INTRODUCTION

❧•☙

The year was 2010, and I was spending time in Dagahaley, one of the Dadaab refugee camps in northeastern Kenya, to conduct some research for Médecins sans frontières. That is how I came to meet one of the organization's medical assistants, a twenty-year-old Somali[1] who started talking about the recent birth of his first child. He said it had reinforced his desire to find a way out of the camp, a place that felt like an open-air jail. He did not want his son to be like him, someone who knows only life in the camp. He explained that he was born in Dagahaley and had never even been to the town of Dadaab, just a few kilometers away. Some days later, the program manager of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) mentioned that at least 10,000 children had been born in the camp to parents who were also born there.

I gradually came to realize that a whole generation of exiled Somalis had been born and raised in the Dadaab camps, and that they were now young adults. I should have become aware of this long before, given that the camps had existed for more than twenty years and that I had been working in such settings for many years. Nevertheless, this was the first time I had grasped this fact of their lives. I started reflecting on their experience. Few nations have been so massively displaced for so long. Palestinians, Afghans and the Sahrawi come to mind. I was used to hearing refugees talking about how things were back home before they fled. But these young people, unlike their parents, had no recollections of Somalia, no other experience to compare their current conditions with. Yet, their community had certainly told them many stories about their homeland. So I wondered how they imagined the land of their parents, how they experienced the camp and how they imagined their future, given all the constraints imposed by camp life and exile.

My questioning quickly became intertwined with interrogations about how and why camps have become such a usual response to mass displacement, given their unsuitability. Very strong criticisms of camps as a long-term solution have been leveled not only by academics but also by the United Nations agency specifically mandated to protect and assist refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It has been repeatedly noted that camps are far from being ideal places for the development and fulfillment of individuals. As early as 2004, the UNHCR stated that:

> If it is true that camps save lives in the emergency phase, it is also true that, as the years go by, they progressively waste these same lives. A refugee may be able to receive assistance, but is prevented from enjoying those rights—for example, to freedom of movement, employment, and in some cases, education—that would enable him or her to become a productive member of a society. (UNHCR 2004: 3)

I found convincing perspectives on what has turned the camp into such a usual response pertaining to containment and the ordering of "undesirable" populations in the writings of Arendt (1968 [1951]), Hyndman (2000), Malkki (1995a) and Nyers (2006). But I noticed that although displacement situations continue to occur and persist, so that more and more young people living in camps are likely to have grown up in them or to have been born there, their experience has hardly been studied and no one has focused on Somali youth. This is what motivated the present study. I conducted it in Kakuma, another Kenyan camp where thousands of Somali youth have spent most of their lives, rather than in Dadaab, because it offered a safer research environment.

While I had spent significant periods of time in Dadaab as an aid worker, I had only been to Kakuma once before, living there for six months, from October 2012 to April 2013. Located in northwestern Kenya, one hundred kilometers from the border with South Sudan and one thousand kilometers from Nairobi, Kenya's capital, Kakuma looks like some faraway city. Established in 1992, it does not match the widespread image of a camp as a temporary place where people sleep in tents, waiting for the guns to go quiet before returning home. Shelters are made of branches, mud and metal sheets, and schools, clinics and markets are part of the landscape. It may look like a city, but it is an odd one, as its inhabitants are not allowed to move freely, work or settle where they choose.

This ethnography is about the experience of young Somalis, aged sixteen to twenty-six who have spent most or all of their lives in Kenyan camps and who now live in Kakuma. Some were born in Kenya; others arrived in the early 1990s as small children. Their parents fled along with millions of people when the Somali State collapsed in 1991. They thought their displacement would

be brief. More than two decades later, they are still in exile. The babies they were carrying when they crossed into Kenya are now adults. Most first lived in several camps located near the coastal city of Mombasa. Between 1997 and 1998, when these camps closed, they were transferred to Kakuma. A few had also lived in Dadaab or in a Kenyan city before arriving in Kakuma. These young people often claim that growing up there might not have been ideal, but it was better than being in Somalia. Unlike many children who remained behind, their lives have been relatively free of violence and they were able to study, even though the quality of their education was unsatisfactory. Once they grow older, the camp becomes a space of frustration and limitations, a place to leave. Indeed, although a fair number of refugees[2] have been living in Kakuma for up to two decades, it is still seen as a transitory place.

In this introduction, I approach Kakuma by examining how global policies intended to confine particular populations have made the opening of camps the usual response to mass displacement. I then present my methodology and discuss the rationale of my research. Subsequent chapters are organized in chronological order. They look at youth's perspectives on their past, their present and their future, and include sections devoted to themes that weigh heavily in their experience. Chapter 2 considers young people's accounts of the collapse of Somalia and their families' past, which seem to help them cope with the present and justify their aspirations for the future. Chapter 3 recounts their arrival in Kakuma in the late 1990s and examines how the early days of the camp have been turned into a foundational story that has contributed to the emergence of a sense of community. The following three chapters focus on young people's lives in the camp. I first reflect on what it means to grow up in such a setting, then examine how this has affected their cultural identity, and finally discuss the camp's connectedness to other spaces and places. In Chapters 7 and 8, I study two related notions: (mis)trust and representation. Chapter 9 looks to the future. Although youth's ambitions vary, most believe that in order to achieve their dreams, they must be resettled in the United States. This chapter is followed by a short note on life after the camp, based on interviews with people who used to live in Kenyan camps but no longer do. The conclusion sums up the findings of this book, focusing on points of tension in the camp experience. Each chapter pursues its own line of questioning and its own particular logic, but several themes also run through this book. These include the tension between victimhood and agency, the role of narratives in structuring people's experience, the camp's connection to the wider world and the importance of mobility in a rather immobile setting. Throughout this study, I aim to look at both the large and small-scale reality of the camp to understand how the refugee experience is shaped by (and shapes in return) the social, political, economic and historical dynamics in which it is embedded.

