

LIMINAL SPACE

Home and Belonging in the Landscapes of Power of Exile

A case of Congolese refugees in Kampala, Uganda

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The photograph on the cover shows the home of a young Congolese refugee in Kampala, Uganda. Photograph by author.

Abstract

The central theme of this thesis is the connection between people and place in the aftermath of forced displacement. It seeks to uncover the dynamics affecting this relationship by exploring narratives of “home” and “belonging” embedded in refugee experiences of displacement and exile. It provides a case study of Congolese men and women living in the slums of Kampala, Uganda, in a protracted refugee situation for at least five years. This thesis builds on constructivist notions of place and belonging, which holds that the meaning of place is constructed from a multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales. It analyses the experience of exile through the landscapes of power, which shape the contours, opportunities and constraints in the structural environment of the host. It finds that the perceptions of the Ugandan landscapes of power lead to a profound feeling of being “out of place”. This feeling is coupled by the fear for fellow Congolese refugees, and the deconstruction of the “homeland”. Instead, “home” is imagined as a “utopic future” or a spiritual state of being.

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When I compare my life, it's like the life of the people of Israel when they were coming from Egypt. They could not look back, and they could not see ahead where they were going. So, I am also like those people of Israel here. I am here... I cannot go back, and I don't see where I am going.¹

Since the onset of violent conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the mid-1990s, an estimated 5.4 million people have died², while hundreds of thousand Congolese have fled their country in search for safety. Currently, there are more than 500,000 Congolese refugees³ of whom at least 113,000 reside in neighbouring country Uganda.⁴ The on-going violence, most recently caused by the conflict between the Congolese government and the M23 rebels, only causes more people to flee the country, while it prevents the return of others. The three "durable solutions" offered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), includes voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement, are currently not available for the majority of the Congolese refugee population, leading increasingly to protracted refugee situations, where refugees have been in exile for five years or more after their initial displacement, "without immediate prospects for [the] implementation of durable solutions" (UNHCR 2009). This is currently the situation for the majority of Congolese refugees in Uganda. It leaves them in a protracted state of uncertainty, or "liminal space" where they can't go back, nor move forwards, as illustrated by the quote of a young Congolese man at the beginning of this section.

In this thesis, I positioned the situation of the Congolese refugees in Kampala, Uganda, at the centre of the theoretical debate on people, place and identity. According to Malkki, identity is often conceptualized as naturally linked to a place, such as "the nation" (1992:28). This "national order of things" usually also passes as the "normal" or "natural order of thing" (*ibid*:26). In this sense, people who become refugees, and "move out" of the nation, create a challenge to the natural order of things. To be territorially "uprooted" means "to be torn loose from culture, to become powerless and to lose one's identity" (Brun 2001:8). Although this essentialist way of thinking is largely absent from contemporary academic literature, it largely informs policy work, and the way "solutions" for the "refugee problem" are formulated. The assumption that refugees cannot belong to a territory other than their

¹ Author's interview with Célestin, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 15 April 2013, Kampala.

² Figure includes deaths directly and indirectly caused by the conflict. International Rescue Committee, 2007.

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics, January 2013.

⁴ *Ibid*.

“own” has led many policy makers to assume that voluntary repatriation is the “natural solution”(Brun 2001:18).

In this thesis, I seek to uncover the dynamics affecting the relationship between people and place by exploring narratives of “home” and “belonging” embedded in refugee experiences of displacement and exile. It provides a case study of Congolese men and women living in the slums of Kampala, Uganda, in a protracted refugee situation for at least five years. The question it seeks to answer is: How do Congolese refugees construct a sense of “home” and “belonging” in the landscapes of power of Kampala, Uganda. It aims to provide an answer to the question: How do Congolese refugees construct a sense of “home” and “belonging” in the landscapes of power of Kampala, Uganda? This thesis builds on constructivist notions of place and belonging, which holds that the meaning of place is constructed from a multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales. In the first chapter, I analyse the experience of exile through narratives of the landscapes of power, which shape the contours, opportunities and constraints in the structural environment of the host. It explains how both the structural environment and the agency of my informants shape the experience of exile, and inform a sense of home and belonging. The second chapter of this thesis examines memories of a previous home in Congo and the experience of displacement and exile deconstruct the idea of a national “homeland”. In the final chapter, alternative conceptualizations of “home” and “belonging” are analysed.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical debate

Recent inquiries in anthropology and other fields relating to refugee studies have led to a critique of the often taken-for-granted and essentialist ways in which the link between people and place is understood. The essentialist understanding of people and place is based on the assumption that “all human beings, understood collectively as cultural groups, “belong” to a certain place on earth and derive a primordial identity from that belonging” (Jansen and Löfving 2007:4). In this sense, culture is tied to a place-focused understanding where people are seen as “firmly settled in a home environment” (Brun 2001:17). When people and cultures are understood as “localized” while “belonging” to a particular place, places become fixed locations with a unique and unchanging character (Massey 1994).

However, Jansen and Löfving argue that the idea of a fixed, unchanging place is flawed in the sense that the “home” of refugees has not only been left behind in another

place, it has also been left behind in another time and is, therefore, irrevocably lost, both spatially and temporally (2007:9). Although essential thinking is mainly produced in our day-to-day lives, Malkki explains that also scholars tend to conceptualize identity as naturally linked to a place, such as "the nation" (1992:28). Appadurai explains that anthropologists have tended to tie people to places through ascriptions of "native status" in which "natives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those place, but they are also those who are somehow incarcerated, or confined to those places" (1988:37).

