trend in humanitarian policy-making toward finding holistic approaches to refugee crises. Policies are gradually reflecting an increased emphasis on the psychosocial dimension of humanitarian need.<sup>3</sup> In a related vein, the UNHCR and other agencies have sought to participatory solutions to various aspects of the refugee crisis, so that those being served may also have a voice in determining the policies and shaping the programs designed for their benefit.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Clowns Without Borders and Magicians Without Borders have performed in numerous refugee camps [<http://clownswithoutborders.org/about-us/history/>; UNHCR Public Health and HIV Section Division of Operational Services, 2008 Annual Report: Public Health and HIV (UNHCR, 2009), 46]. Other examples include the UNHCR and UN Population Fund-sponsored tour of the Positive Lives Exhibition to three refugee camps in Kenya in July and August of 2004 [UNAIDS and UNHCR (joint publication), *Strategies to support the HIV-related needs of refugees and host populations*, UNAIDS Best Practice Collection (2005), p. 19]. Positive Lives, a mobile photo exhibit first shown in 1993 in London, describes the lives of people with HIV for the purposes of reducing the stigmatization of those infected with the disease ["Positive Lives: Using photography to reduce HIV related stigma and prejudice." <<http://healthdev.net/site/post.php?s=5894>>]. It has also made stops in other African countries, including South Africa [Ibid.] and, with sponsorship from UNFPA, Egypt, Gambia, Liberia, and Nigeria UNHCR Public Health and HIV Section Division of Operational Services, 2008 Annual Report: Public Health and HIV (UNHCR, 2009), 46]. In addition to UNHCR Goodwill Ambassadors such as Angelina Jolie and Barbara Hendricks, individual actors and musicians have also visited and performed in camps, including Ecuadorian actor Roberto Manrique and Japanese music duo Yuzu [Sonia Aguilar, "Q&A: Ecuadorian soap star supports Colombian refugees," UNHCR News Stories, 8 Sept 2010; Maureen Ojunga, "The Camp Beat competition for youth at Dadaab," *Capital Lifestyle*, 27 May 2010].

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer-prize winning play, "Ruined," based on her research on the lives of Congolese refugee women living in Uganda [Leo Dobbs, "Q&A: Pulitzer-winning playwright inspired by Congolese refugee women." Interview with Lynn Nottage. UNHCR News Stories, 10 June 2010. <<http://www.unhcr.org/4c10fb4a6.html>>].

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Forward," Frederick L. Ahearn, ed., *Psychosocial Wellness of Refugees: Issues in Qualitative and Quantitative Research* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), viii.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR Mission Statement. "UNHCR's 'Medium-term plan for 2002-2005' stresses that '[in] the provision of assistance, UNHCR's concerns are that assistance, where possible, is delivered in such a way that it involves the recipients.' (EC/50/SC/CRP.4). See also the 2007 IASC Guidelines on Mental

4. Artistic activity, especially that which involves active participation, may provide tools to address the holistic wellbeing of refugees in camps. The healing properties of the arts are well known on an anecdotal basis, and arts therapists have explored the practical implications for treatment of patients in a wide range of situations, from domestic violence to war-related trauma.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, artistic activity addresses psychosocial wellness not only in ways that can treat each individual not only as an individual but also as an integral participant in a larger cultural context.
5. The very range of levels of formality, from ad hoc private performance to official public presentations, may help counteract the artificial and potentially intrusive nature of humanitarian interventions, necessary and life-saving though they may be. Artistic activity can provide an air of “real life” amidst the mundanely surreal ethos of a camp, a reminder of a multifaceted human identity beyond that of “refugee.”
6. Creative activity devised and enacted by refugees themselves may also help restore agency injured along the journey of flight and acceptance of refugee status. In some cases, at least, the many benefits of artistic activity may be enjoyed at significantly less financial cost than alternative programs aimed at similar ends, making such programs more widely accessible in areas in which funds are already stretch to their limit covering the basic needs of physical survival.

#### *Purposes of the study*

7. This report provides a general overview of artistic activity in refugee camps and argues for the consideration of artistic activity as a means for holistic human development in refugee contexts. The study has three primary goals:
  - to call attention to the prevalence of artistic activity in refugee camps and the mainly positive role it is playing in many camps across the world;
  - to promote further research into the use of artistic activity for humanitarian purposes; and
  - to make suggestions for consideration by future researchers and policy-framers.
8. This report is intentionally broad-based in order to highlight the success of refugees across the world in refuting the negative stereotypes held by host communities and the general public. Contrary to the view that refugees are essentially passive and needy individuals with nothing to contribute, those engaging in artistic activity are functioning as active creative agents, enhancing cultural life despite the adverse conditions of their experiences of forced migration and the difficult circumstances of life in camps. Moreover, drawing attention to the successes of artistic activity in promoting wellbeing and preventing conflict and unhealthy behaviors is intended to counter the sense of hopelessness many feel when confronted with the often intractable difficulties of the international refugee crisis.

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Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations, which include “participation” and “building on available resources and capacities” among its core principles (9-10).

<sup>5</sup> See H.L. Stuckey and J. Nobel, “The connection between art, healing, and public health: a review of current literature,” *American Journal of Public Health* 100.2 (Feb 2010): 254-263, inter alia.

9. This study presents strong anecdotal evidence indicating the promise of artistic activity as a means of achieving humanitarian ends in order to encourage the development of humanitarian policies which directly support or indirectly enable artistic activity. However, due to its introductory character and the unsystematic nature of the data on which it is based, this study can do no more than provide a broad framework and suggest possible avenues for future study. More focused research is needed on existing programs or instances of artistic activity, in order to assess their current and potential efficacy, learn from their successes and address areas in which the power of such activity can be harnessed to make a greater impact on human flourishing.

10. Although this study presents only preliminary findings, it aims to contribute generally to the holistic wellbeing and development of people living in refugee camps by advocating specifically for the effective use and promotion of artistic activity.

#### *Scope and limitations of data*

11. The role of artistic activity in the lives of refugees has been disguised, to some degree, by its imbeddedness in everyday life in most of the world's societies. Artistic activity takes place in many different spheres, and can be categorized as entertainment, media, cultural functions, religious rituals, etc. For the purposes of this study, I am defining artistic activity broadly to include formal and informal creative expression of any kind. For practical research purposes, however, the reports I was able to identify related primarily to activities in the performing, visual, and literary arts.<sup>6</sup>

12. Data was drawn primarily from articles and reports from the UNHCR and other NGOs, newspaper articles, blogs, scholarly articles and dissertations dealing with life in refugee camps. The incidents of artistic activity recorded were restricted to the following:

- activities which took place in refugee camps, or involved residents of such camps; and
- activities in which local refugees were among the active participants;<sup>7</sup>

Just as the data illustrated many different types of artistic activity, it also represented a wide geographic span. The data includes reports of artistic activity in all major regions with substantial refugee camp populations, especially sub-saharan Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. However, the data reflects current emphasis on reporting and study of camps in Africa and the Middle East, as well as the general

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<sup>6</sup> Thus, this report defines "artistic activity" based on the nature of the activity and its effect on the participants, regardless of the function(s) of the activity (public entertainment, private entertainment, commerce, education, BCC, etc.). I must acknowledge, however, that the very act of grouping such activities under the term "artistic" and adopting taxonomical genres such as music and drama may reflect a Western cultural bias, as such activities in many cultures are often so embedded in everyday life rituals and actions that people do not conceive of them as inhabiting a sphere that can be independently delineated. C.f., Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> I.e., excluding artistic activities in which refugees/IDP participated only or primarily as passive audience members.

dearth of research and reporting about refugee camps in Central America and the Caribbean.<sup>8</sup>

13. Because the data is limited to publically-available reports, it is skewed toward camps which have attracted media attention, whether for artistic activity or for other reasons. Examples include the Kakuma and Dadaab Camp complexes in Kenya and the Dheisheh Camp in Bethlehem, all of which have become known for high-profile examples of creative artistic activity. This leaves many other smaller or lesser-known camps largely out of consideration.

14. In addition, the original intention of the study was to include IDP camps, but as there was relatively little data available, it seemed best to limit the study primarily to refugee camps. Moreover, the focus on camps, intended to restrict the scope of study, nevertheless excludes important refugee transitional contexts such as urban settlements, not to mention the experiences of resettled refugees, host communities, and other important related milieux.

15. Future studies may be able to generate more helpful insights into the situations of refugees living outside camps, IDP and other persons of concern, and humanitarian crises beyond forced migration situations, as well as ascertain to what degree the observations presented here may be applicable to other contexts.

#### *Outline of the study*

16. This rest of this study is divided into four sections. Chapter 2 presents the role of artistic activity in humanitarian documents and guidelines. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the types of activity undertaken. Chapter 4 presents different contexts in which artistic activity occurs in camps. Chapter 5 focuses on professional refugee artists in camps. Chapter 6 presents key considerations for humanitarian action relevant to artistic activity in camps. Chapter 7 provides a conclusion, with policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

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<sup>8</sup> There is also the possibility of researcher bias, since my own research interests are focused on music among art forms, and Africa and the Middle East among regions. Although I actively searched for sources on other art forms and geographical regions, it may not be coincidental that my data leans toward these areas.

## Artistic activity and humanitarian action

17. Artistic activity has not featured as a major issue in international humanitarian documents. Nevertheless, it has not been entirely absent, even from general declarations and guidelines.

18. In this chapter, we will look at the two-fold role the arts have played in such documents: artistic and cultural expression as a component of basic human rights, and artistic and cultural activity as a helpful tool in achieving other humanitarian ends.

### Artistic activity and human rights

19. The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), Article 27.1: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”<sup>9</sup> Ironically, the seemingly more topic-relevant *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) makes no overt reference to artistic activity, referring instead to the broader right to “take part in cultural life” (Article 15.1.a), the need for States Parties to take steps to seek the conservation, development, and diffusion of science and culture (Article 15.2), and the responsibility “to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity” (Article 15.3).<sup>10</sup>

20. More recently, access to artistic activity seems to have regained some of its status among basic human rights, as demonstrated by its inclusion in the United Nations’ *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). The *Convention* asserts the right to “rest and leisure [...] and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (Article 31.1-2) and calls for States Parties to respect and promote full participation in cultural and artistic life and to “encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.” (Article 31.1-2) Moreover, it protects children’s right to freedom of expression, including expression “in the form or art, or through any other media of the child’s choice” (Article 13).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>United Nations, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>. The Declaration (Article 27.2), as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 15.c), also declares the universal right “to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.”

<sup>10</sup>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>>.

<sup>11</sup>United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Rights of the Child <[http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en)>. See, also, Susan Nicolai and Carl Triplehorn, “The role of education in protecting children in conflict,” Humanitarian Practice Network Paper (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003), 2.



## Artistic activity and other humanitarian goals

21. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's 2007 *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations*<sup>12</sup> endorses the use of artistic activity as an aid to wellness, as a part of a minimum response to emergency situations. The use of songs, dances, drama, drawing, etc., is recommended under three of the four core mental health and psychosocial support domains<sup>13</sup>: community mobilization and support,<sup>14</sup> education,<sup>15</sup> and dissemination of information.<sup>16</sup>

22. Along similar lines, the UNHCR *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* counsels humanitarian and human rights actors to "work with the community to provide displaced children and adolescents with semi-structured educational activities in a safe space," including "recreational activities (sport, music, games or art) aimed at alleviating trauma and psychosocial distress."<sup>17</sup>

23. This explicit mentioning of the arts in documents such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations, and the Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons seems to indicate a general appreciation among humanitarian actors of the connection between artistic activity and psychosocial wellness, especially for children.

24. However, despite the Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support's advocacy, the broader value of artistic activity as a vehicle for the psychosocial wellness of people of all ages and the potential efficacy of artistic endeavors as media for information dissemination, behavior change communication, etc., does not seem to have penetrated the general awareness of humanitarian actors to a comparable extent.

25. While the IASC reports on reproductive health and humanitarian interventions in situations of natural disaster do not preclude the use of artistic activity, they do not mention the arts with any emphasis.<sup>18</sup> The IASC Guidelines on Gender-Based

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<sup>12</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee, IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations, 2007. <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/products>.

<sup>13</sup> IASC Guidelines, 26. Artistic activity is not mentioned explicitly in the guidelines in connection with the fourth domain, health services. It may be implied, however, in the suggestion of "encouraging participation in normal daily routines [...] and use of positive means of coping (e.g. culturally appropriate relaxation methods" and accessing helpful cultural and spiritual supports) (119-120).

<sup>14</sup> IASC Guidelines, 103, 111, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 157, 162, 165, 166.

<sup>17</sup> Global Protection Cluster Working Group, *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* (2007, field-tested 2008), 284. An older study, *Mental Health of Refugees* (1996), makes frequent reference to the use of artistic activity (singing, listening to music, dancing, drama, drawing, painting, clay modeling, story-telling, etc.) for purposes of psychosocial support, expression of trauma, stress reduction, community bonding, and other aims pertinent to mental health [UNHCR/WHO, *Mental Health of Refugees* (Geneva: UNHCR, WHO), 1996, np].

<sup>18</sup> C.f., Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crisis. *Inter-agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings*, 2010 Revision for Field Review <http://www.rhrc.org/>; IASC, *Human Rights and Natural Disasters: Operational Guidelines and Field Manual on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster*, Pilot Version, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, March 2008.

<[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/KHII-7EE9KM/\\$file/brookings\\_HR\\_mar08.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/KHII-7EE9KM/$file/brookings_HR_mar08.pdf?openelement)>. The Inter-agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health (p. 13) does advocate for RH programmes to be accountable to the IASC

Violence (GBV) do refer to using “creative methods (e.g., games, story telling, and drawing) to help put young children at ease and facilitate communication” in cases of possible sexual violence toward children.<sup>19</sup> But this is presented as a special case, and non-verbal communication such as drawing is not mentioned as part of the treatment of adults, who may also be traumatized or otherwise be unable to speak directly of their experiences.

26. The guidelines do not address the potential use of street theatre, participatory dramatic skits, songs, poems, etc., to disseminate information about GBV, help reduce the stigmatization of victims and apply behavior change communication techniques to change social attitudes toward GBV, especially among potential perpetrators.<sup>20</sup>

27. Granted, none of these guidelines are intended to be comprehensive catalogues of possible programs and techniques, and all advocate for an analysis of the particulars of each situation. However, it may be helpful for guidelines dealing with a wide range of humanitarian concern, to challenge program and policy-makers to consider supporting refugee-based peer-to-peer campaigns using creative use of artistic means such as traditional or innovative drama, music, dance, drawing, poetry, etc., in addition to more standard media such as posters, pamphlets and radio spots.

## Conclusion

28. In this chapter, we have considered the three-fold role of artistic activity in international agreements on human rights, with special attention to documents relevant to forced migrants. We have seen that artistic activity is relevant to at least two fundamental human rights: freedom of expression and freedom to pursue a profession.

29. Moreover, a number of agencies framing international policy guidelines have pointed to artistic activity as a potential and desirable vehicle for promoting public health, cultural preservation, economic and cultural development, peace-making and peace-building, and other humanitarian goals essential for human flourishing.

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Guidelines on Mental Health, which may imply the possibility of RH programmes that incorporate artistic activity, as the Guidelines on Mental Health advocate.

<sup>19</sup> Inter-agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies*, 2005, p. 70.

<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-products-products&productcatid=3>;

<sup>20</sup> C.f., *Ibid.*, 73-77. The Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions advise humanitarian actors to “identify existing resources and potential channels for communication that can be mobilised to inform the community about prevention of and response to sexual violence” (76) and to “prepare materials using a variety of methods to ensure communication with literate and nonliterate persons” (77), including radio programmes and posters or pamphlets with words and pictures.

## Artistic activities amongst refugees

30. Although no existing statistical studies gauge the extent or degree of artistic engagement in refugee camps, individual reports indicate that refugees and NGOs have transformed camps across the world into sites of diverse artistic activity. In this chapter, we will sketch an overview of the geographic extent, locations, types, sources of impetus, and contexts of artistic activity currently reported in camps.

31. Considering the global cultural embeddedness of the arts and the unsystematic character of the data available, there seems to be no reason to attempt to correlate the current frequency of reports with the actual geographic distribution of artistic activity.

32. The spotty documentation of many instances of artistic activity results from the dearth of studies focused specifically on artistic activity in camps, as well as the fact that much of the information that is available is only incidental to the primary research purposes of the authors. At best, the data amassed for this study can only provide a pool of partial and anecdotal information. Nevertheless, although further research is necessary before any conclusions can be drawn, it seems likely that the artistic activity currently reported represents only the tip of the iceberg.

33. The data is not sufficient for statistical analysis, and the sources for this study do not represent a comprehensive or even necessarily representative selection of media and research reports. However, several speculative insights about the possible nature of media and research attention toward artistic activity in camps do emerge.

34. One is tempted to assume that there is a correlation between media/research coverage in general and attention to artistic activity in particular. However, such a correlation is not apparent from the sources used in this study. The general impression one gets is that the first wave of media and research reports on a given refugee situation, no matter how high-profile, focuses primarily on issues of survival.

35. At this early stage, refugees in camps, desperately trying to recover their lives and attend to essential survival needs, tend to come across as victims and passive recipients of aid. It may in fact be the case for some refugees, who may be immobilized into passivity by the shock and deprivation of their situation. It is certainly what most of the world seems to expect; in fact, depictions of refugees as actively involved in artistic pursuits might violate such expectations, possibly dampening the philanthropic zeal of those wishing to help.