Contextualizing the Camp: From the Right
to Seek Asylum to the Right to Stay Home

Figures compiled by the UNHCR invariably show that the vast—and ever-growing—majority of refugees live in developing countries (86 percent in 2015, compared to 73 percent in 2006), most often in a country neighboring their country of origin (UNHCR 2007a: 6; 2016a: 2). Taking into account refugees in an irregular situation and those not registered with the authorities of the country of asylum or with the UNHCR, the proportion of refugees in poor countries[3] is even greater (Malkki 1995a: 503). The share of the refugee population received by rich countries is therefore minimal. Two main factors play a role in explaining these numbers. First, while in the period following the end of the Second World War, refugees were predominantly European, most large-scale displacements in the last few decades have occurred in regions of the world far from the West (Sassen 1999: xiiv). Also, since the end of the Cold War, rich countries have enacted increasingly stringent policies on asylum and migration to "protect" themselves from refugee populations, which are seen as threatening (Bauman 1998a: 76; Hyndman 2000: 2–3). The "War on Terror" rhetoric that spread after the September 11, 2001 attacks particularly stigmatizes Muslim communities, which constitute a large proportion of the current refugee population, including Somalis (Zetter 2007: 185).[4] Asylum, theoretically granted to people whose lives are in danger,[5] has become perceived as an irregular path to immigration and therefore as something that should be contained (Zimmerman 2009: 74). Consequently, the refugee phenomenon is treated as a problem to be solved, by means that include the use of migration policies unsuited to the protection needs of refugees, but appropriate to limiting influxes (Feller 2006: 536; Nyers 2006: 5). Hence, if the West does not have problems of refugees on its borders, this "is clearly not a simple accident of geography or history" (Malkki 1995a: 503). In a context of increased mobility and deterritorialization of information, ideas, people, goods and services, while borders are more and more meaningless for a part of humanity, poor populations are increasingly forced into immobility, locked in a territory, inexorably local. It has thus become commonplace to highlight the tension between the hypermobility of the privileged and the confinement of undesirable populations (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998a; Hyndman 2000).

While it remains easier to seek asylum in a poor country, even there, hospitality no longer rules. In order to seek asylum, an individual must cross an international border. Since 1990, relatively poor countries faced with a mass influx of people have closed their borders over a dozen times (Long 2010: 24), violating the principle of *non-refoulement*.[6] Another way to prevent people from fleeing to another country, which resorts to a similar containment logic

without violating international law, is the promotion of regional solutions and "preventive protection" policies. These are at the basis of humanitarian and development programs aimed at providing protection and assistance to people within their country of origin. States and international organizations have come to see this as a substitute rather than a complement to refugee protection. Although the UNHCR has described this approach in rather positive terms,[7] preventive protection can be depicted as a threat to asylum (Dubernet 2006). This development has impelled Hyndman (2000: 21) to write that the international refugee regime has evolved from protecting the right to asylum to championing the right to stay home.

In spite of these restrictions, many refugees manage to cross the border of a neighboring country—generally a poor one, since these remain more open and accessible than their rich counterparts. This is due to traditionally generous asylum policies, the willingness of states to comply with their international commitments, the proximity of conflict-affected countries, and the difficulty of controlling long and porous borders with limited resources (Harrell-Bond 1986: 15; Long 2010). However, refugees' rights are not fully respected, since significant restrictions to their freedom of movement or work are often imposed by states, which tend to delegate their responsibility toward refugees to international organizations (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005).

Presented as the best emergency (and, theoretically, temporary) solution to governments of poor countries increasingly reluctant to accommodate large groups of refugees, the opening of camps has become the norm in mass-influx situations since the 1980s (Fresia 2007: 102–3; Harrell-Bond 1986: 8–9). While the camp is designed to meet the emergency needs of arriving refugees, it remains in place well beyond that period as lasting solutions remain out of sight. Refugees are commonly treated as "temporary guests" (Kibreab 1999: 399) with curtailed rights, perceived as an excessive burden and a threat to stability and the social cohesion of states (Crisp 2003: 3–4; Loescher et al. 2008: 4; Maltou 1999: 136). Camps were not always the expected response to mass influxes: the term does not even appear in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.[8] Historically, the local integration of refugees was the predominant solution (although often de facto) (Fresia 2007: 102; Jacobsen 2001: 2–3). Even today, despite steps taken to encourage or force refugees in Africa and Asia to live in camps, it is estimated that at least half of them have settled on their own (without assistance and often without being registered) in the community (UNHCR 2014a: 6). Yet, the vast majority of those who receive support live in camps that have become "almost synonymous with the refugee experience" (Harrell-Bond 2000: 1). In a growing number of countries, camps keeping refugees at "the margins of society" are not only the recommended solution, but an imposed one (Kagwanja and Juma 2008: 221). Such confinement is sometimes prescribed by law and some-

times enforced by the implementation of measures that make life outside the camps particularly difficult, such as the restriction of humanitarian assistance to camps, or tedious refugee status determination procedures for those outside (HRW 2009a: 43–50; Moret, Baglioni and Efionayi-Mäder 2006: 62). Although these provisions do not prevent refugees from settling outside camps, they have the effect of forcing them into illegality, making them vulnerable to abuse and the violation of their rights.

