

University of Richmond

UR Scholarship Repository

Honors Theses

Student Research

Spring 2007

Figuring the refugee

Genevieve Goulding
University of Richmond

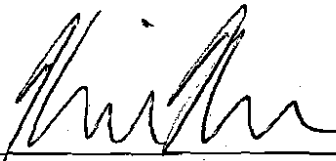
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses>

Recommended Citation

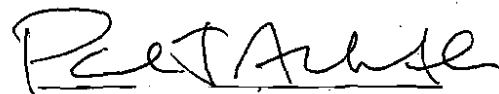
Goulding, Genevieve, "Figuring the refugee" (2007). *Honors Theses*. 201.
<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/201>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

This paper is part of the requirements for honors in Rhetoric and Communication. The signatures below, by the advisor, a departmental reader, and a representative of the honors committee, demonstrate that Genevieve Goulding has met all the requirements needed to receive honors in Rhetoric and Communication.



(Advisor)



(Reader)

Figuring the Refugee

Honors Thesis

Department of Rhetoric and Communication Studies

Weinstein Hall, 402

University of Richmond, Virginia 23172

Genevieve Goulding

May 2007

Submitted to: Dr. Kevin Kuswa, RHCS
Dr. Paul Achter, RHCS
Dr. Carol Summers, History
Dr. Melissa Labonte, Political Science

Figuring the Refugee

Genevieve Goulding

May, 2007

KEY WORDS

Refugee, encampment, UNHCR, positionality, auto-ethnographic narrative, power, binary, discourse, rhetoric, media, appeal, CAP, development, humanitarian assistance, DAR, policy, dialogue, Tanzania, Uganda.

WORD COUNT

29,946

ABSTRACT

“Figuring the Refugee” explores humanitarian relief for refugees as a discourse; a system of communication and identity-making which creates a subhuman refugee and perpetuates the problems of assistance. Through an auto-ethnographic narrative of my experience in the camp, I consider how the space itself creates exploitative binaries between aid workers and refugees. In an analysis of the United Nations 2006 film appeal, I argue that the discourse is normalized by images of the dehumanized refugee. The rhetoric of the film appeal limits the response of the western viewer to an uncritical sympathy, and allows for ineffective models of refugee assistance to continue. Re-informed through international media, the myths of refugee identity and assistance cause serious problems for new policies that attempt to move from refugee relief to development. A study of new Ugandan development initiatives for refugees proves that they have failed, and will continue to fail, because their policies only restate the traditional discourse. I propose a shift from discourse to dialogue as a new way to negotiate humanitarian aid. Dialogue offers a space for refugees to reconstitute their own identities and sense of agency, and for humanitarian actors to engage in meaningful ways for a true resolution to the world’s refugee crises.

This paper is part of the requirements for honors in Rhetoric and Communication. The signatures below, by the advisor, a departmental reader, and a representative of the honors committee, demonstrate that Genevieve Goulding has met all the requirements needed to receive honors in Rhetoric and Communication.

(Advisor)

(Reader)

(Honors Committee Representative)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Preface	7
Chapter One: Situating Self	12
Chapter Two: Evolution of a Discourse	20
Chapter Three: Tales from the Field	34
Chapter Four: Image and Empathy	63
Chapter Five: Development Policy-A Different Discourse?	86
Chapter Six: From Discourse to Dialogue: A New Kind of Assistance	98
Bibliography	110

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the University of Richmond's Quest Program, whose generosity and support opened the world to me. Your program alone makes the University of Richmond deserving of its academic reputation.

Busiku, to think that all this started with your invitation to winter break in Nairobi! Thank you for taking a chance on a silly little freshman. Thank you for showing me a different life, and thank you for your friendship.

Mama Nduna, for your love and support as a mother and an inspiration. Over chai in Nairobi and wine in Geneva, your insight has guided me in profound ways. This would not have happened without you. You have always been there for me with open arms, and I'll never be able to thank you enough for all that love.

To everyone at Refugee Law Project, for your patience with me! For opening your doors and putting up with all my mistakes and curiosity as an intern. For supporting me in my project and never turning down a question that I asked. I had a lot of fun at the office, and learned so much from everyone. You guys are incredible, and the work you do an inspiration. I'm so happy you gave me the chance to be a part of that for a summer. Thank you!

Merrill, I'm glad your train was late. Because that gave me the time to learn so much from you, and I really appreciate how open you were with me. Thank you for your words of wisdom, and thank you for your encouragement. If I can work with half the passion and dedication that you have, I'll know I'm doing something right in the world.

Dani, every time I needed to talk through my frustrations, or catch an elusive concept, or even just whine about the work, you were there for me. You helped me realize what I care about, not just with the project but life as well. I'm not sure what I'd do without you, Vanilla Bean.

Dr. Bhatt, you challenged me to think critically about myself and my place in the world from the moment we first met. Since then, you've pushed me to engage self-reflection in new ways, and I've grown so much because of it. Thank you for offering your shoulder to cry on (literally), and always having your door open.

Dr. Achter, thank you for encouraging me to pursue the new angle of my research, it proved to be an important piece of the thesis. Thank you for your (much-tried) patience and humor while you helped me draw the connections. You helped me keep my head on straight as I

came down homestretch, and I only wish that there had been more semesters for me to learn from your insight.

Dr. Kuswa, it's hard for me to imagine how after all this time, you never gave up on me. As my advisor for close to three years, you've been with me from the project's beginnings and seen it all the way through. In that time, you've gone above and beyond the call of duty as an advisor. Time and again, I came flailing into your office, lost, frustrated, and ready to throw in the towel. But you always knew how to bring me back into the game, and I would leave with a renewed sense of passion and direction. I often emailed you out of nowhere, from whatever country I happened to be in, with some frantic request or last-minute deadline. And you always managed to bail me out, calm me down, and send me on my merry research way with another crisis averted. I don't know how you were able to stay so patient, but I am incredibly thankful for it. Thank you for the dedication and motivation you brought to this project, it would not have happened without your energy and guidance. You are more than an advisor; you are a mentor, counselor, and an inspiration. You've challenged me to grow as a person and a scholar, and you've helped me create something to be proud of.

Mom and Dad, you have been there for me with unwavering love and support. I don't think I will ever find a way to express how thankful I am for that. You've encouraged me, challenged me, kept me focused and kept me sane. You taught me to trust myself, to be independent, to not be afraid to ask questions and seek answers. All these lessons have proved invaluable, with the thesis and in life. You always told me that I could do anything I set my mind to do, and your faith in me has helped me believe it.

My greatest thanks go to every refugee who shared themselves with me, from Kanenbwa to Kampala, Nduta to Richmond. To Caritas, Bugera, and Noel for an afternoon I will never forget. To everyone from English class in Kampala, who taught me so much more about life than I ever taught any English. For all those who forgave me for my ignorance, who trusted me to tell their stories, and who prove to be the most inspiring people I have ever had the honor to meet. Your strength and courage lend hope for humanity. Thank You. GG

Figuring the Refugee

Preface

Children with distended bellies, mothers with machete wounds, young soldiers fiercely clinging to their AK-47s, these are the characters in a drama that play out in flashes across our television screen. The genocide in Darfur. The tsunami. We are curious, we are saddened, and we are moved by these images of horror and suffering. We might donate to a charity, or buy a brightly-colored wristband with interchangeable exclamations like, “Stop the violence!” or “Save Darfur!” or “Make Poverty History!” We send our money to the hard working humanitarian organizations that do so much to *save* those poor people we see on television. We are comforted by images of aid in action, of planes dropping food, of children smiling as schools are built in the background. And then the horror fades away, the world gets bored and we turn to a new cause, a more exciting conflict with fresh images of suffering. But what’s really going on? Who are these people we pity on our T.V.? And what happens to them as they begin to gather dust in our collective memory? Is it really as simple as a plane dropping food, or a school being built? Does aid as we know it really work? And why don’t things seem to be getting any better?

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them.”¹

The aim of this thesis is to explore humanitarian relief for refugees as a system of communication and identity-making which perpetuates a sub-human status for the refugee and restricts humanitarian actors to ineffectual terms of engagement. In the discourse of refugee assistance, lines are drawn between Self and Other, refugee and aid worker, spectator and spectacle, development and relief, and human and the subaltern. These binaries are normalized

¹ Foucault, Michel. “Human Nature.” As cited by The Foucault Reader, Ed. Paul Rabinow, 1984.

in and through the refugee camp, international media, and institutional policies. This project rises to Foucault's challenge by deconstructing the seeming neutrality of humanitarian aid.

Through narrative, media and policy analysis, I hope to expose some of the ways that humanitarian discourse exercises political violence on the refugee. Ironically, political violence is marked by the absence of the political, in both refugee identity and the larger structural crisis. The refugee is figured as a person with no individual agency, and the crisis is figured as an apolitical emergency instead of a politically-charged conflict. This eclipses root causes, and by not addressing them, the crisis continues. In unmasking the neocolonial systems of power at work, I propose a move from discourse to dialogue. Dialogue creates the space for a new conception of Self and its re-presentation, as well an alternative notion of assistance that engages the personal agency of the refugee, as well as the political agency of humanitarian actors on a structural level.

Chapter One situates myself as an author and researcher in the project. Through the theoretical frames of self-reflexivity and positionality, I explore the politics of re-presenting Other. Ethical considerations are not limited to the "field," but extend to the writing process as well. When it comes to writing people's stories of suffering, we can often "do more violence in the telling."² The stories that refugees shared with me in the camps demand dignity, and I try to navigate that by being honest about my motivations and clear about how and why I use refugees' voices in the larger critique.

Chapter Two presents a brief overview of the evolution of humanitarian assistance for refugees, with a focus on the development of the United Nations High Commissioner for

² Nordstrom, Carolyn. *A Different Kind of War Story: Ethnography of Political Violence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

Refugees (UNHCR) and the institutionalization of encampment policy. A system of discourse does not exist in a vacuum, rather, it is historically situated and develops through the politics of the moment. This chapter traces the origins of the refugee regime from the post-World War II period, and the ad-hoc evolution of encampment policy to the status quo it has become today. With a basic understanding of the discourse's history, we are better situated to critique its manifestations in my personal experience.

Chapter Three is an auto-ethnographic account of the space of a refugee camp. Using my own experiences in, and observations of, camp life, this chapter will serve as an introduction to the systems of power, deviance, surveillance and exploitation that appear in camp space and inform the identities of those living within it. Here the idea emerges that humanitarian aid given in a camp context lends itself to the continued abuse of a subhuman "other" by a superior "self." While "saving" refugees, the camp extinguishes humanity.

The refugee identity is not only constituted through the rhetorical space of the camp, but also within the rhetoric of images and texts in international dialogue. Chapter Four will deconstruct the 2006 film presentation of the Consolidated Appeals Process: "Why the Appeal?" The film showing is an international event hosted by the United Nations that makes an annual appeal to raise money for humanitarian crises around the world. The film and its accompanying narration provide a medium to deconstruct how the refugee is figured in global representations, but also how the international community defines its humanitarian obligation and structures its assistance through the relationship between the spectacle-refugee and spectator-donor. The identities constructed through these appeals privilege a censored notion of humanitarian (in)action that limits donor participation to a superficial, sympathy-driven financial donation that

perpetuates refugee crises and eclipses opportunities for greater understanding, personal agency, and political mobilization.

Discourse and policy inform each other, and so the sub-human identity of refugees as portrayed in international rhetoric validates encampment policy as a satisfactory humanitarian solution, despite its inhumane conditions and detrimental consequences for development. Chapter Five will explore how the figuring of the refugee carries consequences for current policy initiatives, specifically the shift from “relief” to “development” in the operations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR). This chapter will analyze the policy shift from a “Self Reliance Strategy” (SRS) to “Development Assistance to Refugees” (DAR). Although DAR is an attempt to provide more autonomy for refugees, this chapter will argue that the initiative is failing because it operates under the same assumptions of camp space and refugee identity as the traditional discourse. While DAR seems to change institutional policy on the surface, the underlying rhetoric remains the same. Without a move between the binaries that define refugee identity and humanitarian aid, any new policy initiatives will suffer from the same disappointing results endemic to the status quo.

The move from discourse to dialogue challenges the normalized identity of the subhuman refugee, as well as the effectiveness of current assistance policies. Where discourse contains and constrains, dialogue provides people with the rhetorical space to construct their own identities. Through the paradigm of dialogue, refugees can figure their own selves within their political, historical, and cultural contexts; and define their own sense of agency, rules of engagement, and relationship with their humanitarian benefactors and western viewing public. The dialogue invites viewers to constantly question and seek a deeper understanding of the context of refugee images, and provides a space where viewers can figure their own sense of responsibility in the

map of others' sufferings. Dialogue encourages a re-forming of humanitarian aid: from encampment to true integration, from "maintenance" to real political protection, and from assistance to agency.

Chapter One

Situating Self

“Who are you to ask us these questions? Why have you come all the way here?”

-Felix, a Burundian refugee in a conversation held 12/2004

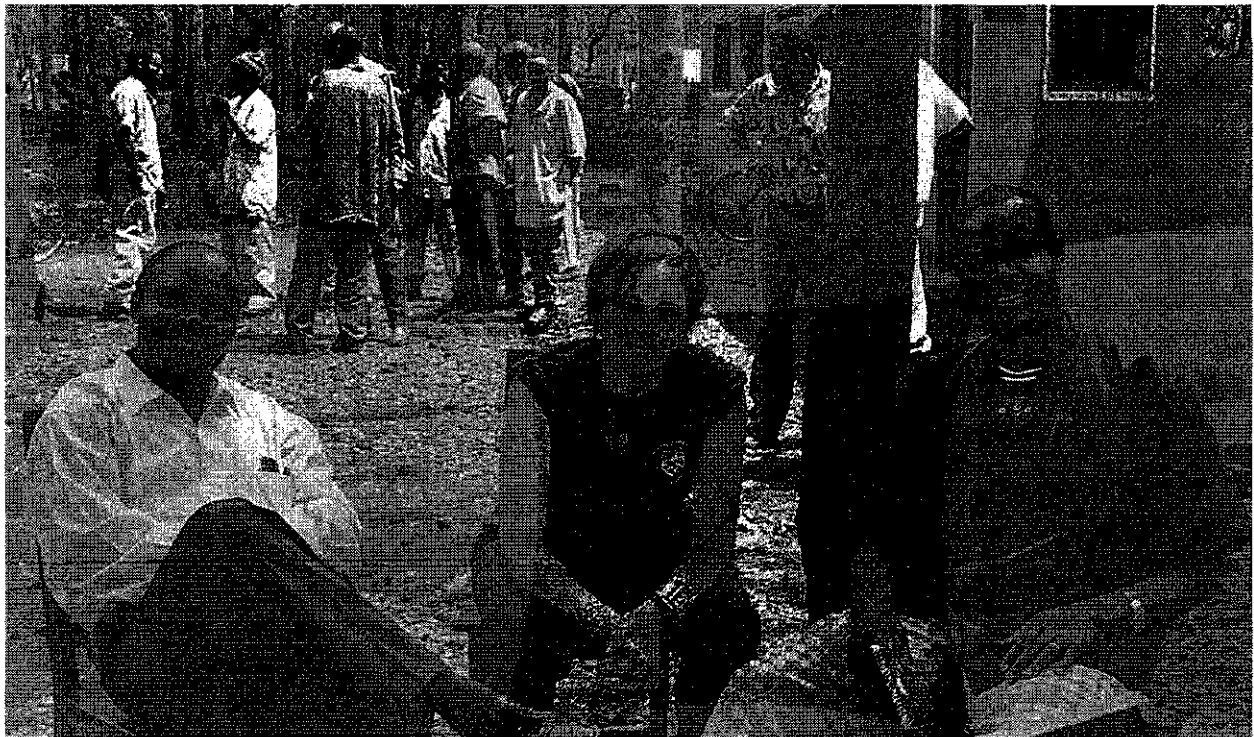


Figure 1.1 From left to right: Thomas, myself, and Samuel in Nduta Camp, 12/2004

Who am I to write of refugees? How do I position myself in the camp and within academic research without slipping into the discourse of colonizing Other? How do I navigate the risk of “imperial translation” (Fine 80) when I re-tell refugees’ stories? How do I re-present the refugee without negatively “figuring” identity?

Felix caught me off-guard when he asked me who I was and why I was there. I’m glad he did though, because it forced me to consider important questions about how I am located in this research. I can’t hide behind my steno-pad and ask him to share his reality with me if I’m not willing to reflect on my own. In an auto-ethnography of a refugee camp I am not a neutral instrument. Every aspect of who I am informs my relationships to and with the research. Rather than being fixed, my identity is constantly renegotiated based on the interpersonal and institutional politics of the moment. I move between power and disempowerment, privilege and disprivilege, insider and outsider, sometimes navigating opposing identities at once. I cannot view my identity as separate from those structures of power I study. One of the best ways to gain a more nuanced understanding of a system is to observe how your own Self moves through it. To deny my position in the colonial discourse of humanitarian aid would be a disservice to my attempt to understand it.

By exploring the politics of my position in the field, I come to a greater understanding of how the system of humanitarian aid acts as a discourse that figures a disempowered refugee. Through auto-ethnographic narrative, I hope to better navigate my re-presentations of refugees and move away from colonizing rhetoric. “Once out beyond the picket fence of illusory objectivity, we trespass all over the classed, raced, and otherwise stratified lines that have demarcated our social legitimacy for publicly telling their stories. And it is then that ethical

questions boil.”³ Indeed, the ethical questions of re-presentation boiled throughout this project, from the time I first step foot in the refugee camps, to coming back to the university and writing a thesis.

UR as a (Mine)Field of ethical considerations

As I work to locate Self, I argue for a broader definition of what constitutes the field. Lal and De la Garza speak, respectively, to the “coming home”⁴ and “winter season”⁵ research phases in their work on locating the author in ethnography. They argue that once the author has gathered his or her observation notes and returns from the traditional notion of “the field,” another field emerges at home. Back in academia, the author enters a period of reflection in which he or she processes the experience before writing. This space/time is an equally important field in which the researcher should consider the location of Self.

“In moving from living to writing the text, then, we can work against reproducing colonizing discourses if we assiduously maintain the perception of the academy as just another field location and of writing as a continuation of fieldwork.”⁶ As a researcher, I cannot presume that once I leave the space of the refugee camp, I no longer figures in systems of power. Just because I return to campus and sit alone in a research office with my notes does not mean that I, nor the context within which I reflect and write, have become neutral. The ethical issues which demand an ethnographer’s reflexivity in the traditional sense of the field also apply to the field of academia. It might seem as though this chapter is the cart that precedes the horse, but it is

³ Fine, Michelle. “Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research.” *Locating the Field: space, place, and context in anthropology*. Ed.s. Simon Coleman and Peter Collins. New York: Oxford, 2006. 70-82.

⁴ Lal, Jayati. “Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and ‘Other’ in Living and Writing the Text.” *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Ed. Diane L. Wolf. Colorado: Westview Press, 1996.185-213.

⁵ Gonzalez, M. C. “The four seasons of ethnography: A creation-centered ontology for ethnography.” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 24 (2000) : 623 – 650.

⁶ Lal, Jayati. IBID: 192.

important to first work through my post-return status in the field of “Academia” before I consider the field of Tanzania. By understanding my position in the actual writing process, I can better situate self in my reflections on the experience of the camp.

When I returned from my research abroad, I sat on my field notes for months before I started to write a thesis, and struggled with my own notion of ethics. Immanuel Kant claims in his deontological theory that action is morally wrong if it is inconsistent with the status of a person as a free and rational being, and that acts that further the status of people as free and rational beings are morally right.⁷ So then, am I morally right or morally wrong? According to Kant, I would be morally right in my argument for refugees’ agency as free and rational human beings. Yet, am I not wrong in all the ways I limited refugee agency in the process of making my argument? How had I handled myself in the field, and how was I representing/exploiting my research since I had come back to school? When I actually did start writing, it gave rise to still more questions: Would I be able to navigate all of the moral tensions that exist when it comes to writing about the Other? Could I work through my guilt over the ways in which I objectified people in the research to arrive at a constructive critique of systems of power? If the question of ethics is not either/or, how can I navigate both/and?

Ganguly writes, “The best way to make ‘a splash’ in ethnographic circles is still to write about something exotic.”⁸ I began to realize the extent to which refugees are considered exotic when returning to school in the states. “You studied refugees? Let’s write a Collegian article about a UR student researching ‘refugee camps’ in faraway places. How out of the ordinary! Let’s put it on the university’s website, and have a ‘Spotlight’ in the alumni magazine where we get to know all about the student’s work ‘helping’ refugees in Africa.” Often, in an effort to

⁷ Kant, Immanuel. *Die Metaphysik der Sitten (The Metaphysics of Morals) 1797*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁸ Ganguly, cited in Lal, Jayati. IBID:192.

make the research sound more exotic, the countries' individual names were lost for the more thrilling ring of "Africa." But I cannot be too cynical about the university's self-promotion through my travels, for am I not a willing participant? Lal warns, "Just how invested are we in locating exploitation? While doing and writing our research, we must vigilantly question our own investments in looking for the exotic."⁹ From the beginning, my own investment in the project was motivated by the possibility to venture into the unknown.