According to the essentialist understanding of people and place, to be territorially "uprooted" means "to be torn loose from culture, to become powerless and to lose one's identity" (Brun 2001:18). When people become refugees, and "move out" of the nation state, it creates a challenge to the "national order of things", which usually also passes as the "normal" or "natural order of things" (Malkki 1992:26). Brun explains that during the inter-war period and since the Second World War "the loss of national homelands represented by refugees was often defined by policy-makers and scholars of the time as a 'politico-moral problem'" (2001:17). It was argued that the physical separation of the refugee and his national homeland would lead to a loss of moral behaviour, implying that refugees were no longer honest citizens (Malkki 1992 in Brun 2001:17). Although moral breakdown is no longer considered a relevant topic in refugee studies today, the premise that refugees represent a "problem" is still valid in policy and humanitarian work. This may come as a surprise, since the "problem" arises from socio-political conditions or processes that produce massive territorial displacement (Malkki 1992:33).

As spelled out by Jansen and Löfving, the problem with the "sedentary bias" is not only that "people are presumed to be naturally rooted, and that movement is therefore somehow inherently violent", but also that they are seen as "*forever rooted*" (2007:9). Therefore, the natural solution to the refugee "problem" would be voluntary repatriation after the causes of displacement cease to exist (Brun 2001:18). In this sense, return is unproblematic, because refugees return to a fixed, native place, as if they were put back in place (Allen and Turton 1996; Hammond 1999). Yet, Brun explains that critics of the essentialist understanding of place, such as Allen and Turton (1996) and Malkki (1992) stress that "people are more mobile than ever, that being a refugee is not a pathological state of being, and that understandings of nativeness are difficult to maintain" (Brun 2001:18). Rather, refugees are active agents who are able to develop strategies and are thus still able to

function socially (*ibid*). Therefore, it is recognized that the link between people and place should be “denatured and explored afresh” (Malkki 1992:24).

In relation to globalization, Gupta and Ferguson argue that in a world in which “the rapidly expanding and quickening mobility of people” has led to “a profound sense of loss of territorial roots” and “an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of people”(1992:9). According to Bhabha, in a world of diaspora, transnational culture flows and mass movements of people, the “here” and “there” become blurred, so that it is not only the refugee who experiences displacement (1989:66), for “even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find that the nature of their relation to the place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture broken” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10). Gupta and Ferguson argue that, in reaction, the idea of culturally and ethnically distinct places become stronger (1992:10). This is particularly visible in narratives of displaced people who cluster around remembered or “imagined” (Anderson 1983) homelands, places or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:101). “Homeland”, in this sense, remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced people, as explained by Malkki, who argues that, now more than ever, people “invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases – not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, place they can or will no longer corporally inhabit”(Malkki 1992:24).

Yet, Steen-Preis argues that “non-essentialist theorizing has tended to leave too little space for the occurrence of the often simultaneous, or parallel processes of essentialisation” (1997:90). According to constructivist thinking, space is constructed from the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales. Place, in turn, is “a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those relations, a particular moment in those network of social relations and understandings” (Brun 2001:15). Indeed, Brun argues that the focus on imagination and the fear of becoming essentialist seem to have “resulted in a neglect of the location where displaced people and migrants are present” (2001:20). Therefore, Brun argues for the study of the “local perspective”- i.e. “the possibilities and constraints, the policy environment in which the refugees find themselves and their livelihood opportunities” (*ibid*). She aims to “reterritorialize” the relationship between people and place. According to Malkki (1995), reterritorialization means to lose one’s territory, and then construct a new community within a new area. However, where she studies the social construction of a

national past, she leaves out the “here” and “now”, Brun argues that even when refugees feel like they want to live elsewhere, “they have a present life, where they need to survive, make a livelihood, and thus through their social action construct the place where they are physically present” (2001:19).

Jansen and Löfving argue that Kibreab (1999) makes a number of important points on the structural constraints that shape refugee experiences, and warns social scientists for the oppressive nature of current migration regimes (2007:4). Kibreab explains that the original “occupiers” have the right to impose conditions of entry and residence, as well as resource use. In this sense, the territory of the hosting state represents a territorialized space (1999:387). Since most African states and their citizens exclude or discriminate against outsiders, on the sole ground that they are not members of that territorially anchored society, Kibreab argues that “there can be no deterritorialized identity in a territorialized space” (*ibid*). Thus, people and cultures are not necessarily tied to particular places, but created and recreated at the interstices between people in their interaction with one another in everyday discourses, but also in the everyday experience of extraordinary events, such as forced migration or exile (Olwig and Hastrup 1997).

Conceptual framework

In order to analyse the experience of exile in Uganda, I will use the concept “landscapes of power”, originally used by Zukin in her book *Landscapes of power: From Detroit to Disney World*. According to Mitchell, landscape is best understood not as a noun, but as a *verb* (2002:1). He seeks to emphasize the role of landscape as a “process” and to reposition landscape at the centre of the theoretical nexus between power and space, known as territoriality (Fields 2007:189). In the broad sense, territoriality assigns a socially constructed meaning to geography by elevating the role of human intervention and human decision-making in disciplining and developing landscape (Agnew and Corbridge 1995:xi). More specifically, territoriality refers to “human agency on the land” (Mukerji 1997:2) marked by the “effort of an individual or group to influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic areas” (Sack 1986:19). “To landscape” is thus “to assert control over human activity by shaping the contours of territorial space” (Fields 2007:190). It is in this way that “landscape” is an action word corresponding to the exercise of power (*ibid*).