This predilection for camps has been explained by the complexity of assisting and protecting dispersed populations, concerns for the safety of refugees and the host community, and the desire to maximize the visibility of refugees in order to mobilize donors (Fresia 2007: 102; Harrell-Bond 1986: 8–9). Humanitarian assistance and protection policies are also closely associated with the will to contain noncitizens in a controlled space (Chimni 2000: 251–52; 2002; Hyndman 2000: 24). Camps were originally conceived as places that would allow refugees to live in decent and secure conditions, while contributing to the development of areas otherwise sparsely populated and underdeveloped (Harrell-Bond 2000: 3). However, they have become a key device in the exercise of arbitrary power to manage large-scale displacement (Malkki 1995a: 498).

Approaching the Experience of Somali Youth: Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

The complexity of the refugee experience has often been overlooked in portrayals that have depicted the displaced in turn as passive victims oppressed by humanitarian agencies or, conversely, as strategists with unsuspected resources and adaptability (Fresia 2007: 101, 105–8; Horst 2006a: 11–18). Many recent studies have, however, tried to capture both the constraints experienced by refugees and their agency. While camps can be envisioned as spaces of exception that fall outside of state sovereignty, where the humanitarian government composed of NGOs and government agencies, and coordinated and funded by the UNHCR, exercises power over bare life (e.g., Agamben 1998: 167-80; Agier 2008: 298–303; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010: 15–16), they cannot be reduced to places where all exits are hermetically sealed and where the disciplinary mechanism is so precise that refugees are crushed, reduced to their biological functions. First, social organizations are rarely perfectly ordered and controlled (Davis 1992: 159). Then, although the camp is unconducive to emancipation and development, this does not mean that refugees are totally deprived of their imagination and are unable to get around the control and power of the institution, at least partially, and regain or retain an identity and political subjectivity. Forced migration can-

not be summed up as belonging to a new legal category, but must instead be considered in terms of experience and a process of rapid social transformation (Malkki 1995a: 496). Arendt (1968 [1951]: 286–87) reflects that a common experience stems from the passage to the status of refugee and therefore to that of noncitizen, i.e., to that of exclusion from the world of men. But beyond this "ban," it is reasonable to assume that there is no typical refugee or ideal-type experience, given that the experience of each individual is unique. Refugee camps become social and political environments in which people are born, marry and die, places of production of locality where new practices are developed (Appadurai 1996: 192).

Hence, camps can be construed as places of confinement where freedom is restricted and where individuals are treated as victims, but also as spaces of (re)invention and (re)definition, connected to the world. Refugees therefore navigate between the state of victim and that of subject, between control and (sometimes creative) avoidance strategies. In that respect, I find Vigh's concept of "social navigation" (2006: 13–15) profoundly valuable, as it allows one to take into account not only people's agency, but also the fact that social forces are at play, and thus people are neither perfectly free agents nor merely powerless victims. Vigh (2006: 32) underlines that the circumstances and limitations of the terrain being navigated influence people's possibilities and their understanding of their possibilities, which, in turn, affects their social navigation. Although refugees living in the same setting may experience similar restrictions, these might not affect people's navigation in the same way, as people's paths are unique, influenced by their history, their gender and their capacities (Clark-Kazak 2011: 6; Essed, Frerks and Schrijvers 2004: 2; Grabska 2010: 481).

Adjusting the Lens

When I started meeting with young Somalis in Kakuma, I noticed that they only began to define and consider themselves as youth in their late teens—and people in their thirties often still spoke of themselves as youth. While in Western contexts, definitions of youth are usually relatively narrow and age-based, in other parts of the world, including Africa, youthhood tends to be related to a stage of life rather than a particular age range (Sommers 2001: 3). It is understood as the passage between childhood and adulthood, a period in which one goes from dependence to independence, when fundamental decisions are made and new roles and responsibilities are taken on (Lloyd, Behrman, Stromquist and Cohen 2006: 1). In environments where young people have to assume "adult" responsibilities, the divide between childhood and adulthood is easily blurred.[9] In Kakuma, I came to realize that most of those who were still busy with school, especially primary school, were not

yet openly engaged in a reflection about their future or, if they were, would not readily share their thoughts on the subject. Refugees typically complete their basic education at a later age than students who start at the standard age and have never had to interrupt their studies. Someone in his or her late teens might still be in primary school. Often the emergence of a reflexive stance seemed linked to the approach of the end of schooling. This generally happened later for boys than for girls. Indeed, while many boys have a relatively long passage from "childhood" to "adulthood," many girls leave school and take on adult responsibilities at an early age and without much transitional time, owing to marriage and motherhood. For boys, coming of age is complicated by their lack of financial means to pay a dowry and create a home for the family. In fact, the camp appears to obscure categories and life paths. While an eighteen-year-old working for an NGO for a small monetary incentive might be the main source of income for his family, he may nonetheless remain unable to marry in the absence of a proper job. Such constraints may not be particular to the camp. Honwana and De Boeck (2005: 9) stress that "a growing number of children and youth in contemporary Africa are excluded from education, health-care, salaried jobs, and even access to an adult status, given their financial incapacity to construct a house, formally marry and raise children."