How did I initially become interested in refugee camps? Busiku, an old college friend, invited me to come spend winter break with her in Nairobi, Kenya and also offered to take me to visit a refugee camp where her family used to work. I thought, "Ooh, a vacation in Africa! And refugee camps-to see them on TV is one thing, but to actually visit one? Maybe I can get the school to pay for it..." My initial justification for researching the camp was fueled by a voyeuristic curiosity and the opportunity to gaze at the exotic. I knew nothing about refugee camps, and stumbled into the research as an ignorant young American on a friend's coattails.

When I came back to campus, did I not interview with the Collegian? Is there not a part of me, buried beneath my performance of modesty, which enjoys the attention? Did I not contribute to this same notion of the exotic when, upon being asked for a photo to accompany the "Spotlight" article on my research, I supplied a stereotypical "African" picture? The picture features me, the "young American ethnographer," balancing a basket on my head, walking through a rural village with little children running in the background: certainly an adequate representation of "Africa!" I could have provided a picture that challenged African stereotypes, or I could have refused to submit one at all. Instead, I perpetuated gross misconceptions. Now I cannot look at the newspaper with the picture of me grinning foolishly with a basket on my head without feeling embarrassed and ashamed that I have whored the experience and objectified

⁹ Lal, Jayati. IBID: 192.

others. Yet I cannot deny that simultaneous tinge of pride that is painful to admit.¹⁰ What if I had not studied something as mysterious and sexy as refugees in camps? Would I have received the unquestioned funding? Would my exploit(ation)s have been publicized as heavily?

One of my questions in a conversation with a young refugee man was, “If you could tell the world something, what would you say?” Who am I to be in a position to ask that? He shares his stories with the assumption that his voice will be heard by an audience that could effect change. His words need the sensitivity and brilliance of a seasoned ethnographer, and instead they are left to an undergraduate student with a presumptuous question. In return for their patience and painful memories, I do little for the refugees who gave me so much of themselves. Despite all this, I am still granted the authority to tell their stories. But surely it is those who must negotiate the rhetoric of humanitarian aid in their everyday lives who can best speak to its dehumanization? People are only willing to “listen to the story as long as the story teller is not the Other.”¹¹ The only way for refugees’ voices to enter the public discourse on institutionalized power is if their identities are packaged through/by a western voice. They must be (imperial) translated into a testimonial in quantitative and qualitative work by a western academic. The very scholars who use the refugee as research—even those who argue for greater refugee rights and autonomy—undermine the agency of the refugee by accepting and writing within this elitist framework for acceptable forms of knowing. Yet, space for resistance remains, and the

¹⁰ An awards ceremony was held for Richmond students by the International Education Office. A ‘Student of the Year’ award is given each year to a student deemed exceptional for their travel and academic pursuits. The dean stood at the microphone and used exotic words like “Africa!” and “refugees” while she explained why I received the award. My “deservingness” was qualified by the exotic. I knew plenty of students at the banquet who have worked much harder for the Office of International Education, and whose quality of work is leagues above my own. And yet, because my research stuck out for its strangeness, I was given the award. And even though I knew why I had won it and disagreed with its terms, I took the award anyways. What kind of person does that make me? It’s a pewter cup, and I’ve put pencils in it as an attempt down play the audacity of my actions. Who have I allowed to be figured as ‘exotic’ so that I can have a nice pencil-holder?

¹¹ Fine, Michelle. IBID: 80.

possibility for change itself warrants and academic translation of the process and implications of figuring the refugee.

Getting on with it

“In an era of rampant reflexivity, just getting on with it may be the most radical action one can make.”¹² While it is important to keep in mind the ways in which I exploit and exotify during the writing process, it is also essential to finally take that step into the ethical (mine)field of re-presenting other. It is just as problematic to keep the stories hidden in field notes as it is to write and misrepresent them. If I never shared the stories of those who shared themselves with me, then they would be silenced with certainty, and that is the ultimate violation of re-presentation. In the end the only thing to do is write, and in the next chapter I have tried my best to navigate around possibilities of misrepresenting Other in the auto-ethnographic narrative.

I work to avoid misrepresentation by resisting the tendency to essentialize Others’ voices. “In a reflexive mode, there is thus always a danger that the people studied are treated as garnishes and condiments, tasty only in relationship to the main course, the [author].”¹³ To avoid figuring refugees as “garnishes” for narcissistic writing, I present their voices as an occasion for understanding how systems of power work through/against/ despite them in the larger discourse of humanitarian assistance. I try to shift from the “self-indulged confessional”¹⁴ that auto-ethnographies can sometimes slip towards, by focusing on the relationships between Self and the refugees whose voices are presented in the text. In doing so, the auto-ethnographic narrative can

¹² Lather, Patti. *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991.

¹³ Laurel, Richardson. “The Collective Story: Postmodernism and the writing of Sociology.” *Sociological Focus* 21(3) (1988), 199-208.

¹⁴ Ruud, Gary. The Interdependence between Fieldworker, Context, and Other in Ethnographic Research. 239.

offer a lens through which to understand and critique institutionalized norms of power in the discourse of humanitarian assistance.

We cannot allow reflexivity to become an end in itself-another academic fad that is pursued for its own sake. A reflexive and self-critical methodological stance can become meaningful only when it engages in the politics of reality and intervenes in it in some significant way. Otherwise, we risk the charge of self-absorbed navel gazing or “soul-searching.”¹⁵

The auto-ethnographic narrative from a communication scholar’s perspective is unique in its ability to move the research away from a self-centered expression of “I.” Because the project’s focus is on the *discourse* of humanitarian assistance, in Chapter Three I explore not just the experience of “I” in the camp, but also the communicative interaction between Self and Other, between me and the refugees whom I speak with and re-present in the narrative. It is within this communicative moment that I can move through “I” and towards a more useful deconstruction of the systems of power at work in humanitarian discourse.

¹⁵ Harding, Sandra. *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Chapter Two

Evolution of a Discourse

“We only try to make a little difference.”¹⁶

¹⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ms. Sadako Ogata, 18 September 1997, cited in Anna Schmidt’s “How camps become ‘Mainstream’ policy for assisting refugees.” Working draft accessed in Refugee Law Project archives.

Every system of discourse is historically situated, and the purpose of this chapter is to contextualize humanitarian assistance as a system with a history. By understanding its origins, we can better locate the power structures of refugee assistance as they manifest in camp space, international media, and national policy. This chapter focuses on the evolution of humanitarian aid to refugees; specifically the development of the encampment policy and its inherent structural problems. Encampment policy was never mentioned in the birth of refugee assistance, but has become the status-quo solution for millions of refugees world wide. The basic background in this chapter leaves us better prepared to recognize how the discourse unfolds as I move into the narrative of the camp.

The Origins of the Refugee Relief Regime

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly.¹⁷ The agency was formed to meet the emergency temporary needs of hundreds of thousands of European refugees resulting from World War II. The agency's original mandate was to safeguard the rights and well being of refugees enshrined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the primary international instrument that defines the status of refugees, their rights, and their obligations to the host State. UNHCR's creators eventually realized that the refugee problem was not only limited to Europe, and so they expanded their sphere of influence with the 1967 Protocol. The 1967 Protocol gave them a worldwide mandate, and fixed UNHCR as a permanent, lead organization for refugees rights. UNHCR shifted from a relatively small, localized agency to a massive organization with branches in over 100 countries, and an annual budget of more than \$1

¹⁷ "Basic Facts." *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. 10 April 2007. <http://www.unhcr.org/basics.html>.

billion.¹⁸ Throughout the 1980's, a dramatic institutional shift occurred that restructured the system of refugee relief and significantly altered the focus from the original protection mandate of UNHCR. Where before UNHCR was a small organization dedicated to its political role as a refugee rights advocate, it became the primary assistance giver for refugees in host countries.

The idea was beginning to arise that the NGO network, in cooperation with the UN and funded by Western governments, might move from merely filling the gaps in official relief programmes run by national governments, to being the primary response to disasters...As donor governments began to channel emergency funds through NGOs, deliberately circumventing African governments, they radically changed the nature of institutional humanitarianism.¹⁹

Before the 1980's, host governments were responsible to meet the needs of refugees while UNCHR served a watchdog function. Left to their own devices, refugees were free to move and seek employment, but received little financial support or protection. As neo-liberalism took hold, UNHCR assumed the role of donor's "money caretaker" and bypassed host governments, to deliver aid to refugees.

The transition of refugee responsibility from the host government to UNHCR was a gradual, ad hoc process, and

each step was taken for specific reasons, with particular problems in mind. None was simply imposed by the international bureaucracy; rather they were negotiated between different governments and institutions. Some were adopted reluctantly. But each step represented a transfer of power to international institutions.²⁰

The reluctance of international institutions to take power from the national government is arguable. To control refugee relief means access to new sources of power and significant donor funding. A whole new charitable market developed, where humanitarian agencies compete to sell

¹⁸ "Helping refugees: An introduction to UNHCR, 2006 edition." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 10 April 2007. <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/420cc0432.html>.

¹⁹ DeWaal, Alex. *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*. African Rights and the International African Institute. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 69.

²⁰ DeWaal, Alex. *Ibid.* 70.

to donor institutions and the donating public.²¹ The international institutions' acceptance of refugee assistance seems to be more a matter of convenience for both parties.²² While poor African governments were eager to relinquish control of a 'burden' onto international shoulders, humanitarian institutions were eager to cash in the international check.

The institutional shift undermined the question of accountability on many levels. Under the original mandate, host governments could be held accountable for their treatment of refugees by international law. When international institutions became responsible for refugee assistance, they were not bound as the state to recognized legislation. Clear accountability was relinquished from governments who could now claim refugees were "UNHCR's problem."

This process of internationalization is the key to the appropriation of power by international institutions and the retreat from domestic accountability... Moreover, the 'responsibility' of UN agencies, NGOs and foreign governments is a vague and easily evaded moral responsibility-nothing more than an aspiration-rather than a practical obligation for which the 'responsible' institution can be called into account.²³

While DeWaal speaks to the loss of domestic accountability in famine vulnerable countries, the same concept holds true for countries hosting refugees. Host governments not only lost political accountability for refugees, but also their ability to integrate refugees into host national society.

The internationalization of social welfare demanded a new structure of assistance for refugees, a parallel aid system maintained through international NGOs. When refugees were the responsibility of the state, the government had a laissez-faire approach which allowed for refugees to fend for themselves, sharing the same resources as host nationals.²⁴ When refugees

²¹ DeWaal, Alex. Ibid. 79.

²² Verdirame, Guglielmo & Barbara Harrell-Bond. *Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism*. Studies in Forced Migration Vol. 17. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005.

²³ DeWaal, Alex. Ibid. 70.

²⁴ Please read Barbara Harrell-Bond's discussion of pre 1991 refugees in Kenya versus post 1991 in *Rights in Exile*.

became the international responsibility, they were separated from host society and isolated in camps that could be more effectively managed by international organizations.

The creation and entrenchment of this international technocracy have immense ramifications. One huge gap is the absence of any political approach to famine prevention. A second is the failure to address the accountability of the UN system itself. Accountability has been narrowed to a set of technical issues, notably financial probity.²⁵

With the shift from leading protection agency to primary welfare agency, UNHCR sacrificed its ability to take a political approach in the protection of refugee rights. If UNHCR or its implementing partners challenge a host government for state violations of refugee rights, they risk deportation. Refugee populations are dependant on those organizations as their sole assistance providers, however, so they cannot afford to be deported. UNHCR must sacrifice the protection mandate to maintain its aid operations, and turn a blind eye to the violation of refugee rights.

DeWaal also considers the accountability of the UN system itself. For UNHCR, accountability is defined by a limited notion of donor demands. Instead of focusing on the needs of beneficiaries, UNHCR responds to its benefactors' demand for balanced budget reports, which one aid worker referred to in an interview as, "the obsession of numbers."²⁶ A recent protection capacity report by UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) exposes UNHCR's current accountability problem and offers suggestions to reestablish refugees' needs as the organization's priority.

Current monitoring practices tend to emphasize quantitative data concerning inputs and outputs. Rarely do they incorporate qualitative monitoring, direct feed

²⁵ DeWaal, Alex. Ibid. 71.

²⁶ Interview with employee from JRS, Kampala, April 2006.

back from beneficiaries, or an analysis of changes in the external environment...current monitoring guidelines do not include process indicators that measure refugee participation and perceptions.²⁷

The UNHCR evaluation suggests that there is a substantial lack of dialogue between refugees and aid officials, a separation that is institutionalized through UNHCR Geneva requirements for reports. The implementing partner (IP) organizations who run assistance programs in the camps are required to send weekly, monthly, and annual reports to headquarters, and policy guidelines dictate the terms of discourse between Geneva and the field. By placing the emphasis on quantitative data, UNHCR restricts the important dialogue necessary between aid giver and receiver, and denies refugees the right to communicate with Geneva about their own living conditions. For example, if UNHCR receives funds from the Japanese government to build a school in a refugee camp, they will contract the job out to one of their in-the-field partners. In “monitoring” whether the assistance was effective, UNHCR will ask the field organization to give them numbers and statistics: how many bricks were bought with the money, how many desks, pencils, and books were purchased? How much were the builders paid, and how many days did it take to build? UNHCR does not ask for context: did the new school increase the number of students in the camp? Is it well staffed, suitable for the children and meeting academic needs? Does it create tension with the local community in any way? How has the building of the new school affected the refugee population? What do refugees feel could be improved, or done differently? There is no space for qualitative data, such as the refugees’ opinion on the school’s impact or consequences, in the current format of UNHCR monitoring reports. How is UNHCR supposed to protect refugees’ rights when monitoring is limited to facts and figures? The report concludes that for the organization to be more responsive to the needs of its beneficiaries, it must

²⁷ Kelley, Ninette, Peta Sandison and Simon Lawry-White. “Enhancing UNHCR’s capacity to monitor the protection, rights, and well-being of refugees.” *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*. June 2004. 10.

change its monitoring requirements to create space in the reports for dialogue, context, and refugee opinion.

The evolution of UNHCR from protection to welfare resulted in a system that is challenged by issues of accountability and funding. The encampment policy developed as UNHCR's mainstream policy of assistance because it provides a convenient way to deliver assistance and account for spending, with tragic consequences for refugees.

The Encampment Policy

Traditionally, there are three main options for any refugee, including repatriation which is the return back to country of origin, resettlement to a third country, or local integration.²⁸ The opportunities are bleak: Repatriation is often impossible for any number of reasons, including ongoing fighting, destroyed homes and livelihoods, or fear of continued persecution.

Resettlement in a third country is even more unlikely. While rich countries with immigration histories such as the U.S, Australia, and Canada do accept the largest numbers of refugees for resettlement, out of some 11,500,000 refugees and asylum seekers world-wide, only 85,000 were granted resettlement in a third country in 2005.²⁹ Proportionally speaking, for most refugees resettlement to a third country remains a slim chance. UNCHR has a very narrow definition of local integration which includes naturalization and citizenship for refugees to the country of first asylum. Because countries of first asylum often receive refugees in the thousands, they are unwilling to consider the naturalization process for such large populations. Since these developing countries already lack the resources to meet the needs of their own citizens, it is understandable why they are hesitant to naturalize tens of thousands more under the current limited concept of "integration."

²⁸ "Helping Refugees: An Introduction to UNHCR." The UN Refugee Agency, May 2005.

²⁹ Refugee Resettlement Statistics. *World Refugee Survey 2005*. US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

“In more recent years, the three solutions have been placed in a hierarchy by the international community, with voluntary repatriation assuming growing precedence over resettlement and local integration.”³⁰ The hope for a quick return to the home country is impractical in today’s age of intense and ongoing intra state conflict, but instead of finding a practical and dignified livelihood option for refugees as they wait decades for an opportunity to go home, the international aid system has chosen an inadequate relief model of refugee assistance.

Rather than responding to this impasse in innovative ways, the principal members of the international refugee regime (host and donor countries, UNHCR and NGOs) chose to implement long term ‘care-and-maintenance’ programs which did little or nothing to promote self-reliance amongst the refugees or to facilitate positive interactions between the exiled and local populations.³¹

In lieu of more creative options, UNHCR perpetuates an encampment policy, by which refugees are restricted to isolated settlements and provided for by the international community through “care and maintenance” programs run by subcontracted implementing or operational partners (IPs and OPs, respectively). Encamped refugees exist in a frustrating limbo, because they cannot return home, there is no available resettlement in a third country, and instead of integration they remain confined indefinitely in camps. Once seen as an emergency response and temporary aid structure, refugee camps have become permanent living conditions.³² The 1951 Refugee Convention entitles refugees to basic human rights such as the freedom of movement and the right to work, security, and a livelihood,³³ to name only a few. The

³⁰ Crisp, Jeff. “The local integration and local settlement of refugees: a conceptual and historical analysis,” Working paper 102. *Global Commission on International Migration, UNHCR*. April 2004.

³¹ Crisp, Jeff. “No solutions in sight,” 12.

³² For an excellent analysis on the evolution of refugee encampment as mainstream policy, see Anna Schmidt’s piece on “How Camps become ‘Mainstream’ Policy for Assisting Refugees,” located in draft form in Refugee Law Project Archives.

³³ “The 1951 Refugee Convention: Questions and Answers.” The UN Refugee Agency, May 2005.

encampment system denies refugees their basic rights, yet is supported by UNHCR as the most “efficient” assistance model.

One characteristic of the ‘care-and-maintenance’ camp is the limited freedom of movement, which denies Article 26 of the Convention, “each Contracting State shall accord refugees lawfully in its territory the right to choose their place of residence and to move freely within its territory, subject to any regulations applicable to aliens generally in the same circumstances.”³⁴ The ability to earn a livelihood proves difficult if not impossible when movement is restricted to the camp. Because a refugee is not free to move, their access to markets and employment opportunities in the local community are limited, denying article 17 of wage-earning employment to refugees. Countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Zambia require permits to work, study, and travel which are often impossible to obtain, be it because the permits are purposefully made too expensive, or because they are arbitrarily denied. An NGO official provides a painful example in an interview,

A refugee tells me that the assistance was inadequate in the camps, and that he was being persecuted. When he went to get permission from the camp commandant to come to Kampala to complain to UNHCR headquarters, the camp commandant denied him. So instead he told him he was coming to visit a relative, and he got permission to come. When he got to headquarters, UNHCR refused his appointment because his permission only allowed him to visit his relative, not come to the office. They told him if he wanted to complain to UNHCR, he’d have to get a signed letter from the camp commandant stating so.³⁵

While Uganda has lax enforcement of the permit requirement, the fact is that settlements and camps are often in isolated locations, far from access to markets or towns. Even if they don’t necessarily need the permits to travel, many refugees lack the capital to leave the settlements to sell, trade, and work elsewhere, and so are confined to the settlements by lack of economic

³⁴ 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

³⁵ Interview with an NGO official, Kampala, May 2006.

opportunity and no way to generate legitimate income within the camp or settlement. Since refugees are legally denied the opportunity to earn their livelihood, they are forced to be dependant on aid. Women and children are sometimes driven to prostitution in order to survive, and their vulnerable position is preyed upon by local officials, other refugees, and aid workers alike.³⁶

Besides the opportunities for exploitation, ‘Care-and-maintenance’ programs undermine the repatriation effort. Host governments restrict refugees to camps to avoid the sense of permanence associated with integration, but by limiting refugees’ rights, movement, and productivity, the government also removes any chance the refugee has to build up a safety net for the journey home. It is difficult for a refugee to repatriate when s/he has no money or networks to make the move and re-establish life back home, and so people remain on camps simply because they don’t have the resources to go. Due to cuts to assistance for refugees in protracted situations, ‘returnee centers’ funded by UNHCR have been shut down in home countries, making repatriation even less likely for many.³⁷

The system of aid delivered in protracted camps results in disintegrating living conditions for refugees as time goes on, decreasing rather than increasing self-sustaining capacity. “Donor fatigue, as manifested by stagnant and reduced funding levels, despite increases in population and continued failures to meet minimum international humanitarian standards of service provision, is part of the operating environment for agencies working in a protracted refugee setting.”³⁸ Donor fatigue translates into budget cuts that are devastating, even fatal, to refugees. “Decisions about when to cut food rations seem to have been triggered by WFP announcements

³⁶ Nduna, Sydia; Christine Lipoah and Asmita Naik. “Sexual Violence and Exploitation.” Joint Mission Assessment Report for UNHCR and Save the Children UK. January 2002.

³⁷ An interview with a humanitarian worker, Kibondo, 12/2004.

³⁸ Crisp, Jeff. “No solutions in sight.” 14.

that not enough food is available for the whole population, rather than on the basis of any actual reduction need.”³⁹ On a refugee camp in Kibondo, Tanzania, the food ration was already insufficient when the World Food Programme (WFP) issued a food ration cut of 18% , citing ‘logistics problems,’ which dropped the ration to 1522kcal, or below basic survival standards.⁴⁰ The situation for protracted refugees grows increasingly desperate, and the intended consequence of encampment policy has had the opposite effect.