Since it is the aims of this thesis to uncover how Congolese refugees in Kampala conceptualize “home”, it is important to note that conceptions of “home” are not static, but dynamic processes, involving acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:6). The existing literature on “home” reveals an on-going tension between definitions pertaining to physical places and those referring to symbolic spaces (*ibid*). In this thesis, the concept of “home” entails both meanings, or as Papastergiadis puts it: “the ideal home is not just a house which offers shelter... a home is a place where personal and social meaning are grounded (1998:2).

Epistemological and ontological stance

In this thesis, I build on constructivist notions of people and place, which argues that the link between people and place is not naturally given, but constructed and reconstructed from the multiplicity of social relations, and at the interstices between people in their interaction with one another in every day discourses, and in extraordinary experiences such as displacement and exile. Simultaneous or parallel processes of reification may crystallize the relationship between people and place, leading to an often taken-for-granted experience of this very link. Epistemologically, this understanding of people and place is rooted in social constructivism, discourse analysis and phenomenology, which hold that realities are constructed through social interaction. Theoretically, this link may also be unmade.

Instead of looking for the causes of behaviour in order to explain it, my aim is to make sense of the experiences of my informants, and thus take an interpretive stance that focuses on the ways in which people construct meaning from shared ideas and rules of social life (Demmers 2012:16). This confronts me with the so-called “double hermeneutic” in which I aim to present knowledge by interpreting how my informants understand their social world, and how this understanding shapes their practice. In part, I try to overcome this by adopting a general self-critique and sense of reflexivity in which I reflect on my relationship with my informants, and how it may affect the production of evidence gathered for my thesis.

Ontologically, I position my research in the structurationist tradition, which holds that structure and agency are mutually constitutive entities rather than distinctive approaches to determine what drives human action (Giddens 1984). While structuralism holds that social structures are sets of meaning rules, telling people how to do social life, individualism argues that actors are embedded in society, but have agency, and that they can

act individually, and can initiate change (Demmers 2012:16). Structuration theory suggests moving beyond the structure-agency dichotomy by arguing that individuals are agents that are born into structures that both enable and constrain them, exemplified in my thesis as Brun's (2001) "local perspective". Individuals both produce structures and are produced by them.

Structuration theory holds that social realities are constructed through narratives and discourses that occur at every spectrum of the social hierarchy. Yet, certain groups and people have more power to define and impose their social reality (Foucault 1984). Power is thus an important element in my thesis. It informs questions, such as: "who has the power to make places of spaces? Who contests this? And what is at stake?" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:11). Throughout my thesis I will discuss the strategies employed by my informants in reaction to the structural constraints in exile. In this thesis, refugees are considered to be active agents who are able to develop strategies and are thus still able to function socially (Brun 2001:18).

Relevance and objectives of the research

Since the situation of the Congolese refugees in Kampala is not unique, as political conflicts in various parts of the world increasingly lead to protracted refugee situation, while global terrorism and concerns about security have slowed down processes of resettlement (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil 2004:26), this thesis presents a context specific case study of a more global condition. Currently, nearly two-thirds of the world's refugees are in situations of protracted exile (Milner and Loescher 2011:3). According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, the twenty-five countries most affected by prolonged refugee presence are all in the developing world (Guterres 2010 in Milner and Loescher 2011:3). In addition, refugees are increasingly likely to stay in urban areas rather than camps or settlements (Brees 2008). The UNHCR website states that more than half of the refugees it assists reside in urban locations (Omata 2012:7). Thus, by studying the Congolese refugees in Kampala, I am able to provide unique insight into the situation of millions of refugees worldwide.

Although the essentialist understanding of people and place as naturally and unchangingly linked has lost some ground in the theoretical debate about people, place and identity, the "sedentary bias" persists in policy and some research work. According to Turton, who wonders why recent anthropological theorizing about place has not left its mark

on the wider literature dealing with displacement, it is “the dependence... on policy definitions and concerns” that form one of the “principal weaknesses” in the field of refugee studies (Black 2001:58 in Turton 2005:267). As a consequence, the link between identity and place of refugees is left untheorized, and therefore “ambiguous” (Stepputat 1999:418). This thesis aims to contribute to a theoretically grounded understanding of this link and fill the gap of knowledge.

Finally, I aim to give voice to the Congolese refugees in Kampala. Although I do not consider my informants as passive victims who can't speak for themselves, I do admit that they have limited resources to make themselves heard. When I asked Lucien, a thirty-nine year old Congolese refugee, at the end of the interview if there was anything else he wanted to share with me, he said: ‘I would like you to maybe tell... inform... I don't know who... that Congolese are not ok in Uganda. Inform that their country is not ok. Inform that they don't have hope. No... tell them to do something.’⁵ In this sense, the contribution of my thesis is not only theoretically. It also aims to create awareness, not only about the Congolese in Uganda, also the more general phenomena of displacement, protracted exile and urban refugees.

Research methods

In order to write this thesis, I designed a research method that consists of literature and documentation research, and qualitative in-depth interviewing. After collecting theoretical insights into the relationship between people, place, identity and displacement in order to write an extensive literature review, I conducted three months of field research in Kampala between March and June 2013.