In the end, I focused on people who, in addition to having lived in Kenyan camps from an early age, defined and perceived themselves as youth. Nearly all were in their late teens or early twenties, from sixteen to twenty-six. In March 2013, the UNHCR statistics showed that about 2,600 Somali youth of that age had arrived in Kakuma before the age of ten. The number of those actually living in the camp was most likely significantly lower, as people leaving the camp by their own means to settle elsewhere in Kenya, return to Somalia or move to another country are unlikely to report their departure.[10] Most of the people I met had spent time in the coastal camps before being transferred to Kakuma. A few already had children and were no longer living with their parents. Most still had limited responsibilities and were at a turning point, trying to make the right decisions for their future and hoping to become independent from their families and take on adult roles. Within their families, they were no longer treated like children, but were not seen as fully adult. People who had grown up in the camp who had different experiences and were at different stages of their life were thus considered together in my research, as they shared the feeling of belonging to the social category of youth and not yet seeing themselves as full adults.

Inspired by Throop's understanding of personal experience as structured by the sensory experience of the present in its raw state and its reflective and narrative retrospective analysis, I considered that grasping the experience of youth entailed combining retrospective assessments by young people them-

selves with a systematic observation of daily life that "focuses upon capturing the often pre-reflective, real-time unfolding of social action" (Throop 2003: 235). I worked through a combination of participant observation, teaching journalism and photography, and in-depth interviews with refuges and other relevant individuals, with the aim of engaging with people's immediate experience and their reflections about it.

Watching Life as it Happens

I spent a lot of time simply being present in the camp, carrying out participant observation in a number of public areas. From the start, I knew I could neither observe nor participate in the life of refugees in an uninterrupted manner, as living in the camp was not an option. Camps tend not to be a setting in which a researcher can easily live for extended periods of time. In this case, the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA) forbade visits to the camp after dark for security reasons (although I believe I could have safely spent nights in a family compound). I could have opted to stay in one of the private guesthouses in the nearby town, but chose instead to "embed" with a relatively small American NGO, FilmAid,[11] and to live in the NGO compound with hundreds of aid workers hired by various organizations that are present in the camp. Jansen (2011) decided not to stay with an NGO or the UNHCR when doing his Ph.D. research in Kakuma to emphasize his separation from the humanitarian system. I concur that to prevent confusion between the roles of researcher and aid worker, a researcher should try not to live or be supported by an aid organization (although being "embedded" with FilmAid did allow me to witness how humanitarian staff engaged with refugee staff and refugees in general, which I found valuable). However, as a woman, I did not feel comfortable with staying on my own in a guesthouse.

Being a white woman in her mid thirties and a former aid worker meant that I was perceived as wealthy and possibly able to influence aid organizations, notably on resettlement matters. This led to my receiving a number of requests for assistance. In a few instances, I was asked if I could plead on someone's behalf to Canadian officials or give significant sums of money. Refugee camps are a setting where people receive assistance and are used to visitors coming to assess their needs. Consequently, when I first met with groups of refugees, I was often asked what I was going to provide and I had to clarify that although I was hosted by FilmAid, I was not there on behalf of an aid organization or a donor, but as a student doing independent research. I think that working with youth for a sustained period of time and in an open and transparent manner helped erode the view that I was working for and in the interests of an NGO or that I was involved in the distribution of humanitarian assistance—to the extent that when I met with older people who would

ask what I could do for them, youth often responded on my behalf that I was not working with an NGO, but was "just a student" conducting research and teaching voluntarily. However, refugees did know that I had good access to NGOs and the UNHCR (and had worked for the UNHCR and NGOs for several years) and I did sometimes help refugees to meet with aid workers. This probably accentuated the impression that I held more power or influence than they did as refugees, but I felt that it would be morally wrong not to provide this very limited support.

It is commonly thought that giving assistance or rendering services will alter the research process and thus the findings. According to that view, giving might exacerbate the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched, and lead people to participate in a project they would not otherwise have been interested in. But as Lammers (2007: 76) points out, one might instead wonder why anyone would engage in a meaningful, trustworthy and respectful relationship with a researcher if no giving-receiving relationship is established. This also wrongly assumes that informants are passive subjects and researchers are powerful agents. But power is not only a matter of wealth and status, but also of qualities such as physical power, intellectual skills, leadership and creativity (Lammers 2007: 74). On all of these dimensions, researchers are not experts—quite the opposite. I feel an affinity with Hecht (1998: 9), who says that while he never "came to terms with the inequality between [himself] and the Brazilian street children" he was spending time with, he came to realize that he was the one depending on the children and not the other way round. In all cases, the very presence of a researcher influences social interactions and cultural configurations, and has some impact on the construction of accounts and representations (Turner 2000: 51, 59).