36. When artistic activity is mentioned in such cases, the reports are mainly limited to visits from outside organizations, like Clowns without Borders or UNHCR Goodwill Ambassadors. While these forms of passive artistic activity are undoubtedly helpful in restoring some sort of psychosocial equilibrium as refugees

recover from the initial shock of their situation, reports of such activity may also reinforce stereotypes of refugee passivity.<sup>22</sup>

37. At least one exception among the sources for this study is R. Tom Sizemore's blog about his visit to Haiti in February 2010. In the midst of the overwhelming need in the IDP camp he visited, he was still able to identify refugee-driven initiatives to rebuild and reclaim agency. He described children playing music and dancing in the IDP camp, along with boys making effective kites out of garbage, the naturally performative nature of the response of many children to his camera, and the entrepreneurial spirit of adults setting up informal vendor booths in the midst of the IDP camp.

38. On the other hand, refugee situations which receive little media/research attention in general also tended to illicit fewer reports of artistic activity in camps. The refugee crises in Latin America, for example, has gotten relatively little international media coverage *qua* refugee crisis,<sup>23</sup> so it is not surprising that reports of artistic activity have been difficult to acquire. Moreover, this study's focus on activity in camps has made it even more difficult to include examples from Latin America, since so many refugees in that region live in non-camp settlements or in the limbo of partial absorption into their host communities.<sup>24</sup>

39. Generally speaking, protracted camp situations seem to garner more significant attention in the area of artistic activity. The most frequently cited sites of artistic activity among the sources for this study were camps in Kenya, the Palestinian Territories, and Thailand, though the types and contexts of activity reported varied a great deal. It is not clear, however, to what extent the frequency of media/research reports reflects the actual frequency of artistic activity on the ground. Further research is needed.

### Geographical extent

40. The NGO reports, scholarly articles, blogs, and other sources on which this study is based report artistic activity of various kinds in camps in almost every geographic region. Countries in which artistic activity in camps has been reported include:<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This is not necessarily the case with refugees and IDPs outside camp contexts. The Lutheran World Federation, for example, has been promoting the decorative artwork of Haitian artisans in their 2010 and 2011 catalogues in order to help them rebuild their lives. It is unclear where these artisans are living and working, however, since the LWF catalogues make no reference to them as being camp residents.

<sup>23</sup> See Jesuit Refugee Service/USA, "Forgotten Victims of the Conflict in Colombia," *The Refugee Voice* 1.1 (June 2007): 1-4, *inter alia*.

<sup>24</sup> In the case of Colombia, the greatest source of forced migration concerns in the region, the UNHCR's 2009 Global Trends statistics indicate that virtually all of the more than 3 million displaced persons were in unknown locations. There were no camps or centers established in the country before the end of 2009; only a handful of IDPs—335 in total—could be traced to urban settings, and none could be traced to rural locations. [UNHCR 2009 Global Trends Statistics, Table 16].

<sup>25</sup> See discussion of Latin America above.

## Africa

Country	Camps (if specified)	Origin of refugees	Year(s) of reported activity
Burundi	unspecified	Burundi	2002
Tanzania*	Refugee camps in Ngara and other unspecified areas	Burundi, Rwanda, and other unspecified countries	Various, from 1995 – present
Chad	Unspecified	Sudan	2005
Kenya*	Dadaab, Kakuma, Kitale	Somalia, Sudan, and other unspecified	Various, approx. 2000-present
Ethiopia	Mai Aini, Shimelba, and other unspecified	Eritrea, and other unspecified	Various, approx 2007-present
Sudan	Unspecified camps in South Darfur	unspecified	2008
Zambia	Mayukwayukwa Refugee Settlement	Angola, and other unspecified	2005-2007
Guinea	Unspecified	Sierra Leone	Unspecified (Late 1990s-present)
Mozambique	Unspecified	Mozambique and other unspecified	1996, Unspecified (mid-late 1990s)
Liberia	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unspecified, around 2006
Uganda	Imvepi, Rhino and other unspecified camp settlements	Sudan	Unspecified, around 2002
Rwanda	Gihembe Camp	Unspecified	2010

## Asia

Country	Camps (if specified)	Origin of refugees	Year(s) of reported activity
China (Hong Kong)	Unspecified	Vietnam	Approx. 1989-1992
Nepal	Various unspecified	Bhutan	Unspecified; approx. 2009
Philippines	Philippine Refugee Processing Center, camp in Puetro Princesa	Vietnam	1988
Thailand*	Various, mainly near Thai-Burmese border	Burma (Karen ethnicity) and other unspecified	Various, from 1985-2008

## Europe

Country	Camps (if specified)	Origin of refugees	Year(s) of reported activity
Serbia	Unspecified	Croatia, Bosnia i	Unspecified; 1999

		Herzegovina, Kosovo, Roma peoples	
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### Middle East

Country	Camps (if specified)	Origin of refugees	Year(s) of reported activity
Jordan	Various; unspecified	Palestinians	2010
Palestinian Territories*	Various (esp. West Bank)	Palestinians	Various, 2002-present
Lebanon	Burj al-Barajne and various others	Palestinians	2002-present
Yemen	Al Ghehein	Somalia	1992-1996

\* = among the most heavily reported sites of artistic activity

41. Relatively little information is available on the demographics or previous artistic experience of most refugees who participate in artistic activity in camps. In the aggregate, however, reports mention participants of all ages, including children, youth, young adults, mature adults and elderly practitioners. Females as well as males are cited.

42. Members of various faiths, including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and animists, are described as active participants in artistic activity. There is tremendous variety to the ways in which different demographic groups are involved in artistic activity, but there is too little data available at present for more precise and nuanced portraiture.

### Types of artistic activity

43. *Genres*: Available sources indicate a tremendous variety of types of artistic activity taking place in camps. Genres include, but are not limited to:

#### *Performing arts*

- music
- dance
- drama
- storytelling

### *Visual arts*

- drawing
- painting
- sculpture
- photography
- film
- video

### *Literary arts*

- poetry
- essays
- other literary, visual, and performing arts

### *Crafts*

- traditional handicrafts<sup>27</sup>

## **Contexts of artistic activity**

44. Artistic activity occurs within a number of contexts in camps. For the remainder of this chapter, we will consider some broad observations about settings, structure and impetus of artistic activity in camps. Then, in the following chapter, we will explore more closely typical contexts in which artistic activity occurs.

45. Artistic activity takes place in a wide range of settings which vary in their scope for private or public expression. Privacy is often a scarce commodity in camps, but some refugees are able to engage in artistic activity in private and semi-private quarters.<sup>28</sup> Other, more public, settings include schools;<sup>29</sup> churches, temples, and other places of worship;<sup>30</sup> community centres;<sup>31</sup> and outdoor and other public gathering venues.<sup>32</sup>

46. Musicologist Adelaida Schramm, doing fieldwork among Vietnamese and Indochinese refugees in the Philippines in 1988, described the music in the Philippine

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<sup>27</sup> Although I list handicrafts among the artforms to be encountered in camps, and have come across such activity in camps I have visited, I have not amassed any significant data on such instances. Further research is needed focusing on the role of handicrafts as cultural artifacts, means of income-generation, etc. See, e.g., Diana Cammack, *Three successful income generating programmes amongst Afghan refugee women in Peshawar, Pakistan, 1990*,

[http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show\\_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:630](http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:630).

<sup>28</sup> Demo,13.

<sup>29</sup> (UNRWA, Kenyan music teachers)

<sup>30</sup> E.g., the public celebration of the major Ethiopian Orthodox Feast of *Timket*, complete with outdoor procession and chanting clergy, at Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp [C.f., "Ethiopian Orthodox Church Celebrates Baptism Day," *Kanere: Kakuma News Reflector*, February 2009,

<http://kakuma.wordpress.com/2009/02/28/ethiopian-orthodox-church-celebrates-baptism-day/>]; or congregational singing in Christian churches, Buddhist chant resounding in temples, or Vietnamese folk songs sung around churches and temple areas in refugee camps in the Philippines (Schramm 28).

<sup>31</sup> (Youth-friendly centers in Nepal, Cultural centers in Palestinian territories)

<sup>32</sup> (end of semester festival in Yemen, World Refugee Day)

Refugee Processing Center in Bataan province. In the areas of private billets, she overheard “Vietnamese popular music [...] live or from cassette recordings sent by relatives and friends [...] American rock and popular music played on cassettes or through Philippine radio [...] excerpts from *cai luong* both live or pre-recorded.”<sup>33</sup> In the camp’s public spaces, she reported “Christian hymns sung by congregation or choir in rehearsal at the various Christian churches [...] Buddhist chant emanating from the temple [...] Vietnamese folk songs around the church or temple areas.”<sup>34</sup>

47. In each of those settings, activities occur which range from ad hoc expressions to pre-planned events. For example, R. Tom Sizemore gives an example of ad hoc music-making in a public space when he blogs about seeing “a little boy pounding on a can with a stick while two little girls danced to his makeshift music” in an unofficial IDP camp south of Port-au-Prince, Haiti.<sup>35</sup>

48. Apparently along similar lines, a reporter for the *Kakuma News Reflector* notes that South Sudanese refugees participating in the 9 January 2011 referendum for South Sudan “were seen dancing in preparation to vote and hopes of success.”<sup>36</sup> Other informal artistic activity in private settings include private recreational music-making<sup>37</sup> and listening to recordings.<sup>38</sup>

49. By their very nature, ad hoc activities such as spontaneous dancing, storytelling, etc., tend to be informal pursuits. In some cases, however, what begins as a spontaneous recreational activity can lead to the formation of established groups. Examples include Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars, founded by refugees in Guinea, I-Voice, a Palestinian hip-hop duo based in the camps of Beirut, Lebanon, and the “Zara” refugee artist club in northern Ethiopia.<sup>39</sup>

50. Formal or structured artistic activity is often associated with social functions such as religious celebrations,<sup>40</sup> cultural and community festivals, educational

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<sup>33</sup> Schramm, “Music and Tradition,” 28. *Cai luong* is a form of Vietnamese folk opera popular in Southern Vietnam.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Sizemore, “News from Haiti,” Blog Posting, 11 February 2010, R Tom Sizemore’s Blog. <<http://rtomsizemore.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/news-from-haiti/>>

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights News Updates, “South Sudan Referendum Comes to Kakuma Camp,” *Kakuma News Reflector* (KANERE), 11 February 2011.

<<http://kakuma.wordpress.com/2011/02/11/south-sudan-referendum-comes-to-kakuma-camp/>>

<sup>37</sup> Abebe Feyissa Demo reports that some residents of Kakuma Camp in Kenya obtain a “rested look” on their faces when playing or listening to traditional instruments [Demo, 13].

<sup>38</sup> E.g., among Somali refugees in the Dadaab Camps of Kenya (Cindy Horst, “Vital links in social security: Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps, Kenya,” *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 38, UNHCR, April 2001, 6) and Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines (Schramm, 28).

<sup>39</sup> C.f., Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars, Documentary Film (Docurama Films, 2007); James Meyers, “I-Voice Interview: SXSW 2010,” 16 March 2010,

<http://www.spinner.com/2010/03/16/i-voice-interview-sxsw-2010/>

“Zara” – “stream” in Tigrinya – is a club formed by refugees in a camp in northern Ethiopia. Membership has included poets, musicians, dancers, actors and other creative artists (Author’s telephone interview with Eritrean refugee formerly resident in a camp in northern Ethiopia, 19 November 2010).

<sup>40</sup> E.g., among Vietnamese Buddhist and Christian refugees in the Philippines (Schramm, 28) and Ethiopian refugees in Kenya (“Ethiopian Orthodox Church Celebrates Baptism Day,” *KANERE: Kakuma News Reflector*, February 2009,

<http://kakuma.wordpress.com/2009/02/28/ethiopian-orthodox-church-celebrates-baptism-day/>).



programs for children, and public health campaigns.<sup>41</sup> The more people involved and the more focused the objective, the more difficult to sustain without some sort of structure. Such structure need not impose formality upon the activity itself, an example being scheduled time for artistic play for children at school, which functions, in effect, as a framework for unstructured activity.

51. The anecdotal evidence suggests that the impetus for much artistic activity in camps comes from refugees themselves, especially on the level of private recreational activity. Abebe Feyissa Demo recounts how some young refugees in Kakuma “used to spend time playing and listening to *kirar* (a traditional Ethiopian stringed instrument),” among other recreational activities, as a way of coping with protracted displacement.

52. A great deal of such refugee-driven activity, being peripheral to most studies of refugee camps, eludes documentation. Yet, despite the constraints under which they live, refugees have not limited their self- and community-driven artistic pursuits to private or informal activities. Festivals are a notable counter-example,<sup>42</sup> as are professional and semi-professional artistic groups such as the previously mentioned Refugee All Stars, I-Voice, and “Zara” Club.<sup>43</sup>

53. Refugees often improvise materials for artistic activity from whatever items are available, among their own belongings or accessible locally. However, due to the limited access refugees have to resources, many seek financial and other material support from NGOs, especially when the activity in question expands in scale.<sup>44</sup> The work of the refugee-run school in the former Al Gehein camp, for example, was supported directly by Rädä Barnen (Swedish Save the Children), and indirectly by the UNHCR.

54. Although the community activities in Kakuma were organized and staffed by refugees, the impetus came from refugees in their capacities as employees of NGOs. The independent “Zara” Club received paper and other materials for their art work from the IRC, one of the agencies working in their camp.<sup>45</sup> Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars, formed and organized by refugees themselves, were sent on tours of different refugee camps by the UNHCR. The post-air raid rebuilding of the Ibdäa Cultural Center in Dheisheh Camp, near Bethlehem, was funded in part by the Middle East Children’s Alliance (MECA) in Berkley, California.<sup>46</sup>

55. NGOs themselves have proposed and implement programs of artistic activity for refugees as part of their humanitarian interventions. In some cases, this is represented by bringing artistic programs and exhibitions into camps. Examples include the UNFPA-sponsored tour of the “Positive Lives” Exhibition, tours of

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<sup>41</sup> E.g., through Youth-Friendly Centres, Bhutanese refugee youth in Nepal have access to recreational activities including music and art, and also take part in street theatre skits in order to raise awareness about adolescent reproductive health and substance abuse (UNHCR. “Field Brief: Establishment of Multi-purpose Youth-Friendly Centres for Young Refugees in Nepal.” July 2010).

<sup>42</sup> See discussion of Religious and Other Festivals and Celebrations later in this chapter.

<sup>43</sup> See discussion of Professional and Semi-professional Refugee Artists in the following chapter.

<sup>44</sup> Author’s telephone interview with Eritrean refugee formerly resident in a camp in northern Ethiopia, 19 November 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Author’s telephone interview with Eritrean refugee formerly resident in a camp in northern Ethiopia, 19 November 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Santiago, Chiori. “Palestine embodied: teens from Dheisheh refugee camp dance their experience.” *Dance Magazine*, 1 December 2003.

groups such as Magicians Without Borders and Clowns Without Borders, and visits from artist ambassadors and other celebrities interested in the cause of forced migration.<sup>47</sup> In other cases, the activities are more focused on refugee collaboration and participation, often including an element of training and skill development.

56. For example, FilmAid International brings outside films to camps for free public screenings, but also sponsors community-based film production and a Participatory Filmmaking Program, which provide opportunities for refugees and other members of communities in need to work as artistic collaborators.<sup>48</sup> The Norwegian Refugee Council, among its other refugee-related activities, has provided training for Burundian actors from the TUBIYAGE theatre association on presenting street theatre on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See UNHCR Public Health and HIV Section Division of Operational Services. 2008 Annual Report: Public Health and HIV. UNHCR, 2009; Ojunga, Maureen. "The Camp Beat competition for youth at Dadaab." *Capital Lifestyle*, 27 May 2010.

<<http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/lifestyle/22/MUSIC/4916-The-Camp-Beat-competition-for-youth-Dadaab.html>>; Aguilar, Sonia. "Q&A: Ecuadorian soap star supports Colombian refugees. UNHCR News Stories, 8 Sept 2010. <<http://www.unhcr.org/4c8796499.html>>.

<sup>48</sup> See FilmAid International: Programs <http://www.filmaid.org/what/programs.shtml>. Elsewhere on its website ("Where We Work"), FilmAid's website indicates that the organization has worked in numerous international locations, including past operations in Afghanistan, Macedonia/Kosovo, and the USA Gulf Coast region; and continuing programs in East Africa (primarily Kenya), Haiti, the Sudan, and Thailand.

<sup>49</sup> Greta Zeender, "Burundians use innovative ways to protect the displaced," *Forced Migration Review* 16 (January 2003): 9.

## The functions of artistic activity

57. The previous chapter provided an overview of some of the extent and diversity of artistic activity in refugee camps. Despite this diversity, certain contexts consistently appear in reports from a wide range of sources and geographic locations. Among the most frequently mentioned contexts within which refugees are reported to engage in artistic activity are: entertainment/recreation; religious events and other public festivals; psychosocial support; educational/classroom situations; information dissemination and behavior change communication (BCC) campaigns; and cultural preservation efforts.