The first step of my field research was to contextualize the research question of my thesis in the Ugandan refugee environment. I collected legal documents relating to refugees in Uganda, complimented by documentation of NGOs dealing with refugee issues. I collected policy documentation on urban refugees in Uganda, and interviewed several NGO officials. The research method also entailed semi-structured in-depth interviews with Congolese refugees in Kampala. I collected stories about violence, displacement, reception in Uganda, livelihood opportunities, assistance delivery and attitudes towards durable solutions. Initially, I used a detailed interview guide, that was later replaced by a simple

⁵ Author's interview with Lucien, 10 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 12 April 2013, Kampala.

topic guide, to leave as much space as possible for the stories of my informants they thought as most relevant (see appendix 1). I aimed to uncover how they perceive their host environment, and how it affects their life and perception of "home".

Sample

The sample of my research consists of twenty-seven Congolese refugees, and officials from UNHCR, Hias and the International Organization for Migration, which are organizations dealing with the refugee presence in Uganda. The Congolese all held refugee status, and spent at least five years in Uganda. Since I largely had to rely on the networks of my informants, the main sampling method employed was snowball sampling. I established my initial contacts through Refugee Law Project, the network of my interpreter, and a Congolese pastor who set up a refugee shelter in Kampala called Bondeko Centre. In total, I conducted interviews in twelve different neighbourhoods in Kampala, with a concentration in the south-west of Kampala. All carried refugee status and had spent at least five years in exile. I choose to target the refugees in a protracted situation, as they have a long experience of life in Uganda, and are passed the first confusion of displacement. I interviewed eleven women and sixteen men. Most informants were adults between twenty-five and forty-five, a few youths and the elderly. Most respondents were born-again Christians and Protestants, while a handful of others were Muslims. Education levels ranged from primary schooling to university degrees. No one was officially employed in Uganda at the time of the interviews.

Since the official language in Congo is French, I undertook approximately thirty hours of private lessons before the commencement of the interviews to improve my French language skills. Yet, the majority of my informants felt most comfortable in Kiswahili or another local language. Likewise, I didn't feel comfortable enough to conduct in-depth interviews in French. Therefore, I hired Alexis, my French teacher and community interpreter at Refugee Law Project. Not only his professional experiences, but also the stories about his personal life aided my understanding of forced displacement and exile in Uganda, as he once fled to Uganda from Rwanda. He truly understands the challenges of life as a refugee in Uganda, and knew how to approach and establish rapport with my informants.

Confidentiality

I met all informants, except one, at the privacy of their homes to ensure their comfort, and to be able to gain a better understanding of the conditions and realities in which they live. There was one exception, which came from one of my informants that feared that a visit at

his home could somehow interfere with his resettlement process. Before the commencement of each interview, I obtained oral and written consent (see appendix 2). I clearly explained the purpose of my research and the implication of their participation. I allowed them to ask questions before, during and after the interview. I left my phone number and email address with them in case they wanted to contact me. Unless they made travel expenses to meet me, I would not pay them for their participation. Throughout my thesis, I refer to my informants with pennames in order to secure their anonymity, while maintaining the personal character of their stories.

Use of quotes

Throughout my thesis, I use quotes to illustrate my observations and points made. I don't quote all my informants, but ensure that the quotes used reflect the experiences and beliefs more generally of my informants. In order to ensure readability of the quotes, I made small adjustments without changing its meaning.

Limitations of the research

Limitations of research are inevitable. As outlined in the methods section, I conducted most interviews with an interpreter. To some extent, this limits the spontaneity of the interview. I conducted three interviews in English, during which I noticed that direct contact aides the observation of non-verbal communication, and to take mental note of issues to follow up in the next questions. To some extent, the meaning or details of certain answers may have gotten lost in translation. Although this is inevitable, I was lucky to praise myself with an experienced and sensitive interpreter. During every interview, Alexis made an honest effort to truly grasp and accurately convey the message of each answer.

Another limitation of the research is my cultural background. Although I trust my sense of empathy, I would never be able to truly understand what the Congolese refugees go through. While I thought of myself as incredibly privileged to be in Uganda, having the opportunity to do field research, work at a renowned international organization, make friends from all over the world, and most importantly, be able to eventually return home, the Congolese in Uganda live a completely different life in Uganda. Yet, I believe that by understanding of my own position, I was able to make a sincere effort to examine their experiences and beliefs from their perspective.

Although one of the objectives of my research was to gain a better understanding of the constraints of the host environment, I was largely unable to verify or counterbalance the view of my informants with the word of the Ugandan state, assistance organizations, or the Ugandan people. This means that I wasn't able to get the "full story". In turn, my informants may not have told the full story either, since I met most of them only once when they may not have been able to fully trust me. In addition, my analysis causes a double hermeneutic in which I interpret subjective experiences and beliefs. I tried to minimize this effect by taking a critical and self-reflexive stance in this thesis.

Another limitation of my research is the fact that I will write about the ways in which religion is employed as a coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of displacement and exile, while I have not been to any of the church services of my informants. Instead, I build on the narratives of church and religion.

Territoriality and displacement

Brun argues that recent inquiries in the meaning of space and place have “neglected the location where displaced people and migrants are present” (2001:20). Accordingly, Kibreab claims that the literature on refugees tends to leave out the policy environment and attitude of the host country. He argues that the original “occupiers” have the right to impose conditions of entry and residence, as well as resource use. In this sense, the territory of the hosting state represents a territorialized space (1999:387). Accordingly, Brun argues that the “possibilities and constraints that come from being in a particular place” are largely determined by “the attitudes of the host community, policy environment in which the refugees find themselves and their livelihood opportunities” (2001:15). In this chapter I will analyse the structural environment of the Congolese refugees in Kampala from the perspective of my informants. Due to the “neglect” of the present lives of refugees previous work, this chapter is largely descriptive, while aiming to abstract insights to contribute to the limited theoretical understanding of this dynamic.