I went to the camp every day, except on a few occasions. I spent time in the public markets and visited the main hospital, some schools and training centers, one of the field posts and a food distribution center. I regularly visited people whom I had come to know in their place of work, recreation or at home and sometimes accompanied youth while they took part in various activities, such as literacy classes they were organizing, film screenings, training sessions and food collection. If I was going to nearby areas, I usually walked, as that allowed me to meet people in an informal way. After a few months, I inevitably ran into people I knew whenever I was walking. Otherwise, I moved around by taxi-bicycle or *bodaboda* (a taxi-motorcycle), or was dropped off by the FilmAid car.

When I first arrived in the camp, I encountered a number of people to whom I explained what I was interested in and asked if they knew anyone I should meet. I used several entry points in making contacts. I first spoke with refugees I had become acquainted with during my previous trip, as well as those working for FilmAid and other NGOs. I gradually met some youth

who had spent most of their lives in the camp, who in turn introduced me to other young people they had grown up with and to people they saw as influential in their community. I also came to know several young people through the classes I was giving, and they introduced me to more people, many of them out of school. At a later stage, youth leaders and community leaders introduced me to yet more young people. Quite soon I was being referred to people I had already met, and thus I realized in the early stages of my research that most of those who had grown up in the camp and still lived there were part of a relatively small group of persons who usually knew one another. Over time, I ended up developing relatively close relationships with a number of young people who introduced me to various aspects of their lives. While it would be incorrect to say that I thoroughly selected key informants, I did strive to ensure that I was spending time with young women and men with diverse backgrounds and social characteristics, notably in terms of age, clan affiliation or occupation.

I paid attention to interactions and social dynamics among youth, as well as with other members of the community, teachers, humanitarian workers and representatives of the authorities. I considered how people filled their days and observed the social, financial and domestic responsibilities that youth were assuming. This relatively unstructured time in the camp allowed me to be a witness of daily life, of life as it happens. People often shared small pieces of information that they did not necessarily see as worth mentioning in an interview, such as their daily chores or feelings of boredom, whom they liked spending time with and where, or where they would go for dating. In the course of informal interactions, inconsistencies in people's stories sometimes became clear, either through their actions or as they altered (or contradicted) stories they had previously told me.

I integrated photo-taking into my participant observation, as I worked on a series of portraits. I offered to snap and print family portraits for people with whom I had developed fairly close relationships. I also took individual portraits of my photography students. My intention was to see how distant people's desired representation would be from the typical imagery of refugees. This allowed me to verify the obvious: that people would not present themselves as victims, but would want to look the best they could.

Participatory Research Methods: Teaching Photography and Journalism

In addition to participant observation, I wanted to experiment with participatory approaches. This was partly because I was not comfortable with asking for time, insights and trust without giving something in return. This appeared even more important in a context where refugees regularly express their fatigue vis-à-vis the constant surveys, censuses and studies undertaken

by aid organizations and researchers (Cooper 2005: 468). Of course, reciprocity could have simply consisted in being genuinely attentive and interested. I also found this a compelling way to establish sustained relationships and believed that refugees were in a privileged position to identify matters of interest and give meaning to findings, as underlined by Horst (2001: 14). The involvement of youth took different forms. Many accompanied and assisted my reflection by informally discussing with me the topic of my research and how to approach it. Some also helped me identify people to meet with. When I interviewed older people in the community to whom I had been introduced by a youth, either because they were his or her parents or someone he or she deemed worthy of attention, the youth would sometimes accompany me, but not always. This depended on the matters to be discussed and the views of the youth and the interviewee. When they came along, I included them in the interview, asking if they wanted to make comments or ask questions. Once it was over, we usually reflected together on what had been said. I shared my impressions and conclusions with many, asking for their input. During the writing of this book, I have also shared completed chapters with a number of them. In fact, I wrote this in English, rather than in French, my mother tongue, so that Somalis would be able to read it and comment on it. Those who did send feedback had usually paid very close attention to parts that felt close to them and often commented on how reading their stories told by someone else had been moving.

Then I gave an unplanned journalism class, in addition to a planned three-month photography and writing class. After arriving in Kakuma, I was asked by FilmAid to develop a curriculum for a journalism course and to start the class while they were recruiting a teacher. (As a journalism graduate, I worked as a journalist for the Canadian public radio broadcaster, Radio-Canada, before becoming a humanitarian worker.) I agreed, in part because FilmAid was giving me precious support, but also because I thought that teaching journalism would contribute to my understanding of the camp. For a month and a half, I gave biweekly classes to fourteen students, aged nineteen to twenty-nine, from Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Uganda. Half of them had spent most of their lives in the camp; of these, four were Somalis. I regularly asked students to come up with ideas for articles, which gave me valuable insight into their interests and concerns, and what they felt were important stories to tell about Kakuma. They commonly suggested topics related to security, coexistence between various nationalities, the situation of women, the unsatisfactory provision of water and food or access to medical care, camp politics and corruption, and problems related to humanitarian governance. When it came to researching and writing articles, students voiced concerns for their security and feared

they might lose resettlement opportunities if they were to write anything critical about the UNHCR or the authorities. Interestingly, they often stressed that they were comfortable discussing those subjects in class because I was white. While I felt that being white created a barrier and that it could prevent people from talking in depth about their survival strategies or certain topics deemed sensitive or alter people's perception of my influence on aid organizations, I also realized that in some instances, people were able to articulate fears and uneasiness because I was seen as too distant from their reality to constitute a threat. This brings to mind the Indian anthropologist Palriwala who, reflecting on her work in the Netherlands, writes that her outsiderness was an advantage because "many informants felt confident that what they had told me would not filter back into their lives" (2005: 166).