Finally, the encampment policy has become a determinant of refugee status unto itself. People who exist outside of the system, such as self-settled or urban refugees, become persons “not of concern” to UNHCR, as refugee status is determined by whether one occupies the physical space of the camp.⁴¹ By international law, refugee status should not terminate just because they have left the confines of the camp. Yet the current system is designed so that refugees stop receiving protection or assistance from UNHCR once they leave. This creates a huge protection gap with implications not only for those refugees who exist outside camp space, but for the communities who host them without any kind of international recognition or support.

42

Why then, does the encampment policy remain the status quo, despite its serious violations of Convention rights, its unsustainability, and its painful consequences for refugees and the areas that host them?

UNHCR will say that they can only operate within the constraints of host government policy, and yet perhaps here too the perpetuation of the encampment policy is another ‘matter of

³⁹ Kaiser, Tania. “UNHCR’s withdrawal from Kiryandongo: anatomy of a handover,” *New Issues in Refugee Research*, UNHCR, Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. Geneva, 2003.

⁴⁰ “TCRS Profile-Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service.” The Lutheran World Federation Tanzania Field Programme. December 2004.

⁴¹ “We are all stranded here together’: The local settlement system, freedom of movement, and livelihood opportunities in Arua and Moyo districts.” *Refugee Law Project Working Paper No.14*. Kampala, February 2005.

⁴² For further discussion on urban refugees, please see Refugee Law Project’s Working paper No. 16, and the latest Working paper No.18 for self-settled refugees in Koboko. www.refugeelawproject.org.

convenience' for governments and UNHCR. When Uganda's new Refugee Bill was being drafted, UNHCR's input encouraged the continued presence of camps, "Perhaps under this section there should be added positive powers to establish or designate specific areas as transit centres, camps, or settlements where refugees will be required to stay or settle rather than just including a provision that empowers the Commissioner to specify certain areas out-of-bounds for certain refugees."⁴³ Why was UNHCR actively promoting some provision for settlement policy in a Refugee Bill designed to move away from the repressive legislation of the previous Control of Alien and Refugees Act (CARA)?⁴⁴

The answer can be found in to whom UNHCR holds itself accountable. Were it refugees protection needs, UNHCR would not advocate for restricted movement in the Refugee Bill. In the refugee relief regime, UNHCR holds itself accountable to donors, and benefactors need statistics to justify their spending budgets. Camps serve as an easier way to 'manage' refugees and control services, for "the quest for humanity ... has taken second place to the search for efficient delivery of relief supplies."⁴⁵ Furthermore, camps offer high visibility of the refugee problem, which is crucial when it comes to donor fund-raising. "The charitable market is driven by demand for a humanitarian 'product.' By far the most important stimulus to demand is the media."⁴⁶ The images we will consider in Chapter Four, of destitute refugees crowded together, lined up behind chain link fences on distribution day to receive their bags of clearly marked World Food Program rations- these are the images we see in international media that tell donors, "See, there is a demand for your money!" The refugee camp space, as we will develop through the narrative of Chapter Three, prove an excellent space in which to produce those images.

⁴³ As quoted from reference (UNHCR 1996j) in Verdirame, Gueglimo and Barbara Harrell-Bond. *Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005. 337.

⁴⁴ The impacts of Uganda's legislation are discussed further in Chapter Five.

⁴⁵ DeWaal, Alex. Ibid. 68.

⁴⁶ DeWaal, Alex Ibid. 82.

Unfortunately, the refugee relief industry is caught in a vicious cycle: if it doesn't manipulate those images, then they won't receive adequate donor backing to keep the "care and maintenance programs" running in the camps that prove such fertile space for the images.

After funding some refugee crisis for over two decades, donors are beginning to lose interest, and are not as easily wooed by the competition of the "charitable market." Donors have quick attention spans, and want their money to be going to the latest disaster flashing across the television screens, where their institution, or government, will get the most press for their generosity. No one wants to keep sending money to problems that drag on with no end in sight. UNHCR and its IPs and Ops have felt the pinch of donor fatigue, which has resulted in steadily decreasing funds despite their annual consolidated appeals process. And so the international institutions that took over power from the national governments back in the 80s, those institutions that were so eager to internationalize social welfare and circumvent African governments, are now looking for an elegant way to get out, to shift the 'burden' of refugees back to governments, to create a tidy 'exit strategy' before the devastations of their budget cuts in the settlements catches up with them.

Today the discourse of humanitarian assistance for refugees has developed a new kind of "Geneva jargon," where the same relief institutions are now talking about 'bridging the gap' between relief and development, and ushering in a new phase where refugees become 'self-reliant' and contribute as development agents to the communities that host them. It is an attempted move towards the local integration solution, by 'sharing' services between national and refugees, although the refugees remain in the settlements. However, this supposedly different discourse is encountering serious problems because of its underpinnings in the

rhetorical space of encampment, and the ways that works to figure refugees. This “new era” will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

I have attempted to show how the current discourse of humanitarian assistance is a historically constituted event, informed by ad-hoc transfers of power, a loss of accountability, and the rise of encampment policy, which has several fundamental problems. The next chapter expands the notion of aid as discourse by employing narrative to figure my own Self in camp space. The institutional flaws of the aid system discussed in their historical context manifest themselves in my own experience. Through the narrative, we see how structural problems become personal realities for the refugees who now bear the brunt of the humanitarian regime’s legacy.

Chapter Three

Tales from the Field⁴⁷

“I became a refugee to save my life, here I am treated as though I have no life deserved to be saved.” –Burundian man, Nduta refugee camp, 12/2004



Figure 2.1 On the road to Kibondo, Tanzania

⁴⁷ “Tales from the Field” is a title adapted from J. VanMaanen’s book, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press (1988).

Busiku and I climb into the back of the 4x 4 land cruiser, garishly white against the blood red clay that clings to everything else. We clutch our seats as the car bumps violently down a pot-holed mud trail that serves as the eight-hour road to Kibondo. Kibondo is a beautiful rural town nestled between palm tree groves in a rolling green valley, with the hills of Burundi peaking in the distance. The town sits centrally to the several surrounding refugee camps, ranging from half an hour to two hours away.



Figure 2.2 The view in Kibondo

Kibondo Market and Taboo

The market hums with the bustle of over a hundred people, trading in crowded aisles at stands of vegetables, cloth, sugar cane, anything you can imagine. The car pulls up on the outside of the market, and Busiku and I step between stalls into the throng. All conversations in the market cease mid-sentence, and every single person turns to stare at me. I have never felt the

pressure of so many eyes in my life. I timidly smile and mumble “Habari!” (Hello), trying my best to downplay how stupid I look. People laugh and point, some shouting “Mzungu!” (white person) while others just giggle to their neighbors. I lean over to Busiku and mutter, “Why is it such a big deal for a white person to be here?” Busiku laughs, for as a dark-skinned Zambian, she moves through the market with ease. Busiku used to live in Kibondo when her father was the camp director, knows the inner politics of the place, and proved to be a (very patient) informer. She looks at me wryly and says, “Genevieve, do you think that the aid workers [the only people who are white] actually get out of their land cruisers? They go straight from the TCRS compound to work and back again, they never come to the market like this!” Indeed, the only time I ever saw the white 4x4s was when they raced through town or the camps, blaring their horns so that people on the road would dive out of the way, never once slowing down.



Figure 2.3 The Market

The sense of social taboo was reinforced by a discussion I had with an NGO worker later that evening concerning what he did to amuse himself. “There’s nothing at all to do here. You just sit here, in the bush, doing nothing.”⁴⁸ I offered, “But we stopped in town today. It seemed like a lot of fun...the little shack bars and cheap beer, the market! You don’t have any friends to hang out with in the camp or in town?” He shot me a look and answered, “No... we just don’t do that.” The unspoken social norm drew distinct boundaries between locals and the international aid workers. Aid-workers did not go “into town” to let their hair down on the weekends, they did not ‘make friends’ with the locals and especially not the refugees. By standing outside the car and moving through the market with my whiteness that morning, I disrupted a separation that exists between white/black, foreign/national/refugee.

My whiteness also marked me as a person with resources. Children came up to me, asking me for money or sweets, and completely ignored Busiku. She shook her head, “It’s just because you are white, they think you have money.” One woman told her son to come up and hold my hand, “because it’s good luck to touch a white person, good things will come to you.” I had a difficult time explaining, both to Tanzanians in town and refugees in the camps, that I was not an aid worker, that I had no food or resources to give them, that I was “just” a student doing research. As an identity, whiteness was collapsed with “provider,” because in the area the only white people *are* the foreign aid workers, and their bodies *are* marked by the power and money of the western world.

A humanitarian-worker hierarchy exists based on staff position and nationality and is reinforced by where one lives. To my surprise, I discovered that the international (and mostly white) staff who work as managers and implementing officers for the various partner

⁴⁸ Conversation with an expatriate NGO worker, Kibondo, 12/2004.

international organizations live in the gated Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS)⁴⁹ compound in Kibondo, and drive to the camps everyday. We would be staying in one of the empty staff houses on the compound courtesy of an old friend of Busiku's family, the man who took over Busiku's father's position as camp director when he left. The national staff that works directly for the expatriates as drivers and secretaries live in town. The national staff that works in the camp as camp commanders and security officers (the lowest-paying positions) live in their own fenced-off community within the refugee camp. Each rung of the social hierarchy is physically re-enforced with wire and guns. The white expatriates are guarded from locals by high-fenced walls and guards carrying Kalashnikovs. The locals who work in Mzungu offices live in town, away from the camps and free of fencing, while the poorest paid nationals demonstrate their separation from and superiority over the refugees in the camp by having their own enclosed community, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded with guns. Movement between the different spaces was top-down, expatriates could move freely into and out of any of the other communities, while locals could not move into white space. Locals in town were free to move in the space of the nationals living on the camp and through refugee homes, but nationals in the camp could not move as freely in the town because of little money and access to transportation. Finally, nationals living on the camp moved about the refugee community at will, but refugees can go nowhere. Because of my own position as white, American, and friend of the former director's daughter, I was granted total access to all spaces, from the highest echelon of the hierarchy to the "lowest." The freedom to move about as I pleased marked my privilege to transcend the rigid social system.

⁴⁹ Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service is UNHCR's implementing partner for refugee assistance and administration in the camps near Kibondo.

Parties, Privilege, Power

After dropping our bags off in the cozy staff house and catching up with the camp director and his family, we were invited to the “club house” for a (expat-only) staff party. When we arrived, a gate to the inner compound was opened for Busiku and I by armed guards (and promptly closed behind us). Inside, some of the staff were playing a rousing game of volleyball.



Figure 2.4 Our House on the TCRS Compound

As I jumped in to serve, I noticed a group of local kids peering in at us between the iron bars of the gates. There I stood, volleyball in hand, looking at them from the other side of a fence. I stood on the side of privilege, playing a game to which they were not invited, and indulging in the exclusivity of a “club house” while the kids return, under-clothed and under-fed, to mud-brick homes where they play with spare bicycle tires for fun. The disparities in privilege and

circumstance could not have hit me harder than if I'd been smacked in the face with the volleyball.

One of the features of the club house is a recreation room, complete with projector, pool table, dart board, foosball table, and mini-bar. As we all settled in after the volleyball game to watch a movie, Busiku whispers, "You know, when Dad set this clubhouse up, it was supposed to be for everyone. Like an informal place for people to meet." Somehow things had changed, and locals had to be invited (only on rare occasions, I gathered) to join in the festivities of the clubhouse. Earlier in the evening I had spoken with a young Canadian woman working for an NGO dedicated to recreation opportunities for refugee children. She told me about the difficulties her organization was having with the Tanzanian government, who kept stalling on the permits so that they could start their activities in the camps. How ironic that while refugee children were being denied the right to amuse themselves, a crowd of white faces sat laughing over a recently released movie flickering across the clubhouse projector.

From the club house, one of the aid workers, a wiry Irishwoman working for a Dublin based non-profit organization, invited everyone back to her house for a party. The music blared, the alcohol flowed, and she passed out real French cheese (!!) from her stockpile of imported European food, flown in as a rare treat for expat staff and stored in fridges hooked to generators. After a few rounds of local brew, limbs were loose enough to dance and I learned how to do an Irish jig. Throughout the night, a strange tension existed between my constant awareness of how I was performing privilege in that elite space, and how much fun I was having despite myself. The expats were a tight-knit group, "cuz all we bloody have is each other," as a slightly-inebriated Englishmen lamented. I was embraced as a friend, and the sense of being accepted into an exclusive circle was seductive.

Flirting with Ethics

I also began to realize how ethically slippery the role of researcher can become. My presence in Kibondo was based on two pretenses: one as a student doing research about refugee camps (I conveniently left out the fact that it was a critique of power in the aid system), and the other as a “friend along for the ride.” Busiku came to the camp to catch up with old friends, and I had just tagged along because we were on break together. One positions me as an information seeker bound by clear ethical obligations and terms of consent, the other as more of a free-roamer. My role remained vague, and because many people did not see me in “official researcher” terms, they were often more relaxed and willing to share sensitive information. While I was privileged with this greater access, I also had to work to respect the ethical considerations that blurred the lines of insider/outsider. One such situation presented itself as the party wound down that evening.

By the end of the night, everyone felt no pain, myself included. My attentions focused on one man in particular, a Canadian who had been working with an international NGO in Kibondo for close to a year. I took advantage of my position as a young female to flirt with him, and twenty minutes into our conversation he was offering me goldmines of information. He leaned in, took my hand, and said under his breath, “If you really want to hear some crazy stories about the trouble aid workers get into with sexual scandals in the camps, well, I could tell you about some things that went down right here just a couple months ago...”⁵⁰ I could have pursued the conversation, and maybe with a bit more flirting and a kiss he would have shared some truly damning evidence. But I realized that I was not only allowing myself to be objectified by him, but that I was also objectifying him. I was willing to make myself an object of attraction to gain information, and I was making him an object of information to which ethical considerations did

⁵⁰ Conversation with an expatriate NGO worker, Kibondo, 12.2004.

not apply. I let his hand go, and let the story go, but held on to respect for myself, him, and the research process.

The question of exploitation must be complicated by the realities of those with power. The life of an expatriate humanitarian worker is by no means easy. Compared to the countries they come from, the living conditions for aid workers are difficult. Living and working in a foreign culture with customs and language different from your own can leave you exhausted and clamoring for something familiar. From this perspective, it is understandable why there might be a need for volleyball games and clubhouses, imported food and wine. I can also understand why every once in awhile it might be nice to hang out with fellow expatriates who share similar backgrounds and can find support in the common struggles of Mzungus in African countries.

The abuse of power lies in the exclusivity with which the aid workers define themselves, constructing an elite self against an inferior other. “The ruling class is affirmed by recourse to rituals wherein its power is expressed”⁵¹ and so humanitarian workers affirm their power through habits that express their privilege. The aid workers do not get out of their cars. They do not go into town. They do not socialize with townspeople or refugees. They did not invite the local children to join the volleyball game. And the club house has become an ‘expat only’ bar. “International staff are noticeably absent from camps and inaccessible to refugees thus giving [staff] unprecedented power and control over camp life.”⁵² Aid workers have the power to choose when they will engage the Other and when they will remain in their elite sphere. Refugees do not have access to a space where they can chat with an aid worker over a beer and a

⁵¹ McKerrow, R. E. “Critical rhetoric: theory and praxis.” *Communication Monographs*, 56, (1989): 91-111.

⁵² Nduna, S., Naik, A., & Lipohar C. “Sexual violence and exploitation: the experience of refugee children in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Save the Children-UK Joint Report*, 2002.

game of darts. Refugees are confined to the camp, and it is there where aid workers decide whether they will step down from the truck and perform their roles as benefactors of assistance.

The First Day

The research situation often places the researcher in an overtly powerful position vis-a-vis research subjects, and this inequality is exacerbated by the researcher's often necessary relationship with access providers who may have control over other research subjects.⁵³

The morning of my first day on the refugee camp, I met Thomas,⁵⁴ a Tanzanian national who works as the repatriation officer for TCRS. The director asked him to take Busiku and I around that day, and he served as the researcher's 'gatekeeper,' the sole source of access to the camp. He provided and drove the car, and he also smoothed the process for my permission to enter the camp. The Tanzanian government makes it incredibly difficult to gain access to the camps, and people must often wait long periods and wade through bureaucratic nightmares to obtain permits. I spoke with one international NGO official who had been waiting for over four months for a permit to begin work. Thomas managed to register me under the name of a NGO worker who had already left but whose permit had not yet expired. Because of that, I felt indebted to him. My very necessary relationship with him affected my position in the research in several ways. I felt obligated to ignore his hints of sexual suggestiveness towards Busiku and myself. Just as I had marked my own position as a female researcher in my flirtations at the party, so now was I being clearly marked as a female in this man's advances. Had I chose to confront him about it, he might have restricted future research access. I found myself navigating both my disempowerment as a result of the leverage he held and my institutional empowerment as a researcher.

⁵³ Lal, Jayati. IBID: 193.

⁵⁴ All names have been changed to respect the identities of those involved with the research.

Thomas drove us into Kanembwa, displaying his command of every statistical fact there was to know about the camp. I sat in the back with my face pressed to the window, taking in my first sight of a refugee camp. Thomas suddenly stopped and called to a tall, lanky man wearing a faded blue shirt and pants walking along the road. Thomas shouted, "Noah! Come join us!" As Noah opened the back door to climb in, Thomas turned to me and grinned, "Your first refugee! Here's your first refugee of the day!" I cringed with embarrassment because the way he spoke made it sound as though he were my tour guide on an African safari, and we had just spotted our first lion. I wanted to avoid objectifying relationships as much as possible, yet here my position as the institutionally empowered researcher vis-à-vis Noah the refugee was painfully clear. Caught in the awkward moment, I began bumbling introductions. With sad eyes and a gentle smile, Noah saved me by extending his hand and softly saying, "Hello, my name is Noah, It's nice to meet you."

When Thomas introduced Noah, the man behind the sad smile was effectively erased and replaced by an animal-sounding 'refugee.' The interaction manifests a politics of positioning with two important perspectives: my position of overt power is understood within the researcher context, but why was Noah presented as sub-human? What system of communication was at work to dictate such a dehumanized identity?

In the context of giving humanitarian assistance, whether or not they are aware of it, humanitarian workers stand in an asymmetrical relationship to refugees who are symbolically disempowered through becoming clients of those upon whom they are dependent for the means of survival and security.⁵⁵

The framing of refugees as 'clients of charity' positions the aid worker as the powerful benefactor whose power is "further legitimized by [the] implicit association with altruistic

⁵⁵ Harrell-Bond, Barbara. "Can humanitarian work with refugees be humane?" *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24(1) (2002): 55.

compassion...its effect is to reduce visible consent.”⁵⁶ The refugee is reduced to a figure with little agency who cannot question the giver. Aid workers also decide which clients receive their assistance,⁵⁷ giving them incredible power because the survival and security of the refugees rests with them. A power binary emerges in the rhetoric of humanitarian assistance in which refugees are acquiescent receivers and the aid workers hold an unquestioned benevolent power. Framed by such a discourse, Noah could not be introduced as a man with a name and identity of his own, but instead as “My first refugee!”

The Rhetoric of Pity

After Noah joined us, we continued on to Kanembwa’s hospital. “Hospital” is a generous term, because it was more a collection of tarps, benches, and empty medicine cabinets. We met the head doctor who explained that because the camp was so old, donors were growing tired of giving money and funding levels were steadily dropping. As epidemics of malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS raged through the camp, the medicine cabinets stood empty. All that the health staff could do was to try to make people as comfortable as possible as they waited to get better or die. Noah introduced me to a small boy named Matthew, no more than three feet tall. He looked to be only four or five years old, yet he had the pocked, loose skin of an old man due to the effects of leprosy. I bent over to greet him, and slipped into that irritating baby tone adults use with children. “It’s so nice to meet you!” I gushed. “How..old..are..you?” I said in the halting manner that adults speak to kids because they think children will not understand. Matthew glared at me, pulled away and squared his shoulders as he said, “I’m seventeen,” with a hint of annoyance.

⁵⁶ Harrell-Bond, B. IBID: 56.

⁵⁷ Harrell- Bond, B. IBID: 56.

I was dumbfounded. With the stature of a toddler, I could not imagine how Matthew could be seventeen years-old. Noah explained that Matthew was born with HIV and, because he could not receive the proper nutrition or treatment while growing up, his growth was severely stunted. I stood corrected and humiliated as Matthew walked away. Why had I been so quick to make assumptions? And, even if I did think he was five, why was I so patronizing towards him? I pitied this “poor little boy” who had suffered so much at such a tender young age, yet through my pity I dehumanized Matthew by making him an object to be pitied. Instead of talking to him like a normal human being, I cooed with sympathy. Pity reinforces the disempowered refugee figure because it articulates that we will not try to understand the hardship of a refugee as a fellow person (empathy), but we will feel sorry for “them” as a more pathetic Other, and in doing so situate ourselves as a more superior Self.