58. In this chapter, we will consider examples of each type of artistic enterprise. For practical convenience we will discuss each category of activity in turn, although it is important to understand that, in reality, the categories and contexts are interrelated and cannot functionally be separated. For example, Youth-Friendly Centres in Nepal use recreational artistic activity to serve both psychosocial and educational purposes, as well as providing training in artistic skills for peer information campaigns. BCC initiatives that incorporate street theater and other performing arts capitalize on the entertaining nature of these art forms in their efforts to achieve socially-beneficial aims.

### Entertainment and recreational activities

59. Like personal expression and psychosocial support (see below), entertainment/recreation is both an element present in nearly all artistic activity and a specific context in which people engage in artistic activity. Time is, of course, one resource that is plentiful in refugee camps. The regular occupations of work and study have been largely dismantled in the process of forced migration.

60. Many and various employment and educational restrictions established by host countries limit local opportunities. Even NGOs employing refugees in camps are generally permitted only to pay limited “incentives” rather than regular wages. So there seems to be little to do and little incentive to find anything to do beyond attending to necessities.

61. But circumstantially-enforced inactivity cannot be sustained indefinitely without serious consequences to psychosocial health. In response to this deep need for occupation, some refugees organize their own entertainment and recreational activities, often involving sports or artistic activity of some sort.<sup>51</sup> As discussed in the

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<sup>51</sup> Numerous sources mention engagement in sports alongside formal and informal programs of artistic recreational activity, including Abebe Feyissa Demo, “Riding on the back of a tortoise: An Ethiopian community responds to protracted displacement.” *Forced Migration Review* 33 (Sept 2009): 12-14; J. Benjamin, R. De Buysscher, and D. Engel, “HIV/AIDS prevention and education for refugees: implementing effective emergency projects,” in: Makinwa B and O’Grady, M, eds. *Best practices in HIV/AIDS prevention collection* (Arlington, VA: Family Health International and UNAIDS, 2001), 7-23; Jesuit Refugee Service, “Ethiopia: new project to open in the north,” JRS News, 29 January 2010, [http://www.jrs.net/news\\_detail.cfm?TN=NEWS-20100213123726](http://www.jrs.net/news_detail.cfm?TN=NEWS-20100213123726); Jesuit Refugee Service, “Ethiopia: new project to open in the north,” JRS News, 29 January 2010.

previous chapter,<sup>52</sup> many refugees engage in informal, ad hoc activities as individuals or in small groups, including playing and singing music, dancing, listening to recordings, painting, and reading poetry.<sup>53</sup>

62. In some cases, NGOs or other camp leadership establish recreational centers in camps, where residents—especially young people—can gather and find ways to be engaged in positive activities and channel their pent-up energy into constructive action. These centers can also serve as sources of helpful information about public health and safety issues; youth attending such centers are sometimes trained as peer educators and participants in information education communication (IEC) and/or behavior change communication (BCC) campaigns. An example of this is the system of multi-purpose Youth-Friendly Centres (YFCs) in Nepal, established by the UNHCR and other NGO partners.<sup>54</sup>

### **Religious events and festivals**

63. The challenge of time in a refugee camp is not only that of having too much of it on one's hand. There is also the lack of structure, the radical shift in the organization of time resulting from forced inactivity. People have had to leave their regular lives and occupations, and have entered a world not only of forced inactivity but one in which many of the daily, weekly, seasonal and annual rhythms have been interrupted, suspended indefinitely. As Zemedede Bezabih, a refugee in the Kakuma Camps, commented, "each day of the week falls on Sunday."<sup>55</sup>

64. Special celebrations, like entertainment and recreation, serve to break up the daily routine on a grand scale, and camp residents are often eager to participate. One report from Irdimi Camp in Chad, for example, mentions that "to break the routine of camp life," a group of young refugee girls from the Sudan "perform traditional Sudanese songs and dances whenever there are special celebrations."<sup>56</sup> However, regularly repeated events, such as religious celebrations, annual festivals and recurring competitions, may also serve the purpose of reestablishing

65. Certain time cycles, such as the annual cycle of religious events, remain in place despite encampment, and large crowds of participants and onlookers are often attracted when the celebration of such events is possible. For example, Ethiopian Orthodox adherents in the Kakuma Camps of Kenya were able to celebrate the important church festival of *Timket* (commemorating the baptism of Jesus) with "a colorful procession" following the *tabot* (arc of the covenant) through the streets of the camp.

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[http://www.jrs.net/news\\_detail.cfm?TN=NEWS-20100213123726](http://www.jrs.net/news_detail.cfm?TN=NEWS-20100213123726);

Steven Muncy, "Vietnamese Paraprofessionals in Child Welfare," in Margaret McCalin, ed., *The Psychological Well-Being of Refugee Children: Research, Practice and Policy Issues* (Geneva: International Catholic Child Bureau, 1992), 221; UNHCR. "Field Brief: Establishment of Multi-purpose Youth-Friendly Centres for Young Refugees in Nepal." July 2010; *inter alia*.

<sup>52</sup> In the section on settings for artistic activity, p. ??.

<sup>53</sup> More elaborate entertainments will be discussed below in the section on festivals.

<sup>54</sup> These are discussed below, in the section on information dissemination.

<sup>55</sup> Abebe Feyissa Demo "Riding on the back of a tortoise: An Ethiopian community responds to protracted displacement," *Forced Migration Review* 33 (Sept 2009): 12.

<sup>56</sup> Le Breton, Ginette. "Growing up in a refugee camp" " UNHCR News Stories, Abéché, Chad, 2 August 2005 <<http://www.unhcr.org/42ef92c77.html>>.

66. In addition to displaying the artistry of liturgical implements and costumes, the procession featured liturgical chanting by deacons and choirs and religious singing by lay congregants in the surrounding crowd.<sup>57</sup> Ramadan is commemorated by many Muslim refugees in camps and collective centers despite economic and other challenges.<sup>58</sup> In some cases, an *Iftar*—even in a refugee camp—may feature entertainment like music.<sup>59</sup>

67. In addition to religiously-oriented celebrations, non-religious festivals are popular events in refugee camps. Many reports from different regions indicate the important role refugees often play in organizing and providing artistic elements for festivals.<sup>60</sup> For example, teachers and other staff members of the refugee-run school in the former Al Gehein camp in Yemen organized festivals for parents, students, and staff of nearby refugee and host-country schools, including the Somali Cultural Festival in November 1994, which featured performances of dances, songs, athletics and acrobatics.

68. In the Kakuma Camps of Kenya, Demo and other refugees working for NGOs as counselors and social workers began to plan community activities, including plays and music festivals, for other camp residents.<sup>61</sup> As the discussion of YFCs in Nepal (above) indicated, international consciousness-raising festivals like World AIDS Day and Environmental Day present opportunities for topical artistic activity, including singing, dancing, skits and visual art.

69. NGOs have also organized artistic activity surrounding festivals. For example, World Refugee Day (20 June), sponsored by the UNHCR and partnering organizations, has traditionally shined a spotlight not only on the refugee crises but also on the refugees themselves, including their artistic and creative gifts. In addition to the many programs held in major cities on every continent, the 2010 celebration included a number of events in or associated with refugee camps, including an art and essay contest for Tajik and refugee children; a exhibit in Sana'a, Yemen of photos taken by refugee children; and special activities in Gihembe Camp, Rwanda.<sup>62</sup>

### **Psychosocial support**

70. As mentioned above, psychosocial support represents both a general feature of artistic activity and a specific context in which artistic activity is utilized. Refugee

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<sup>57</sup> "Ethiopian Orthodox Church Celebrates Baptism Day," *Kanere: Kakuma News Reflector*, February 2009, <http://kakuma.wordpress.com/2009/02/28/ethiopian-orthodox-church-celebrates-baptism-day/>.

<sup>58</sup> See Andrea Szobolits, "Muslim refugees strive to maintain Ramadan traditions in Hungarian centres," UNHCR News Stories, 2 November 2005. <http://www.unhcr.org/436a2b5d4.html>.

<sup>59</sup> For example, according to a 2010 press release from the US Consulate, Palestinian students prepared an *Iftar* for orphaned children in Amari Refugee Camp, Ramallah, including music, face painting, and other festive activities. Consulate of the United States Press Release, "Palestinian Students Volunteer in Ramadan Community Service Projects," Jerusalem: August 26, 2010. <http://jerusalem.usconsulate.gov/pr082610.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Ginette Le Breton, "Growing up in a refugee camp" "UNHCR News Stories, Abéché, Chad, 2 August 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Demo, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Leo Dobbs, "As World Refugee Day gets under way, UNHCR appeals for the displaced," UNHCR News Stories, 20 June 2010.

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4c1e47006&query=music>  
I am inferring from this article that these three examples directly engaged people living in camps as participants, although I have not verified that fact independently. The 2006 celebration had included a drawing contest in Islamabad, Pakistan for Afghan refugee children, including residents of the camps of Masehra, on the topic of "My Hope for the Future" (Tan and Baloch, np).

camps, like all centers of humanitarian crises, are filled with individuals traumatized by the circumstances they have undergone and continue to undergo. The trend among humanitarian organizations toward holistic approaches to emergency and protracted care has resulted in increased attention to mental and emotional health, and this attention has also influenced the way in which artistic activity is discussed.<sup>63</sup>

71. Given the prevalence of trauma and the need for coping and healing mechanisms, it is not surprising that refugees and non-refugee humanitarian actors frequently describe artistic activity with reference to its therapeutic benefits. In fact, the therapeutic component is evoked directly or indirectly in many reports on artistic activity in refugee camps, even when the primary focus of the artistic activity in question is entertainment, recreation, education, cultural enrichment, professional development, or some other such purpose. As Abdul Rahim Kamara ("Arahim") of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars explains, "[playing with the band] heals my trauma, because when I am playing I forget about myself for the moment."<sup>64</sup>

72. In addition to benefiting from the general therapeutic effects of artistic engagement, some refugees who undergo psychosocial therapy may find the arts playing a role in their treatment. A number of therapists have integrated artistic activity as a tool to aid traumatized refugee patients, especially children.<sup>65</sup> In addition to injecting an element of fun into the work of therapy, artistic activities such as drawing, singing, acting out skits, etc., can help provide non-verbal or supra-verbal means for patients to communicate experiences.<sup>66</sup> Joan Allison reports a series of Participatory Assessment workshops in Southern Africa, organized around

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Forward," Frederick L. Ahearn, ed., *Psychosocial Wellness of Refugees: Issues in Qualitative and Quantitative Research* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), viii.

<sup>64</sup> Abdul Rahim Kamara ("Arahim"), band member interviewed in *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars*, Documentary Film (Docurama Films, 2007). Other examples include: Abebe Feyissa Demo "Riding on the back of a tortoise: An Ethiopian community responds to protracted displacement," *Forced Migration Review* 33 (Sept 2009): 13; John Baily, "Can you stop the birds from singing? The censorship of music in Afghanistan" (Denmark: Freemuse, 2001), 45-46, <[www.freemuse.org](http://www.freemuse.org)>; Pumla Rulashe, "Music key to helping Johannesburg' refugee students, says Goodwill Ambassador Henricks," UNHCR News Stories, 23 September 2004. <<http://www.unhcr.org/4152f3934.html>>.

<sup>65</sup> One of the most frequently cited references on arts and psychosocial therapy is David Tolfree, *Restoring Playfulness: different Approaches to Assisting Children who are Psychologically Affected by War and Displacement* (Rädda Barnen, Sweden: Swedish Save the Children, 1996). See also, David Tolfree, "Children, Conflict, and Displacement," *Development in Practice* 7, no. 1 (February 1997): 94-96; Bethany Ojalehto and Qi Wang, "Children's spiritual development in forced displacement: a human rights perspective," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13, no. 2 (5, 2008): 129-143; Siena Anstis, "Beyond Food and Water: Providing Psychosocial Support for Refugees in Syria," *Toward Freedom*, August 3, 2010, <<http://www.towardfreedom.com/middle-east/2051-beyond-food-and-water-providing-psychosocial-support-for-refugees-in-syria>>; Helen Scott-Danter, "Between Theatre and Therapy: Experiences of a Dramatherapist in Mozambique." In *Arts Therapists, Refugees and Migrants: Reaching*. Edited by Ditty Dokter (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998), 95; Guglielmo. Schininà, "Far Away, So Close": Psychosocial and Theatre Activities with Serbian Refugees," *The Drama Review* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 32-49.

<sup>66</sup> "Expressive activities such as art, clay and narratives act as a secondary medium through which children can communicate their thoughts, emotions, feelings and desires. For example, a child who cannot describe the fear experienced from viewing a massacre can draw what he or she saw and express his or her fear through their drawing. The drawing can later be used as a vehicle for non-verbally communicating and exploring feelings or meanings" [S. Simó-Algado, N. Mehta, F. Kronenberg, L. Cockburn and B. Kirsh. "Occupational therapy intervention with children survivors of war," *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 69.4 (2002): 210].

artwork “as a medium to encourage reflection and discussion.” Staff of Music Therapy International, for example, have visited refugee children in camps in Kenya, including Kitale, and engaging them in music therapy using traditional music from various parts of Africa.<sup>67</sup>

### **Educational and classroom use**

73. The arts can be especially useful in classroom and other educational settings. Some teachers working with refugee students use artistic means such as drawing, songs, dances, and skits as an educational aid, as a means for students to express themselves in cases of trauma, and as a culturally-enriching recreational activity in the absence of access to other forms of entertainment. In addition, artistic activity can expose children to broader and more diverse epistemological avenues in refugee schools which are often poorly funded and unable to attend sufficiently to the varying educational needs of students.

74. For example, a report on the refugee-run school in the former Al Gehein Camp in Yemen describes how Somali teachers incorporated artistic activity into the schools psychosocial programming, including training children to write songs, poetry and plays, as well as drawing and story-telling.<sup>68</sup> Serene Dweikat, headteacher at Balata Basic Girls’ School near Nablus, West Bank, has been lauded for her innovative use of music and drama in the classroom. Conscious of the adverse circumstances in which her students lived and studied, Dweikat began by transforming science lessons into songs for children to learn.

75. When she saw how successful this approach was, she gradually expanded her use of participatory artistic activity to address other academic subjects, behavioral issues, etc. The award-winning educator has also prepared materials to help teachers in other UNRWA schools adapt these methods and activities for their own contexts.<sup>69</sup>

### **Information dissemination**

76. Because of their broad appeal and effectiveness in communicating with people at varying levels of literacy, artistic means such as music, visual arts and drama are often chosen to deliver messages of social import, including public health and safety information. Artistic activity and media/communication are sometimes viewed as

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<sup>67</sup> David Otieno Akombo, “Reporting on Music Therapy in Kenya,” *Voices* 1.1 (20 April 2001). <<https://normt.uib.no/index.php/voices/article/viewArticle/45/29>>.

<sup>68</sup> Helen Gezelius, *Refugee-Run Education: The Somali Refugee Primary School in the Republic of Yemen* (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen-Swedish Save the Children, 1996), 19. This camp has since been closed; refugee residents were transferred to another camp in 2000. See <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=90531>>.

<sup>69</sup> UNRWA, “Teacher makes a song and dance for students,” UNRWA Press Release, 30 April 2010, <<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=740>>.

separate and incompatible spheres, possibly due to Western modernist *ars artis gratia* perspectives that resist any instrumentalization or commercialization of art.<sup>70</sup>

77. Rather than representing potentially competing spheres,<sup>71</sup> art and artistic activity can be used as a form of communication, whether on a large or small scale. For example, a recent AIDSCAP handbook lists music and traditional theater alongside radio, television, newspapers, advertising, etc., as possible vehicles for mass communication.<sup>72</sup>

78. Artistic vehicles are not limited to merely disseminating information; they are often effective in influencing attitudes and behaviors. Although information is always conveyed within complex contexts—never abstractable into a pure transfer of meaning<sup>73</sup>—the use of artistic activity and artistic vehicles overtly and deliberately provides multiple ways of knowing, appealing to the whole range of senses.

79. The entertainment which artistic activities provide helps them sustain the attention of participants over extended periods. Moreover, songs, poems, stories, etc., are generally easier to remember than simple lists of facts, and have long served as mnemonic devices. Thus, using artistic vehicles to convey information may boost the impact, endurance, and “stickiness” of that information, enhancing its power to change attitudes and influence behavior.

80. In addition, artistic activity can be helpful in approaching taboo subjects indirectly, when direct discussion may be difficult. Earlier we noted how traumatized patients can sometimes express through indirect means like drawings, songs, poetry, and stories things that happened to them but which are too painful to relate directly. Similarly, artists can use drama, songs, dances, visual arts, and other means to bring up sensitive issues and open them up for consideration and discussion.

81. The urgency of the AIDS epidemic among refugees has challenged refugees and NGOs to find creative approaches to informing high-risk communities and transforming attitudes and behaviors which are likely to fuel the epidemic. Among other means for information dissemination and behavior change communication (BCC), street theatre is often cited as an attractive and effective method. A 2005 behavior surveillance survey among refugees in Nepal indicated that street drama

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<sup>70</sup> See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980) for a critique of prevailing Western notions of “high art” influenced by a Kantian “aesthetic,” anti-instrumental perspective.

<sup>71</sup> To borrow Aristotelian language, art—whether music, drama, visual arts, literary arts, etc.—represents the formal cause of an entity, whereas media/communication relates to its final cause (*telos*), i.e., its purpose or function.