Previous experiences in the Dadaab camps and several other settlements of displaced Somalis in both Somalia and Yemen had convinced me that teaching community-based photography can help establish a lasting dialogue with people who might otherwise be difficult to engage with (Grayson 2007, 2009). In addition, the photographs themselves sometimes facilitate discussion and exploration by revealing scenes of everyday life that are rarely seen by an external observer. For this reason, I used photography teaching, combined with nonfiction writing, as a research tool (see Ewald (2001) on teaching photography and writing to children). I held classes from January to the end of March 2013 with eight boys and eight girls in the secondary school, aged between fifteen and twenty-one. Nine were South Sudanese, six were Somali and one was Ethiopian. Five of the Somalis were born in the Mombasa camps and one South Sudanese was born in Kakuma. The others arrived in Kakuma before they were five. In the beginning, students attended a short theoretical and practical training session. We also agreed on themes to explore. They included family, home, self-representation, daily life, dreams for the future and negative aspects of the camp. The next page presents an example of their work. The photograph shows eighteen-year-old Luula's room, while she describes her dream home. Like all names in the book, Luula's is a pseudonym. Most interviewees were comfortable with using their real names, but given the links between people in the camp, I felt it would be impossible to protect only the anonymity of some individuals. Details that would have made possible to identify certain people were also omitted, even though these might have given additional depth to the study.

In general, classes proved an interesting way to steadily engage with a group of youth, witness their interactions and dynamics (in particular between boys and girls, between people of the same and different nationalities and with teachers), and to participate in discussions with them. Seeing them on a regular basis meant that they ended up telling me about various details of their

Figure 0.1 Photograph by Luula. Courtesy of Luula

lives and their hopes for the future. The photographs and their accompanying texts, just like the articles written by the journalism students, helped me understand their reality and prompted more discussions.

Giving Meaning to Observations through Interviews

Interviews appeared a necessary complement to observation, as the sense of actions is not given and decipherable in itself. I thus conducted over a hundred in-depth interviews, mostly with youth, but also with parents, camp leaders and other adults, as well as employees of organizations working in the camps and local authorities. Seeking to attenuate the asymmetry between researcher and subject, I tried as much as possible to stay away from directed questionnaires and instead to define with the interviewees themselves matters they were interested in exploring, as suggested by Bourdieu (1993: 905–6). Nonetheless, there were a number of themes that I tended to broach systematically. For example, I talked with youth about their life in the camp, their hopes for the future, and their perception of Somalia and of their compatriots who were raised there. With parents, I often spoke of cultural transmission and raising their children in a refugee camp. I chose not to ask about people's reasons for fleeing Somalia because of the sensitivity of the subject. This did not prevent many from talking about their families' paths into exile, but they were the ones bringing it up. In most cases, I also had numerous informal interactions with the people I interviewed. Finally, I carried out semistructured formal interviews with government representatives and NGO and UNHCR workers.

I had planned to work with a translator while I was taking Somali classes. In the end, the youth who were of interest to me all spoke English, as it is the language of education in Kenya. I therefore conducted most interviews in English. As a result, I decided to learn Swahili rather than Somali, because it is the other shared language in the camp, along with English. Looking back, I think this was a mistake: learning Somali would have helped me establish more intimate connections with youth, engage directly with non-English-speaking adults and gain a better understanding of Somalis in general. My basic knowledge of Swahili did allow me to notice how frequently Somalis incorporated Swahili words into their own language, to remark that it was the language used in the camp between "old-timers" of different nationalities and to understand some of the interactions between youth of various origins. The only times I needed a translator were when meeting with parents and older people, or with newcomers to the camp. In such cases, youth with whom I had been spending time helped me, which also allowed me to see how they reacted to certain stories and comments. This sometimes led to

memorable moments. In one instance, Mahdi, a twenty-one-year-old who arrived in Kakuma when he was a few months old, accompanied me for an interview with a fifty-one-year-old Somali lawyer, Osman. In the end, the lawyer needed no translation, but Mahdi stayed. Osman started talking about the language changes that had occurred during his education in Somalia:

> In primary school, I learned in Arabic. At that time, the Somali language was not written. We would either attend Italian or Arabic schools. I remember that before entering the class, we used to stand and sing in honour of the flag in Arabic.

He stood up and proceeded to sing in Arabic:

> After studying in Arabic for three years, there was the military revolution [led by Siyad Barre in late 1969] and our Somali language was scripted [in 1972].[12]

He stood again and started singing the same song, this time in Somali:

> It means: "We are very happy for this flag that looks like the sky. We have to welcome and respect. We should never forget that we gained it through the shedding of war."

Mahdi was sitting there looking mesmerized. After the interview, he explained that he had never heard that song, that he would not be able to sing the Somali national anthem and that witnessing the discussion had been fascinating, as he was discovering new facts about his own country. Similarly, young people attending interviews with their parents sometimes remarked that they had learned new facets of their family history.