Nduta

The difference between Kanembwa and Nduta is drastic. Nduta is the newer camp, built to accommodate a second mass movement of Burundian refugees into Tanzania. Where Kanembwa is more spacious, with less people, and has larger plots of land per family, Nduta is crowded, with almost twice as many people on a third of the land. Homes are stacked on top of one another and there is no room to grow food. Some families resort to growing tomatoes on the roofs of their homes.

As provinces in Burundi stabilize, refugees begin the repatriation process.⁵⁸ As they leave, the camps slowly empty. When there was talk of closing Kanembwa and sending the rest of the refugees to Nduta, a Kanembwa refugee said, “I will NOT go. The most importance difference between here and Nduta is that here I can grow my own food. That is the one thing I can do for myself here, so I don’t have to stand and feel ashamed when food officers poke holes

⁵⁸ Repatriation means returning to the country of origin, and it is UNHCR’s “most preferred durable solution.”

in my ration card.”⁵⁹ Because there is no space to cultivate crops, no jobs to be found, and little opportunity for personal agency, refugees in Nduta must depend more heavily on humanitarian assistance from the NGOs. They wait for years with growing desperation for something to change: an end to the fighting so they can go home, increased opportunities for livelihood in the camp, or the slim chance of resettlement to a third country. Frustration cuts thick in Nduta air and manifests itself in higher domestic violence, crime, and suicide rates than Kanembwa.



Figure 2.5 A communal field for harvesting crops in Kanembwa

⁵⁹ Conversation with a refugee, Kanembwa, December 2004.

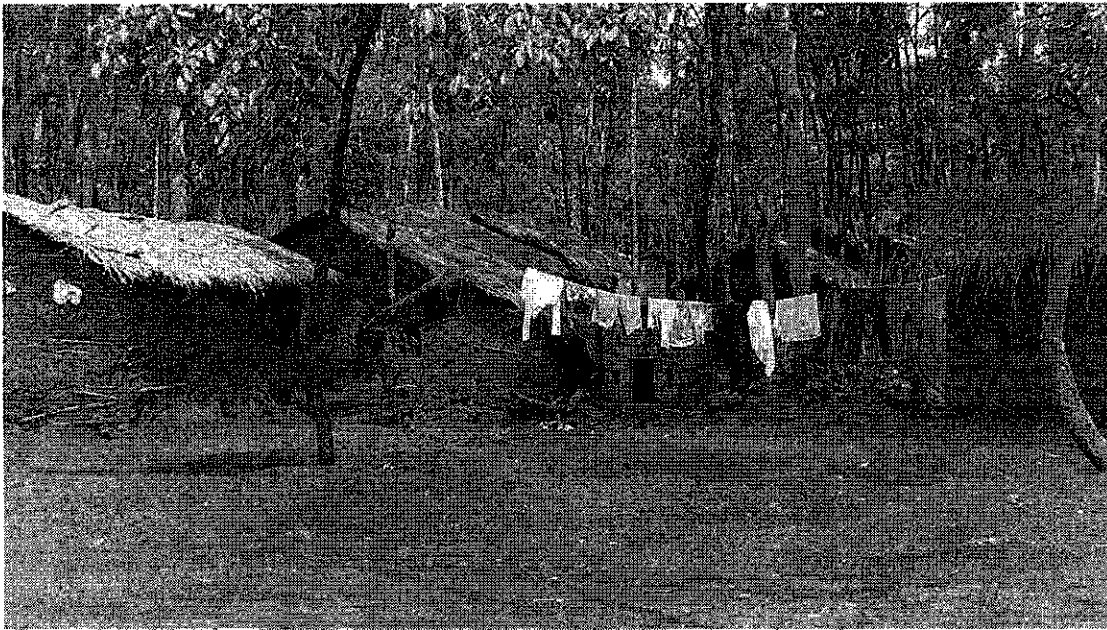


Figure 2.6 Crowded quarters in Nduta

Negotiating (Dis)Privilege with Incentives

Our first visit in Nduta led us to the assistant camp manager, Samuel, a polished-looking man with a shy smile and a firm handshake. We circled chairs in the shade of a tree and began to talk. Samuel was a university student when fighting broke out between the Tutsi army and guerilla Hutu groups. When the army began killing Hutu students on the university campuses, Samuel fled back to his province, but the fighting followed him home. He crossed the border to Tanzania, registered as a refugee in Nduta, and has been working as the assistant camp manager for the last decade. He serves as the liaison between the refugees and NGO staff, explains and enforces new camp policies, acts as a one-man security and investigation force for crime in the camp, and serves as the focal point to express refugees' needs and concerns.⁶⁰

Samuel explained with frustration the system of “incentives” refugee workers. By Tanzanian law, refugees are not allowed to receive pay checks, and instead are given “incentives.” Incentives are a fraction of what Tanzanians make in the same job, and nothing in

⁶⁰ Conversation with Samuel, Nduta, December 2004.

comparison to international employees' salaries. Samuel told me, "I put in sixteen hour days and get paid pennies. I have a college education, but I'm treated like a slave." A Tanzanian NGO officer also spoke about the power play in salary pay, "The international workers receive their paychecks first, then Tanzanians, and lastly the refugees with their 'incentives,' which are often late or don't come at all. It's a matter of priorities to the NGO."⁶¹

Samuel and other refugees who work for camp NGOs must navigate both privilege and disempowerment. They are privileged because they hold highly-sought employment, yet disempowered because if they complain, they will be fired and replaced by the next person standing in line for a rare job-opening. If refugees manage to secure a shred of personal agency through employment, they are quickly re-defined as resources to be exploited.

Reclaiming Identity

Busiku and I entered a tiny, dark room that sat off of the main path of Nduta's marketplace. As my eyes adjusted to the dark, I noticed a few rickety benches lined up along the sides of the crumbling mud walls. I claimed a dusty spot for myself, and nervously pulled out my stenopad and pencil. I did not end up using either until later that night when I could cry, write, and cry again in the privacy of my mosquito tent. It was to be my first "focus group discussion," and despite reading dozens of articles with titles like "Ten Steps to Focus Group Success!," nothing could have prepared me for the conversations we had.

The block leader,⁶² Nicholas, an elderly Burundian man with a patient face who moved and spoke with slow, steady, and articulate deliberation, introduced himself and left to gather other volunteers for the focus group. Five minutes later, Patrick, a young man in his late teens,

⁶¹ Interview with a Tanzanian national, employee of an operating partner NGO to TCRS, Kibondo, December 2004.

⁶² The camp is divided into neighborhood blocks for administrative purposes. The block leader is a highly respected individual elected by fellow block members for the position. S/he serves as a representative in official meetings with other block leaders, camp commanders, NGO staff, and visiting officials. Block leaders serve as mediators, counselors, surveyors, record keepers, and points of contact for the families of his or her block.

walks in and sits down shyly next to Busiku, while Grace, an elderly woman, shuffles slowly by, leaning on her cane and glancing at me suspiciously as two men help her to her seat. Felix, a middle-aged man with a sharp, flashing look walks briskly in and takes a seat next to the block leader. Thomas, the repatriation officer, exchanges pleasantries with Nicholas and then seats himself on the outskirts of the group. I don't know if this is to distinguish himself from 'the refugees,' or just because he does not feel like talking. Either way, I'm glad because I have been having difficulties during some previous conversations with Thomas' interruptions.

We introduce ourselves and I am sure my nervous ramblings present a challenge for translation.⁶³ At first the conversation moves awkwardly. I do not know how to frame questions that would generate discussion, and so I receive 'yes' or 'no' answers. My very questioning prompts expressions of, "What are these stupid questions? Are you joking somehow? Or just wasting our time?" But then the conversation shifted towards what the identity of 'refugee' meant to them. The discussion erupts and I feel a subtle but perceptible shift in the dynamics of researcher-subject relations. I move out of the position of authority, imposing questions on the subject that *extracts* information from, but does not *engage*, their Selves. Instead, a space of agency and engagement is created where people reclaim their identities and reconstitute what *they* feel that being a refugee should mean.

In that moment the refugee identity became not just a political or social circumstance, but a communicative act. In this new space, people had room to negotiate an identity that transcends not only the position of subjugated Other, but the entire colonizing rhetoric of humanitarian aid.

⁶³ Nicholas was the only person comfortable with English, so translation was necessary for Kiswahili. He offered to translate, and I certainly preferred him to Thomas, because I felt that Nicholas would feel more accountable to his neighbors and make sure that their words were translated as they wished to be understood. Grace spoke Kirundi, so Felix translated from Kirundi to Kiswahili, and Nicholas then translated to English. I realize that with so many languages, some original meaning might have been lost in translation. I tried to guard against that by asking Nicholas to be as exact as possible, and I also would restate the speaker and ask if that is indeed what they said/meant to say for confirmation. While Busiku, who speaks fluent KiSwahili, said that Nicholas did an admirable job with translation, I still recognize the room for error and apologize for any misrepresentation.

And it is from this disruption that conversation erupted. Felix looked at me, sharp eyes flashing, and said what I now have as the quote for this chapter, “I became a refugee to save my life, here I am treated as though I have no life deserved to be saved.”⁶⁴ In the figured identity of humanitarian discourse, to be a refugee means to be dependant, helpless, and subhuman. In the reclaimed identity, to be a refugee means to be a survivor; to be smart, quick-witted, and strong enough to escape a country in chaos and be alive to tell the tale. It means to have agency in a life acknowledged for its value. Felix did not say, “I became a refugee so that someone else could save my life.” To him, the refugee identity is not figured upon him by the rhetoric of humanitarian aid, rather it is a choice that he makes to save himself.

Patrick, too, emerged from a shy shell to define identity on his own terms. Before the translator could bring meaning to his words, I could tell from the passion in his voice that he had something to SAY about his Self being dictated to him by another.

I was raised in Tanzania. I speak Kiswahili, not Kirundi. My first memories come from this soil. My friends, they are brothers to me, they are Tanzanian and they know me as Tanzanian. I used to live *freely* in town, not in this *camp*. It is only when the government soldiers came and took those without citizenship cards to the camps that I came to be here. I only spent the first year of my life in Burundi-I do not know that place as home. Just because I don't have a card does not make me a refugee. I *know* who I am, and I am NOT a refugee. I am Tanzanian.⁶⁵

By engaging refugee identity as a communicative act, Patrick was able to challenge institutionalized conceptions of nationality. Like Felix, for Patrick the refugee identity is not something that can be imposed by citizenship cards, soldiers, or humanitarian discourse. It is a decision, and Patrick emerges as an agent of his own identity-making when he chooses ‘No.’

The conversation moved to how they felt that the space of the refugee camp worked to defined them. They informed me of the “Four-Kilometer Rule,” a Tanzanian law that restricts

⁶⁴ From a conversation with Felix, focus group discussion in Nduta, 12/2004.

⁶⁵ Patrick in a focus group discussion, Nduta, December 2004.

refugee movement to within four kilometers of the camp. The government's stated motivations behind the 4 k. rule are to keep refugees from using surrounding forests for firewood, to keep refugees from flooding local job and economic markets, and to contain the "security threat," that refugees represent because they are associated with crime and unrest. Besides violating international law,⁶⁶ the policy complicates the harsh realities of camp life. Grace, who had been quiet up to this point, lifted her eyes from the floor and her voice shook with indignation,

This four kilometer rule, they tell us we must find the wood for our cooking fires, the wood for our homes, within the borders of this camp. People have lived here for years-every piece of wood that can be used has been taken. We are forced to go across the boundary if we want to eat. Men are arrested, and women are raped there at the edge of camp-for firewood!⁶⁷

The Four Kilometer rule demarcates the camp as a deviant space, figuring refugees as criminal for being there and making refugees criminal if they try to leave. "These heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed."⁶⁸ The refugee camp once existed to provide temporary safe harbor for people fleeing crisis. Today, the refugee camp has become a permanent space to contain a rogue population. The camp space collapses into both heterotopias at once, a place of crisis and deviance.

Refugees make nation-states nervous. A refugee is someone who slips between the cracks of traditional notions of the state. By fleeing from a country that does not recognize them as citizens worth protecting, and coming to a host country that will not accept them as citizens, there is no state to claim them. An identity that exists outside traditional paradigms of knowing

⁶⁶ "Tanzania Country Update." *World Refugee Survey 2005*. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Washington D.C.111.

⁶⁷ Grace, in a focus group discussion, Nduta, 12/2004.

⁶⁸ Foucault, M. "Of other spaces." (1967). Retrieved Mar. 3, 2005, from foucault.info Web site: <http://foucault.info/documents/beteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>.

invites chaos and uncertainty. For the state, the refugee identity becomes something to fear and demonize.

Camps are known to be quickly militarized by rebels exploiting an aid system that lends itself to manipulation. The potential for militarized refugee camps to serve as bases for cross-border attacks invites the possibility of conflict between bordering countries. The refugee becomes a loaded gun, and an unpredictable liability to the state. By restricting refugees to camps, states try to make them less of a liability, but by reinforcing camp structures, governments provide the medium for militarization.

The State assumes that refugees bring the ills of the war left behind, such as drug trafficking, arms dealing, and roving-bandit militias. The State collapses refugee and terrorist identities, fearing that their own citizens will be terrorized by refugees addicted to violence and crime. “What makes a human monster a monster is not just its exceptionality relative to the species form; it is the disturbance it brings to juridical regularities.”⁶⁹ The camp is used to order this possible terror and contain this human monster that defies regular citizen-state relationships. By keeping refugees in isolation, the State protects its’ citizens from a corrupted humanity it fears would spread like a disease. The space of the refugee camp does not protect, it punishes. The camp reinforces the colonizing rhetoric of humanitarian aid by figuring refugees as anomalies, liabilities, and terrorists. The camp not only locates the refugee identity in a place of deviance, but imprisons it there. Nicholas exposed the function of camp space when he said, “It makes you feel like an animal here, caged in with boundaries you cannot cross.”⁷⁰

Nicholas also disrupts the discourse to negotiate refugee identity on his own terms. While he acknowledged that the camp can make him *feel* like an animal, he also made an important

⁶⁹ Foucault, M. “Order of Discourse.” *Modern and Postmodern Rhetoric*, 22, (1976): 1461.

⁷⁰ Nicholas, in a focus group discussion, Nduta, 12/2004.

distinction between how the space figures his identity and how he constitutes his own, "...I *am* a *human being*, not an animal." By re-framing the camp as a rhetorical function, refugee identity can be released from the deviants' imprisonment. The legitimacy of the camp as a defining space is challenged by questions between signifier and signified. Consider the camp space as the physical symbol of the 'signifier' and refugee identity as the 'signified' when we navigate the questions: How does the camp space work to define you? What does the Four-Kilometer Law and the barbed-wire fences communicate to you about yourself? Such a framing invites a conversation between signified-self and the signifier-camp. What does it tell (or try to tell) me about myself? How does it try to figure/fix/entrap me? Do I *have* to feel that way? Is how I am signified who I *really* am? What grants the signifier the right to define me?⁷¹ The communicative act transforms into a performance of resistance and agency.

The Food Distribution Center

On our last day in Tanzania, we returned to Kanembwa's Food Distribution Center (FDC) to watch the monthly food distribution process.⁷² The FDC consists of makeshift open-air "corrals," made of slim birch tree trunks propped together and roofed by large sheets of green UNHCR⁷³ tarps. Ragged wire mesh fencing separates the waiting area from distribution area.

⁷¹ Once the space has been created to consider how you are being figured, then you can reclaim your authority over the signifier to negotiate your identity. 'Yes, the fencing might be real and the law might exist. It wants to figure me as an animal. It tells me that my identity as a refugee is deviant. That I am a monster. That I am a terrorist. Well, I DON'T AGREE with how this signifier has marked me. That is not my identity. Yes, I am a refugee, and yes, I exist in this space, but I AM *HUMAN!*' The signified rebels against the figuring of the signifier, and reclaims the right to shape his or her sense of Self.

⁷² Once a month, every refugee in the camp gathers at the Food Distribution Center (FDC) to collect their family's ration. Each family unit is given a ration card which notes how many members make up the family, and every refugee is assigned a tracking number to guard against attempts to collect more than one ration. The World Food Program (WFP) is an international organization contracted as an operational partner by TCRS, and is responsible for the supply, delivery, and distribution of the food in the camps.

⁷³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Only distribution officers (who are Tanzanian nationals employed by World Food Program⁷⁴ and other NGOs) are allowed in the distribution area, while refugees must stay confined to the waiting area behind the fencing. One refugee per block is elected to collect the ration cards, and only he is allowed to step into the Distribution Officer space to receive the food and bring it back to the others in the Waiting area.



Figure 2.7 Food Distribution Center

We approached the Center from behind the Distribution stalls, directly facing the wire mesh fencing and the thousands of people packed behind it like cattle in the aptly-named “corrals.” It had to be over a hundred degrees, and the tarps trapped the sun and created a suffocating heat as everyone sat waiting for food. I stepped into one of the food measuring stalls, where a distribution officer measured out the daily portion of the food ration for one person. It barely filled my palm. He explained that the reason that rations are distributed monthly is because the portions are so small that it would be impossible to cook just the daily amount.

⁷⁴ See footnote 18.

Families are forced to cook a week's worth of the ration at once, and then portion it off per person, per day.

“The contradictions inherent in ‘humanitarian’ assistance are most graphically illustrated in the confrontational relations between the ‘helper’ and the ‘beneficiaries’ in the context of distributing assistance.”⁷⁵ The aid workers-the ones with access to power, food, money, and security- stand on one side of the fence in cool dark rooms and measure out food they know isn’t enough. On the other side of the fence stand the refugees, herded like animals and cooking under the sun, as they wait for their handful rations which they must accept as sustenance until tomorrow.

Figure 2.8 Distribution Day



⁷⁵ Harrell-Bond, Barbara. “Can humanitarian work with refugees be humane?” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24(1), (2002): 55.

I lifted my camera, looked through the lens, and saw sad, angry faces stare back at me through the fence. I felt as though I was taking pictures at a zoo, and I realized that I was performing the rhetoric of humanitarian assistance in that very moment. There I stood on the other side of the fence in the cool shade of a distribution stall, gazing on these refugees as a spectacle to be objectified through my camera lens. I occupied and willingly acted through that space of power and privilege. Thomas kept nudging me and telling me to take more pictures, but after one or two quick snaps I just couldn't force myself to take more and hurriedly shoved the camera back into my bag. I had further dehumanized people who were already figured as sub-human by the fences of the FDC and the way they had to wait for food. The sense of power and its disparity had never been so real to me, so overt and consuming until I couldn't breathe and I looked down in shame because I couldn't look the people in their eyes. That fence didn't just regulate refugees to the Waiting Area, it also kept human dignity confined to "our" side, where I stood with the other aid workers. Dignity couldn't fit through those wire mesh holes, and refugees weren't allowed to have it.

Creating Agency

How do [refugees] assert their agency and shape their own representations?⁷⁶

In a system that works in so many ways to undermine refugees' individual agency, how does one resist the overarching rhetoric of subjugation and dependency and create a space for personal action? The experiences of Michael, Catherine, and William prove that creative forms of resistance are possible, and that agency stolen by the colonizing discourse of humanitarian assistance can be created anew.

⁷⁶ Lal, IBID: 188. Insertion of [refugees] my own notation.

Michael

Michael and I sit across from each other on the cracked wooden benches of the camp “restaurant.” Over a skewer of beef and two bottles of the local beer, he tells me his story. Michael fled to Kanembwa from Burundi ten years ago with his wife and son. Michael was a Hutu, mid-level bureaucrat in the Burundian government which made him a target when fighting broke out between the Tutsi-controlled government and Hutu rebel groups. One day while he was at work, Tutsi soldiers came to his house and raped his wife, who shortly thereafter became sick with AIDS. Before they knew about her disease, Michael and his wife had a son, who was born with AIDS, and Michael contracted HIV soon after. None in his family were aware of their sickness until they fled to Kanembwa, when his wife fell very ill. Shortly after their arrival, she died, followed by their son, leaving Michael alone with a newly-discovered diagnosis of AIDS. A huge stigma about the disease existed in the camp, and Michael was the first person to come out publicly about his sickness. He was met with prejudice and discrimination as religious leaders told him he must have done something bad in life, and that AIDS and the death of his family was God’s punishment to him. Instead of allowing himself to be ostracized by the rest of the refugee community, Michael actively worked to change misconceptions about the disease.

Michael began a youth awareness program which involves peer education in the form of skits and discussion groups where young adults help each other deconstruct superstitions about AIDS. Augusto Boal, a scholar and activist who uses theatre as a pedagogy for understanding and revolution, describes this as “myth theater,” a kind of “poetics of the oppressed” that seeks to discover the obvious behind the myth: to logically tell a story, revealing evident truths.⁷⁷ Through this theatre program, Michael helped create a space where children could consider the myths and truths of AIDS, and not have their identities dictated to them by social stigma.

⁷⁷ Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. 150.