<sup>72</sup> AIDSCAP Behavior Change Communications Unit, *Behavior Change Through Mass Communication: Using Mass Media for AIDS Prevention* (Arlington, VA: Family Health International), 6. <<http://www.fhi.org/en/HIVAIDS/pub/guide/BCC+Handbooks/Behavior+Change+Through+Mass+Communication.htm>>.

<sup>73</sup> The person who conveys the information, the language used, the specific choice of words, the body language and intonation of the person’s voice, the place in which the information is conveyed, etc., can influence what the information signifies and how it will be received.



was one of the most preferred sources for information on HIV/AIDS, especially among males.<sup>74</sup>

82. Researchers noted that “although street drama was not reported to be a common source of information about HIV/AIDS among most groups, a large proportion of respondents reported that they would like to hear about HIV/AIDS from street drama,” and suggested that “efforts to create a street drama troupe within the refugee and host community should be explored; linkages can be made with local NGOs in the Terai that use street drama.”<sup>75</sup>

83. In seven camps of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, the UNHCR and partner organizations have established Youth-Friendly Centres (YFCs) geared primarily toward engaging and informing youth in order to prevent HIV/AIDS among high-risk groups.<sup>76</sup> Despite their specific focus, the YFCs are designed to provide a range of services for young people; in addition to sports and learning activities surrounding adolescent reproductive health, recreational and learning activities available include music, drawing, and art. In addition to booklets and brochures on HIV and reproductive health, cartoons are available and accessible to members.

84. Youth members of the YFCs are also trained as peer educators. Among their activities are street drama campaigns on HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. These street drama performances have taken place in all seven camps; 45 events were recorded in 2009 alone. The UNHCR report on these YFCs includes a photograph of one of these street drama performances; in the photograph, one sees a huge, rapt audience gathered around a open-air platform.

85. In this case, at least, the artistic activity concentrated at the centre has poured forth into the larger camp community, providing both recreation and possibly life-saving information.<sup>77</sup> Youth members of the YFCs are also involved in devising and leading peer activities, including arranging music classes and organizing refugee youth to take part in major celebrations like World AIDS day, Environmental day, and other such events.

86. In Tanzania and Burundi, former refugee Noe Sebisaba’s organization, STOP-SIDA Nkebure Uwumva (Stop AIDS – Advice to those who are ready to receive it), uses music, dance, drama, posters, and other methods to transform attitudes towards people infected with HIV/AIDS and promote AIDS prevention. One scene in a 2005 documentary on the organization depicts a STOP-SIDA troupe performing a play just outside a Pentecostal church for an audience of church members in a refugee camp in Tanzania.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> HIV/AIDS Unit. “Behavioral Surveillance Survey among Refugees and Surrounding Host Community: Jhapa and Morang districts, Nepal” (UNHCR, Nov 2005), 17, 52-53.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>76</sup> UNHCR, “Field Brief: Establishment of Multi-purpose Youth-Friendly Centres for Young Refugees in Nepal,” July 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/4c5fdf326.html>.

<sup>77</sup> For more on this theme, see the section below on Information Dissemination and Behavior Change Communication.

<sup>78</sup> Noe Sebisaba, Miia Hanninen, Kassim Mustafa, Lars Johansson, *Love in a time of AIDS: The story of Noe Sebisaba and Stop-SIDA* (Kanembwa and Nduta Refugee Camps, Western Tanzania: Maweni Farm and Stop-SIDA Nkebure Uwumva for Tanganyika Christian Refugee Services and UNHCR, 2005),

87. The play presents a pastor who had contracted AIDS even though neither he nor his wife had committed adultery. As Sebisaba explains, “many church people think that the only way you can get HIV is through extramarital sex. This belief is what they are addressing with this play.” But Sebisaba implies that the play is not merely aimed at exposing this particular myth; it is part of a larger campaign to involve religious communities in the struggle against AIDS among refugees: “At first, when STOP-SIDA began, churches and mosques didn’t take part in the fight against AIDS. But now the churches are changing.”<sup>79</sup>

### Cultural preservation

88. A number of artistic initiatives in camps have used traditional art forms for entertainment, education, and celebration purposes, including folk songs and dances, traditional literary forms, storytelling, and handicrafts.<sup>80</sup> Even for young refugees born outside their native regions, traditional arts may resonate on a deep level, reconnecting refugees to the cultural roots of their identities. The presence of Vietnamese folks songs and *cai luong* music among Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines, for example, attests to the power of music to carry and sustain cultural traditions richly.<sup>81</sup>

89. Yet the challenges facing refugees in camps are not restricted to the health, education, and well-being of individuals. In some cases, the situations which forced people to flee their homes also threaten the survival of their cultures. Some artistic activity, then, is driven in part by an impulse to preserve cultural traditions and practices in exile. Among ethnic minorities in Burma living as refugees in Thailand, elders in the camps, such as Karen musician Sein Tin Aye of Mae La Camp, teach traditional music and other art forms to the young.<sup>82</sup>

90. Some Burmese refugees in Thailand have organized programs to facilitate the intergenerational sharing of tradition, including the Intergenerational Arts Project

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<<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5174670791673980288#>>.

<sup>79</sup> In the context of the documentary, Sebisaba does not seem to be implying that mosques have *not* changed, as opposed to churches, which *have*. Rather, he seems to be focusing on churches because they are the subject of that particular scene in the documentary. Another example of street drama for social change among refugees is the work done by Pakistan-based NGO Struggle for Change (SACH). Among their activities is using theatre to raise awareness and change attitudes toward social concerns like domestic violence among Afghan refugees. According to Executive Director Khalida Salami, “Domestic violence is a sensitive issue and we can get into trouble if we approach it directly [...] Theatre is a tool to raise awareness in a way that is easy to understand for the Afghan community.” See Asif Shahzad, “16 Days of Activism: Play seeks to broach taboo of domestic violence.” UNHCR News Stories, 3 December 2008. <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/newsitem?id=4936a6d84>>.

<sup>80</sup> For example, Karen refugees sang traditional songs about peace and love as part of a UNICEF “Living Values” Educational Program (LVEP) designed to promote a culture of peace in two refugee camps in Thailand [Diane Tillman, “Educating for a Culture of Peace in Refugee Camps,” *Childhood Education* (2001): 376, 377].

<sup>81</sup> Schramm, “Music and Tradition,” 28, 30. Another of the numerous examples of this is the promotion of traditional Azerbaijani mugham music among Azerbaijani children, youth, and elders living in refugee camps. These populations were dislocated due to the Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-1994, though still not fully resolved as of 2010. [“Refugee Children Sing Mugham,” Video (streaming online), <http://mugham.org/i/?p=110>; Abbas Atilay, “Home Fires,” *Transitions Online* (March 22, 2010):4].

<sup>82</sup> “From Eastern Burma, the Music of Karen Refugees,” *Guerilla Ethnomusicology*, June 29, 2008, <<http://guerillaethnomusicology.wordpress.com/2008/06/29/karenrefugees/>>.

(IAP).<sup>83</sup> Established in 2003 in cooperation with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sarah Green of Art for Refugees in Transition (A.R.T), the program utilizes a “bottom up,” based on the interests of the youth to learn as well as the willingness of the elders to teach. Artistic skills taught include traditional music (making and playing musical instruments), storytelling, dance, and handicrafts. At present, IAP is a self-sustainable program run completely by refugees themselves.<sup>84</sup>

91. Among the Karen and other ethnic minorities from Burma, the preservation of their artistic traditions is connected directly to the survival of their culture. The case of Afghan refugees is both similar and different. They, too, face the possibility of the extinction of artistic traditions, but this is due less to forced migration than to severe restrictions on artistic activity within Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the power to preserve many Afghan musical and other cultural traditions remains largely in the hands of refugees and other exiles.<sup>86</sup>

92. One video filmed in Jalozai Camp, Pakistan, depicts an intense gathering of Afghan male refugees singing, dancing, and playing music together, with extensive audience participation. Through a translator, refugee Ali Gul reminisces about singing and dancing at neighborhood celebrations at home in Afghanistan, and comments that the traditional music they are enjoying is “not only music for us [...] we are keeping through music our culture.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sara Green, “Art for Refugees in Transition Journal,” Feb 2003-Feb 2004, *Art for Refugees*, <<http://www.artforrefugees.org/journals.html>>.

<sup>84</sup> Art for Refugees in Transition: Programs, <<http://www.artforrefugees.org/projects.html>>.

<sup>85</sup> Baily, Can you stop the birds from singing?; Nicholas Wroe, “A culture muted,” *The Guardian*, 13 October 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/oct/13/afghanistan.books>>. The role of music in Islamic cultures has always been complex. For overviews of Islamic theological debates over the propriety of music, see: Arthur Gribetz, “The sama’ controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist,” *Studia Islamica* 74 (1991): 43-62; Kristina Nelson, “The Art of Reciting the Qur’an,” PhD. diss., Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1980 (esp. chapter 3); and Fadlou Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), *inter alia*. Nevertheless, Taliban policies on music, as well as other areas such as women’s rights, are among the most restrictive in the entire history of Islam.

<sup>86</sup> On the efforts of Afghan refugee musicians living outside refugee camps to preserve Afghan music in exile, see John Baily, “Music and refugee lives: Afghans in eastern Iran and California,” *Forced Migration Review* 6 (Dec 1999), <http://www.fmreview.org/textOnlyContent/FMR/06/03.htm>> and Nader Farhad, “From Canada to Kabul: Afghan singer [Amir Jan Saboori] seeks to restore music education,” *UNHCR News Stories*, 15 August 2005, <http://www.unhcr.org/430097ac4.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Picture People, “Music in Refugee Camps - Pakistan,” YouTube, posted March 7, 2008, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDDJVTozUfM>>. The camp has since been closed.

## Refugee artists

93. In the previous chapters, we discussed contexts of artistic activity in camps, focusing on artistic participation that is not contingent on individual artistic ability or potential. However, even in camps, some artistic activity is only appropriate for talented and skilled individuals and groups. The following chapter will deal more specifically with refugee artists in camps functioning—or, at least, aspiring to function—on a professional or semi-professional basis.

### Art and alienation

94. Artistic activity and forced migration are no strangers to one another. Considering how ubiquitous the theme of exile has been in literature, music, and other art forms, it is not surprising that many artists through history have created and performed art in ambiguous contexts of alienation. Many of the world's greatest artists have been refugees at some point in their lives, forced to leave their homes by political, social or natural crises or personally and professionally-targeted persecution.

95. Unlike farmers and others whose livelihoods are geographically tied, musicians, visual and literary artists, etc., have nevertheless been able to participate in their profession in exile despite the challenges of their new situations. Numerous European composers, writers, etc., established new careers in North America during the time of Nazi persecution of Jews and others in Europe.<sup>89</sup>

96. Many Congolese musicians fleeing political strife in the 1970s and early 1980s were able to flourish professionally in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and other foreign cities, due to their highly sought-after skills and the regional popularity of the Congolese sound.<sup>90</sup>

97. Similarly, and despite music bans instituted by religious leaders in Afghan refugee camps in the 1980s, refugee Afghan musicians were able to find work performing for Pakistani patrons due to the stylistic sophistication of their Pashtun musical style and the compatibility of their language and music with that of their north-eastern Pakistani neighbors.<sup>91</sup> Other refugee artists have been able to flourish artistically after being resettled, including Winnipeg-based Sudanese rapper and former “Lost Boy” Samuel Mijok Lang, a.k.a. “Hot Dogg.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> See Joseph Horowitz, *Artists in Exile: How Refugees from Twentieth-Century War and Revolution Transformed the American Performing Arts* (New York: Harper, 2008), *inter alia*.

<sup>90</sup> Alex Perullo, “Migration and the Cultural Commodity of Congolese Music in Dar es Salaam, 1975-1985,” *Migration Studies Working Paper Series #34*, Forced Migration Studies Programme (Johannesburg, South Africa: University of Witwatersrand, 2007), 4.

<sup>91</sup> John Baily, “Music and refugee lives: Afghans in eastern Iran and California,” *Forced Migration Review* 6 (Dec 1999), <http://www.fmreview.org/textOnlyContent/FMR/06/03.htm>.

<sup>92</sup> Shelow Hy and Gisèle Nyembwe, “Winnipeg ‘s refugee rapper with a mission,” *UNHCR News Stories*, 14 July 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/487b6c502.html>. Hala Mahmoud’s doctoral dissertation presents the example of Daniel, at the time of the report a

## Professional artists

98. Still, relatively few studies focus on to professional refugee artists in camps. There are several possible reasons for this. Though few statistics are available, trained and skilled artists likely make up a fairly small percentage of people living in camps.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, it would be ingenuous to claim that refugee camps are naturally hospitable environments for artistic creativity, even when time and inactivity are taken into consideration, and the trauma which many refugee artists suffer may render them temporarily or permanently unable or unwilling to pursue their craft.

99. In addition, many reports on artistic activity are produced by NGOs, often in connection with descriptions of programs sponsored by the organization to benefit refugees. Discussions of the arts as a pastime, coping mechanism, tool for personal and communal expression, etc., imply potential accessibility for all, even when such opportunities are practically limited to certain camps and certain groups within camps.

100. It would be understandable for many NGOs to focus their efforts on programs accessible to as wide a range of refugees as possible, and endeavors targeting professional or potentially professional artists may be seen as elitist, restrictive, or even discriminatory. Given the range of pressing needs in any given refugee camp, professional development in a field like the arts—possibly held as making only a marginal developmental impact—may be rather low on the list of priorities. If the arts are to be engaged, better to engage them in an avocational sort of way, such thinking may go, so that everyone can be involved and benefit from the therapeutic power of artistic activity.

101. There may be deeper issues involved, as well. Despite calls to address the waste of human potential that often takes place in camps,<sup>94</sup> the widespread undercurrent in writings on refugee life is that the waste, while lamentable, is an unavoidable part of refugee reality. The camp experience is often perceived as a time

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24-year-old Sudanese artist living and working in Cairo. Though always a painter and musician, Daniel's engagement with art became more professional after he fled to Egypt, and his work has even been exhibited in a Cairo art gallery [Hala W. Mahmoud, "Disrupted Lives and Shattered Dreams: Culture, Identity, and Coping Pathways among Sudanese Refugees in Cairo," PhD dissertation, Faculty of Politics, Psychology, Sociology, and International Studies (PPSIS), (University of Cambridge, 2009), 125]. In addition, some refugees discover their artistic gifts, or develop news ones, in the time-rich context of camp life.

<sup>93</sup> Machiavello provides some data on the previous occupations of refugees in Kampala, Uganda in 2001-2002. However, since artistic activity was not a focus of the research, the data is presented such that it combines artistic professions with other occupations, making it impossible to discern what percentage of refugees in the camp were professional artists before being forced into exile. For example, musicians are grouped with professionals, along with journalists, doctors, lawyers, university lecturers, teachers, economists, and engineers; whereas artists are counted among artisans like electricians, beauticians, and butchers. [Michela Macchiavello, "Forced migrants as an under-utilized asset: refugee skills, livelihoods, and achievements in Kampala, Uganda," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 95 (UNHCR, Oct 2003), Appendix C, 43].

<sup>94</sup> Jeff Crisp, "Mind the Gap! UNHCR, humanitarian assistance and the development process," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 43, UNHCR, May 2001.

out of time, a place that is no place,<sup>95</sup>—a sort of NGO-administered purgatory in which survival and waiting are the sole occupations.

102. Although scholars and NGO policy guidelines increasingly emphasize the importance of cooperation with the refugee communities being served,<sup>96</sup> refugees continue to be perceived as largely passive recipients of aid, dependent on the largesse of host countries and donor organizations, helpless and unable to take care of themselves, let alone contribute to their local and regional communities and economies.

103. The agency which more casual artistic activity suggests—even when initiated and produced by refugees themselves—only moderately tests notions of refugee passivity. Conceptual space remains to dismiss such programs and endeavors as something to keep refugees occupied while they are “warehoused” in limbo,<sup>97</sup> something to prevent them withering away psychosocially and physically.

104. It is nevertheless valuable to reflect upon the role of professional refugee artists in camps. Professional refugee artists provide important examples of refugees actively engaged in productive activity even in the liminal environments of camp. They redefine normalcy rather than merely accepting a suspension of reality, especially in protracted situations that long outlast the immediate aftermath of the humanitarian disasters that initially spawned them. Moreover, due to their training, skill, creativity, ingenuity, and entrepreneurial spirit, they embody a degree of power and agency that many are not accustomed to associating with refugees, thus undermining stereotypes of refugee passivity.

105. Considering the situations of professional refugee artists in camps may also enable humanitarian actors identify ways to foster the development and work of refugee artists. And if we take seriously this relentless continuation of life in camps and the critical importance of the passing present moments, then we must also recognize the possibility that skilled artists in camps can contribute significantly not only to their own psychosocial welfare but also to the cultural and economic wellbeing of their local refugee and host communities, their regions, and the world at large.<sup>98</sup>

106. As barriers to economic and cultural productivity are lifted, refugee artists may then facilitate the establishment of cultural and economic bridges to local host

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<sup>95</sup> “*Kakuma* [the name of a major refugee camp in Kenya] was, we were first told, the Kenyan word for nowhere” [Dave Eggers, *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, A Novel* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 373].