Why This Book?

To some extent, this study is the fruit of years of humanitarian work with refugees in Africa, mostly in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, years spent wishing that the response to refugee movements were more adequate and wondering about the obvious discrepancy between theory and practice. When I embarked upon this ethnographic research, I wanted to explore holistically the impact of containment policies, which have turned the camp into a long-term response, on a specific group of people: refugee youth who have spent most or all of their lives in a camp. My aim was to loosely examine three interrelated spaces in time and the way they are perceived, understood and described by refugee youth: the lived present, the imagined past and the projected future. Underlying this undertaking was the belief that regardless

of the considerable limitations they face, refugees are the ones defining their lives and giving meaning to their own situation and circumstances. I therefore intended to engage with the experience of refugees in a way that recognizes the agency of these social actors. I also sought to resituate their individual trajectories in a broader context that extends beyond the humanitarian system and encompasses transnational networks.

Refugee-related research has commonly focused on young children and adults, neglecting youth as a distinct social group. This could be because those younger than eighteen are often subsumed under the broad international legal category of children, while young people over eighteen are counted as adults (Clark-Kazak 2011: 7–8). While several relatively recent studies have been dedicated to the subject, they have mostly been from a psychological or psychiatric perspective, typically studying trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g., Farwell 2001; Goodman 2004; Halcón et al. 2004; Murray, Cohen, Ellis and Mannarino 2008). The camp experience has rarely been studied from the viewpoint of refugee youth who spent most of their lives in such closed settings. The anthropologist Dawn Chatty is a noteworthy exception, as she carried out or oversaw studies focusing on Palestinian youth, and then on Sahrawi and Afghan youth who grew up in exile (Chatty 2010a, 2010b; Chatty and Hundt 2005). These studies have shown that while the main concerns of youth living in various locations are similar, relating to life experience and agency, and to educational constraints and aspirations, the particular historical, political and economic contexts have significantly colored their experiences, just as their gender has done.

As will become evident throughout this book, these observations are equally significant when studying the experience of Somali youth who grew up in the Kakuma refugee camp. Their experience is gendered and influenced by their living environment. Their identity and sense of belonging are complex. Immense value is vested in education. And youth nurture great ambitions and show a remarkable resilience and optimism. Although there are resemblances between the situation of Somalis and Afghan, Palestinian or Sahrawi refugees—they all are in protracted displacement and are predominantly Muslims—there are also contextual, historical and sociocultural differences. For example, not all of the refugees involved in the aforementioned studies reside in camps, nor do they have the same legal status, which has an impact on people (un)settledness. As opposed to Afghans, Sahrawis and Palestinians, Somali refugees in Kenya have been and still are part of a sizeable resettlement program to the United States, which influences their camp experience and their ambitions for the future. In contrast to what I observed concerning the Somalis, the involvement of Palestinian and Sahrawi refugees in national liberation struggles affects their views on resettlement,

local integration and return, and turns camps into spaces of collective mobilization (Farah 2009). In some locations, refugees have the right to work, settle outside of camps or move freely, which is not the case for Somalis in Kakuma.

The Camp as a Site of Tensions

My research shows that although camps, from the perspective of Somali youth, are not a good response to lasting displacement, they also believe that being in Kakuma has saved their lives. It has allowed them to grow up in a safer environment than they would have in Somalia. Until they completed their education, children and teenagers were busy with school, and had little time to wonder about their future and the "normality" of the camp. Frustration, fueled by connection to and awareness of the rest of the world, grows when education opportunities are exhausted and chances for leaving through resettlement remain vague, while at the same time many of their friends have been resettled in the United States. Although youth are better able than their parents to navigate the humanitarian system and Kenya itself, they still manage to gain only limited financial autonomy, making it hard to honor certain traditions and social responsibilities. While this might contribute to a renegotiation of traditions, it also catalyzes young people's will to leave the camp and "find a life."

Furthermore, growing up coincides with a greater awareness of the representation attached to being a refugee. Even though youth do not see themselves as lesser human beings, they believe they are perceived as people of little value, with limited or no rights, who cannot be trusted. Such feelings reinforce their determination to leave Kakuma. Despite the fact that refugees have been living there since the early 1990s, the camp remains a *lieu de passage*: no one plans to spend their lives there, although youth who grew up in the camp often say that "Kakuma is home." While satisfactory ways out are few, refugees do move, make plans and build their lives beyond the humanitarian system. Resettlement is the exit solution that is usually hoped for, but the process is lengthy, so youth often look for other temporary avenues. Those rejected for resettlement sometimes remain in the camp with growing levels of resentment, while others move by their own means and irregularly to Kenyan cities or to another country. Some might return to Somalia.