Michael explained with a crooked little smile that the same religious leaders who had originally condemned him now work with him to expand the program in their congregations. He also said that more people have come out as AIDs carriers, and that the general attitude in the camp has been increasingly accepting. The program is so successful that it has spread to other camps in the Kibondo district, and Michael is currently working to extend the program into other districts of Tanzania and beyond. Through his work, Michael transcends a system that tells him he should be passive and dependant, and a community that had rejected him for his illness. Through theatre, he forged a communicative space in which youth can navigate their own identities and reclaim agency as human beings, whether or not they are sick with AIDs. Instead of accepting how he is figured as a refugee and AIDs carrier, he struggled against it. In doing so, he transformed attitudes, renegotiated Self on his terms, and created a space for agency. At the end of our conversation, Michael said, “The most important lesson of being a refugee is this: A person cannot grow without struggle in their life.”⁷⁸

Catherine and William

Catherine is an elegant, soft-spoken woman, while her husband William is a large man with an even larger laugh. Both of them served as high-level diplomats in Burundi before fighting broke out, and lived in a luxurious home with chauffeurs who drove their children to private school every morning. Catherine told me that they were determined to stay in Burundi and try to work towards peaceful political negotiations, despite the fact that they were targeted by the Tutsi army because they were Hutus in high positions of political power. One day, however, their eldest daughter looked out the window and saw their neighbors get hacked to death by an approaching group of soldiers, and it was then that Catherine and William had to grab their children, leave everything behind, and flee for their lives across the border to

⁷⁸ A conversation with Michael, Kanembwa, 12/2004.

Tanzania. Along the way, what possessions they had managed to bring, including their car, were taken from them as bribes to checkpoint soldiers who refused to let them pass otherwise. By the time they arrived at Kanembwa, they had nothing but each other.

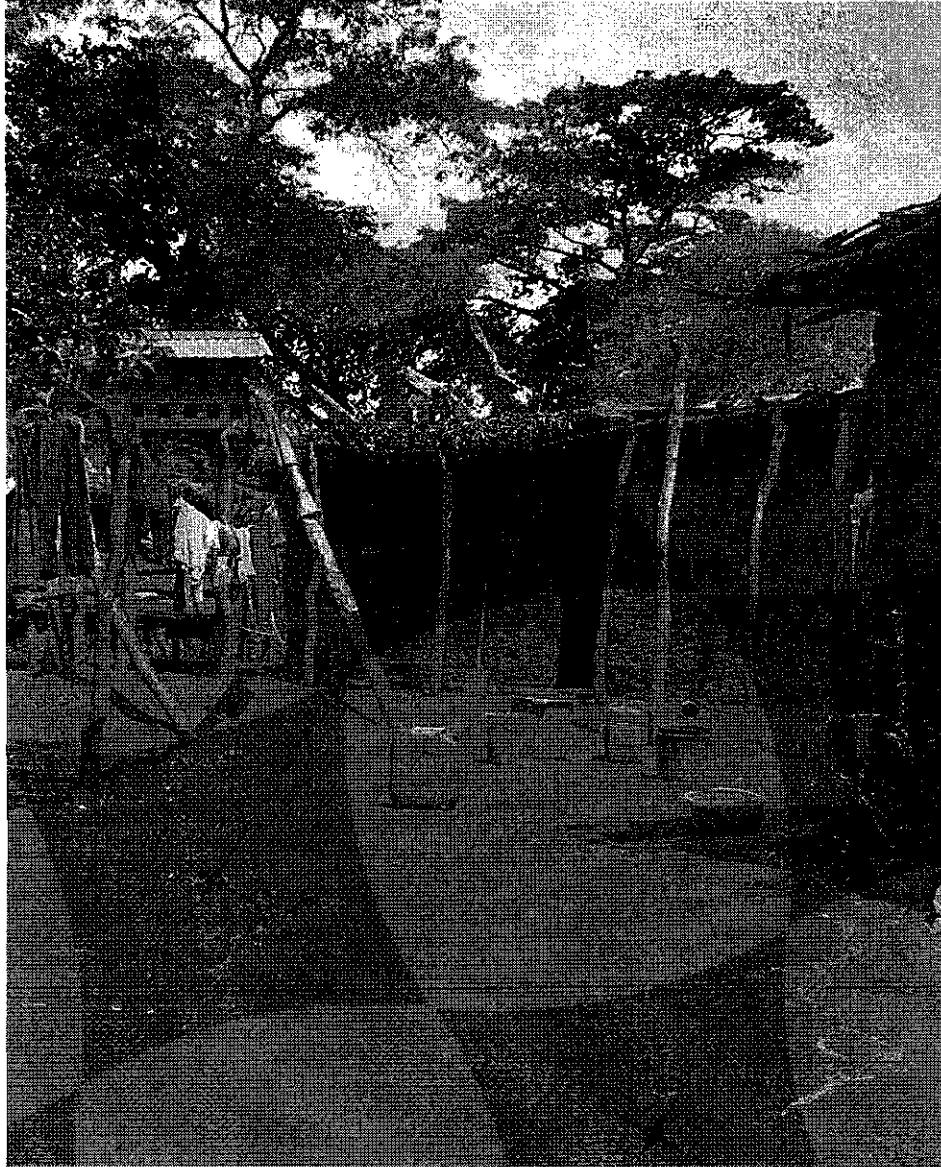


Figure 2.9 Catherine and William's Home in Kanembwa

The miserable conditions of the refugee camp are often justified by the notion that “Africans are used to a simple life. These camps are not so much different then their villages.”⁷⁹ Yet Catherine and William are examples of those who lived with the highest standards of western wealth, and now must live in a mud hut, ride bicycles, and cultivate a small plot of crops for the family’s food.

I asked Catherine how she navigates the extremes of her past and present realities. She paused, looking out onto her family’s modest homestead. “If I thought about what I had, I would go crazy. The only thing you can do is live what you have now.” But Catherine and William do not merely “live with” what they have now, they both work as tireless activists for the refugee community. Catherine works long days at the women’s shelter, where she runs a Sexual and Gender Based Violence Program for refugee women, while William serves as a figurehead of the refugee community, and lobbies the assistance organizations and Tanzanian government for better conditions.

Because of their high profile, Catherine and William have been offered the rare opportunity to resettle in a western country. Yet they refused, and instead continue their work as representatives and activists in the refugee community. “We cannot just leave and abandon everyone. These are our people, their struggle is our struggle. If they must stay, so will we.”⁸⁰ By refusing the privilege of resettlement, Catherine and William disrupt the binary in humanitarian discourse between the benevolent gift-giver and the unquestioning receiver. The opportunity to resettle is seen as a gift bestowed *upon* the refugee, who should accept with gratefulness to the aid system. In their refusal, Catherine and William also refuse to be figured as passive beneficiaries. Just as Nicholas and Patrick reclaimed Self by constructing refugee identity as a

⁷⁹ Conversation with an international aid-worker, Geneva, 12/2005.

⁸⁰ Conversation with Catherine, Kanembwa, 12/2004.

choice that was their own, so too do Catherine and William create agency through their choice to refuse resettlement.

Conclusions

This auto-ethnographic narrative works to deconstruct aid discourse through my experience and interactions in the refugee camps of Kanembwa and Nduta, Tanzania. I explore ways in which systems of power and privilege perform through me to figure the refugee. Several themes arise in the communication of the refugee camp, including the binary of assistance-giver Self and refugee-receiver Other, the collapsed rhetoric of pity, salvation, and fear, and objectifying relations in both the camp and in research.

Moments of agency and identity-making exist despite the system. Refugees can and do create a space for their Selves to emerge; an alternate sphere that resists institutionalized discourse. Disruptive dialogue occurs in the Nduta focus group discussion when refugee identity is reconstituted as a communicative act. Through that new paradigm, refugees reclaim the identity-making process and break away from the system of humanitarian/colonizer rhetoric. Michael, Catherine and William engage in acts of resistance by embracing struggle and navigating their own creative ways through it.

This chapter develops the argument of humanitarian assistance as a discourse that figures identities by working through my own experiences in the systems of power in camp space. The next chapter moves the figuring of refugees from personal interactions in the camp to the mediated images in international discourse. Using the UN's annual humanitarian appeal film as a case study, I will explore the several rhetorical strategies employed to figure refugee identity in the same ways as we saw in the camp.

Chapter Four

Image and Empathy

“Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Poe, Edgar Allen. *Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

According to Roland Barthes, most signs gain cultural prominence when broadcast through the electronic and print media.⁸² The figure of the refugee as a pitiful Other is what the world knows today due to the rhetoric of image/texts in international discourse. This analysis calls for a more contemporary understanding of rhetoric that is not simply the technique of persuasion in speech. Rhetoric is a complex system of message-making and sending that uses symbols, as Kenneth Burke describes, “to induce cooperation in those who by nature respond to symbols.”⁸³ The communication of messages manifests itself through mediums well beyond speech, including photography, radio, and film.

“Why the Appeal?” is the 2006 film presentation of the Consolidated Appeals Process, an international event hosted by the United Nations that makes an annual appeal to raise money for humanitarian crises around the world. The film and its accompanying narration provide a medium to deconstruct how the refugee is figured in international speak, but also how the international community defines its humanitarian obligations and assistance through the identities of spectacle-refugee and spectator-donor. The identities constructed through the appeal privilege a censored notion of humanitarian (in)action that limits donor participation to a superficial, sympathy-driven financial donation. Such action perpetuates refugee crises, and eclipses opportunities for greater understanding, personal agency, and political mobilization.

Background: The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) 2006

The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) is an annual appeal for financial assistance to manage humanitarian crises around the world. It is used as a tool by UN organizations and

⁸² Griffen, Em. “Chapter 25: Semiotics of Roland Barthes.” *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 6th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006. 358-369.

⁸³ Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (1966).

partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to plan, implement, and monitor activities, and manages to secure sixty-eight percent of its requested budget each year. The CAP claims to offer a more ‘thoughtful’ approach to humanitarian aid, and promises to provide “people in need the best available protection and assistance, on time.”⁸⁴ CAP presents its strategic marketing advantages to interested NGOs, which includes a broader donor base, increased visibility within donor governments, foundations, rich individuals, media outlets, and international organizations that donate money, not to mention a voice in humanitarian agenda making, expanded credibility, and coordination.⁸⁵ CAP also consolidates the humanitarian appeals of various participating organizations to reduce competition in the advertising market and increase the likelihood of donor support.

The launch of the Humanitarian Appeal 2006 took place on November 30th, 2005 at UN Headquarters in New York. Guest invitations focused on prospective donors, and included governments such as Denmark, Japan, the United States, Canada, and the UK; prominent foundations such as Ford and Carnegie-Mellon; humanitarian organization giants such as International Rescue Committee (IRC) and CARE; and rich individuals, including both private business representatives and politicians. The “primary purpose of the launch was to bring donors’ attention to the plight of millions of people in some 18 countries,”⁸⁶ which included Burundi, Chad, Cote D’Ivoire, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Great

⁸⁴ “Consolidated Appeals Process.” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). 15 November 2006. UNOHCA. 1 December 2006. <http://ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?Site=cap>.

⁸⁵ “CAP FAQ.” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). 15 November 2006. UNOHCA. 1 December 2006. <http://ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?Site=cap>.

⁸⁶ “CAP Launch.” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). 15 November 2006. UNOHCA. 1 December 2006. <http://ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?Site=cap>.

Lakes, Guinea, Liberia, Nepal, Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, West Africa, Zimbabwe, occupied Palestinian territories, and Chechnya.

The program began with an opening statement by the Master of Ceremony, Mr. Jan Egeland, Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Egeland is a UN figurehead in the media, and famous for coining catchy, if slightly wordy “buzz phrases” for various humanitarian crises. African nations jockey for his most tragic headline; Egeland has called Sudan the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis,” while Uganda is “the world’s worst forgotten humanitarian crisis.” Following Egeland’s opening were statements by representatives of aid organizations, a humanitarian appeal by Secretary-General Kofi Annan himself, and the showing of the five-minute film, “Why the Appeal?” produced by UNTV, the UN’s very own media production company.

Before exploring the rhetorical strategies within the film that constitute refugee and donor identities, it is important to understand the space in which “Why the Appeal” was presented, and how that setting informs the spectator’s gaze. Picture the space: cushioned designer carpet flooring, gleaming mahogany tables, grand windows with sweeping views of one of the wealthiest metropolises in the world, plush leather-backed chairs, and an expensive projector screen for viewing comfort and pleasure. In roll the guests: representatives of the richest and most powerful people, organizations, and governments in the world. An unspoken line is fixed between the North/South, West/East--a sea of white faces, of Western faces, of rich faces, who settle into leather chairs and gaze upon the screen. The black faces, slanted eyes, and foreign ‘others’ of poor, southern and eastern developing countries look blindly out from the images on the screen, seeing nothing of their audience and wondering who watches them as a spectacle.

The privilege of the Western viewer in the space of spectatorship calls into question the notion of distance and its role in the voyeuristic tendencies of an appeal. A paradox exists between how close the film's images bring the spectator to suffering, and how comfortably far away he or she truly is. "The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway suffering seen close-up on the television screen and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power."⁸⁷ Susan Sontag writes about the complications of power that come with viewing photographs of pain, which also applies to the spectacle of suffering in the CAP film. Through the spectator's gaze, Self engages in the pain of Other in a way that reinforces Self's position of safety and privilege. By watching the pain of refugees "first hand" through film footage from their (ad)vantage point in Geneva, western donors are "kept distant and safe from any actual conflict, and from the complications of explanation."⁸⁸ There is no need to understand *why* the people suffer, or to even consider that there is a "why?" in the first place. Viewers are asked only to accept as a given that people do suffer, therefore they should feel pity and give money.

Distance also frees the viewer from questioning whether elements of dehumanization, horror, and violence exist within his or her own society. The distance of Other is a physical reality, but also becomes a rhetorical figuring in which one purposely constructs an isolated Self. By placing everything violent and terrible as something that exists only in the space of Other,

⁸⁷ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. 102.

⁸⁸ Fair, Jo Ellen and Lisa Parks. "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees." *Africa Today* (1996): 37.

one's "own social system can be declared free from culpability."⁸⁹ Rozario refers to this process as the naturalization of the bourgeois self:

Moral philosophy, whatever else it was, was a political or ideological venture that invented a whole new category of monstrosity to dehumanize those who lacked the proper "human" feelings displayed by the more virtuous and sensitive members of society.⁹⁰

We do not just isolate Self from Other, but by locating horror in Other's space, we dehumanize them to lift ourselves to a more righteous sense of humanity. The implications of this spectator-spectacle binary echo the relationship between the virtuous humanitarian and subhuman refugee introduced in the previous chapter.

After one is successfully insulated from the baser horrors of life, what happens? Sontag argues that the "more taboo death and suffering became, the more eagerly viewers responded to their sensational representations."⁹¹ Paradoxically, the more we isolate Self from horror, the more we are curious about how it plays out on Other. Suffering moves from something foreign to something exotic, and it is in this moment that Self slips into voyeurism. The CAP film provides a medium for viewers to "enjoy the erotic pleasures of the 'gaze,' to see others without being seen, to appraise others without being appraised, [and] find...exciting possibilities for voyeurism."⁹² Through the film's gaze, western donors are allowed to engage their curiosity about refugees' suffering without feeling guilty about their fascination with pain. The

⁸⁹ Stables, Gordon. "Justifying Kosovo: Representations of gendered violence and U.S. military intervention." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 20 (1), (March 2003): 103.

⁹⁰ Rozario, Kevin. "Delicious Horrors: Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the appeal of modern American humanitarianism." *American Quarterly* 55(3), (September 2003): 425.

⁹¹ Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977. 167-168.

⁹² Hansen, Miriam. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

justification for this “pornography of poverty”⁹³ can be deconstructed through the semantic double meaning of the word “appeal.”

The dual notions of the “appeal” work to explain how viewers can feel morally justified for entertaining their curiosity of suffering at the Other’s expense. The CAP guests grant themselves the freedom to indulge the voyeurism of refugees’ pain by defining the gaze in terms of a righteous act.. The spectators are not engaged in the pornography of poverty, rather they are the virtuous viewers of a UN sponsored film for morally legitimate humanitarian purposes.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘appeal’ is adapted from the Latin ‘appellare,’ which means ‘to call upon.’ Thus it is that charity organizations call upon donors for contributions...however, the word has also carried another meaning: the quality of being attractive, enticing, appealing...It seems that a closer connection exists between the appalling and the appealing than most accounts of humanitarianism have recognized.⁹⁴

“Why the Appeal?” is a film that simultaneously calls upon its viewers to contribute to the UN’s humanitarian efforts, and entertains their attraction towards the horror of a dehumanized Other, a taboo spectacle in the space of the morally superior Self. To appall and to appeal collapse in the justification of the viewer’s gaze.

The appeal’s stated purpose is to provide prospective donors with an understanding of the humanitarian crises afflicting eighteen different countries, yet only DR Congo, Uganda, and Nepal are presented in the film. Has a value judgment been made by the film directors as to what crises are more important to film? Are the other countries not as important or exciting? Does Uganda provide more of a viewing-spectacle than, say, Burundi or Chechnya? Why is there coverage of two African countries in the film and no Middle-Eastern faces? Or white faces? The

⁹³ Bell, Daniel A. and Joseph H. Carens. “The ethical dilemmas of international human rights and humanitarian NGOs: Reflections on a dialogue between practitioners and theorists.” *Human Rights Quarterly* 26 (2004): 300-329.

⁹⁴ Rozario, Kevin. “Delicious Horrors,” 422-423.

motivation to film in one country over another could be dictated by logistical constraints unknown to the audience such as time, access, or resources. But the decision to represent only three countries and say the film provides a comprehensive review of humanitarian crises worldwide denies the historical, political, and socio-cultural realities unique to each of the eighteen countries' crises. The ability to have a more nuanced understanding of the different humanitarian situations is denied from the outset with the collapse of highly contextual refugee crises into a five-minute display of narrowly-represented human suffering.

The credits at the end of the film textually manifest the objectification and possession of the refugee. “[Images] objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed”⁹⁵ The representations of refugees in the film are not constructed by the refugee themselves, rather, they are figures owned by the director of the film. Do the names of the refugees who offered their words appear in the credits as co-creators of the film? Because didn't they, indeed, help the director in the creation of their image? No, they are not. The refugees depicted don't even appear in a “Special Thanks To” section. Their selves are appropriated by the director, and the only identity attached with their visual re-presentations is the name of the filmmaker. By placing their names at the end of the film, the director and cameramen signify that the images are their work and the film is their product to be officially recognized. The UNTV production label demonstrates that the film is a professionally mediated event, a production of (in)humanity that is cropped, polished, and presented for the specific aims of the appeal. All of this works to create a space for spectatorship that is marked by imbalances of power. The very production of the film, let alone its content, works to figure the refugee in ways that reinforce the institutionalized colonization of Other in humanitarian assistance.

⁹⁵ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding Pain*, 81.

Figuring the Refugee: Strategies in Rhetoric of Images and Texts

The film reinforces the colonizing discourse of humanitarian assistance by re-presenting refugees as an apolitical disaster, “the waiting other,” vulnerable victims, and continually ‘placeless’ within a movement/incarceration binary. The film further shapes humanitarian discourse by presenting images of the superficial engagements of Western notions of “effective” refugee assistance. All of these rhetorical figures of the refugee work to limit donor response to an unthinking compassion for a powerless other, and limits their participation in the act of humanitarian assistance to financial contributions when other forms of mobilization would be more useful.

At the launch of the 2006 annual CAP ceremony, the UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan accompanied the viewing of the film, “Why the Appeal?” with his own humanitarian appeal, a statement which informed prospective donors about the CAP process and encouraged the international community to meet the \$4.7 billion appeal request. He prefaced his plea with a short synopsis of the recent humanitarian crises:

The past year has been a wretched one for millions of disaster victims. It dawned with the Indian Ocean tsunami, saw a hurricane season unrivalled in living memory strike the Americas, and included South Asia’s devastating earthquake. Through it all, other tragic crisis persisted in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Like never before, the year stretched and tested the capabilities of aid agencies, and the will of survivors.⁹⁶

The CAP requests money for a variety of humanitarian activities, including but not limited to the assistance of refugees. The CAP also raises money for emergency response to natural disasters and some development initiatives. Of the 30 million people for which the

⁹⁶ “Appeal Speech.” Humanitarian Appeal 2006. UNOCHA. 1 December 2006.
http://ochaonline.un.org/cap/webpage.asp?Nav=appeal_en&site=appeal&Lang=en.

humanitarian appeal was made, approximately 20 million of those are refugees. Considering the ratio, Annan's focus on natural disasters is a curious one. He does not even make a distinction between refugees and victims of natural disasters, only adding as an afterthought that 'other tragic crises persist.' Other 'persistent' crises include over 7 million refugees in Sub-saharan Africa and Asia who have waited in camps for decades or more,⁹⁷ waited for politics to change, for conflicts to end, and for the opportunity to restart life free from persecution.

My purpose here is not to judge one tragedy's worth over another, but it is important to recognize the difference between a natural disaster survivor and a refugee. A victim of an earthquake is someone who has suffered at the hands of an unavoidable outside force, where prompt, sufficient, and effective humanitarian assistance is necessary to help a country in the recovery process. A refugee, on the other hand, is someone who is "forced to leave his/her state owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political opinion."⁹⁸ Refugees are not the passive receivers of tragic luck, rather, their suffering is a 'product of political history' and their circumstances are defined by a larger social struggle. The approach to refugee crises should respond accordingly with a political mechanism that engages discourse on grievances, accountability, responsibility and reparations.