By crossing the international border between the two countries, refugees literally step into an unknown “landscape” with its specific rules and regulations. Yet, as with every international border, someone who wishes to cross it needs to be able to provide travel documents and proof of identity. However, what happens when, in the midst of violence and chaos, you are unable to prepare for your flight or collect any valuables and belongings? With death on your heels, could you be refused at the border? I immediately think of the Syrian refugees, who were left stranded behind the closed borders of Turkey, Jordan and Iraq earlier this year.⁶ Although Uganda has never closed its border to refugees, I realized that in a situation of war and violence, territoriality and state borders may acquire a somewhat surreal meaning in the lives of refugees. They define who “belongs” to the demarcated territory, or who is “in” and who is “out”. To find out more about the meaning and power of state borders, I asked my informants how they entered into Uganda, and if they experienced any difficulties. Nardelie, a forty year old widow and victim of rape, looked deep into my eyes, and declared: ‘When you are fleeing from death, there is no

⁶ Human Rights Watch. 1 July 2013.

soldier who can stop you.'⁷ thirty-three year old Nicia simply crossed the border, as she arrived at a border village on a market day, when dozens of other people commuted between Congo and Uganda. I realized that state borders may not be as rigid as I thought they were, and gave space for refugees to cross it in order to seek protection.

Due to the alleged military and financial support of the Ugandan state to rebel groups in eastern Congo⁸, several of my informants considered Uganda as part of their problems. Hiram, a twenty-five year old student, argued that seventy per cent of the Ugandan development can be attributed to the natural wealth of Congo. He explained that 'we have a weak government, we don't have an army, we don't have a disciplined police force, so it is very easy. People can go and disturb parts of the country when they need money.'⁹ This involvement has led to a complex and troubled relationship between the Ugandan state and the Congolese refugees, as expressed by forty-six year old Patrique:

The government of Uganda pretends that they love us, but they are part of the problem. They are the ones with Rwanda who attack our country. I know how they came and killed people in Ituri, how they captured Goma... We saw what the Ugandans did. We are running to our enemy. That is the problem.¹⁰

I could see the paradox of seeking protection from a country which is attacking you in your own. When I tried to grasp the meaning of being physically present on the territory of "the enemy", nineteen year old Céléstin stated that 'if they wanted to give us peace, they would give us peace. But they don't want that.'¹¹ Herewith, Céléstin suggested that, if the Ugandan state attacks the Congolese in Congo, it also has no interest in protecting them in Uganda, as it doesn't seem to care about them in the first place. This has far reaching consequences, as Patrique stated that 'I cannot think of local integration with the enemy community.'¹² Yet, Brun explains that even when refugees feel like they want to live elsewhere, "they have a present life, where they need to survive, make a livelihood, and thus through their social action construct the place where they are physically present" (2001:19). The remainder of this chapter examines the "present lives" of my informants..

⁷ Author's interview with Nardelie, 6 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 8 April 2013, Kampala

⁸ Deutsche Welle. 4 January 2013.

⁹ Author's interview with Hiram, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 17 April 2013, Kampala.

¹⁰ Author's interview with Patrique, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 9 April 2013, Kampala.

¹¹ Author's interview with Céléstin.

¹² Author's interview with Patrique.

Policy environment

Uganda has a long history of hosting refugees from the Central and East African region, and is generally considered a welcoming country. Although most of my informants entered Uganda when the oppressive and archaic Control of Alien Refugees Act 1964 (CARA) was still in place, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), UNHCR, and other practitioners had distanced themselves from the CARA, arguing that they relied on international refugee and human rights law in their practice and programming (Hovil and Okello 2008:83). Accordingly, Sharpe and Namusobya argue that, “while there remains room for improvement, the Refugees Act should be praised” (2012:562), as it represents a significant improvement on the CARA. Since Uganda’s recognition rate of refugees is high with ninety-five per cent (Sharpe and Namusobya 2012:570), all my informants were granted refugee status without much hassle, and therefore do not have to worry about being sent back to Congo.

Before the implementation of the Refugees Act 2006, refugees were confined to “designated and enclosed geographical locations” (Hovil and Okello 2008:78). In its effort to “manage” the refugee situation in Uganda, this policy severely restricted the freedom of movement of refugees in Uganda. Yet, almost all my informants had never seen a refugee camp or settlement in their lives. Most went straight to Kampala where they reside today. Olivier, who has lived in Kampala for nine years, explained that ‘there has been no organization telling me to go to the settlement... so I remain in the city.’¹³ In practice, refugees were allowed to remain in Kampala if they could prove to be self-reliant (Clark 2006:104). For example, Nicia, who arrived in Uganda ten years ago, was allowed to stay in Kampala after she found a job at a tailoring shop in the first weeks after her arrival.¹⁴ Currently, by allowing refugees to reside outside the settlement, the Ugandan state has recognized the increasingly protracted refugee situation, as “‘settlement’ is the largely euphemistic Ugandan government term for what is really a refugee camp”(Sharpe and Namusobya 2012), and thus cannot function as a long-term home for the approximately 200,000 refugees in Uganda.¹⁵

¹³ Author’s interview with Olivier, 9 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 9 April 2013 in Kampala.

¹⁴ Author’s interview with Nicia, 10 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 19 April 2013 in Kampala.

¹⁵ UNHCR Statistics. 1 January 2013.