<sup>96</sup> C.f., UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations, UNHCR, May 2006, <http://www.unhcr.org/450e963f2.html>; Gaim Kibreab, “Pulling the Wool over the Eyes of the Strangers: Refugee Deceit and Trickery in Institutionalized Settings,” *Journey of Refugee Studies* 17.1 (2004): 22, 24, -25.

<sup>97</sup> See Crisp, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Although his focus is on economic development and refugees in repatriation and resettlement situations, Jeff Crisp’s words may also bear relevance to refugees in camps: ““While the political climate might not be propitious for such an initiative, it is now time to reconsider the wisdom of using scarce international resources to feed, shelter and generally ‘warehouse’ refugees who are deliberately prevented from establishing livelihoods and becoming self-sufficient [...] the principle [...] that refugees should enjoy productive lives and contribute to the development of the areas where they have settled - could usefully be revived” [Crisp, 19].

communities and vocational bridges to life in the long-term sustainable circumstances of repatriation, assimilation or resettlement.<sup>99</sup>

107. The terms “professional” and “semi-professional” can relate to any number of factors connected with the nature, quality and/or intent of the activity. For the purposes of this study, “professional” artistic activity is that which:

- requires or involves preparation in the form of training, practice, experience, etc.;
- is characterized by the artist’s regular and frequent engagement and a high level of commitment and intentionality;
- is meaningfully connected to the lives and personal identity of those generating it, such that they consider themselves, and may be considered by others, to be artists (musicians, poets, painters, etc.); and/or
- contributes to the local and regional economy and is actually or potentially income generating.

“Semi-professional” activity is that which approaches but has not yet reached professional levels; and is often a developmental stage on the way to professional status.

108. Some artists are trained, experienced, working professionals in their home countries before being forced to flee, as was the case with the Afghan and Congolese musicians cited earlier in this chapter. Others find their gifts emerging within the context of camps; examples include a number of young Palestinian hip-hop and rap artists, like Yassen Qasem (“YaSeen”) and Mohammad Turk (“TNT”) of I-Voice, born and raised in refugee camps in Lebanon, the West Bank, and elsewhere.<sup>100</sup>

109. For others, the distinction is not clear-cut—some may have had a long-standing involvement in artistic activity, but only considered turning their pastime into a profession when compelled by the circumstances of migration to relinquish their primary occupation. For example, Daniel, a Cairo-based Sudanese painter who has always been involved with the arts, became a professional painter only after fleeing his homeland.<sup>101</sup>

110. Still others may be involved in artistic activity in camps with a professional-level commitment, but do not expect to earn a living from the activity—not unlike professional artists in the wider world who must seek external support for their art through grants and “day jobs.” The staff of KANERE, the Kakuma News Reflector—a refugee-run newsblog out of Kakuma Camp, Kenya, that features includes cartoons and poetry alongside journalistic coverage of the camp’s refugee community—work

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<sup>99</sup> See, Michela Macchiavello, “Forced migrants as an under-utilized asset: refugee skills, livelihoods, and achievements in Kampala, Uganda,” *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 95, UNHCR, Oct 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Ray Smith, “Lebanon: Hip-Hop Kindles Hopes in Destroyed Refugee Camp,” *Inter Press Service*, 29 Dec 2009, < <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49838>>.

<sup>101</sup> Hala W. Mahmoud, “Disrupted Lives and Shattered Dreams: Culture, Identity, and Coping Pathways among Sudanese Refugees in Cairo,” PhD dissertation, Faculty of Politics, Psychology, Sociology, and International Studies (PPSIS), (University of Cambridge, 2009), 125.

without pay and at considerable risk to themselves, although some staff members are professionally trained journalists and/or engage in the enterprise with a high level of commitment.

111. There are two primary concerns related specifically to professional artists in camps—obtaining opportunities to engage in their work in a professional, economically-sustainable capacity, and identifying, training, and developing the skills of artists in camps. Those who were artists before arriving in camps have the advantage of having completed their basic training and having ready human capital to engage in productive activity. Their principle needs are for support for their entrepreneurial ventures, whether assembling fellow artists for creative collaborations, acquiring the materials and equipment needed to practice their profession, obtaining performance/presentation opportunities, or devising methods to monetize their efforts.

### Some examples

112. A prominent example is Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars, a band founded in the Kalia Refugee Camp, Guinea, by musicians Reuben Koroma, Efuah Grace Ampomah, and Francis “Franco” John Langbo, all forced out of Sierra Leone when the violent civil strife reached the capital of Freetown.<sup>102</sup> The three began playing together, “just for fun.”<sup>103</sup>

113. After intense violence spilled over into Guinea and NGO activity was suspended for months, the three were relocated to the more secure Sembakounya Refugee Camp, where they met Abdul Rahim Kamara (“Arahim,” or “Jah Voice”), a former teacher, Mohammed Bangura, a former taxi driver, and young Alhadji Jeffrey Kamara (“Black Nature”), and the group accordingly expanded. They played music together to work through their trauma—all members had witnessed or suffered horrifying atrocities during the war—and to lift the spirits of their fellow refugee.

114. The band chose a name—the Refugee All Stars—and developed a reputation in the camp. The Refugee All Stars came to the attention of the UNHCR; staff members put the band in touch with French Canadian NGO CECI (Centre for International Studies and Cooperation), which helped them acquire further instruments and a sound system.<sup>104</sup>

115. With the help of UNHCR official and music advocate Alphonse Munyaneza, they became the subject of an award winning documentary, “Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars,” which helped catapult them to international fame. The UNHCR also provided full logistical support for a tour of refugee camps, as well as a trip back to Freetown to record their first album after the end of the war. The journey to Freetown, documented in the film, was part of the UNHCR’s “go and see” campaign to convince refugees that Freetown was safe enough for repatriation. The

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<sup>102</sup> “About the Band,” *Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars: Documentary Film*, <<http://www.refugeestars.org/about/about-the-band/>>.

<sup>103</sup> Rupert Colville, “Cinderellas of Reggae: The incredible story of the Refugee All Stars of Sierra Leone,” *Refugees* 146.2 (2007): 27.

<sup>104</sup> “Cinderellas of Reggae,” 28; “About the Band.”



bandmembers have since returned to Freetown, and maintain a busy touring schedule; they have also released a second album.<sup>105</sup>

116. The Refugee All Stars have developed a signature stylistic mix, including elements of reggae, rap, Afropop, and traditional “goombay” music from Sierra Leone. Their music is uplifting and rhythmically engaging, while their lyrics call listeners’ attention to serious subjects such as the difficulties of refugee life (including their signature song, “Living Like a Refugee”), and the arms trade, malaria, AIDS, and global warming.<sup>106</sup>

117. However, though they represent the voice of a marginalized population—refugees—there is nevertheless a strongly mainstream quality about them. Their documentary has appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show, they have performed with American rock group Aerosmith; they have enjoyed supportive relationships with NGOs and have cooperated successfully with the UNHCR and other organizations for humanitarian causes.

118. Other professional artists have developed their craft closer to the fringes, including many of the hip-hop artists who have emerged from the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon, the West Bank, and other areas in recent years. Historically speaking, hip-hop has always been the art of resistance, the music of the disenfranchised, since its beginnings among African American urban youth.<sup>107</sup>

119. In the Middle Eastern context, groups such as “I-Voice,” “Katibe 5” and “Ramallah Underground” have provided a voice for a generation of young Palestinians frustrated and disillusioned by the failure of international leaders, NGOs, local political heroes, etc., to address either the fundamental issues or the daily challenges of the Palestinian situation.

120. At the same time, many have sought to use their music as a means of creating hope in the midst of the seemingly hopeless intractability of their plight. Drawing on traditional Palestinian narrative and musical traditions as well as Western hip-hop and rap genres, these artists strive to express not only the violence around them but also the beauty of their culture and the possibilities for the future. I-voice, for example, emphasizes the importance of education. They consider themselves community activists, performing at schools and social events and taking advantage of the cache they have among children and youth to encourage them to stay in school and complete their education. As YaSeen explains, “We try to say to kids that it is not Israel or the United States that is the enemy. Ignorance is your enemy.”<sup>108</sup>

121. In some cases, NGOs in camps have supported the work of hip-hop artists. The Danish Centre for Culture and Development (DCCD) has even funded workshops for budding rappers and hip-hop musicians in Lebanon, and, partnering with the UNRWA, in Jordan.<sup>109</sup> Yet NGOs themselves are not immune from hip-hop

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<sup>105</sup> “Cinderellas of Reggae,” 28-31, “About the Band.”

<sup>106</sup> Sebastian Perry, “Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars; Jazz Café, London [Concert Review],” *Music-News.com*, <http://music-news.com/ShowReview.asp?nReviewID=2382&nType=2&>

<sup>107</sup> “Lebanon: Hip-Hop Kindles Hopes.”

<sup>108</sup> Rasmus Bogeskov Larsen, “In Lebanon refugee camp, ‘hip-hop is a school,’” *The Electronic Intifada*, 15 January 2010, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/lebanon-refugee-camp-hip-hop-school/8626>.

<sup>109</sup> E.g., see Dave Stelfox, “Hip-hop workshops for refugees in Jordan,” *The National*, 8 Oct 2010, <<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/music/hip-hop-workshops-for-refugees-in->

critique, as in some of the songs of Katibe 5 which point out corruption within ostensibly benign NGOs and humanitarian organizations.<sup>110</sup>

### Developing artists

122. Occasional visits from foreign artists, like the hip-hop workshop mentioned above, provide one means for rising artists to receive training. After visiting the Dadaab Camps of Kenya, the Japanese music duo Yuzu was so impressed by the musical talent encountered that they spearheaded the Camp Beat Competition, co-sponsored by UNHCR in Kenya, UNHCR for Japan, and FilmAid International. In addition to showcasing the young people of Dadaab, the competition aimed to increase international awareness of the issue of refugees and to raise funds toward education in the camps.

123. Three finalists were chosen, given musical coaching, and taken to Nairobi to record their music and make music videos. By the fall of 2010, a winner had been selected—the Golden Blue Girls, from Dagahaley Camp in Dadaab—and \$200,000 had been raised from the Japanese public to rehabilitate the infrastructure of schools in Dadaab.<sup>111</sup> It is not clear, however, whether this competition will be repeated so as to provide recurring opportunities for other refugees to obtain training and professional exposure or will remain a one-time event.

124. These opportunities are not limited to musicians. American painter Sally Lincoln visited the Kakuma Camps in 2009; in addition to painting portraits for a project on people facing identity transitions, she conducted daily drawing lessons open to all interested refugees. Although only able to remain for 3 weeks, Smith was impressed by the progress her pupils made, ranging from young children to adults with previous professional artistic experience. “For the world of art, Kakuma is an enormous hidden opportunity,” she explains. “I believe that the world’s refugee camps could produce the next generation of great artists.”<sup>112</sup>

125. More sustained opportunities for the training and development of artists also exist. As discussed in previous chapters, recreational music and art lessons are among the activities available to young people at some community centers and after-school programs in refugee camps. Less common, however, are programs dedicated to developing artists to a professional standard. In recent years, alongside the rise of hip-hop groups on the streets of Palestinian camps, more formally organized schools for Western classical music have also emerged, especially in the West Bank.

126. These West Bank schools are, in a sense, an extension of the idea of a recreation center, but with a greater sense of purpose. Many are funded by foreign governments, local foundations, and the Palestinian Authority, and have been championed by prominent figures such as Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said. A

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jordan?pageCount=0>; “Video: Young refugees spin tunes in Jordan,” *UNRWA News Articles*, 5 Oct 2010, <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=818>.

<sup>110</sup> Caroline Curran, “Beirut’s Katibe 5 gives voice to refugee resistance,” *Daily News Egypt*, 7 Jan 2011, <<http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/music/beirut-katibe-5-gives-voice-to-refugee-resistance.html>>.

<sup>111</sup> Ojunga, np; Film Aid, np.

<sup>112</sup> “An Artist’s View of Kakuma Refugee Camp,” *KANERE: Kakuma News Reflector*, 28 Feb 2009, <http://kakuma.wordpress.com/2009/02/28/an-artists-view-of-kakuma-refugee-camp/>>.

number of Palestinian students from these schools have been sent on to Europe and the United States to continue their studies.<sup>113</sup>

127. The music schools are not immune from controversy. Administrators explain that some traditional Palestinian families have balked at sending their children to music school out of concern over the co-educational, mixed-gender learning context. Others are skeptical about the value of embracing Western music, although some Palestinian music teachers describe their endeavors as methods of “resisting the occupation.” Still others fear that such schools may encourage collaboration with Israelis.

128. In March of 2009, Wafaa Younis, an Israeli Arab violin teacher, was temporarily banned from a refugee camp in Jenin when authorities discovered that her music students had performed for Holocaust survivors in Israel.<sup>114</sup> The concert was retroactively condemned as serving “enemy interests.” Ironically, the classical musical activities among Palestinians has received little attention in Israel. According to Noam Ben-Zeev, music critic for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, “We cannot perceive [Palestinians] as people who have their own cultural lives.” Younis has since resurrected her music program, called “Strings of Freedom.”<sup>115</sup>

129. The artistic renaissance among Palestinian refugees is not without danger, either. A music school in Gaza was heavily damaged during the fierce fighting in late 2008. The Jenin branch of the Al Kamandjati (“the Violinist”) music school, founded by Palestinian violist Ramzi Aburedwan, was firebombed in March 2009, just a month before the school was scheduled to move to larger facilities across town. Despite lingering damage, the school was reopened within days of the attack, and the move to the new conservatory facility proceeded successfully.<sup>116</sup>

130. There has been no such happy ending in the case of Juliano Mer-Khamis, the Israeli-Palestinian actor and co-founder of the Freedom Theater in Jenin Refugee Camp who was shot down in front of the theatre facilities on 4 April 2011. The Freedom Theatre, co-founded in 2006 with former Palestinian militant leader Zacharia Zubeidi, is only professional arts center in northern West Bank. It oversees professional acting and filmmaking schools, runs programs of arts activities for children and youth, and presents theatre performances to capacity audiences from both Palestinian territories and Israel.

131. Despite the tensions in Jenin, a town more famous as for suicide bombers than cultural superstars, Mer-Khamis and his colleagues have not shied away from pushing the limits in their efforts to provide young Palestinians with constructive tools for expression, resistance and socio-political change. Genders are not segregated in activities, and both girls and boys are given opportunities onstage,

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<sup>113</sup> Daniel J. Wakin, “Minuets, Sonatas and Politics in the West Bank,” *New York Times*, 31 May 2009, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/01/arts/music/01dali.html?\\_r=3&sq=kamandjati&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/01/arts/music/01dali.html?_r=3&sq=kamandjati&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all)>.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Adigal, “‘We are Muslims. God created us to have good lives, not to stop it.’ Wafa Younis, music teacher and conductor,” *History and Violins: Classical Music In Palestinian Life* [Blog], 14 July 2009, <<http://historyviolins.blogspot.com/>>.

<sup>116</sup> “Opening the music center in Jenin,” Al Kamandjati online news release, 29 April 2010, <<http://www.alkamandjati.com/en/news/119-opening-the-music-center-in-jenin-alkamandjati.html>>.

practices unpopular among some traditional Muslim Palestinians. In a 2009 stage production of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, some children wore masks portraying pigs – animals forbidden in Islam – and spoke some lines in Hebrew.

132. The Freedom Theatre's adaptation of the play, originally a satirical look at socialism, reinterpreted it as a critique of Palestinian politics. In January of 2011, the theatre presented a play version of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, dealing with issues including freedom of expression and movement, and women's rights.<sup>117</sup> Mer-Khamis himself, born in Nazareth to a Jewish mother and a Christian Arab Palestinian father, struggled in vain to be fully accepted by either side of the divide, though he considered himself "100% Jewish and 100% Palestinian."<sup>118</sup>

133. Since the theatre's establishment in 2006, it had been firebombed twice; Mer-Khamis himself had received death threats and had his car window smashed. Nevertheless, the theatre had strong support among many in the Jenin community, and Mer-Khamis' assassination has been deeply mourned locally as well as internationally.<sup>119</sup>

### Leadership roles

134. Many former and current refugee artists have taken on leadership roles in camps. Ramzi Aburedwan, mentioned above as founder of the Al Kamandjati music schools, was born in Bethehem and raised in Al Amari refugee camp in Ramallah, West Bank. A photograph of him as child, poised to hurl a stone at Israeli forces during the First Intifada, became an iconic image of Palestinian resistance.<sup>120</sup> Less than ten years later, Aburedwan met Mohammed Fadel, a Palestinian professor of music, who introduced him to the viola.

135. Deflected from the likely path of a militant, Aburedwan worked with teachers locally and made rapid progress on the instrument despite his relatively advanced age for musical study. After attending a summer music program in the United States, he obtained an opportunity to study at the conservatory in Angers, France. Upon completing his studies, he chose to return to the camps of the West Bank, rather than continuing his career in Europe, in order to establish the Al Kamandjati music schools in 2002.

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<sup>117</sup> Harriet Sherwood, "Jenin's 'Alice' plays to packed audiences: West Bank city's Freedom Theatre stages unconventional adaptation of Lewis Carroll novel," *The Guardian*, Blogpost, 26 Jan 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/view-from-jerusalem-with-harriet-sherwood/2011/jan/26/theatre-palestinian-territories>>.