By naturalizing refugees' movement...the problem can be understood not as a product of political history, but rather as an inevitable natural catastrophe. This conflation of indigenous people with the landscape itself has long been a strategy of western colonial and neocolonial discourse, and it has the effect of reducing the

⁹⁷ "Refugee Statistics" Fact Sheet. United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). Published by USCRI: Washington D.C., 2005.

⁹⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Convention relating to the status of refugees." 28 July 1951. 1 December 2006 <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/refugees.htm>

political agency and autonomy of colonized people to the unpredictable whims of the natural world.⁹⁹

By collapsing the distinctly unique situations of natural disaster victims and refugees in his appeal, Annan partakes in the neocolonial discourse that reduces the refugee to a body acted upon by arbitrary nature versus an autonomous individual exercising personal agency. Annan also removes the important political sphere from refugee assistance by rhetorically approaching disaster relief and refugee situations with the same perspective.

The appeal also uses repeated image/text combinations to develop the sense of a refugee as perpetually 'waiting' and powerless, and defines a specific 'savior' role for the spectator/donor. The film first introduces its title, "Why the Appeal?" in text that overlays the image of several Ugandan refugees standing in line for food. It is obviously cold and wet, as many people stand shivering in line. Their faces seem hopeless and resigned, and there is little action in the frame except for the camera panning down the line of faces. The filming technique informs the message that the appeal delivers: see these bodies, unmoving, waiting. The camera *acts* upon these passive refugees standing in a line, scanning so close by their faces that one woman even flinches away from the camera. Why the appeal, the film asks, then shows more images of refugees simply waiting. They cannot help themselves, the images say—they are powerless and helpless, and since they cannot save themselves then the viewer is obligated to save them. Just as only the camera had agency in the frame against a backdrop of sullen faces, so too are donors the only actors with agency to 'save' these refugees by bestowing upon them the financial resources to survive. The refugees will stand in that line until aid acts upon them, until they are given the bucket of food by someone else, and so the donor must act because the refugees will suffer without them.

⁹⁹ McCarthy, Michael. *Dark Continent: Africa as seen by Americas*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.

To emphasize refugees' lack of personal agency, the film focuses on the powerless, and in doing so reduces the refugees to their powerlessness. "It is significant that the powerless are not named in captions...to grant only the famous their names demotes the rest to representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights."¹⁰⁰

The first frame of the film opens on an interview with a male Congolese refugee. As he tells of the attacks of murderous violence upon his village and family, no caption is given to inform the viewer of his name, age, or hometown. Instead of being figured as a unique individual, he remains an anonymous person. Without his name, the spectator cannot connect with him personally, and so his identity is constructed solely through his plight and powerlessness in the face of guns, machetes, death, and tragedy.

The only instance of personal agency is represented in the character of the orphanage director in Nepal. Her interview includes a caption with her name and title, coupled with images of her exercising personal agency as a teacher, 'big sister' support figure, and director of a charity. Even so, these representations are placed within the more powerful voice-over that focuses solely on the charity's pressing needs, her frustration with the lack of resources, and an unspoken plea for help. Although the characterization of the Nepalese orphanage director provides a small space for agency, it is muted by the overarching narration of need and want.

"Audiences...expect refugees to be passive, nobly resigned to their lot in life, not actively engaged in reformulating their political, cultural, and historical identities."¹⁰¹ The humanitarian appeal needs the moral pressure and sense of urgency behind the message, "You **have** to save him because he **can't** save himself!" to motivate donors. If refugees were represented as people

¹⁰⁰ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding Pain*. 78-79.

¹⁰¹ Fair and Parks. "Africa on Camera." 41.

capable of personal action and change, the impetus for the spectator/donor's 'savior' role would be undermined. And so the 2006 film appeal is filled with the long lines of the "waiting for your aid" refugee instead of images of people actively participating in a political rally or peaceful protest.

The appeal also uses images of women and children to create a victimized refugee Other. "Women and children are used to evoke sympathy. Often viewed as innocents, without political attachment and involvement, they embody a sense of pure humanity because being refugees has made them into pure victims."¹⁰² One particular frame from the Ugandan segment shows a woman sitting in front of her mud shelter in the crowded camp. She has a baby in each arm, and her breasts are fully exposed as she attempts to nurse them simultaneously. Her nakedness, the only shot of adult nakedness in the film, emphasizes the vulnerability of the pure, ultimate victim in her struggle to provide for her young children. Such exposure of the body occurs nowhere else in the film, and contrasts sharply with the later images of fully clothed Nepalese women in elegant robes. The image of bare black breasts resonates with grander narratives about 'the primitive African native' in the Western consciousness, shaped by glossy National Geographic pictures of naked African bodies, adorned with bone jewelry, gold neck-rings, and loin clothes. In an attempt to symbolize her plight, the film's exposure of this woman's breasts figures her as primitive and reduces her from a person to her body parts.

The effect of such images is to establish a relationship between the refugee 'victim' and the spectator, but what kind of relationship is established between this Ugandan woman and the prospective donor audience back in Geneva? The exposure of intimacy, not only the woman's

¹⁰² Malkki, Lisa. "Speechless emissaries: refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996) 377-404.

intimate parts but also the process of nursing between mother and child, places the spectator in a position of voyeuristic power over this “pure victim.” Through the camera lens, the spectator invades a woman’s very personal space, allowing the viewer to casually encroach on privacy in a manner that, in person, would be considered indecent. It is the privilege of distance through film and the position as ‘spectator’ that allows these businessmen, billionaires, and diplomats in Geneva to engage in this impropriety. She, in turn, is figured as a person of no agency, she can do nothing but sit and be filmed, viewed-violated by an audience she cannot see and will never know. Her subtle act of defiance to the power differential of spectatorship occurs when she gently lifts a sheet to shield her baby’s face and her nipple from the camera’s gaze as it pans out of the shot.

Besides the helpless mother, nothing proves more effective at eliciting an emotional response from the viewer than the image of the child, the physical embodiment of vulnerability at its greatest. The child is exploited two fold, first by the tragedy of war and displacement over which he or she has no control, and secondly by the humanitarian appeal that uses the image to wrench open the hearts and purse-strings of prospective donors. Children are a constant theme in the CAP 2006 film, be they background ‘bodies’ or the central focus of accompanying narration. Their innocence is emphasized as a strategy to morally obligate the spectator/prospective donor to ‘save’ the pure, victimized children with financial assistance.

The segment in the Democratic Republic of Congo includes children in the background of an interview with a male Congolese refugee. Nestled between mothers, they stand in tattered, dirty clothing and watch the camera curiously. Their faces are the only other faces in the frame besides that of the man being interviewed, and their innocent expressions of childhood curiosity contrast sharply with the horror of the man’s story of brutal violence.

The Uganda footage features the image/text story of 'night commuters,' children who leave the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps every day and seek shelter at night in the towns, to avoid being kidnapped and forcefully inscripted into the northern rebel army. One image is particularly striking in its display of complete vulnerability: two children are sleeping close together on the ground, huddled in the fetal position under their blankets. The frame is shot with the cameraman standing directly above them, inviting the viewer to look down upon and pity these small, dark, and helpless bodies. Just as with the image of the bare-breasted mother nursing her child, this frame too grants spectators the right to invade the fragile space of the sleeping children: the garish backlight of the camera wakes one of the boys and he hides his face under the blanket in an attempt to escape it.

The Nepal segment opens with the sound of children reciting lessons, and pans across a mass of young humanity before focusing on the tragedy of a young girl with her siblings at an orphanage. Again, the film gives spectators access to an intimate space, where the young family is gathered around their teacher on a blanket in a garden and shyly tell her their sad story. As the girl explains the murder of her father at the hands of Maoists, the camera moves into a close-up of one of her younger brothers, who sadly looks off to one side of the frame. The effect is, as it was meant to be, heart-wrenching. The narrator then cues in with the needs of the charity, first with a close up of the director of the orphanage as she tries to keep from crying, then a wide angle shot of the children quietly eating their staple meal of rice as the director mourns their inability to give them enough. The narrator then extrapolates the needs of the orphans in Nepal to the needs of millions around the world. Children become a tool to inextricably link the donor's response to the CAP film with the spectator's knee-jerk sympathy for suffering children.

The images of women and children in the film establish a relationship between ‘victim’ and viewer that shapes the identity of the refugee as a pathetic ‘other,’ to be pitied and to be saved for they are unable to help themselves. The perpetuation of ‘victimhood’ implies that refugees are helpless in the face of some unfortunate, inevitable circumstance which simply happens to them, acts on them. The video appeal structures donors’ paradigm of thinking about refugee crisis in a superficial way, “to appeal to the senses rather than to reason, placing vivid accounts of suffering before the spectator in order to provoke an imaginative identification with the misery of the victims.”¹⁰³ The only possible measure for donors to ‘save’ these ‘victims,’ then, is to alleviate their suffering with financial assistance. The sympathetic response sates the viewer without asking for deeper understanding, allowing only for an unreflective compassion. Yet this form of appeal denies the fact that refugee crisis are not caused by unavoidable circumstance, but rather by complex socio-political struggles. This requires a different construction of refugee identity by “seeing [refuges] not purely as victims to be inspected but as individuals who are part of a larger social and political body engaged in struggles for autonomy, place and identity,”¹⁰⁴ It also requires prospective donors to become political actors, and engage in the discourse and action that will hold those guilty of causing suffering accountable.

The duality of movement and incarceration is another rhetorical strategy employed in the film to figure the refugee as a perpetually placeless. By constructing an identity that is constantly wandering, the ability to ground Other in a moment of understanding is lost.

Refugees were portrayed as either constantly on the move or as trapped in makeshift encampments. The extreme polarity of these representations is significant because it positions the refugee as deterritorialized, alternately moving and forced into highly regulated and surveilled spaces. Such representations

¹⁰³ Rosario, Kevin. “Delicious Horrors.” 32.

¹⁰⁴ Fair and Parks. “Africa on Camera.” 43.

reflect the displacement of refugees, but when combined with the inadequacy of media coverage of the roots of the conflict, the public is left to conclude that placelessness is a natural condition.”¹⁰⁵

While Fair and Parks refer to televised Rwandan Hutu refugees after the genocide in 1994, the same can be said for media images of internally displaced Ugandans today. The CAP film’s Uganda footage focuses on the night commutes of children from camps to town, as discussed in the previous section. The portrayal of refugees’ constant movement and incarceration is manifest through narration and images alike. A frame shows three children on the move, plastic sacks in hand as they weave their way through the crowded slums while the narrator says, “Every night, children in northern Uganda leave their villages and walk for hours to sleep in safety in streets of the nearest town.”¹⁰⁶ The children disappear at the corner of the frame, then reappear, still moving, down a long country road with their backs to the cameras.

The shot then switches to a fourteen year old girl, lying under her blanket with a silent young boy sitting next to her. She explains why they come and ‘make camp’ in the town, “We come here every night to sleep because we are afraid that the rebels will come into our camp and kidnap us.” Not only are the children physically incarcerated by life in the IDP camps, but psychologically so by fear of the rebels, thus compelling them to hide in the towns at night. The camera moves to the shot of the two sleeping children on the ground, and rests on an image that stretches the spectator’s eye down a long, dark hallway of huddles masses of bodies and blankets. The image’s harsh conditions, with stark walls, bars over the windows, and bodies sleeping on an unforgiving floor, render the environment eerily prison-like.

¹⁰⁵ Fair and Parks. Ibid. 38.

¹⁰⁶ “Why the Appeal?” Narration from CAP 2006 Film Appeal. UNOCHA. 1 December 2006.
<http://ochaonline.un.org/cap>

The text/images of the film normalize the placelessness of children in northern Uganda in two important ways. Firstly, the night-commuters are figured as a monolithic mass engaged in a ritual tradition of camp/town exodus and sleeping on floors. Secondly, the film offers little clue as to *what initially caused* “night-commuting.” The narrator makes the vague comment about “sleeping safely in streets,” while it is only through the testimony of the young Ugandan girl that the viewer realizes the children are hiding from some kind of rebel action. The narrative of the appeal does not ask the viewer to question the context, but only to feel compassion for the poor children who must react to unavoidable outside forces acting upon them (and donate money to help alleviate their suffering, of course).

This process strips refugee identity from contextualization in history, and dangerously limits the subject of humanitarian discourse to how much money the donor will commit. To truly alleviate the suffering in northern Uganda, rather than merely perpetuate the humanitarian crisis in the IDP camps, donor/viewers must be encouraged to address the root causes. A political stance must be taken to publicly air and redress the regional, ethnic, and historical grievances that continue to prolong the conflict and necessitate camps and commuters to this day. For that to happen, an appeal must be made for moral political action based on contextual understanding, instead of blind humanitarian assistance premised on moral indignation.

The film not only offers specific representations of refugees, donor response, and appropriate donor action, but it also offers specific representations on what humanitarian assistance should look like. Just as the appeal focuses on the mobilization of money versus the mobilization of politics, so does it figure effective humanitarian assistance as concrete examples of the use of a donor-dollar, instead of more abstract processes of politically enabling.

“We do prefer to keep our crises simple...It is one thing to respond with American skill and generosity to a human disaster, fly in the food and medicine, build the roads, set up the water purification plants. But at that point, our attention starts to lag.”¹⁰⁷

The last segment of the film is a focus on the humanitarian aid response of the international community, and provides a series of images that represent the CAP version of effective aid. In quick succession: the image of a long line of UN four runners on the move, a food-lift airplane, an irrigation project, a vocational school, a building under construction, and a school classroom. All of these images define appropriate aid: concrete, quantifiable resources of which the budget can be accounted for brick by brick. To determine whether aid money was well spent is the ultimate aim of the CAP monitoring process. Unfortunately, the most necessary assistance for refugees is probably not the most quantifiable, and traditional systems of aid distribution and monitoring are not well suited to address and monitor processes of refugee political and social enabling.

Figuring the Viewer: The Limits of Compassion and Humanitarian Assistance

The structure of the humanitarian appeal as communicated through the images and text of the CAP film figures not only the refugee, but the spectator/donor's identity and role in relation to the refugee. Each rhetorical strategy for constructing a dehumanized, victimized, other also cultivates the 'compassion response' in the donor. The identity making process for refugee/spectacle and donor/spectator is not mutually exclusive, rather, they continually inform and restrict the perceptions and actions of the other.

The appeal uses naturalization, othering, spacial incarceration, movement/incarceration duality, and victimhood to limit refugees' agency, indeed, but also to restrict the donor reaction.

¹⁰⁷ Koppel, Ted. *Nightline ABC*. 9 August 1994.

These same rhetorical strategies regulate donor response to a superficial, uninformed notion of sympathy, and conveniently restructures the discourse around a humanitarian problem so as to remove the desire for deeper understanding and contextualization and replace it with complacency with the unquestioned sensationalizing of suffering.

So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what causes the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent-if not an inappropriate-response. “To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering...is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark.”¹⁰⁸ Sympathy proves to be a dangerous sentiment in response to the appeal, not only because we fail to contemplate the deeper historical and political realities that inform refugee crises, but also because we lose the ability to find our own place in the problem. Sympathy is another form of distancing the plight of the refugee far enough away from self that you can longer trace your complicity. If we do not recognize our culpability in the oppression, it will continue.

The Appeal suggests that a financial donation is the only way for a viewer to engage in a sense of civic action with, and responsibility to, the international community. Again, this removes agency from the donor by allowing only one, narrowly defined option to be engaged. The viewer is either a prospective donor or nothing, and the option of political mobilization to address root causes is, like critical thinking, displaced from humanitarian discourse. An external evaluation of the CAP process, posted in the archives of OCHA online, even suggests under its ‘matrix of improvement’ that the appeal process move out of the conventional obsession with

¹⁰⁸ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding Pain*. 109.

budget statistics, and focus more on a discussion of internal security issues that prevent access to aid (a decidedly more political turn). The result of this annual cycle of financial donation, without political engagement of the responsible actors, means the same money will be regurgitated into the same aid system that never solves, and only alleviates, the problem.

Conclusions on Image and Empathy

It is not so much the images of refugees' suffering that are cause for concern in the CAP film appeal, but the strategies behind those images that figure not only the refugee in inhumane ways, but also the spectator-the film defines' the viewer's as a prospective donor and not an actor for potential change, it defines the only path for agency/assistance in the form of a monetary donation based on unreflective sympathy for the refugee other that alleviates/perpetuates suffering instead of ending it, and eclipsing other forms of understanding and recognition: both the contextualization of complex historical, political, and cultural realities that create/inform crisis and recognize refugee's agency within a larger social struggle, and the recognition of the viewer (western donors governments, businessmen, politicians) within the context of the problem.

Instead of the appeal, a new form of raising awareness for prospective viewers/donors is needed. It should be an

invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by the established powers. Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable? Is there some state of affairs which we have accepted up to now that ought to be challenged? All this with the understanding that moral indignation, like compassion, cannot dictate a course of action.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Sontag, Susan. Ibid. 117.

These are the kinds of questions that are necessary for informed, thoughtful humanitarian discourse and action. This is not an argument to banish filmed humanitarian appeals; it can be useful to raise awareness to international donors as they work through their conceptions of civic identity and action in a politically motivated international arena. But the appeal is not useful when it dictates the narrow, racialized perception that viewers can have of refugees, when it defines donors' response in terms of unquestioned sympathy and eclipses all other forms of understanding/processing/reflection, and when it demands that the only way to help is to donate money. The 'invitation' gives people the rhetorical space to construct their own identities: for refugees to figure their own selves within their political, historical, and cultural realities; for refugees to define their own sense of agency, rules of engagement, and relationship with their viewing public; to invite viewers to constantly question and seek a deeper understanding of the context of the images; to provide a forum through words and images where viewers can figure their own sense of responsibility in the map of others' sufferings; where viewers are given impetus to move from the fiscal to the political sphere, and from humanitarian assistance to real enablement.

Chapter Four explores how identities figured in the neocolonial system of humanitarian assistance are normalized in international discourse through media re-presentation. The images in the film appeal do more than just reinforce refugee identity in humanitarian discourse. The images turn the realities of encampment into myths, so that the figured refugee identity becomes the *only* way to know the refugee and encampment becomes the *only* solution in international consciousness. According to Roland Barthes, "The mythology that surrounds a society's crucial signs displays the world as it is today-however chaotic and unjust-as natural, inevitable, and

eternal. The function of myth is to bless the mess.”¹¹⁰ In this instance, the “mess” is humanitarian assistance as we know it, and the blessing is our unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. We forget that encampment was never mentioned in the 1951 convention, because the only images we see are refugees in camps: this becomes what we know. We forget that refugees are human beings capable of individual agency, because we only see images of them as helpless and dependent victims, and this too becomes what we know. These are myths that deny history from the system and identity from the refugee. The images re-present the myths in international discourse to the point that we know of no other existence, no other possibilities; they are the signs that have become the “eternal” and “inevitable” understandings of humanitarian aid. Barthes says that ideological signs enlist support for the status quo by transforming history into nature-pretending that current conditions are the natural order of things.¹¹¹ The idea that refugees *belong* in camps becomes the natural order, and it is from this mythology that new policies rise and fall.

¹¹⁰ Griffen, Em. “Chapter 25: Semiotics of Roland Barthes.” *A First Look at Communication Theory, 6th ed.* Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006. 358-369.

¹¹¹ Griffen, Em. *Ibid.*

Chapter Five

Development Assistance-A Different Discourse?



Figure 5.1 A “Sustainable Development” Project.¹¹²

¹¹² Figure 5.1 image retrieved from a Google Image search, 20 April 2007. www.kulika.org.

The aim of this chapter is to understand how the discourse of humanitarian assistance is contextualized in the current refugee development policies of Uganda. The Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), and more recently the Development Assistance to Refugees (DAR), are policy frameworks that attempt to move refugee assistance from relief to development, with the hopes of making refugees self-sufficient and bringing development benefits to the community. I argue that despite a new rhetoric of development and self-reliance, Uganda's first refugee development initiative, Self Reliance Strategy (SRS), failed because it perpetuates the same system that has been critiqued throughout this project. DAR is supposedly the "new and improved version" that has fixed all of the problems with SRS. I aim to show that because DAR works from the same problematic discourse as SRS, the policy will be just as unsuccessful in its attempt to bring "development" to refugees.

Uganda is a country with a history of hosting as well as producing refugees. As of 2005 statistics, Uganda hosts approximately 252,300 refugees and asylum seekers, including 214,800 from Sudan, 19,200 from Rwanda, and 15,300 from DR Congo.¹¹³ The majority are confined to settlements in the economically marginalized north and West Nile regions, while an unknown number live illegally outside of the settlements as self-settled persons or as urban refugees in Kampala. As Uganda struggles with its own development goals, the push for refugees to become 'self-reliant' has grown stronger as well as the need for hosting communities to benefit from their presence.