Livelihood opportunities

Under the refugee act of 2006, refugees officially enjoy the right work “accorded to aliens generally in similar circumstances” (article 29(1)). Yet, none of my informants were formally employed. Previous research found that there appears to be confusion and disagreement about the way in which to interpret this right. While the immigration department believes refugees require work permits, OPM asserts that once a refugee is officially recognized as such, he or she is *de facto* permitted to work (WRC 2011:9). This ambiguity, and its effects on refugees, was illustrated by Lucien, who worked at a health clinic in Kampala, as a nurse, until

They asked me for my papers. I gave them the paper [refugee identity card], but they said: ‘No, you are not right to work in Uganda, for you are a refugee.’ I said that I didn’t know I didn’t have the right to work in Uganda, and that I was working for my survival. They said I was not allowed to work, unless I got a work permit.¹⁶

Hiram, who has worked as an interpreter at several refugee organizations, did obtain permission to work at OPM. Yet, he explained that it is not easy to get formal permission, as

You need a letter of recommendation of the organization you are going to work with. With that letter you can get a permit at OPM. Otherwise, you can also get them, but they are very expensive, up to 1,000 Dollars annually.¹⁷

Obviously my informants cannot afford 1,000 American Dollars, and are thus reliant on OPM. Yet, when Lucien went to OPM for their permission, he was told that ‘there were no work permits there. They said: “we no longer give them, they are finished.” I was not happy with them.’¹⁸ Due to the unclarity and inconsistencies between state authorities about the right of refugees to work, and the necessity of a work permit, many Ugandan employers are weary of hiring refugees, let alone writing a letter of recommendation. Up to now, Lucien has been unable to get a permit, and, as a consequence, was laid off from his job. Currently he relies on his wife, who is selling necklaces on the streets, for their survival.

¹⁶ Author’s interview with Lucien.

¹⁷ Author’s interview with Hiram.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with Lucien.

Discrimination

In addition to the sole question whether refugees are allowed to work or not, many of my informants felt as if they were stereotyped and discriminated when seeking employment. Olivier, for example, explained that

When you go to look for work, they say they don't trust us Congolese. They even say we have manners of stealing. Our image has been damaged, and now, no one can get a chance of getting a job.¹⁹

Discrimination was not only experienced in seeking employment, also those who managed to get a job, or own a small business, like Jannie, received discriminatory treatment. Jannie explained that 'now that I am running a business, people will say: 'why do you buy from a foreigner while you have shops of nationals here?' So some people tell others not to buy from my shop.'²⁰ Célestin, who got an internship at a garage through InterAid, the implementing partner of UNHCR in Kampala, explained that he is unable to learn anything, and is blamed when something gets lost or broken. He explained that 'I am not given the chance of learning and working. For their own children, they say how it works, they explain... I simply stand and look, as if I am watching a TV.'²¹

Another common difficulty when seeking employment was the lack of recognition of school diplomas and academic certificates. Since the ones they obtained in Congo are in French, and based on a French education system, while Uganda is an English speaking country, they are considered inadequate to prove their skills and knowledge. This problem is coupled by the language barrier and discrimination, as explained by Aristride, who declared that

I try to look for jobs here, but the fact that I am a refugee... they say: 'no, we cannot employ a refugee.' And our certificates, these are certificates from French speaking countries, so they can't accept them. And again, they say that our English is broken. So they cannot allow us to do their jobs. So we are left jobless.²²

In order to overcome these obstacles in finding a job, Olivier decided to bring the Local Counsel Chairman (LC) of the area to the garage where he wanted to get a job. Yet, the LC, usually a respected community leader, was told: "No, no... I don't want a Congolese. If you

¹⁹ Author's interview with Olivier.

²⁰ Author's interview with Jannie, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 8 April 2013, Kampala.

²¹ Author's interview with Célestin.

²² Author's interview with Aristride, 13 years in Kampala. Interview conducted on 10 April 2013, Kampala.

bring me a Uganda, it's fine.”²³ According to Aristride, the inability of Congolese to find employment in Uganda is largely based on the social system in which kinship plays an important role, as he stated that ‘things are based on families here. if you have a brother, you cannot give the job to me. That’s how the jobs are done here.’²⁴

The impact of the lack of livelihood opportunities goes beyond the constraints imposed on their ability to reconstruct their lives on a practical level. It also affects their sense of self, as illustrated by Jules, who declared that ‘before, I would describe myself as a farmer, or a chicken supplier. But now, I am starting from zero, with no starting point. I am just here, so I can’t really see where I could describe myself from.’²⁵ Thus, the lack of an “occupation” clearly affects their individual identity and mental well-being. Work is thus not only a means of survival, it also gives a purpose and meaning in life.

Housing

Since there are limited to no sustainable livelihood opportunities available for Congolese refugees in Kampala, my informants explained they are facing many challenges. The emotional impacts of life in exile were clarified by Aristride, who stated that ‘in my country there were wars. But here, there is psychological torture, whereby we find that we have nothing to eat. We don’t have money to pay rent. We don’t have *anything*.’²⁶ The inability to pay rent has far reaching consequences of the type of housing available to them. Frequently, they are chased away. Those whom had lived in the same house for more than a few months explained that they had found a friendly landlord or lady that accepted delays of payment. Herewith, my informants were dependent on the kindness of the landowner, leaving them in an unstable and powerless situation. This was clearly illustrated by Hiram, who fears he might lose his home after losing his job earlier this year:

The landlord of this place has been good to me. But since I lost my job, things have changed. It has been five or six months now since I last paid. I can’t tell him I am financially unstable, because he will tell me to shift, or leave my house.²⁷

While I visited my informants in their homes, I realized that their houses were not places of comfort and ease. Closely packed together, they usually lived in a house of only

²³ Author’s interview with Olivier.