<sup>118</sup> Rachel Shabi, "Juliano Mer-Khamis Obituary," *The Guardian*, 11 April 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/apr/11/juliano-mer-khamis-obituary>>.

<sup>119</sup> Rachel Shabi, "Juliano Mer-Khamis Obituary," *The Guardian*, 11 April 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/apr/11/juliano-mer-khamis-obituary>; "[Obituary:] Juliano Mer-Khamis," *The Economist*, 14 April 2011, [http://www.economist.com/node/18557289?story\\_id=18557289&fsrc=rss&utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+economist%2Ffull\\_print\\_edition+%28The+Economist%3A+Full+print+edition%29](http://www.economist.com/node/18557289?story_id=18557289&fsrc=rss&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+economist%2Ffull_print_edition+%28The+Economist%3A+Full+print+edition%29).

<sup>120</sup> Dion Nissenbaum, "Palestinian icon trades violence for violins," Checkpoint Jerusalem [blog], 24 Dec 2008, <<http://blogs.mcclatchydc.com/jerusalem/2008/12/palestinian-icon-trades-violence-for-violins.html>>.

136. According to Aburedwan, "through music, you can make from negative energy, positive energy, and that's what I do."<sup>121</sup> Danger and controversy notwithstanding, Al Kamandjati schools—including branches in refugee camps and villages in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon—have over 500 students, with hundreds more on waiting lists.<sup>122</sup>

137. YaSeen and TNT of I-Voice also consider themselves as much community activists as musicians. Their music has brought them a devoted following among young Palestinians, and they have taken chosen to use this fame to promote the importance of education. In addition to playing concerts in the Middle East and abroad, they perform at local schools and social events, encouraging children and youth to stay in school and complete their education. As YaSeen explains, "We try to say to kids that it is not Israel or the United States that is the enemy. Ignorance is your enemy."<sup>123</sup>

## Conclusion

138. Aside from a few superstars and "Cinderella" stories, professional artists in refugee camps have received relatively little media attention. Yet a study of artistic activity in camps would be incomplete without considering the important contribution such artists make. Their successes challenge the assumption that time spent in refugee camps cannot be productive. In displaying their power as creative agents, they undermine stereotypes of refugees as passive and needy, drains on host communities with nothing worthwhile to contribute to society.

139. Some refugee artists have used their skills to bridge the divide between refugee and host communities by seeking artistic employment outside camps. Others have served as mentors and leaders within refugee camps. Policies restricting refugee mobility, employment, remuneration, etc., isolate artists and prevent them not only from practicing their professions but also from contributing to the economic, social, and cultural development of the regions in which they live. Consequently, artists in refugee camps have a great deal more potential as bridges connecting communities within and beyond camp walls than has thus far been utilized.

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<sup>121</sup> Sandy Tolan, "Ramzi's Story: Laying Down Stones, Picking Up Instruments," NPR, 10 July 2010, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128385513>>.

<sup>122</sup> Project History, "Al Kamandjati [School Website], <<http://www.alkamandjati.com/en/project/history/>>.

<sup>123</sup> Rasmus Bogeskov Larsen, "In Lebanon refugee camp, 'hip-hop is a school,'" *The Electronic Intifada*, 15 January 2010, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/lebanon-refugee-camp-hip-hop-school/8626>.

## Implications for humanitarian actors

140. What bearing does a survey of artistic activity in refugee camps have on the practical work of humanitarian actors, in the broad sense of the term? Whether they are refugees themselves, non-refugee individuals, or representatives of NGOs, those concerned about addressing the refugee crises have much to gain from considering both the potential and the limitations of artistic activity. They may come to the question from at least two different perspectives:

- those who are aware of or have skill in particular art forms/activities (music, poetry, dance, painting, filmmaking, etc.) and are interested in exploring how these skills may become tools to promote human flourishing and positive change among refugees in camps; or
- those who are aware of a particular problem (e.g., HIV/AIDS, malaria, SGBV) and are interested in exploring what options, including creative artistic methods, may be available to help combat the problem.

141. Although the two categories are not mutually exclusive, people in the first category are often professional artists, or artistically inclined, and are seeking greater significance for their artistic vocation. Examples include drama and music therapists, as well as artists who visit camps and try to use their craft for the good of the refugees they meet.<sup>125</sup>

142. Some establish long-term artistic engagement with people in camps, often as teachers and/or through arts centers in camps. Others – often themselves refugees or former refugees – promote the cause of refugees and draw attention to concerns relevant to refugees through their art, providing a forum for expression and working to raise awareness in the wider world of the crises brewing within the walls of the camp.

143. Despite the importance of artistic skill and experience, humanitarian engagement in artistic activity need not be limited to people with backgrounds as professional artists. Humanitarian actors with little or no artistic background have adopted the use of artistic activity as part of campaign to tackle particular issues (social, economic, public health, etc.). Their primary point of entry is concern about the specific problem they are confronting, and the artistic activity component has resulted principally from creative problem-solving to identify the most effective methods among those realistically available, rather than a marked desire to promote the arts *per se*.

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<sup>125</sup> American painter Sally Lincoln, the Japanese musicians of Yuzu, and Ecuadorian actor Roberto Manrique are among the examples mentioned in this study [C.f., An Artist's View of Kakuma Refugee Camp," *KANERE: Kakuma News Reflector*, 28 Feb 2009, <http://kakuma.wordpress.com/2009/02/28/an-artists-view-of-kakuma-refugee-camp/>]; Maureen Ojunga, "The Camp Beat competition for youth at Dadaab," *Capital Lifestyle*, 27 May 2010; Sonia Aguilar, "Q&A: Ecuadorian soap star supports Colombian refugees," UNHCR News Stories, 8 Sept 2010].

144. Noe Sebisaba's Stop SIDA organization is a one such example. Sebisaba worked previously as a government administrator and a teacher in a refugee camp school before founding the organization. Nevertheless, he and his colleagues have successfully incorporated artistic methods such as songs, dances, skits, posters, film, etc., in their efforts to dispel stigmas surrounding those infected with HIV and inform others how to prevent infection.<sup>126</sup>

145. Regardless of their initial perspective, humanitarian workers should take into account several characteristics of artistic activity relevant to refugee camps. Much of the value of artistic activity for positive social change lies in the fact that artistic activity is especially well-suited to:

- facilitating participatory action;
- reaching a broad audience;
- engaging difficult or taboo subjects that cannot be approached directly;
- creating bridges; and
- improvising creatively within limited budgets.

146. At the same time, artistic activity can easily fail to fulfill its potential positive value if the ambiguity, multidimensionality and limitations of its power are not taken seriously. Humanitarian actors must be aware of the following caveats:

- artistic communication can be a powerful tool, whether for good or for ill.
- artistic activity relates to all layers of life, and thus brings to the fore the underlying power dynamics of any given situation.
- artistic activity is not a quick fix for deeply imbedded problems, nor is it a panacea.

### **Artistic activity and participatory action**

147. The trend among refugee NGOs has been to advocate for the idea of participatory approaches to humanitarian interventions, including incorporating the perspective of the communities being served, involving recipients in the delivery of assistance, and supporting refugee agency.<sup>127</sup> The rationale for participatory

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<sup>126</sup> Noe Sebisaba, Miia Hanninen, Kassim Mustafa, Lars Johansson, *Love in a time of AIDS: The story of Noe Sebisaba and Stop-SIDA* (Kanembwa and Nduta Refugee Camps, Western Tanzania: Maweni Farm and Stop-SIDA Nkebure Uwumva for Tanganyika Christian Refugee Services and UNHCR, 2005), <<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5174670791673980288#>>. Although not specifically related to refugee camps, the story of Principal Desmond Mabuya's campaign to establish a music program for his New Nation School in Johannesburg, South Africa is instructive. The school's students, both refugees and South Africans, come from largely disadvantaged backgrounds in which they have experienced severe traumas. The school cannot afford the necessary trauma counseling, and many students were limited in their ability to learn because of their psychosocial health. However, Mabuya explains, "what we realised is that when they beat upon a makeshift instrument or create a lyric or two, their outlook on life changes. It is like music is the key to opening up and releasing the burdens their young hearts hold, so this is important to me." Mabuya and his colleagues conceived the idea to establish a music program in the school, since "it is music that has a way of reaching into their innermost parts, soothing away the pain or exorcising what demons are lurking in the depths of their being. This is why my children need that music class and I will not rest until I have it" [Pumla Rulashe, "Music key to helping Johannesburg' refugee students, says Goodwill Ambassador Henricks," UNHCR News Stories, 23 September 2004, <<http://www.unhcr.org/4152f3934.html>>].

<sup>127</sup> UNHCR Mission Statement. "UNHCR's 'Medium-term plan for 2002-2005' stresses that '[in] the provision of ... assistance, UNHCR's concerns are that assistance, where possible, is delivered in such a

approaches is compelling. By making use of the critical yet often overlooked insights of refugees themselves, they are based on assessments which provide a full picture of the situation.

148. In treating refugees as partners, such programs protect against infractions against the dignity and human rights of those being served. Operationally, they tend to ensure more successful outcomes, establishing refugee ownership of programs and increasing the likelihood of sustainability and cost-effectiveness.<sup>128</sup>

149. In reality, however, actual refugee participation is rarely achieved to any significant degree, for various bureaucratic and other reasons.<sup>129</sup> Such entrenched policies and mindsets may be difficult to undo on a large scale. Nevertheless, individual programs – especially experimental ones – may be more amenable to fresh approaches.

150. Artistic activity is one realm in which participatory methods fit fairly naturally. Participation requires agency on the part of those participating, and the status of an artist (whether professionally or recreationally-oriented) or audience member automatically confers a certain agency. The artist has at least some degree of control over the activity; and even the seemingly passive audience member has control over his or her response to and opinion of the performance.

151. Participation also requires attention. Few things can draw and maintain an avid crowd as easily as street theatre, a dance or musical performance, a painter at work, a storyteller. The entertaining element and broad appeal of artistic activity, especially in the often aesthetically challenging framework of refugee camps, makes it relatively easy to garner immediate interest.

152. Participation requires a collaborative forum. Although some artistic activities are naturally solitary, many are structurally collaborative. Many lend themselves easily to inviting participation not only in the planning process but also in the context of performance. Examples include participatory drama, ensemble music-

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way that it involves the recipients.' (EC/50/SC/CRP.4). There is also a move within UNHCR to adopt a community development approach to refugee situations." Cited in Arafat Jamal, "Minimum standards and essential needs in a protracted refugee situation: A review of the UNHCR programme in Kakuma, Kenya," UNHCR, Geneva, EPAU/2000/05, November 2000, 23, 23n41. See, also, the 2007 *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations*, which include "participation" and "building on available resources and capacities" among its core principles (9-10). See also, *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*, UNHCR, May 2006, <http://www.unhcr.org/450e963f2.html>; *Operational Protection in Camps and Settlements: A reference guide of good practices in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern*, UNHCR, 2006, 16-19.

<sup>128</sup> *Operational Protection in Camps and Settlements: A reference guide of good practices in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern* (UNHCR, 2006), 16-19, 121-124; Gaim Kibreab, "The Consequences of Non-participatory Planning: Lessons from a Livestock Provision Project to Returnees in Eritrea," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12.2 (1999): 135-136, 158. Note, for example, the deliberately participatory method which Sara Green adopted in spearheading an Intergenerational Arts Project (IAP) in the camps of Mae Hong, Thailand, discussed in Chapter Three (above, p. 36). Although the IAP Committee of refugees relied on support from various NGOs, the community was deeply involved in every step of the process, and their interests largely shaped the program. The segments of the project in which refugees themselves had the most authority and ownership seemed to function most effectively, and the project became self-sustaining [Sara Green, "Art for Refugees in Transition Journal," Feb 2003-Feb 2004, *Art for Refugees*, <http://www.artforrefugees.org/journals.html>].

<sup>129</sup> Gaim Kibreab, "Pulling the Wool over the Eyes of the Strangers: Refugee Deceit and Trickery in Institutionalized Settings," *Journey of Refugee Studies* 17.1 (2004): 22, 24,-25; Kibreab, "The Consequences of Non-participatory Planning," 135-136, 155-156.



making, group dances, artistic collectives. Yet even solitary art forms are inherently social, in that they establish conversation, elicit responses, and create a network of communication. Artistic activity creates a society, and responds to and through the society in which it is created and rendered.

153. Participation also requires deep engagement. The responses which artistic activity elicits are often profound, tapping into the “innermost parts,” including and beyond verbal communication.<sup>130</sup> This is especially true when individuals and communities resonate particularly with a certain type of art, be it traditional music or dance, literature in their native language, or artistic genres borrowed from other cultures which nevertheless provide a fresh means for authentic self-expression.

### **Artistic activity and breadth of communication**

154. Humanitarian actors in refugee camps also face the difficulty of reaching a broad and diverse audience, as refugees in any given camp may come from various walks of life, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. Artistic activity can appeal to people of different backgrounds and ethnicities, drawing them together despite cultural differences.

155. As a means of communication, artistic activities can enable the dissemination of messages on a variety of levels: conscious, subconscious, visual, verbal, aesthetic, kinesthetic, etc. This range of options makes communication richer, more likely to stick in the mind of the target audience, and more likely to produce constructive behavior change when needed.<sup>131</sup>

156. Such methods also open up communication to people at different levels of literacy. Numerous agency guidelines state that information, education and communication materials should be available in forms appropriate for all education levels, ranging from literate to illiterate.<sup>132</sup> Songs, drama, drawing, and other non-literary art forms enable people with limited literacy to participate fully as artists and audience members, conveying valuable information in ways that are immediately accessible.

### **Artistic activity and taboos**

157. Another challenge to addressing refugee concerns in the culturally diverse contexts of refugee camps is the fact that many important subjects are highly sensitive or deemed inappropriate to speak of in public. Participation is of limited

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<sup>130</sup> Pumla Rulashe, “Music key to helping Johannesburg’ refugee students, says Goodwill Ambassador Henricks,” UNHCR News Stories, 23 September 2004, <http://www.unhcr.org/4152f3934.html>; See, also, fn 65-68 above, on arts and psychosocial therapy.

<sup>131</sup> See discussion in Chapter Three (above) on Information Dissemination and Behavior Change Communication (BCC).

<sup>132</sup> E.g., HIV/AIDS Unit. “Behavioral Surveillance Survey among Refugees and Surrounding Host Community: Jhapa and Morang districts, Nepal,” UNHCR, Nov 2005, 35-36; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations*, 2007, 163-166, <<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/products>>; Inter-agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies*, 2005, 77, <<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-products-products&productcatid=3>>.

value if the subjects that need to be discussed cannot be aired in an open forum. In some cases, such as HIV/AIDS awareness or SGBV, social stigmas can prevent important, often life-saving information from being accurately disseminated or making a discernible impact on behaviors. Yet whether the obstacle to communication is individual trauma or social taboo, a counterproductive communications shut-down may occur if the obstacles are disregarded and sensitive subjects are haphazardly thrust into the light of day.

158. Here, again, artistic activity can be of immense help in approaching such subjects effectively, without bulldozing over cultural norms or personal capacities. For as long as human cultures have existed, they have used art to express the otherwise inexpressible. Metaphor—whether verbal, visual, or otherwise—myth, poetry, objective narrative, all provide indirect ways to express subjective truths. What we cannot say about ourselves or our situations, we may be able to depict, or sing, or dance, or attribute to fictional characters.

159. As we discussed in a previous chapter, arts therapists know this, and have adapted artistic activity for therapeutic treatment. Behavior change communication campaigns have also adopted artistic methods to draw sensitive subjects out of obscurity in order to address vital concerns. Sebisaba's Stop SIDA organization, discussed earlier, epitomizes such an approach.<sup>133</sup>

160. Another example is Struggle for Change (SACH), a Pakistan-based NGO which works with Afghan refugees, using theatre. As part of the 2008 global "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence" campaign, SACH staged a drama performance for refugees in Losar Sharfu village, Punjab province. According to Executive Director Khalida Salami, "Domestic violence is a sensitive issue and we can get into trouble if we approach it directly. Theatre is a tool to raise awareness in a way that is easy to understand for the Afghan community."

161. The play presented how two different men responded to losing their business—one calmly, the other with violence toward his innocent wife. Out of sensitivity to cultural norms of the Afghan community, the domestic drama was enacted for an all-male audience, with an all-male cast—including the character of the burqa-draped wife. Audience members responded well to the message of the play, and SACH had plans to present similar plays for all-female audiences to inform them of their rights within their families and communities.<sup>134</sup> It is not clear to what extent such plays deal with the root causes of gender-based violence, presenting the issue in public may be at least a first step toward addressing it effectively.

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<sup>133</sup> Noe Sebisaba, Miia Hanninen, Kassim Mustafa, Lars Johansson, *Love in a time of AIDS: The story of Noe Sebisaba and Stop-SIDA* (Kanembwa and Nduta Refugee Camps, Western Tanzania: Maweni Farm and Stop-SIDA Nkebure Uwumva for Tanganyika Christian Refugee Services and UNHCR, 2005), <<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5174670791673980288#>>. See discussion in Chapter Four about a Stop-SIDA drama depicting a pastor infected with HIV (p. 36, above).

<sup>134</sup> Shahzad, Asif. "16 Days of Activism: Play seeks to broach taboo of domestic violence." UNHCR News Stories, 3 December 2008. <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4936a6d84&query=teacher%20and%20drama>>.