The camp experience appears to be traversed by tensions between seemingly opposite notions—such as mobility and immobility, isolation and connection, locality and globality, victimization and the affirmation of the subject, control and circumvention, fixed space and space of reinvention, citizenship and refugeeness—and conflicting temporalities. At first glance, Kakuma feels disconnected, largely because, like many other camps, it is established in a

remote and sparsely populated border area with barren land. But this impression quickly gains layers of complexity: while distant, the camp is also in intense interaction with the wider world, an interaction that shapes the experience of refugees. Refugees cultivate relationships with people who have remained in their country of origin and others who have moved elsewhere. They are also in contact with merchants and aid workers from across Kenya and around the world. The media expose them to what is happening elsewhere, and policy decisions taken around the globe affect their daily lives. The camp may be geographically isolated, but it is also a connected place that is in constant motion. Mobility is actually the only way to accept and make sense of the camp's reality. Seen from this perspective, the camp becomes an endless passage in a difficult location, on an (imagined) trajectory that takes refugees from Somalia to the West. This value placed on movement can be linked to the Somali tradition of resilient nomadism and mobility. It is only by seeing it against this background that the camp becomes tolerable. To some extent, the camp can be regarded as a place of confinement that paradoxically induces movement.

Seemingly contradictory temporalities also coexist within the camp. People wait endlessly for a hypothetical resettlement, which gives the impression that time has stopped. Social time—which would normally command refugees to get married, settle down, have children or find a job—is chaotic, because accumulating sufficient resources to establish oneself is hard. The feeling of living in suspended time makes it difficult to plan for the future, but as biological time passes, some marry and establish families. Many camp dwellers speak of the tension between the primacy of waiting, chronic uncertainty and the passage of time that means that they are getting older (see Griffiths 2014). A temporal tension is also perceptible in the transitory yet permanent nature of the camp. Although refugees have been living there for decades, imbuing it with a feeling of permanency, people's experience reflects the fact that the camp is designed for temporary rather than permanent settlement. In such a setting, subtle identity and cultural changes occur. The younger generation is questioning tribalism and young women are increasingly open in criticizing their social role. This creates tensions between generations and between genders. The camp becomes a site of social, political and historical (trans) formation. Perceived as such, exile, even in a camp, can be considered productive and emancipating, as long as the camp is used properly and remains impermanent.

Such observations highlight the fact that the camp cannot be regarded only as a space of immobility and constraints, but must be approached as an ambiguous place, traversed and shaped by tensions. These tensions constitute the fabric of this ethnography.

Notes

1. In this book, I use "Somali" to refer to the nationality and not to the ethnic group, unless otherwise specified. This therefore includes Somalis who do not belong to one of the main Somali lineages, but to minority groups such as the Bantu or the Bajuni.

2. In this book I use the term "refugee" to refer to people who, in most cases, live in Kakuma refugee camp and, in all cases, define themselves as such. In reality, they might not all fit into the legal category of "refugee." The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as any person who, "for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." The 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of the Organization of the African Unity proposes a broader definition, a refugee also being someone who has been compelled to leave his place of habitual residence to seek refuge outside his country of origin or nationality "owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality."

3. I speak about poor/rich countries, despite the vagueness and relativity of these terms, as I find this more accurate than the South/North designation, which does not refer to the northern and southern hemispheres, but rather to a shifting and questionable divide between developed and developing countries.

4. In 2015, Syrians, Afghans and Syrians, who are predominantly Muslims, were the three most important groups of refugees and constituted more than half of the 21.3 million refugees falling under the UNHCR's mandate (UNHCR 2016a: 3). The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is responsible for the protection and assistance of some 5.2 million Palestinians.

5. In principle, the reception and protection of refugees and asylum seekers are not dependent on the generosity of states, but are governed by international instruments. While the right to leave one's country and to seek asylum in another one, set out in Articles 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is not accompanied by the right of entry into a territory, the principle of *non-refoulement,* which requires states to allow refugees and asylum seekers onto their territory and prohibits the return of a refugee to a territory "where his life or freedom would be threatened," is enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 33) and is considered a rule of customary international law (UNHCR's introduction to the 1951 Refugee Convention: 4). It is therefore binding on all states.

6. Although the labeling of border closure as *refoulement* has been the object of significant divergence since the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention, such closure is now considered an act of *refoulement* (Long 2010: 62–63; UNHCR Excom 1981: Conclusion 22, II.A).

7. "Whereas the older paradigm can be described as reactive, exile-oriented and refugee-specific, the one which has started to emerge over the past few years can be characterised as proactive, homeland-oriented and holistic" (UNHCR 1995: Emerging trends and strategies).

8. The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is hereafter referred to as the 1951 Refugee Convention.

9. For a stimulating overview of the social studies of childhood and youth, see Benwell and Hopkins (2015: 4–14).

10. Statistics in refugee camps are far from perfectly accurate, but can be used as an indicator. Population data is normally updated and verified through periodical re-registration. This operation is also referred to as a "verification." The last verification of demographic data before I began my fieldwork took place from October 2010 to April 2011. Between these periodic verifications, changes occur within the population and might not be communicated. Refugees have limited interest in reporting deaths, as it means that their family size will be reduced, which affects the size of their food ration. In addition, registration figures do not take into account the mobility of refugees and include a number of local residents who register as refugees to receive some assistance.

11. FilmAid produces and distributes film and media to deliver information and entertainment to communities in crisis and trains community members in video production (www.filmaid.org). Its head office is in the United States and it runs operations in five countries. In 2012, fewer than ten Kenyan staff and many more refugee workers made up the FilmAid team in Kakuma.

12. In 1972, the military junta introduced a Latin script as the official orthography of the Somali language. It was accompanied by an edict making Somali the only official language. To diffuse the new orthography quickly, literacy campaigns were organized throughout the country (Abdullahi 2001: 73; Lewis 1993: 150).