

Foreword

The author of this book stimulates the reader with insights on a variety of interrelated subjects. Dar es Salaam as “Bongoland” and the commentary on urban youth culture and language enrich the discourse on urbanization in Africa. Those interested in social networks will be intrigued by the importance of Pentecostal patronage and the distorting impact of fear and suspicion on rural-urban (chain migration) and intra-urban (social support) social networks.

Our understanding of a particular refugee population, Burundians in Tanzania, is enhanced through the author’s revelations concerning internal schisms (by class, region, and generation) and contradictions in what had been projected to be a homogeneous (empirically and as imagined) Burundian Hutu national consciousness in exile. The volume’s approach in addressing emotion and ethos, and analyzing the importance of the transgenerational institutionalization, or crystallization, of an emotion such as dread, is a welcome antidote to the usual materialistic analysis of refugees (“All they need are food, shelter, and medical care”). In addition, of relevance to the more general field of forced migration and displacement studies, this conceptualization of cultural fear and its influence on the behavior of subsequent generations could be utilized as a linkage to post-Holocaust studies.

However, the primary focus of this book is on self-settled urban refugees, and the information and insights that the author provides about these Burundian refugees in Dar es Salaam are, in my mind, the primary contributions of this pioneering work. Conducting this research was not easy. Classes in research design will benefit from this cautionary tale of the difficulties of conducting research on sensitive populations and the all too frequent necessity of transforming one’s research design in the field (the “making lemonade from

lemons” analogy). In this case, the author’s preparedness, creativity, tenacity, ability to establish trust with informants who were living clandestine existences, and use of snowball sampling allowed him to successfully conduct innovative research on representatives of an important and seriously understudied population.

Each reader may be stimulated by and respond to a different subject in this book. Instead of trying to summarize the author’s findings, I wish to concentrate on how this innovative and pioneering research contributes to our knowledge about African refugees and, in particular, to our knowledge about self-settled urban African refugees.

There is much that we do not know about the millions of African refugees coming from and currently living in scores of countries across the continent. Most of what we think we know has been gleaned from official statistics and reports or, in terms of field research, has been learned from studying people living in official camps and agricultural settlement projects in rural areas. Most African governments require, as a matter of law or policy, that almost all refugees live in these officially demarcated and supervised rural areas. The exceptions to these laws and policies are small numbers of officially recognized refugees living in urban areas.

International attention focuses on, or is exclusively dedicated to, protecting and caring for refugees in transit or living in these camps and settlements. Official reports are based on official statistics and on the movements, activities, care and feeding, and supervision of the refugees living in these camps and projects.

All of us who study African refugees recognize that the official statistics of refugee populations and flows should be considered to be, at best, rough approximations of reality and, at worse, seriously misleading. Similarly, we recognize that many—perhaps as many as half—of Africa’s refugees live off the official map. They have chosen to settle themselves unofficially (in what is referred to as “self-directed” or “spontaneous” settlement) in villages, towns, and cities instead of living in the official settlements. These self-settled refugees live and work interspersed among the local residents and deliberately do not call attention to their refugee origins and (usually illegal) presence because they do not wish to be confined to official settlements or to have their movements and socioeconomic activities limited.

Governments and researchers know almost nothing about these self-settled refugees. The clandestine nature of self-directed settlement means that these refugees do not want to be identified. This

makes it extremely difficult for researchers. The little that we know about the (presumably) millions of self-settled refugees and their activities comes from a few rare and scattered research projects that, by intent or fortuitous accident, managed to penetrate the secrecy and enlist the cooperation of refugee informants. What we do know from this research is that the conditions of life and processes of settlement of self-settled refugees vary significantly from what is typical of officially settled refugees, who have been the subjects and informants for almost all research about African refugees.

Officially settled refugees are relatively easy to study. Their identity and location are known. They live in locations that are supervised and managed by the national government or by international organizations (the United Nations or nongovernmental organizations) and are already in contact with international organizations that are providing assistance (food, medical care, shelter, clothing, etc.). Thus, there already exists a link between these refugees and international staff members of humanitarian assistance organizations. In migration terminology, this existing link facilitates the chain migration of local and expatriate researchers to these refugee locations and populations.

Saying that research on officially settled refugees is relatively easy does not imply that it is easy. No field research on refugees is easy. The author originally intended to study refugees living in an official rural settlement, but permission to conduct this research was not granted by the Tanzanian government. Governments are suspicious about refugees themselves (foreigners associated with, and perhaps inciting, cross-border conflict) and about activities in refugee-affected (unsettled) areas. The mantle (or mantra) of national security makes it easy for governments, which are generally distrustful of research anyway, to refuse researchers permission to study refugees or even to enter refugee-affected areas.

The author persisted in trying to study refugees in Tanzania and, finally, was given permission to study the few officially recognized refugees residing in Dar es Salaam. This was undoubtedly seen by the government as a relatively contained and secure activity. Fortunately, the researcher is an anthropologist and managed to turn this unpromising permission into an opportunity to learn about an important and unrecognized clandestine population of self-settled and urbanized Burundian refugees.

The author's academic orientation facilitated his being able to recognize and establish contact with these wary informants. Most academic disciplines emphasize accessing and analyzing existing

documents and statistics. Thus, what is most important is a control of the administrative and archival language. Researchers are not required or expected to speak local languages or dialects, or to understand local cultures. On the other hand, all anthropologists, and some individuals from the cognate social sciences (social geography and sociology), are expected to learn much more about the language and ways of life of common people. The author speaks Swahili, the local language, but the real opening to young urban refugees was the author's exploration of the dialect, or jargon, of urban youth (*Lugha ya Wahuni*).

This research also demonstrates the complementarity of formal and informal, and quantitative and qualitative, research methods. Formal research methods, such as surveys, are designed to efficiently collect representative information about the society. These methods rely upon people's willingness to answer questions honestly. Unfortunately, these methods do not work well in an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion and will not stimulate clandestine peoples to identify and reveal themselves. Identifying and studying these elusive and fearful persons requires a combination of informal methods (usually participant observation and unstructured interviews) and the expenditure of time (months or years) to build relationships that are the foundation for allaying mistrust.

The informal research reported in this book identifies and opens up a new world to us. We learn about the networks and processes that enable these young men to leave their rural settlements and establish themselves in Dar es Salaam, and we learn about their traumatized culture and society. Much remains to be learned. How many self-settled refugees from different refugee populations are living in this city? How representative are the lives of the young men to whom we are introduced in this volume? Hopefully, the author's research will stimulate others to expand upon this opening, this portal to Bongoland.

Art Hansen