## Artistic activity and bridge-building

162. The sense of the suspension of life in camps feeds into isolation of individuals and units within camps, and especially between the world of the camp and the world beyond its borders. As the discussions above have indicated, the arts can serve as bridges within camps, between artists and audience and across lines of literacy, social taboo, etc. But larger scale bridges are also needed to span the chasms of tension and mistrust between refugee camps and host communities, and between refugees and the wider world. Artistic activity may be valuable in these contexts, as well.

163. Local integration seems to have become a less popular option since the advent of the refugee camp as the default response to refugee crises. Ethnic difference, mutual suspicion, negative stereotypes, and competition for limited international aid can severely erode relations between refugee populations and the communities that grant them refuge. Especially in situation in which host countries are already struggling economically, incoming international aid that is restricted to refugees can cause resentment among local people in need to whom comparable assistance from their own government is denied.<sup>135</sup>

164. In some cases, refugees have used artistic activity as a means to make meaningful connections to host communities. We have discussed earlier how, in the 1980s, Congolese and Afghan musicians, known for their skill and thus highly prized in their respective regions, found work despite their refugee status by performing for patrons in neighboring countries.<sup>136</sup> In the mid-1990s, students at refugee-run Somali school in Yemen presented a Somali Cultural Festival not only for fellow refugees but also for parents, students and staff of a nearby Yemeni school.<sup>137</sup>

165. Other examples exist, but there remains much further scope for the expansion of such interactions, including cultural exchanges and artistic collaborations between artists from refugee and host communities. Such cooperative ventures may bring people into non-combative contact, begin the process of changing attitudes and allaying mutual suspicion. In the long run, such contact may lay the groundwork for pursuing mutual economic interests as well as social and cultural enrichment.

166. Artistic activity may also help connect refugees in camps to the world at large. The isolation resulting from the material poverty, geographic remoteness, and psychosocial conditions experienced in most refugee camps makes it easy for refugees to feel that they are forgotten by the outside world. And despite the efforts of many host communities to maintain camps as prominent reminders to the

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<sup>135</sup> Ekuru Aukot, "It Is Better to Be a Refugee Than a Turkana in Kakuma': Revisiting the Relationship between Hosts and Refugees in Kenya," *Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees* 21.3 (2003) 73-83, <<http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/refuge/article/view/23482>>.

<sup>136</sup> Alex Perullo, "Migration and the Cultural Commodity of Congolese Music in Dar es Salaam, 1975-1985," *Migration Studies Working Paper Series* #34, Forced Migration Studies Programme (Johannesburg, South Africa: University of Witwatersrand, 2007), 4; John Baily, "Music and refugee lives: Afghans in eastern Iran and California," *Forced Migration Review* 6 (Dec 1999), <http://www.fmreview.org/textOnlyContent/FMR/06/03.htm>.

<sup>137</sup> Helen Gezelius, *Refugee-Run Education: The Somali Refugee Primary School in the Republic of Yemen* (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen-Swedish Save the Children, 1996), 19.

international community, it is all too easy for refugees to fall under the radar of international awareness.<sup>138</sup>

167. Engagement in artistic activity is itself a connection to normal life, to life as it is lived everywhere. In some cases, refugees involved in the arts are reestablishing their links to their own traditional cultures, links that may have been damaged in the process of migration. In other cases, the connection is more general; artistic activity may connect refugees to a world of beauty to which they have limited access in circumscribed world of the camp.

168. As Palestinian refugee and dancer Manar Faraj explains, "the best moment is when we stand onstage feeling the wood under our feet, with our legs and hands ready and the people out there [...] We are thinking, 'Look, we are here; we are doing something. In the camp we may be dirty and poor, but inside, I feel shiny and rich.'"<sup>139</sup> In still other cases, artistic activity can help prepare refugees for life beyond camps, whether enabling them to cope psychosocially so that they can proceed to whatever opportunities become available in and beyond the camps, or, more rarely, developing their skills for a profession in the arts.<sup>140</sup>

169. From the perspective of the world, the artistic activity of refugees may help draw attention to the refugee crisis, as it competes with other humanitarian concerns for media attention. Articles and refugee profiles presented on the websites of the UNHCR, UNRWA, and other organizations, help highlight both the continuing predicament and the human dimensions of the situation.

170. Those which present refugees as culturally productive, artistic people may be particularly effective in putting a "human face" on otherwise faceless statistics. Such stories are catchy, uplifting, and appealing to readers, depicting refugees as heroes and heroines who overcome obstacles to the fulfillment of their human dignity and cultural worth, and thus challenging dominant narratives and mono-dimensional stereotyped notions of refugees in camps.

171. Even more powerfully than media reports are actual personal experiences of the artistic activity of refugees. It is no surprise that celebrations of World Refugee Day, designed to raise global awareness of the international refugee crisis, invariably feature a significant artistic component.<sup>141</sup> The City of Sanctuary movement in the UK has used artistic means such as dance and music concerts and story events to

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<sup>138</sup> Arafat Jamal, "Camps and freedoms: long-term refugee situations in Africa," *Forced Migration Review* 16 (Jan 2003): 6.

<sup>139</sup> Chiori Santiago, "Palestine embodied: teens from Dheisheh refugee camp dance their experience." *Dance Magazine*, 1 December 2003, available online at: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1083/is\\_12\\_77/ai\\_111979431/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1083/is_12_77/ai_111979431/). C.f., Daniel J. Wakin, "Minuets, Sonatas and Politics in the West Bank," *New York Times*, 31 May 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/01/arts/music/01dali.html?\\_r=3&sq=kamandjati&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/01/arts/music/01dali.html?_r=3&sq=kamandjati&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all): "Despite the opposition of some, many Palestinians see the study of Western classical music – part of a broader cultural revival in the West Bank – as a source of hope, a way to connect to the outer world from a hemmed-in and controlled existence, particularly at a time when hope for a Palestinian state seems ever more distant."

<sup>140</sup> E.g., Rupert Colville, "Cinderellas of Reggae: The incredible story of the Refugee All Stars of Sierra Leone," *Refugees* 146.2 (2007): 28.

<sup>141</sup> E.g., Leo Dobbs, "As World Refugee Day gets under way, UNHCR appeals for the displaced," *UNHCR News Stories*, 20 June 2010, <[www.unhcr.org/4c1e47006.html](http://www.unhcr.org/4c1e47006.html)>.

enable refugees and resettlement communities to enjoy cultural exchanges and communicate their experiences to one another.<sup>142</sup>

172. Artistic work by refugees can also act as ambassadors to the international community. Presentations of refugee poetry, music, visual art, etc., across the world can draw on the connectivity of the arts to bring home to international audiences the plight of refugees, while reminding audiences of the valuable contributions of refugees as cultural actors.<sup>143</sup> The more such events can showcase the artistic agency of refugees themselves—including those still or recently living in camps—the more refugees are enabled to be active agents in their own development, restoring their dignity and inspiring others to respect their worth and recognize their rightful place in the world.

### **Artistic activity and cost-effectiveness**

173. It is, of course, impossible to quantify the benefits of artistic activity for refugees in camps. When incorporating artistic activity into humanitarian programs with particular goals, such as providing psychosocial support, improving the effectiveness of educational systems, disseminating information and changing attitudes about public health concerns, etc., it may be possible to consider the costs of comparable alternatives.

174. For example, Principle Desmond Mabuya of New Nation School in Johannesburg, faced with widespread trauma among his students, has been campaigning for a music program because of its high effectiveness-affordability ratio relative to a formal trauma counseling program extensive enough to meet the needs of his students.<sup>144</sup> A survey of refugee camps in the Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal indicated that street theatre was a more popular and common way of receiving information about HIV/AIDS than community health workers or volunteers.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Jonathan Darling, Craig Barnett, and Sarah Eldrige, "City of Sanctuary—a UK initiative for hospitality," *Forced Migration Review* 34 (Feb 2010): 47. This is only one of many examples of artistic events in connection with refugee beyond camp contexts; other examples include fund-raising concerts and cultural shows.

<sup>143</sup> E.g., the Camp Beat Competition at Dadaab Camps, Kenya [Maureen Ojunga, "The Camp Beat competition for youth at Dadaab," *Capital Lifestyle*, 27 May 2011]; broadcast of poetry by Somali women refugee poets [Awa Mohammed Abdi, "Refugees, Gender-based Violence and Resistance: A Case Study of Somali Refugee Women in Kenya," in *Women, Migration and Citizenship: Making Local, National and Transnational Connections*, ed. Evangelia Tastsoglou and Alexandra Dobrowolsky (Abingdon, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 245]; the international tours, recordings and media attention surround Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars [see: Rupert Colville, "Cinderellas of Reggae: The incredible story of the Refugee All Stars of Sierra Leone," *Refugees* 146.2 (2007): 25-31; tours of the Ibdaa Dance Troupe [Santiago, Chiori. "Palestine embodied: teens from Dheisheh refugee camp dance their experience." *Dance Magazine*, 1 December 2003, available online at:

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1083/is\\_12\\_77/ai\\_111979431/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1083/is_12_77/ai_111979431/)]; the work of Art for Refugees in Transition (A.R.T.; see: [www.artforrefugees.org](http://www.artforrefugees.org)) and other such organizations; and various exhibits and performances of visual art, literature, music, drama, dance, etc., produced or performed by refugees.

<sup>144</sup> Pumla Rulashe, "Music key to helping Johannesburg' refugee students, says Goodwill Ambassador Henricks," UNHCR News Stories, 23 September 2004, <<http://www.unhcr.org/4152f3934.html>>.

<sup>145</sup> HIV/AIDS Unit. "Behavioral Surveillance Survey among Refugees and Surrounding Host Community: Jhapa and Morang districts, Nepal" (UNHCR, Nov 2005), 17-18. Other popular means included radio, television, friends and family, schools and teachers, and NGO workers.

175. Generally speaking, artistic activity provides the option to take advantage of local resources—the creativity and talent of refugees, materials that may be easily available within or near the camp, and time to devise clever ways around material limitations. Some artistic activities require some financial and material investment, such as musical instruments, sound systems, painting implements, clay for sculpting, etc. Others require little or no money. Yet all depend far more on the ingenuity of the artists than their access to equipment.

176. This deep sense of refugee ownership, leading, as we have discussed above, to a greater likelihood of successful implementation and program sustainability, combined with the multifaceted benefits which anecdotal evidence suggests that refugees receive from artistic activity, seem to indicate a substantial return on the investment.<sup>146</sup>

### **Ambiguity of the arts**

177. We have discussed the power of the arts and artistic activity and its potential to be harnessed for positive social change and other constructive action. However, that same power can also be used for destructive ends, whether deliberately or unintentionally. Totalitarian regimes know well the influence of artistic communication; what would a propaganda campaign be without poetic chants, songs, iconic visual images, mythic narratives, etc.?

178. But even those with ostensibly benign intentions may create or reinforce negative messages or undermine widely-shared humanitarian goals. Balancing communal cultural or religious beliefs about artistic activity with individual rights to expression may lead policymakers to impinge upon one freedom in the name of protecting another. And although freedom of expression is a critical human right, the social impact of fostering freedom of expression depends greatly on the complex intentions of those doing the expressing.

179. When societal ills are viewed as zero-sum games, then the “winner” is the one whose message can drown out all opposition. Take, for example, the situation of Somali refugee women in the Dadaab camps. On the one hand, the arts have served as a means for empowering them: the BBC Somali Service broadcasted two poems by Somali refugee women describing the difficulties of life in Dadaab camps and appealing to Somali leaders, the Kenyan government, the United Nations, and the international community for help.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, artistic communication has also contributed to the disenfranchisement of women by reinforcing the idea that freedom for women is a social evil:

When asked about the good and bad aspects of [resettlement and] life abroad that people had heard about, one of the negative aspects

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<sup>146</sup> Some artistic and artisanal activity may also generate income and contribute to local economies, but further research is needed to identify how extensive a direct economic impact the artistic activity of refugees may make.

<sup>147</sup> The poems, collected by researcher Awa Mohammed Abdi, were broadcasted on the occasion of International Women’s Day, 8 March 2004. Awa Mohammed Abdi, “Refugees, Gender-based Violence and Resistance: A Case Study of Somali Refugee Women in Kenya,” in *Women, Migration and Citizenship: Making Local, National and Transnational Connections*, ed. Evangelia Tastsoglou and Alexandra Dobrowolsky (Abingdon, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 245.

often mentioned was the change in gender relations. Put quite bluntly, 'women turn bad' abroad because they are 'poisoned' with ideas about women's rights and gender equality. There is a perception that many Somali women deviate from their culture and religion once they are abroad, and it is not uncommon that a man has to come back to the region to marry again. This kind of information is circulated through many different sources, such as personal communication, the BBC Somali service and cassettes of theatre plays and songs.<sup>148</sup>

180. In one play, a social services representative explains to a resettled Somali couple the differences between life in Africa and North America, including differences in women's rights. The couple gets into a fight, and when the husband reprimands the wife to "stop this behaviour," the wife responds:

Stop this behaviour? Heeyee. Every dog has a day and today is my day. [...] How many teeth and ribs has he broken from me? I remember having children of his at night, he threw me on something. Today is another day; I told you I will go to school. Ladan will drive me to school. You cook for the children and take them to bed when they sleep, and you clean the house well. And be careful: You have to follow my orders, otherwise you will be in jail. Bye, bye.<sup>149</sup>

181. Along similar lines, a song, performed by a Somali-Canadian group popular in the Dadaab camps, presents a Somali man lamenting the impact of Canadian gender norms on his life:

The wife I send, and given her  
Whatever I had  
The mother of my children  
When she came to Canada  
She came out with different things  
'It is true', as I said  
I took you to Canada  
You started to be arrogant  
You eye-liner yourself  
[...]  
Men have no future.  
They call their prayers in a dish  
Women have more power than them  
[...]  
Hey, the sons of men  
Hey, look after your children  
Hey, refuse to go abroad  
Hey, put your wives in your houses  
[...]  
Whoever believes in Islam  
Never go to foreign countries

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<sup>148</sup> Cindy Horst, "Vital links in social security: Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps, Kenya," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 38, UNHCR, April 2001, 6.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

'It is true', as I said<sup>150</sup>

182. In addition to the actual content of the messages propagated by artistic communication, one must also consider the moral ambiguity of social attitudes toward various forms of artistic activity. While every culture and religion embraces some art forms as spiritually and morally beneficial, most also decry other artistic activities as morally disreputable. And though it is problematic for many human rights proponents—especially those influenced by Western principles—to accept external restraints on individual autonomy, it is difficult to deny that the frequent association between certain types of entertainment, especially music and dancing, and alcoholic drinking, promiscuity, and other dangerous pursuits.

183. Refugee camps are not exempt from this association. Note, for example, the connections implied between artistic activity and high-risk behavior in one description of Shimelba Camp in northern Ethiopia: "The camp has a thriving nightlife and has many music cafes, shops, bars, video clubs and entertainment halls. Alcohol is widely available and sexual risk behaviour is high."<sup>151</sup> While the artistic activity itself may not be the cause of the high-risk behavior, the social association of the two should not be dismissed.

184. At the same time, societal attitudes are not immutable. The hip-hop embraced by many young refugees in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere, for example, remains controversial due to its associations with violence as well as its representation of Western aesthetics.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, signs of gradual mainstreaming include increasing community acceptance,<sup>153</sup> NGO-sponsorship,<sup>154</sup> an expanding international fan base,<sup>155</sup> and media coverage in the humanitarian sphere.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>151</sup> Marian Schilperoord, Laura Buffoni and Wélla Kouyou, "UNHCR's potential and its challenges in implementing the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings in the Ethiopia context," *Interventions* 6.3/4 (2008): 307-309. (quote from p. 307).

<sup>152</sup> Note associations of hip-hop culture with Sudanese refugee youth gangs in Cairo [Themba Lewis, "Sudanese refugee youth 'gangs' in Cairo," *Forced Migration Review* 33 (Sept 2009): 52-53.

<sup>153</sup> "By speaking about issues close to the heart of their peers and by incorporating traditional Arabic instruments and beats in their music, the rappers [of I-Voice] have succeeded in overcoming the initial suspicions towards hip-hop" [Rasmus Bogeskov Larsen, "In Lebanon refugee camp, 'hip-hop is a school,'" *The Electronic Intifada*, 15 January 2010, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/lebanon-refugee-camp-hip-hop-school/8626>.

Note that the interview also mentions performances at school and social function. C.f., also, a US Consulate press release lauding alumni of the English Access Microscholarship program ("Access") and the Youth Exchange and Study program ("YES") for sponsoring a performance by a local Palestinian hip-hop and rock band, "Culture Shock," at the traditional breaking of the Ramadan fast in Qalqilyah, West Bank [Consulate of the United States Press Release, "Palestinian Students Volunteer in Ramadan Community Service Projects," Jerusalem: August 26, 2010.].

<sup>154</sup> E.g., Hip-hop workshops and concerts sponsored by mainstream NGOs (see, Dave Stelfox, "Hip-hop workshops for refugees in Jordan," *The National*, 8 Oct 2010, <<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/music/hip-hop-workshops-for-refugees-in-jordan?pageCount=0>>; "Video: Young refugees spin tunes in Jordan," *UNRWA News Articles*, 5 Oct 2010, <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=818>).