The Self Reliance Strategy (SRS)

The SRS was a program developed in 1998 and delivered jointly by the offices of UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister, designed with the hopes of bringing development benefits to the hosting communities of over 100,000 Sudanese in Arua, Moyo, and Adjumani

¹¹³ 'Country Updates.' World Refugee Survey 2005. United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

districts of northwestern Uganda. Some of the settlements in the region have remained there for over a decade, and the surrounding communities are among the most impoverished in the country.¹¹⁴ After initial implementation in the three districts, the program expanded to become the government's official national policy.

The stated objectives of SRS were “to empower refugees and national in the area to the extent that they will be able to support themselves,” and “to establish mechanisms that will ensure integration of services for the refugees with those of the nationals,” in the eight key sector areas of health, education, community services, agricultural production, income generation, environmental protection, water and sanitation, and infrastructure.¹¹⁵ The plan was to implement the strategy over a four year time period, and ‘by the year 2003, the refugees would be able to grow or buy their own food, access and pay for basic services, and maintain self-sustaining communities.’¹¹⁶

Several problems arose with the implementation of SRS which highlight its underpinnings in the traditional discourse. Firstly, the SRS was a top-down program, drafted in Geneva and Kampala offices and delivered to district doors with no consultations of national field officers or refugees.¹¹⁷ The policy was met with resistance by districts who felt they were left out of the planning process, and confusion from refugees, who interpreted the new policy as UNHCR's scheme to stop paying for food rations. Both refugees and local district officials feared that UNHCR was bored, broke, and looking for away out.

Others see implicitly that the SRS is an ‘offloading’ and exit strategy on the part of UNHCR. Much of the initial resistance is die to this perception. This was not helped by the top-down manner of its inception and the overall decline in the

¹¹⁴ Prior to the launch of SRS, the Human Development Index (HDI) of northern Uganda was .301 compared to a national average of .308. Uganda Human Development Report, 1997.

¹¹⁵ Government of Uganda and UNHCR. “Self Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for refugee hosting areas in Moyo, Arua, and Adjumani Districts, Uganda.” Report of the Mid Term Review. April 2004.

¹¹⁶ SRS Mid Term Review, Ibid.

¹¹⁷ From an interview with WFP consultant and SRS Midterm Review Team member, Kampala, April 2006.

UNHCR budget...There was a (well-grounded) fear that if UNHCR/OPM failed to attract additional development agencies, the districts would be left with additional responsibilities and no resources.¹¹⁸

The above quote also refers to a serious issue of lack of development agency involvement. As UNHCR began to cut back, a gap was left with no agencies or resources to help facilitate the transition and boost local government capacity to handle increased responsibility.

Development institutions and donors balked at budget expansions to include refugees, and the SRS program review concluded that no real integration of the new refugee development focus took place within the larger UN planning system. When I met with a development agency official in Kampala and asked about the new refugee development aid initiative, he responded, “SRS? What’s that? Refugees? Oh, you’re in the wrong office. Go to UNHCR.”¹¹⁹

It was concluded that the active involvement of development agencies or inclusion of refugees in their own support programmes has not been achieved beyond UNHCR’s traditional partners (WFP)...reasons appear to be related to donor policies, lack of sustained effort to attract partners, and mind set among potential partners that refugee issues are taken care of by OPM and UNHCR.¹²⁰

The result was very little development perspective, to the detriment of district offices who were in dire need of capacity development to handle the job that UNHCR and its partners were leaving them with whether they were ready or not. “From discussions with various partners, the team had the impression that the scope of the capacity building has been limited, with few activities reaching beyond enhancement of staff numbers, provision of allowances, logistic support and provision of some infrastructure.”¹²¹ The goal for district offices to be able to manage on their own in four years, especially without developmental support, was idealistic, if not unattainable. “Adequate district capacities are one of the key obstacles to SRS

¹¹⁸ SRS Midterm Review. Ibid. 12.

¹¹⁹ Conversation with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) officials, Kampala, June 2006.

¹²⁰ SRS Midterm Review. Ibid.

¹²¹ SRS. Ibid.

implementation...despite great interest to become fully involved, the sub county level was suffering, in some cases from inadequate facilities but more particularly poor logistical support.”¹²² District officials received little assistance from either development agencies whose support never materialized, or UNHCR, who remained stuck in its ways.

Another basic assumption for the success of SRS was that UNHCR and NGOs would move away from the relief mindset of parallel service delivery, but the results of the SRS review prove other wise. Because UNHCR remained the primary coordinator of funding for NGOs in the camps, and the issues of accountability and impunity appeared in the relationship between UNHCR and its subcontracted partners in the districts.

The review team had the impression that many of the IPSS¹²³ have an unhealthy reliance on one major source of funding, namely UNCHR, and therefore it may be difficult for them to act as a challenging partner-leaving UNHCR to dictate the form and nature of assistance.¹²⁴

The pattern of funding for assistance programs in the camps creates an environment where UNHCR’s power goes unchecked and there is little room for constructive criticism. If an implementing partner takes issue with a decision UNHCR has made, they cannot engage in dialogue because UNHCR will simply pull their funding and give it to another organization. Critics are silenced, and problems in assistance delivery go unresolved.

SRS is a program that’s supposed to direct development support towards the local community so that they can integrate refugees into local systems such as schools and clinics. Training was supposed to be focused on building up local staff capacity, but the Midterm review found that traditional staff hierarchies remained.

¹²² SRS. Ibid

¹²³ IPs stand for implementing partners, those organizations that are contracted by UNHCR to run assistance programs.

¹²⁴ SRS. Ibid.

Existing (UNHCR) staff were occupied with their traditional roles. They also had a limited understanding of important issues such as district planning mechanisms and procedures-rather the expectation was for the districts to align their procedures with the needs of UNHCR instead of the other way around.¹²⁵

Instead of moving towards genuine government ownership and the development of infrastructure and services for the area's nationals and refugees, projects remained in the parallel delivery system, with short sighted relief projects rather than longer term development goals.

In pursuit of self-reliance, the options for refugees to generate income remained limited to the space of the refugee camp. UNHCR supported encampment as a policy given, instead of addressing the legal barriers that restrict refugee rights in Uganda. Limitations still exist on the freedom to move, which hinders access to real opportunities for income. The SRS Review concludes, "Without an established legal framework, important issues relating to self-reliance of refugees such as freedom of movement, employment and taxation will remain unresolved and/or left to arbitrary interpretations."¹²⁶

UNHCR's notion of a durable livelihood remained confined to farming the camp's allotted land plots. This idea of what "counts" as a livelihood figures all refugees as rural farmers, and that their achievement of self-reliance matters only on whether they have land and seed. Even for those refugees who were farmers, the size of the camp's plots, the lack of resources, and bad weather left crop yields insufficient to justify a cut in food rations. Despite the fact that people did not produce as much as planned, rations were reduced and UNHCR proceeded with its exit strategy. "Livelihood strategies" in the camp context do not allow for any kind of self-determination, and instead dictates to the refugee, "this is how you will earn your living, so go dig and become self reliant," whether one is a business man, doctor, lawyer, or

¹²⁵ SRS Ibid.

¹²⁶ SRS. Ibid.

village farmer. The settlement policy does not allow refugees the agency to choose for themselves the best way to make money. The review concludes “the team regards the lack of consistent efforts to support income-generating activities and develop alternative livelihoods for both nationals and refugees to be a major gap in the implementation of the SRS.”¹²⁷ My conversation with a refugee woman living in Kampala demonstrated her disillusionment with the empty promises of development initiatives in the camp.

This self-reliance nonsense. I remember when they came to us with this new “strategy.” They gave us spades and tomato seeds, and told us we could be self-reliant by growing tomatoes. Fine. I humored them. What other option did I have? We grew those stupid tomatoes. Then, do you know what happened? The camp commander wouldn’t let us leave the camp to go to Kampala and sell for a fair price. He has to sign our permits to travel, you know. Instead, men from the city came with a big truck and bought all our tomatoes for nothing. Dirt, dirt cheap. Who else were we to sell them to? And I know they sell for twenty times that price in town. Do you know what? It turns out the men with their truck give a cut to the camp commander. So of course he will never give us permits to go to Kampala. This is what, this self-reliance?¹²⁸

Janice is a Congolese refugee whom I met while living in Kampala. She left the camp because of its terrible living conditions, and now lives in Uganda’s capital illegally. UNHCR provides her no protection or assistance, because she has moved outside the refugee camp and is labeled, in UNHCR terms, as an “irregular mover.” She told me that she’d rather struggle on her own in Kampala, then receive UNHCR attention but be forced to live in the misery of the camp. Her story demonstrates the impossibility of any true “self-reliance” in the space of the camp.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ SRS. Ibid.

¹²⁸ Conversation with Janice, a Congolese refugee. My own translation from French. Kampala, 3 July 2006.

¹²⁹ While I could not personally validate the legitimacy of Janice’s story, an official from a Kampala-based NGO that had assisted Janice confirmed the details in an independent interview, Kampala, 12 June 2006.

The isolation and insecurity of the camps also provoked the failure of SRS. For the policy to succeed, an improved security situation was necessary. Fighting in northern Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army,¹³⁰ significantly impacted SRS.

Unfortunately incursion of LRA rebels in parts of Adjumani continues and this has had an adverse effect of the program...[and] hampered capacity to produce food and diverted resources. Coupled with this, Adjumani and Moyo's relatively isolated position and routes through the troubled areas of Gulu and Lira has an impact on the prospect for development[and] limits the livelihood possibilities for the nationals and refugees.

As discussed in previous chapters, the government places camps in isolated locations in an effort to control the refugee population. Unfortunately, the camp locations are often vulnerable to attack, such as the Acholi-Pii camp in which hundreds of refugees were massacred by LRA soldiers.¹³¹ In an effort to prevent a security crisis, the refugee camp created one. The ability to be "self-reliant" becomes impossible when a community is figured as an easy target. Roads become paralyzed, and refugees are not safe to move about even within the confines of the camp. Development cannot be achieved when the fundamentals of safety and stability are not established.

Self-reliance for refugees is hindered in a more insidious way than general camp insecurity. Deng is a young Sudanese man who I also met in Kampala, a refugee who fled a camp on the border of Uganda and Sudan to escape from being forcibly recruited into the Sudan

¹³⁰ The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a rebel group led by Joseph Kony. They waged war against Museveni's government from the late eighties through the early nineties, but after peace talks broke down in 1994, LRA's tactics shifted to generalized violence against the northern Ugandan population that continues today. LRA is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths, over one million internally displaced people, thousands of child soldiers, and abduction, rape, torture and killings across the countryside.

¹³¹ "Great Lakes: IRIN Weekly Roundup #18 15-22 July 1996." United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN). University of Pennsylvania African Studies Center. 15 May 2006. <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/irin18.html>.

People's Liberation Army (SPLA). His story manifests the opportunities for corruption and exploitation that the system of encampment allows.¹³²

The camp commander had a list of names of all of us Sudanese boys in the camp. One day, SPLA soldiers arrived. I saw the camp commander talking with one of the SPLA soldiers. They began rounding up the young men, telling us that we would go back to our country to fight for SPLA. I became a refugee to escape this war, not to fight in it. I was harassed; they tried to force me to go. So I left the camp to come here.¹³³

How is Deng supposed to work towards self-reliance when his "durable livelihood option" as a child soldier for the SPLA is decided for him? The systems of power that dictate camp space and humanitarian assistance structure a discourse in which the policy jargon of "self-reliance" and development remain empty words. Development Assistance to Refugees (DAR), the newest policy framework for refugees in Uganda, claims it has addressed all these issues that caused SRS to fail. I question how successful DAR can be when it engages the same rhetoric of the refugee camp.

Development Assistance to Refugees (DAR)

The DAR program is Uganda's newest refugee policy, a joint initiative piloted by UNHCR in cooperation with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). DAR attempts to address the mistakes of SRS and move forward with the transition from relief to development in refugee/host area assistance. A head DAR program official states that "The results from the SRS Midterm review are the foundation of this program's planning."¹³⁴ After analyzing DAR program structure, however, it does not seem as though recommendations from the SRS review were considered.

¹³² As was the case with Janice, I could not personally verify the truth of Deng's claims. However, his story is supported by briefings of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), an independent refugee rights' organization in Kampala. RLP publicly decried SPLA recruitment in refugee camps in local Kampala newspapers, and in retaliation the Ugandan government denied them access to continue research in camps for several months. From a conversation with an RLP official, Kampala, May 2006.

¹³³ Conversation with Deng, a Sudanese refugee, Kampala, 5 May 2006.

¹³⁴ Interview with member of the DAR secretariat, April 2006.

The lack of district capacity to handle integrated refugee services was one of the downfalls of the SRS. Unfortunately, the funding patterns that limited district level development remain the same in DAR's budget framework. In DAR negotiations, several alternatives were suggested to reroute funding in a more effective manner. Options included direct donor assistance to district level services, direct donor assistance to the federal branch of the host government, who would then disburse funds to the district, or the creation of a secretariat (made up of international partners, etc.) who would then distribute the funds to operational partners in the field. The last option is exactly how funding works in traditional humanitarian discourse, and the cause of UNHCR accountability issues in SRS. Despite this, the last option was chosen to be DAR's funding framework, so that the bulk of monetary assistance bypasses the much needed government and district levels, and goes straight to contracted international NGO partners running traditional "care and maintenance programs" in the camps.

The same funding pattern will result in the same structural failures as SRS. If DAR was committed to real development, then they would invest directly into district capacity so that the host society would be prepared to handle the integration of refugees into their services. Furthermore, the DAR secretariat has yet to attract any development partners, which was the same fear of district authorities under SRS. Services are being handed over to government infrastructure that is too weak to handle it, UNHCR and its partners are pulling out whether the national system is ready or not, and no development actors are in place to bridge the gap. The big obstacles of SRS, including lack of direct district funding and capacity building, no development support, and stagnant relief mentalities, all while operating through the settlement system, will bring the same anticlimactic conclusion to DAR as it did to its predecessor, to the ultimate disadvantage to the refugees and underdeveloped hosting communities it was hoping to help.

One of the fundamental problems of SRS was the lack of a legal structure which would grant refugees the rights they need to truly be self reliant. While a new Refugee Bill,¹³⁵ which includes some significant reforms of former draconian legislation,¹³⁶ has passed into law since the implementation of DAR, implementation has yet to be realized. Although the new Bill grants refugees more of the rights guaranteed by international law, there are still several restrictions that limit refugee agency.¹³⁷ The realization of law into every day practice is a serious problem. The Ugandan government can have beautiful policies in paper, but reality is often another matter.¹³⁸ Because little has been done to sensitize officials to the new law, refugees are still objected to the arbitrary will of camp commandants. Some national field officials aren't even aware of the Refugee Bill's existence, much less of what it actually entails.¹³⁹ The SRS midterm review suggested that every effort be made to pass the bill, which at that time was still on the negotiation table. Now that the bill has become law, the rights it provides must be realized in a practical sense.

Most importantly, SRS failed because it operates from the camp context. All the problems that come with encampment policy, including the way it figures refugee identity, contributed to SRS's lack of success. Refugees must be given the freedom to move away from the camp, and legally exist outside this traditional discourse of humanitarian assistance. Without that, any refugee development policy is doomed to fail. DAR, like SRS, does nothing to move away from camp space, and the Refugee Bill does not do much to grant greater freedom of movement and personal agency. The rhetoric of the refugee as "self-reliant" collapses into the larger discourse of the refugee as subhuman Other. Any new policy that does not question the

¹³⁵ Uganda Office of the Prime Minister. "The Refugees Bill 2003." Kampala, Uganda 2003.

¹³⁶ Uganda Office of the Prime Minister. "The Control of Alien Refugees Act." Kampala, Uganda. 30 June 1960.

¹³⁷ For an excellent critique of the 2003 Refugee Bill, see Refugee Law Project's "Refugee Bill 2003 Critique." RLP comments on the Refugee Bill 2003. July 2006. [online] at www.refugeelawproject.org.

¹³⁸ Conversation with an advocacy officer, Refugee Law Project, Kampala, April 2006.

¹³⁹ Interview with Jesuit Refugee Service Employee, Kampala, April 2006.

larger system will not be able to navigate out of it, no matter how many spades and tomato seeds refugees are given in the meantime.

Chapter Six

From Discourse to Dialogue: A New Kind of Assistance



Figure 6.1 Catherine's Daughters

Self-reliance is not something that can be imposed on refugees through the traditional neocolonial humanitarian discourse. Instead, space must be made for refugees to assert their own agency and create their own livelihoods options, and in doing so contribute to their host society's development. As concluded in the Chapter Four, the creation of such a space requires real political mobilization and a dialogue between all involved actors, including refugees, host nationals, humanitarian officials and host and donor governments. Change is required not only in host government legislation, but also in donor funding patterns, UNHCR mandate, and the operationalization of humanitarian assistance.

Overcoming the structural forces that create and perpetuate extreme inequality is one of the most efficient routes for overcoming extreme poverty, enhancing the welfare of society and accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.¹⁴⁰

Host governments, donor governments, and aid institutions represent forces in a system that creates and perpetuates the extreme inequalities of refugee aid, which not only hinders development progress, but also compromises fundamental rights and basic human dignity. Extreme inequalities are rooted in power structures that deprive poor people of market opportunities, limit their access to services and-crucially-deny them a political voice.¹⁴¹ Power structures that enforce extreme inequality and deny refugees their Selves take the forms of restrictive national legislation, unresponsive international funding patterns, and the actual structure of refugee relief through encampment. By systematically addressing the structural inequalities that figure refugees in humanitarian discourse, a new dialogue of refugee assistance can be constructed that allows for real personal agency.

¹⁴⁰ "International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World." *United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report 2005*. Published for UNDP, 2005. Retrieved from UN Library Archives, Geneva, 15 November 2005.

¹⁴¹ "International Cooperation," Ibid.

What concrete steps must be taken so that refugees can truly exercise the independent, dignified lives promised to them in international conventions? How does the rhetorical notion of dialogue translate into practical structural changes? In a spirit of co-operation, trust, and mutual responsibility, governments and aid institutions must take bold steps to move out of traditional discourse and into a new dialogue of assistance.

Host Governments

“Developing countries have a responsibility to create an environment in which aid can yield optimal results.”¹⁴²

The host government plays the key role in creating the legal capacity for refugees to contribute to host development. “It can only happen if there’s law, legislation that encompasses it, a legal framework that provides for refugees as development actors.”¹⁴³ Although Uganda has a more relaxed policy towards refugees than some of its neighbors, the vacuum of protection and support that exists outside the space of the settlement, coupled with the arbitrary interpretation of law by camp commandants, leaves many refugees confined to the settlements. Reduced to the meager livelihood of farming, which in itself is vulnerable to factors such as weather and poor soil, refugees cannot become ‘self-reliant’ and are denied freedom of movement, the right to earn a wage, and the right to return home due to lack of a real sustainable income.

The Ugandan government has made some notable steps in creating a legal space for refugees to enjoy their convention-granted rights. The Refugee Bill, conceptualized in 1999 and finally passed into act in May of 2006, is an effort to nationalize the international laws of the 1951 Convention and 1969 OAU convention, both to which Uganda is a signatory. The Bill is seen as a landmark piece of legislation, because it harmonizes international promises with national level

¹⁴² “International Cooperation,” Ibid.

¹⁴³ Interview with Ms. Judy Wakahiu, Executive Director of the Refugee Consortium of Kenya. December 9, 2005.

law. The implementation of the new act has yet to be seen, however. Uganda has several policies, such as its Constitution, the National Internally Displaced Persons policy, and its Women and Gender policy, which in theory are progressive but in practice are far from it. Thus, while the government has made a significant step in drafting and passing the act, the real test will come with whether or not it's actually implemented.

Refugees are an overlooked opportunity for public investment that should be streamlined into host countries' national development plans and poverty reduction strategies. "The process of developing an MDG-based poverty reduction strategy needs to be open and consultative, including all key stakeholders, domestic and foreign." As a significant portion of the host country population, refugees are forgotten stakeholders. The UN Millennium Project concludes that, "The needs of refugees and returnees are not systematically incorporated in national transition and development plans by governments concerned, the donor community and the UN system."¹⁴⁴ Merrill Smith, editor of United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) *World Survey Report* and leader of the Anti-Warehousing Campaign, notes that although poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) could be a possible framework to include refugees on a national policy level, hardly any host countries have considered them.¹⁴⁵ The Poverty Eradication Action Paper, or PEAP, is Uganda's country specific Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The DAR secretariat has lobbied hard to streamline development assistance to refugees into national planning through the PEAP, and negotiations are currently on the table.¹⁴⁶ Uganda should be encouraged by the international community to incorporate refugees in their PEAP.

¹⁴⁴ Convention Plus, IBID.

¹⁴⁵ From email correspondence with Merrill Smith on December 12, 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with a DAR secretariat official, Kampala, 10 June 2006.

There are several ways for host governments to approach refugee rights on a national policy level and provide a legal, legitimate basis for their role as development agents. The responsibility, however, by no means rests on the shoulders of host governments to reform restrictive legislation. If meaningful change is to occur so that refugees can enjoy true self-efficacy, significant reforms by donor governments and aid institutions are also necessary.