²⁴ Authors interview with Aristride.

²⁵ Author’s interview with Jules, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 8 April 2013, Kampala.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Author’s interview with Hiram.

one small room for a large family. Their sleeping area was usually separated from the rest of the room with a bed sheet. The lack of space clearly had its impact on the private lives of my informants. Three men complained that they were unable to sleep with their wives²⁸, while two widows felt embarrassed to share the room with their sons.²⁹ The importance of intimacy between married couples was explained by Patrique, who recently moved to a house with a separate bedroom. He stated that 'at least I can sleep and have sex with my wife now, and I can feel some happiness.'³⁰

A major complaint about the house and neighbourhood was based on the unhealthy environmental conditions. According to Jules, the environment of his house is 'very dirty'.³¹ He continues that 'when I look at the sickness of my children, I don't like this place'.³² Olivier, in turn, complained about his neighbour whose drainage doesn't work properly, causing the waste from her toilet to end in the children's drinking water. When he asked her to get a pipe to evacuate the waste, his neighbour got annoyed: 'she wanted me to get beaten and even detained. Now there is nothing I can do'.³³ Similar to Olivier, many informants complained about bullying neighbours. Patrique, for example, declared that 'I don't know why they hate me so much. If I had money, I would have gone by now'.³⁴

Indeed, many wished to leave the place where they were living. Yet, when you move into a new house in Uganda, you need to pay the rent three months in advance. Without a steady income, not many can afford this shift. Yet, not everyone experienced difficulties in their neighbourhoods, such as Jannie. After five years, she felt as if she was 'getting used to the neighbours'³⁵, while Cecile explained that 'there is no discrimination within the neighbourhood, because I am poor, and they are poor. So those ones are my colleagues of poverty'.³⁶ Yet, the current situation caused many of my informants to compare their current lives with the lives they had in Congo. It makes them mourn their losses, as illustrated by Nardelie, who stated that 'when I look at the home I was staying in Congo, and I look at the

²⁸ Author's interview with Jules, Patrique and Lucien.

²⁹ Author's interview with Jannie and Cecile, 7 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 18 April 2013, Kampala.

³⁰ Author's interview with Patrique.

³¹ Author's interview with Jules.

³² Ibid.

³³ Author's interview with Olivier.

³⁴ Author's interview with Patrique.

³⁵ Author's interview with Jannie.

³⁶ Author's interview with Cecile.

life here, I feel bad. I feel a lot of pain and I cry. Before I had a life, but now I am just miserable.³⁷

When I asked my informants whether they believed in the possibility that their lives may improve in Uganda, I got a unanimous ‘no’. In this sense, Uganda is “not home” according to Hage’s conceptualization of “home” as a “sense of possibility” with opportunities for change, improvement, and the unexpected – that is, room for dreaming and imagining (1997:102-108). Instead, almost all my informants declared that they had lost all hope for the future.

State services

Like Ugandan nationals, refugees in Kampala have access to several state services, such as health care, police protection and education. In government hospitals, general health care is free of charges. Refugees may also go to InterAid, where they can get medical assistance. Yet, there exists unclarity about when and what conditions are covered by the organization. For example, when Jules’ fourteen year old daughter with heart problems needed to go through a scan in the hospital, InterAid refused to pay for it. Jules was left confused, and explained that ‘the problem is that I don’t know my rights. It is right to ask for treatment? Or, is it just begging?’³⁸ The lack of assistance at hospitals and InterAid was often perceived as the result of discrimination against Congolese. Aristride explained that ‘when you reach there, and you don’t know English, no Luganda... when you don’t know the official languages, they ask you: “Who are you? Which tribe are you? Which language do you speak?” So when they know that you are a foreign person, they don’t treat you as a Ugandan.’³⁹ In order to solve this problem, Aristride usually requests the medical counsellors at InterAid to accompany him. The more general problem of state institutions, according to Aristride, is corruption, when he stated that ‘they cannot ask money from Ugandan nationals, because they are citizens of the country and they might go and report at police. For us, we have nowhere to report.’⁴⁰ I realized that membership of a territory through citizenship comes along with a more favourable treatment. Congolese refugees, in this sense, feel discriminated and excluded from social life in Uganda, based on the fact that they do not “belong” to the Ugandan territory.

³⁷ Author’s interview with Nardelie.

³⁸ Author’s interview with Jules.

³⁹ Author’s interview with Aristride.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Similar to Aristride, few of my informants felt they could go to police and report crimes committed against them. When I asked Aristride why he was unable to report to the police, he responded that he could go to police, but ‘at the end of the day, this person that you reported may come and give money to police.’⁴¹ Thus, corruption is not only believed to be in the hospitals, also at police refugees are marginalized due to the lack of Ugandan nationality. In this sense, Ugandan nationals exercise power over the Congolese and their actions through a system of corruptions, while simultaneously maintaining it. Nardelie’s perception of police is that they outright discriminate against Congolese, as she declared that ‘at police, they say that you are deceiving them... that you are just a Congolese who is lying.’⁴² As a result, they felt extremely vulnerable. Olivier explained that when his daughter was taken by a Ugandan man, he ‘reported to police, but they didn’t do anything about it.’⁴³ Desperately, he cried out that ‘I don’t have power... to fight them. There is *nothing* I can do.’⁴⁴ Patrique even believes he might put himself in danger if he goes to police, as he declared that ‘I may go and report, but the next day this person will begin to follow me, and I have nowhere else to go.’⁴⁵ Thus, my informants felt controlled by fear and the lack of power to contest the established social order.