<sup>155</sup> E.g., I-Voice had played concerts in cities including Beirut, Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels, Rome, and Toronto

[http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=12209941429&v=app\\_2344061033](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=12209941429&v=app_2344061033);

[http://i-voiceonline.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=65](http://i-voiceonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=65)).



## Artistic activity and power dynamics

185. Artistic activity relates to all layers of life—including gender, ethnicity, age, class, language, culture, religion, aesthetics, politics. Any individual artistic decision has implications on many levels, and the stakes are high. Such decisions are intricately tied to the underlying power dynamics at work within any refugee camp: among refugees and between refugees and the powers that be.

186. Thus, in addition to ambiguity about the content of the messages propagated by artistic communication, any humanitarian actors interested in promoting artistic activity in camps must be sensitive to the negotiation of authority and the deeper implications of seemingly simple decisions. Artistic activity prompts these questions because it relates directly to individual and communal agency within a context of a hierarchy of power.

187. Artistic activity can empower the marginalized by serving as a forum for their voices to be heard, but it is important to recognize that such empowerment can substantially destabilize the status quo. Those formerly bereft of power may no longer be willing to accept their assigned slot in the hierarchy, and unless the authority implied by their exercise of agency is taken seriously, the resulting unrest can eventually overturn the entire system.<sup>157</sup>

188. It makes no sense to espouse rights-based approaches and the empowerment of refugees without being prepared to take practical measures to redistribute power accordingly. This is true whether the power differential is experienced between different groups of refugees or between refugees and NGOs, governmental representatives, etc.

189. Most sources do not discuss the complexities of the relationships between refugees and NGOs in relation to artistic initiatives. Brief reports intended to promote or celebrate the success of artistic endeavors rarely reveal the dynamics of power-sharing or the precise impetus for activities and programmes. Nevertheless, the internal politics of refugee camps, resulting in part from imbalances of power built into the circumstances of current policies on forced migration, presumably play some role even when the activity is one that enhances refugee agency.

190. For example, the *Kakuma News Reflector* (KANERE), a refugee-run weblog that features poetry and drawing alongside journalistic and editorial writing, continues to negotiate the sensitive issues of power and money with NGOs and local government officials in its efforts to maintain journalistic integrity and free speech.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, NGOs face their own limitations and frustrations, seeking to promote refugee participation and agency while subject to organizational policies, inter-agency communicational inefficiencies, and other operational challenges.

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<sup>156</sup> E.g., a recent United States Institute of Peace (USIP) panel discussion of hip hop: USIP, “Rhymes of Peace: Arab Hip Hop Artists on Youth and Media,” 27 October 2010, Washington, D.C., <<http://www.usip.org/events/rhymes-peace-arab-hip-hop-artists-youth-and-media>>.

<sup>157</sup> One cannot help but think of the people across North Africa and the Middle East and the recent upsurge in their struggles for greater democratization.

<sup>158</sup> Bethany Ojalehto, “Refugee news reporting project under threat,” *Pambazuka News: Pan-African Voices for Freedom and Justice*, 10 March 2010, Issue 474. <<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/63143>>.

191. Artistic activity may be a useful means for achieving refugee independence – the opposite of the much-decried “dependency syndrome.” Gaim Kibreab defines refugee independence as “the capability to adopt responses which rely on traditional social support systems, coping mechanisms, organizational and technical skills. Independence is not only an indispensable instrument to achieve sustainable material well-being. It is also key to non-material advancement.”<sup>159</sup>

192. Programs and policies which engage refugee communities in traditional and innovative artistic activities hold tremendous promise in being able to strengthen traditional social systems, enhance coping mechanisms, and help develop organizational and technical skills. However, Kibreab also notes that humanitarian interventions can unwittingly undermine refugee independence by creating a contextual environment that is unfavorable to the goal of self-sufficiency.<sup>160</sup>

193. This, of course, once again prompts the question of refugee participation in devising, planning, organizing and implementing artistic activity. It seems obvious to simply admonish humanitarian actors to consult with all the people being served, as any participatory approach would advocate. An arts advocacy program which privileges certain groups over others, for example, could add fuel to conflict, further dividing rather than building bridges. In practice, however, producing programs that attend effectively to the sometimes competing needs and interests of various groups is not an easy task for even the most conscientious.

194. But refugee participation is more than simply a “best practice,” an operational tip to smooth over cultural differences between NGOs and affected populations or establish local “ownership” of initiatives in order to assure their sustainability, though these are both important considerations. On a deeper level, it comes down to the paradox presented by the role of artistic activity in declarations and other international humanitarian documents.

195. On the one hand, artistic activity is presented as being a human right, related to freedom of personal and cultural expression as well as the flourishing of the spirit. On the other hand, artistic activity is promoted as a means for other ends, especially psychosocial support and information dissemination. This sets up the potential for artistic activity to be wielded as a tool for manipulation, whether well-intended or otherwise. The arts are not an autonomous sphere in most cultures in the world; quite often, they are intimately connected to daily life and used for a wide range of purposes.

196. What happens when the center of cultural and personal power shifts outside the circle of those affected, and those who determine the uses of the arts are not themselves impacted by those decisions? Who decides what information is to be disseminated and what behavior change promoted? And what happens when the information and behavior change, whether overtly endorsed or subtly reinforced, affects part of the community adversely? The line between persuasive influence and manipulation – benevolent or malevolent – is thin.

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<sup>159</sup> Gaim Kibreab, “The Myth of Dependency among Camp Refugees in Somalia 1979-1989,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6.4 (1993): 330.

<sup>160</sup> Kibreab, “Myth,” 332.

## Limitations of artistic activity

197. As powerful as artistic activity is, it has its limits. Even when artistic activity is effective in addressing social and individual concerns, it is never provides a quick fix for deeply imbedded problems. Noe Sebisaba's Stop SIDA organization, for example, has made tremendous progress in using artistic communication to combat stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS. But their promising results stem from maintaining narrowly focused goals (primarily combating stigmas and disseminating information on how to prevent the spread of the disease), conducting extensive campaigns, following up with opportunities for deep community interaction and partnership, and investing much hard labor and passionate commitment.

198. It has taken painful courage on the part of Sebisaba and his colleagues to speak openly of having HIV and using that openness to help others. While their decision and efforts have proven fruitful and ultimately life-giving, their path has no doubt been a challenging one.

199. Entrenched attitudes cannot be overturned in a day, no matter how influential the artistic medium conveying the message. The author of a play presented to Afghan refugee men on the subject of domestic violence is quoted as declaring: "I am fully confident that after watching today's drama on stopping violence, Afghan people - especially the men - will live in peace and calm."<sup>161</sup> As laudable as the writer's hopes may be, it seems unlikely, at best, that centuries of traditional behavior can be completely and enduringly reconfigured by a single viewing of even a brilliantly thought-provoking drama.

200. Attitudes and behavior may be influenced somewhat on a short-term or erratic basis, but such transformation cannot be sustained unless artistic activity is incorporated into long-term efforts involving the interaction of the entire community, consideration of culturally-acceptable alternatives, development of effective incentive structures, continual reinforcement of target behavior, etc.

201. When the UNHCR and UN Population Fund-sponsored photo exhibition "Positive Lives" toured refugee camps in Kenya in 2004, the occasion created an opportunity for an entire coordinated campaign, including question-and-answer sessions, community discussions on discrimination and stigma, peer education activities, street theatre and sports activities, and condom promotion and distribution. By expanding the exhibit into a comprehensive initiative, combining information dissemination with opportunities for refugee interaction, the "Positive Lives" tour led to substantial changes in erroneous beliefs about HIV/AIDS, as well as a reduction in the discrimination and stigma previously aimed against HIV-infected people.<sup>162</sup>

202. Nevertheless, artistic activity is not a panacea. Previously we have discussed artistic activity as a useful coping mechanism and possible element in the treatment

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<sup>161</sup> Shahzad, Asif. "16 Days of Activism: Play seeks to broach taboo of domestic violence." UNHCR News Stories, 3 December 2008  
<<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4936a6d84&query=teacher%20and%20drama>>.

<sup>162</sup> UN AIDS and UNHCR, *Strategies to support the HIV-related needs of refugees and host populations*, UNAIDS Best Practice Collection, Oct 2005, 19.

of psychosocial challenges. Yet, while artistic activity may help enable traumatized refugees to move forward with their lives, significant issues may remain which only mental health counseling, extensive therapy, or even medication can resolve. Viewing artistic activity as low-budget therapy, while possibly providing some coping mechanisms where none would otherwise exist, may approach the ethical rectitude of watering down medication for broader distribution.

203. On a socio-political level, we have discussed how artistic activity has provided important outlet for refugees to express their frustrations with their conditions and their critiques of those in power. The expression itself is a liberating act that may engender hope for a better future. But if no actual change results from those expressions, then that hope can easily morph into bitterness, disillusionment, despair, and even violence.

204. Those who dismiss artistic activity as peripheral to humanitarian work of significance deprive themselves of a valuable tool. But it is possible to misuse this tool by misunderstanding its strengths and limitations. At its best, artistic activity is deeply participatory, connective, and empowering, comprising one component in comprehensive, long-term efforts to make a practical impact on refugee concerns.

## Conclusions and recommendations

205. The aesthetic dimension of refugee life is easy to dismiss as a peripheral concern, relative to such pressing needs as food, shelter, primary health care, basic education, etc. Although the arts have played a fairly small role in international documents on human rights and development, international guidelines nevertheless affirm, both directly and indirectly, the importance of artistic activity as a human right and a means to advance human flourishing. And the widespread presence of artistic activity in refugee camps attests not only to the resilience of the human spirit but also to the central role the arts play in the lives of most human beings.

206. Artistic activity is already being used broadly as a means for achieving humanitarian ends. It can play a crucial role in the overall wellbeing of human beings, and can importantly, though indirectly, affect the chances of a person's physical, emotional and economic health and development. Such initiatives do not have to be expensive to be effective, and though it may be difficult to quantify their benefits of artistic activity, anecdotal evidence suggests that it has tremendous potential value to humanitarian efforts. Policymakers err when they ignore this important set of tools in the humanitarian arsenal.

207. Nevertheless, policymakers must recognize that artistic activity is not always an unqualified good. Humanitarian actors seeking to incorporate artistic activity must be sensitive to the complex and ambiguous roles artistic activity plays in the lives and cultures of refugees. They themselves must be particularly conscious of acting as facilitating partners, promoting refugee agency and independence, rather than unintentionally undermining refugees by acting as oppressive external fonts of cultural largesse.

208. Given the anecdotal and incomplete nature of the data available, only provisional policy recommendations can be attempted. However, a consideration of the available data, in light of current emphases in international humanitarian policies, suggests that relevant programs and policies incorporating artistic activity should be based on an approach that is collaborative, contextual, coordinated, comprehensive and consistent.

### **Collaboration**

209. *Humanitarian Actors:* Representatives of NGOs and other humanitarian actors should serve primarily as facilitators and catalysts of refugee-driven artistic activity. Although some NGO-initiated programs may be helpful, an emphasis on identifying and supporting existing refugee initiatives seems to be one of the more effective approaches.

210. Humanitarian actors can help create an environment amenable to creative artistic solutions to various problems in camps by helping connect refugees to appropriate artistic resources—training, equipment, potential collaborators, etc.—and by partnering with refugee artists and others to promote the consideration of

artistic activity among the tools utilized in information dissemination efforts, BCC campaigns, etc.

211. *Refugee participation:* Refugees themselves should be given the opportunity to play major leadership roles in conceiving, planning, and implementing programs of artistic activity. Refugee-driven programs, or at least over which refugees themselves experience a significant degree of ownership, are among the most successful. Fostering community-based and community-initiated artistic activity, and working in partnership with community leaders, artists, and representatives of relevant groups, helps promote refugee independence, taps into the wisdom and experience of those being served, and promotes operational effectiveness and sustainability.

212. In engaging participation, policy makers should consider structuring at least some planning and implementation meetings along lines of similar social category, e.g., by age group, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc., to ensure that traditionally marginalized groups are not intimidated into silenced by traditionally dominant ones.<sup>163</sup>

213. *Other relevant parties:* As part of their role as facilitators and catalysts, humanitarian actors should maintain efforts to support collaborations between refugee camp artists – both professional and recreational – and artists outside camps, especially those in local host communities, former refugees settled into sustainable situations, and non-refugee artists. Many artists have established links with refugees in camps, through visits, teaching workshops, touring performances, etc.

214. Collaborations may be fostered by raising awareness in host and other communities about the existence of artistic activity in camps and improving the infrastructure for collaboration by addressing logistical challenges. Other avenues for sustained partnerships may be explored, including associations with artistic educational institutions (e.g., conservatories, film schools, arts departments).

## Context

215. Each situation must be assessed individually, based on formal or informal surveillance information gathered from refugees as well as other relevant persons. The need to express oneself through artistic means may be a universal human impulse, but actual instances of the use of the arts for psychosocial and other forms of development cannot be advanced or assessed as a “general” phenomenon.

216. Although information about programs and methods that have been successful in other contexts may be helpful and even establish models to emulate, humanitarian actors should be operationally aware of the unique characteristics of the context at hand. Each situation, with the specifics of the individuals, cultures, and histories involved, must be seen, appreciated and assessed in its particularity.<sup>164</sup> This is especially important in connection with artistic programs, as cultural and psychosocial differences may strongly impact the propriety of certain uses of the arts.

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<sup>163</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs – Equal Opportunities, Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action* (IASC, 2006), 7, 13, <<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/gender>>.

<sup>164</sup> C.f., Kibreab, “Myth of Dependency,” 326, 332.

217. Humanitarian actors must also remain sensitive to changes in context over time. Even in protracted camp situations, important changes in demographics, political climate, and other relevant factors may occur. In order to avoid the inefficiencies of entrenchment, a flexible, responsive approach should be sought, characterized by an openness to try different initiatives and a willingness to discard them if they no longer fit with the needs and functionalities of the refugee community.

### **Coordination**

218. Given the broad use of artistic activity by refugees, there may be ways in which various agencies, programs, etc., can coordinate their efforts in order to increase both operational and cost effectiveness. Humanitarian actors should assess the range of organizations and initiatives involved in artistic activities in a given camp context and consider the possibilities of improving services available to refugees by pooling resources and information, co-sponsoring programs, etc., thus expanding the range of options available to refugees.

219. A number of successful artistic initiatives in camps have been supported by coordinated NGO sponsorship, and there may be further scope for creative collaboration beyond co-sponsoring specific events and programs. In some cases, it may be most effective for one NGO to sponsor an entire initiative; in other cases, different NGOs and individuals may work more efficiently by supporting the aspects of the project which match best with their organizational strengths.

220. In addition, humanitarian actors should consider coordinating their efforts with local government, NGOs, and community programs incorporating artistic activity in host countries. Such partnerships may help cultivate understanding between refugee and host communities and may be more cost-effective than setting up redundant, parallel programs.

### **Comprehensiveness**

221. Humanitarian programs that feature artistic activity should also integrate other complementary methods, including follow-up community conversations, opportunities for audience question-and-answer periods, multi-media approaches, etc. Artistic activity, while powerful, is nevertheless best used as one component within a comprehensive campaign.

### **Consistency**

222. Although occasional events and programs can make a positive difference in the lives of refugees in camps, sustained engagement is preferable. Recurring artistic events and performance/presentation opportunities and regular interactions with artists within and beyond the camp provide greater scope to effect lasting constructive transformation. Consistent engagement—even when the individuals involved may necessarily change over time—provides more opportunities to improve programs over time. However, in long-term artistic initiatives, it is especially important for policy-makers and implementation agents to maintain a

flexible and responsive approach, so that programs remain relevant and effective in their present context.

### Further research

223. The purpose of this study has been to provide a broad overview of recent artistic activity in refugee camps and to suggest avenues for consideration by policy-makers and researchers.<sup>165</sup> The efforts of humanitarian actors would be greatly aided by more abundant and more precise information and analysis.

224. Data collecting surveys and other researchers studying general demographics should consider collecting information on artistic activity. In addition, assessments and in-depth case studies of artistic activity in specific camps and programs, as well as more fully substantiated data in relation to relevant general trends, should be implemented. Examples include:

Camp-based field research, including:

- behavioral surveillance surveys on artistic activity, including both anecdotal as well as quantitative data
- case-studies of specific artistic initiatives, including assessment of refugee participation, program efficacy, cost-effectiveness
- analysis of the role of artistic activity in specific IEC and BCC campaigns, etc.

General trend studies, including:

- regional assessments of artistic activity in refugee camps
- systematic data collection on artistic activity to provide a more accurate picture of the nature and extent of artistic activity in refugee camps
- art- or genre-specific studies, e.g., considering the role of street theatre in refugee camps
- group-specific studies, e.g., considering the artistic activity of refugee women in a given context or art form

Organizational-specific studies, including:

- case-studies and assessments of the work of organizations specializing or extensively using artistic activity in refugee camps

Expanding research to include artistic activity pertaining to:

- under-researched art forms, such as handicrafts, literature, and visual arts
- under-studied camps, i.e., those less-known for artistic activity
- refugees in urban settings
- IDPs
- other persons of concern

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<sup>165</sup> See the December 1999 edition of *Forced Migration Review*, dedicated to "Culture in Exile" and the March 2006 issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (32.2), on the theme of Music and Migration, for additional broad treatments of these issues from previous years.



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