Donor Governments

“Rich countries, on their part, have an obligation to act on their commitments.”¹⁴⁷

A dialogue of assistance requires donor governments to address their hypocrisy, change rigid and unresponsive traditional funding patterns, streamline refugees into their own development initiatives, and deliver on current development assistance promises.

Donors must speak to the hypocrisy of their criticism of host government policies by reflecting on their own restrictive asylum-seeker policies. In the argument for increased rights, credibility is compromised in light of donors’ own laws. While placing pressure on host governments is important, even more necessary is for civil society actors in donor countries such as NGOs and lobbying groups to focus their energy and resources on changing the increasingly hostile atmosphere their own governments have towards refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants. Host governments can be expected to consider the demands for rights-based integration only when hypocrisy is replaced with legitimacy.

Perhaps an even more difficult change is the structure of international assistance. It is difficult for host governments to heed the cry of the international community and include marginalized populations such as refugees in long-term poverty reduction strategies when “low-income nations are painfully aware of the truth: the United States (and other donor nations for that matter) can be counted on to respond to emergencies, but not to help them break free of

¹⁴⁷ UNDP Report 2005, IBID

poverty.”¹⁴⁸ Host governments have a serious concern with local integration because of fickle development funding. What incentive do host governments have to change the state of refugee assistance? At least when refugees are kept in the perpetual “emergency” of camps, they are assured some form of assistance from the international community.

The expectation is that refugees will benefit from humanitarian funds through UNHCR and other humanitarian actors. Concerned that humanitarian assistance will not be replaced by development funds, hosting governments are reluctant to change strategy, responsibilities and funding support.¹⁴⁹

What would happen if host governments did incorporate refugees in development plans, and gave them the legal rights to be development actors? Would appropriate assistance follow suit from donors?

The examples from SRS and DAR suggest that development assistance would not be forthcoming. The traditional funding model leaves a huge gap between development and humanitarian relief into which refugee situations fall. The problem with humanitarian assistance in protracted situations is that refugees end up receiving a permanent “temporary” relief through the care and maintenance programs of camps. As much as 95% of funds go directly to UNHCR and their implementing partners for camp based care and maintenance, while aid to the hosting area barely reaches 5% .¹⁵⁰

New refugee-development initiatives continue to channel money through the same system, so that the intended goal of government-level capacity building does not occur because it doesn’t have access to resources. Instead, resources are disbursed through a separate parallel system, whereby international NGO partners, whose accountability is more attuned to donors’

¹⁴⁸ Sachs, Jeffrey. “The Development Challenge.” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005.

¹⁴⁹ *Convention Plus Issues Paper on Targeting of Development Assistance*. Draft version. UNHCR. June 2004. Accessed from UN Library Archives, Geneva, 10 November 2005.

¹⁵⁰ World Survey 2005. *Warehousing-Inventory of Refugee Rights*. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2005

expectations, run programs that leave local government infrastructure weak. This funding scheme is problematic for several reasons. Tension rises between the refugee hosting community and the refugees, because nationals see refugees receiving international support while they receive little in the way of development. The lack of development in government resources results in unsatisfactory support for its nationals, while the fickleness and donor fatigue of the international community results in dwindling services for encamped refugees. All stakeholders end up with a raw deal; host government development remains limited, donors are trapped in an unending cycle of humanitarian assistance with more money wasted in the long run, and emerging worst off are the refugees themselves. This current system of funding must change. Why have two separate, parallel aid tracks that are both weak, when funds, resources, training and attention can be focused on the development of one system, owned by the government with the facilitation of the international community, that adequately responds to the needs of both nationals and refugees?

The answer is a shift in funding from UNHCR's "care and maintenance" programs to development initiatives in the host community. Services and infrastructure can be supported to handle the integration of refugees into the government system, while leaving a solid foundation from which the national community can grow if and when the refugees repatriate. Through finance and capacity building, the development of the community for the mutual benefit of hosts and refugees is a truly durable solution to protracted situations. Not only will it reduce social tension by giving direct benefits to the host community and greater access to international support, but it will also provide refugees a real opportunity for self reliance, for the funds would facilitate integration rather than perpetuate a dependant existence.

Host governments are rightly worried that if they make the shift to include refugees in development, international funding won't follow suit because of the current rigid assistance structure. Donors must move out of this system of internationalized social welfare, and be willing to invest in the development of governments that host the refugees, for this is the opportunity to truly bridge the gap of humanitarian assistance and development.

For effective aid and development, government ownership is required, which refugee assistance programs currently lack. "Donor reluctance to use national systems adds to transaction costs and weakens national capacity."¹⁵¹ Governments will not grant refugees more rights unless donors are there to support them, and so donors must shift their responsibility towards facilitating government capacity to absorb refugees in the national system. It is time for donor countries to invest directly in the infrastructure of host governments, and provide the necessary funds so that host governments can build their capacity to take care of refugees in national systems which provide equal access for both nationals and refugees.

While new initiatives by donor countries could serve as excellent facets for distributing funds for refugee-development aid partnerships, success hinges on donor commitment. Just as host governments must make a commitment to formalize refugee rights in national legislation, so too do donors hold the same responsibility.

Donors, for their part, do not set targets for themselves. Instead, they offer broad, non-binding commitments on aid quantity, and can break them with impunity.¹⁵²

Ripe to support refugee rights in development, new donor initiatives will only work as far as the donors keep their promises to fund new accounts. Considering that many of the donor nations have yet to meet the .7% GNI ratio goal that was outlined in the Millennium Declaration

¹⁵¹ UNDP Report 2005.

¹⁵² UNDP Report 2005, Ibid.

to half poverty by 2010, one should regard with some reservation all of the new donor initiatives that have been promised. It is unfair to ask developing countries to change the status quo of refugee encampment when there is no mechanism in place to ensure that development funds will be there to help facilitate the transition.

UNHCR and Implementing Organizations

On an institutional level, UNHCR needs to refocus on its original mandate of protection and monitoring. How can it do this? If host governments and donor governments will make the necessary changes, UNHCR can act as a go-between for hosts and donors. UNHCR could serve its monitoring responsibility in two important ways: by monitoring refugees' access to services under the government system, and by monitoring the costs to the host government for absorbing refugees into a national system and lobbying host governments for the required financial support. Host governments can be assured that they will be supported if refugees are integrated into their communities, and donor governments can be assured of how their money is spent. Merrill Smith provides an example of this alternative conception of UNHCR's role,

UNHCR would monitor the extent to which refugees enjoyed all their rights under the 1951 Convention in a given country. For those rights that involve fiscal outlays on the part of the host government, eg, education, public assistance, etc, UNHCR would not only monitor whether the refugees enjoyed the rights but also estimate how much this cost the government. For example, it might verify that 50,000 refugee children are attending primary schools at a cost of \$X each (overhead could be included). Based on this, UNHCR could approve an expense of 50,000 X \$X from the host government to the donors. Indirect expenses, such as softening of the labor market by refugee entry, would have to be measured separately, perhaps by development economists and remedied separately by development agencies."¹⁵³

To clarify, UNHCR would not be an "approving" entity that infringes on the sovereignty of the host government. Instead, it would work in collaboration with the host government, and

¹⁵³ Smith, Merrill. Email to Genevieve Goulding. 12/05.

consult refugee and local populations to create a proposal of the X amount of dollars necessary to integrate refugees into the local system. Together, UNHCR and host governments can bring the proposal to donor governments, who then distribute the funds directly to the local community in the form of development aid. Traditionally, donor governments give the funds to UNHCR, who in turn distribute the money to implementing partners to run care and maintenance programs. By distributing funds directly to the host government, government ownership over the development initiative is encouraged, while providing an occasion for the host government to build its credibility in the eyes of the international community and access other “good governance” funds.

UNHCR, in turn, would provide a monitoring function to ensure that the funds distributed to the host government do help refugees gain access to local services within an integrated system. Instead of being donors and hosts’ scapegoat for the “responsibility” of refugees, UNHCR can act as a facilitator that strengthens ties between donor and host governments and ensures that responsibilities are held equally held. UNHCR’s implementing partners (IPs) can work to build the absorption capacity of government services for a twofold effect: to ensure that refugees have integrated access to their rights, and to contribute to the hosts’ larger goals of development.

This model would also increase UNHCR’s accountability as an advocate for refugees. It is difficult for UNHCR to reflect objectively on the negative consequences of encampment when it perpetuates the camp’s very existence. If refugees were integrated in the national system, and UNHCR was left simply with its original mandate of protection, the organization would be in a more objective position for critical reflection. As the SRS review noted, implementing partners are also limited in their ability to critique UNHCR because they are subcontracted by the organization. If funds were directed to the host government, instead of through UNHCR, IPs

would also have more room to reflect objectively on UNHCR, themselves, and the host government's performance.

Could UNHCR make the shift? This might be the hardest stakeholder in which to effect change. Host and donor governments are answerable to their people, but as Chapter Two's discussion shows, UNHCR has no base of constituents to hold them accountable. He who holds the purse-strings is in the best position to promote reform, which in UNHCR's case is the American government. And the American government *does* have a constituent base who can mobilize their representatives for meaningful change.

Bureaucratic change is a slow and painful process; people are entrenched in their ways and by nature, UNHCR shows little creativity when it comes to delivering aid. But we cannot forget that while UNHCR might seem like an impossible bureaucratic beast, it is an organization comprised of people. This paper has proved that individuals can and do create agency for themselves in the face of a dominant discourse, and that significant change can be effected on the individual level. With this in mind, I am left with hope that even a bureaucracy as mighty as UNHCR's can transform with the determination of individual people.

Refugee crises are complicated and protracted, and the majority of the world's refugees have lived in camps for more than ten years.¹⁵⁴ Theirs are not the most recent headline, and their faces are not the ones we see flashing across our television screens. Nonetheless, they are people who should not be forced to wait in the miserable purgatories of refugee camps, and whose lives should not be forgotten. If given the chance by the humanitarian community, refugees can make lives for themselves, support their families, and make their own ways back home. Refugees are resourceful enough to escape with their lives from whatever persecution they fled, and they are resourceful enough to rebuild new ones. Self reliance strategies that allow women to grow

¹⁵⁴ World Refugee Survey 2005.

tomato gardens in camps do not suffice. Refugees must have real opportunities, and that requires a new dialogue of refugee assistance.

This is a three fold responsibility on the part of host governments, donor governments, and UNHCR: host governments must enact legislation granting refugees their 1951 Convention rights in a free-movement, local integration context; donor governments must use new funding initiatives to ensure refugee rights-oriented host community development, shift funding from expatriate-driven camp based programs to government facilitated projects, and make good on their promises of assistance; and UNHCR must move back to its original mandate of protecting refugee rights in nationally integrated systems. As Uganda's policies prove, the reversal of an entrenched discourse does not occur on a superficial level. The answer lies not in the *re-arranging* of traditional discourse, but the *re-forming* of humanitarian assistance through a dialogue of agency and change.

I am a refugee, yes. But I am also so many other things: I am a mother...a wife...a sister...a daughter...a neighbor...a friend. And for all those things I am very, very human. I know this for me, no matter how badly I am treated. Or what anyone else says. I know who I am, and I know that one day things will change.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Conversation with a refugee woman, Kampala, 2 July 2006.

Bibliography

- Amara, Tamba. "Zambia: Refugees an asset, not a burden." *AfricaFiles*. 7 November 2005. <http://www.africafiles.org/printableversion.asp?id=10091>.
- "Appeal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations." *CAP Humanitarian Appeal*. 30 November 2006. UNOCHA. 1 December 2006. http://ochaonline.un.org/cap/webpage.asp?Nav= appeal_en&site= appeal&Lan=en.
- Bell, Daniel A. and Joseph H. Carens. "The ethical dilemmas of international human rights and humanitarian NGOs: Reflections on a dialogue between practitioners and theorists." *Human Rights Quarterly* 26 (2004): 300-329.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. 150
- Harrell-Bond, Barbara. "Can humanitarian work with refugees be humane?" *Human Rights Quarterly* 24(1)(2002): 55.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.
- "Consolidated Appeals Process." 15 November 2006. UNOHCA. 1 December 2006. <http://ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?Site=cap>.
- "Convention Plus Issues Paper on Targeting of Development Assistance, Draft" *UNHCR*. June 2004. Accessed from the UN Library Archives, Geneva, 10 November 2005.
- "Convention relating to the status of refugees." *UNHCR*. 28 July 1951. Accessed [online] 1 December 2006 from <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/refugees.htm>.
- Crisp, Jeff. "No solutions in sight: the problem of protracted refugee situations in Africa," Working paper 75. *Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit UNHCR*. January 2003.
- Crisp, Jeff. "The local integration and local settlement of refugees: a conceptual and historical analysis," Working paper 102. *Global Commission on International Migration, UNHCR*. April 2004.
- DeWaal, Alex. *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*. African Rights and the International African Institute. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- "Development Assistance for Refugee-Hosting Areas." *Operational Manual*. The Republic of Uganda. November 2005. Accessed from DAR Secretariat Files. May 2006.
- Development Assistance for Refugee-Hosting Areas in Uganda. Programme Document 2004-

2007. The Republic of Uganda.
- Development Assistance for Refugee-Hosting Areas Secretariat Progress Report. March 2006.
- DAR Secretariat Work Plan 2006.
- Evans, Gareth and Mohamed Sahnoun. "The Responsibility to Protect," *Foreign Affairs*. Volume 81 No. 6, pg. 102.
- Fair, Jo Ellen and Lisa Parks. "Africa on Camera: Television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees." *Africa Today* (1996): 37.
- Fine, Michelle. "Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research." *Locating the Field: space, place, and context in anthropology*. Ed.s. Simon Coleman and Peter Collins. New York: Oxford, 2006. 70-82.
- Foucault, M. "Of other spaces." (1967). Retrieved 3 March 2005 from foucault.info Web site: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>.
- Foucault, M. "Order of Discourse." *Modern and Postmodern Rhetoric*, 22, (1976): 1461.
- "Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and People of Concern." *UNHCR*. May 2003. Accessed from UN Library Archives, Geneva, 1 December 2005.
- "Free to Stay, Free to Go? Movement, seclusion, and integration of refugees in Moyo district." *Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 4* May 2002.
- Ghosh, Bimal. "Elusive Protection, Uncertain Lands: Migrants' Access to Human Rights." *IOM International Organization for Migration*. Accessed [online] from www.iom.org.
- Gonzalez, M. C. "The four seasons of ethnography: A creation-centered ontology for ethnography." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 24 (2000): 623 – 650.
- "Great Lakes: IRIN Weekly Roundup #18 15-22 July 1996." *United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)*. University of Pennsylvania African Studies Center. 15 May 2006. <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/irin18.html>.
- G8 Africa Action Plan, June 2002. Accessed December 2005 [online] from <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/11515.htm>.
- Griffen, Em. "Chapter 25: Semiotics of Roland Barthes." *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 6th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006. 358-369.
- Hansen, Miriam. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

- Harding, Sandra. *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- “Helping Refugees: An Introduction to UNHCR.” *A Brochure from the UN Refugee Agency*. May 2005.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- “International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world.” *UNDP Human Development Report 2005*. Published for UNDP 2005.
- Jamal, Arafat. “Minimum standards and essential needs in a protracted refugee situation: a review of the UNHCR programme in Kakuma, Kenya,” *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit UNHCR*. Accessed [online] from <http://www.unhcr.org/research.html>.
- Kaiser, Tania. “UNHCR’s withdrawal from Kiryandongo: anatomy of a handover.” *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*. Accessed [online] from <http://www.unhcr.org/research.html>.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Die Metaphysik der Sitten (The Metaphysics of Morals) 1797*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996
- Kelley, Ninette, Peta Sandison and Simon Lawry-White. “Enhancing UNHCR’s capacity to monitor the protection, rights, and well-being of refugees.” *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*. June 2004. 10. Accessed [online] from <http://www.unhcr.org/research.html>
- Koppel, Ted. *Nightline ABC*. 9 August 1994.
- Lal, Jayati. “Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and ‘Other’ in Living and Writing the Text.” *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Ed. Diane L. Wolf. Colorado: Westview Press, 1996.185-213.
- Lather, Patti. *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991.
- Laurel, Richardson. “The Collective Story: Postmodernism and the writing of Sociology.” *Sociological Focus 21(3)* (1988): 199-208.
- Loescher, Gil and James Milner. “The Long Road Home: Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa.” *Survival 47(2)*(Summer 2005): 153-174.
- Lischer, Sarah. “Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict.” *International Security 28(1)* (Summer 2003): 79-109.

- Macchiavello, Michela. "Forced migrants as an under-utilized asset: refugee skills, livelihoods, and achievements in Kampala, Uganda." *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*. Accessed [online] from <http://www.unhcr.org/research.html>.
- Malkki, Lisa. "Speechless emissaries: refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996) 377-404.
- Maren, Michael. *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.
- McCarthy, Michael. *Dark Continent: Africa as seen by Americas*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- McKerrow, R. E. "Critical rhetoric: theory and praxis." *Communication Monographs*, 56, (1989): 91-111.
- Moya, Paula M.L., "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism," in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. Edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. New York: Routledge, 1997. 125-150.
- Nduna, Sydia, Christine Lipohar and Asmita Naik. "Sexual Violence and Exploitation." *Joint Mission Assessment Report for UNHCR and Save the Children UK*. January 2002.
- Newman, Edward. "Refugees, international security, and human vulnerability: Introduction and survey," *Refugees and forced displacement: International security, human vulnerability, and the state*. Paris: United Nations University Press. 7.
- NGO Statement on Relevance of UNHCR's Activities to MDGs, September 22, 2005.
- Nordstrom, Carolyn. *A Different Kind of War Story: Ethnography of Political Violence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- Peterson, Sarah-Dryden. "Local integration as a durable solution: refugees, host populations, and education in Uganda." *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*. Accessed [online] from <http://www.unhcr.org/research.html>.
- "Refugees by Numbers." *A Brochure of the UN Refugee Agency*. May 2005.
- "Refugee Statistics" Fact Sheet. *United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)*. Published by USCRI: Washington D.C., 2005.
- Rozario, Kevin. "Delicious Horrors: Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the appeal of modern American humanitarianism." *American Quarterly* 55(3), (September 2003): 425.

- Ruud, Gary. The Interdependence between Fieldworker, Context, and Other in Ethnographic Research. 239.
- Sachs, Jeffrey. "The Development Challenge." *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005.
- "Self Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) For Refugee hosting Districts in Moyo, Arua, and Adjumani Districts, Uganda. Report of the Midterm Review April 2004." *Government of Uganda and UNHCR*. April 2004.
- Smith, Merrill. "Development Aid for Refugees." US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants World Refugee Survey, 2005.
- Sofsky, Wolfgang. *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*. Translated by William Templer. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977. 167-168.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. 102.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* Ed. By Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995.24-29.
- Stables, Gordon. "Justifying Kosovo: Representations of gendered violence and U.S. military intervention." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 20 (1) (March 2003): 103.
- Statement by US President George Bush at the Monterrey Conference, 2002.
- "Tanzania Country Update." *World Refugee Survey 2005*. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Washington D.C.111.
- "The 1951 Refugee Convention: Questions and Answers." *The UN Refugee Agency*. May 2005.
- "The Role of ICTs in Poverty Reduction." Class Reading for 19 September 2005.
- "TCRS Profile-Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service." *The Lutheran World Federation Tanzania Field Programme*. December 2004.
- Turner, Simon. "Angry young men in camps: gender, age, and class relations among Burundian refugees in Tanzania." UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. Accessed [online] from <http://www.unhcr.org/research.html>.
- Uganda Office of the Prime Minister. "The Control of Alien Refugees Act." Kampala, Uganda. 30 June 1960.

Uganda Office of the Prime Minister. "The Refugees Bill 2003." Kampala, Uganda 2003.

UN Millennium Project, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals, 2005*,
www.millenniumproject.org/reports/fullreport.htm.

US Senate Committee on Appropriations Press Release. *Conferees Agree to Foreign Operations Spending Bill*. November 1, 2005.

VanMaanen, J. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press (1988).

Vautravers, Dr. Alexandre. "Lecture on Conflict Analysis Since the End of the Cold War, 1989-1991." Programme Assistant, SIT Study Abroad: Switzerland. 29 August 2005.

Verdirame, Gueglimo and Barabara Harrell-Bond. *Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism*. Oxford and Bloomington: Oxford University Publishers, 2005.

"We are all stranded here together: The local settlement system, freedom of movement, and livelihood opportunities in Arua and Moyo districts." *Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 14* February 2005.

White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

"Why the Appeal?" Narration from CAP 2006 Film Appeal. UNOCHA. 1 December 2006.
<http://ochaonline.un.org/cap>

World Survey 2005. *Warehousing-Inventory of Refugee Rights*. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2005.

'Zambia Initiative spreads to North Western Province.' *UNHCR Release*. 26 July 2005.
Accesses on 7 November 2005, [online] from <http://www.reliefweb.int>.