Assistance and resettlement

Government and UNHCR policy holds that, to be eligible for assistance, asylum-seekers must reside in a rural settlement (Sharpe and Namysobya 2012:568-9). This policy has led to confusion and frustration among my informants, as illustrated by forty-two year old Jules, who explained that

When I saw the Rwandans fleeing Congo, there was no difference between assistance in town or the settlement. But here they say: ‘when you stay in town, you are assisting yourself. The only assistance is given to those in the settlement. It is not fair.’⁴⁶

Yet, none of my informants considered a life in the settlement. There, they depend on cultivation for their survival. According to Olivier, ‘life in the settlement is fine for those who are used to cultivate. But for those who don’t know, life is very hard.’⁴⁷ Grace, a forty-eight

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Author’s interview with Nardelie.

⁴³ Author’s interview with Olivier.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Author’s interview with Patrique.

⁴⁶ Author’s interview with Jules.

⁴⁷ Author’s interview with Olivier.

year old widow who used to live in the settlement confirmed this, as she declared that ‘life was too hard. When I started cultivating, my uterus came down because of the hard work.’⁴⁸

In order to support those who can’t stay in the settlement due to security threats and medical emergencies, UNHCR provides assistance to a small urban caseload in Kampala of approximately two hundred refugees per month (Dryden-Peterson 2006:385). However, this has led to confusion and suspicion of my informants, due to the lack of transparency in the selection procedure. This was illustrated by Jannie, who stated that

They give assistance to some people, but not to all... sometimes I think they base it on their own feelings, because sometimes you see that they have been giving assistance to someone who is already doing somehow well, and they don’t give it to someone who really needs it. They give maybe to their friends.⁴⁹

When seeking assistance, my informants were not very pleased about the way it was delivered. They felt as if they were treated with disdain and degraded to non-humans because they are refugees, as explained by Nicia, who declared that

When you go to seek assistance from anywhere, they say: “Oh, you are a refugee, you can wait.” But that person doesn’t understand that I have a baby at home, that I need to prepare food, that I have a life like any other person. They don’t even say they are sorry. You feel bad, because they are not giving you the respect like any other person.⁵⁰

Thus, my informants often felt denied by the Ugandan state and population, and therefore construct a negative sense of place associated with the Ugandan territory.

Due to the hardships in Uganda, all my informants expressed their desire to be somewhere else, preferably resettled to a third country. Interestingly, the terms “resettlement” and “assistance” were frequently used interchangeably, as resettlement is often understood as the only useful assistance. Yet, only a small proportion of the refugee population is resettled due to restrictive admission policies (Kibreab 1999:388).

At Hias, where resettlement cases are assessed, I learned that the resettlement procedure is a generally slow process which can take up more than two years.⁵¹ Yet, Patrique believes that the process is slow due to corruption, as he declared that ‘they say they work

⁴⁸ Author’s interview with Grace, 8 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 19 April 2013, Kampala.

⁴⁹ Author’s interview with Jannie.

⁵⁰ Author’s interview with Nicia.

⁵¹ Ibid.

slowly because they have many cases. But, I think that the problem is that there is corruption. If you have some money, you can skip the line.⁵² When I asked him if he had ever attempted to bribe his way out of Uganda, he responded that he failed to raise the money. ‘Otherwise, it could work out. What is happening is that, if you have money, things move on well. If you don’t have money, you just sit.’⁵³ Another complaint about Hias came from Lucien, who was selected for a case assessment at Hias together with twelve other families. His case was approved, and he was going to be resettled to America. Yet, something went wrong, and from all families, he was the only one remaining in Uganda. He explained that ‘they never called me, so my mind is not good.’⁵⁴ When I asked Hias about the story of Lucien, my questions were dismissed. The protection officer explained that the screenings before Hias established an office in Kampala in 2011 are not known to them, so there was nothing they could do.⁵⁵

Kibreab (1999) argues that the limited rights accorded to refugees in Africa lead to a profound feeling of being “out of place”. This appears to represent the feelings of my informants. Kibreab concludes that for those who are compelled to live in a restrictive foreign environment, “the desire to return to one’s place of origin is invariably powerful” (1999:404). Yet, only one of my informants expressed this desire, while the other twenty-six desired to be resettled. In the next chapter I will explain why the “desire to return” is largely absent from the narratives of my informants.

⁵² Author’s interview with Patrique.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Author’s interview with Lucien.

⁵⁵ Senior protection officer Hias. Interview conducted on 13 April 2013, Kampala.

Violence and “home”

According to the essentialist understanding of people and place, “all human beings, understood collectively as cultural groups, “belong” to a certain place on earth and derive a primordial identity from that belonging” (Jansen and Löfving 2007:4). In this sense, culture is tied to a place-focused understanding where people are seen as “firmly settled in a home environment” (Brun 2001:17). When people and cultures are understood as “localized” while “belonging” to a particular place, places become fixed locations with a unique and unchanging character (Massey 1994). However, Jansen and Löfving argue that the idea of a fixed, unchanging place is flawed in the sense that the “home” of refugees has not only been left behind in another place, it has also been left behind in another time and is, therefore, irrevocably lost, both spatially and temporally (2007:9).

Indeed, when I asked my informants how their experiences of violence had changed their relationship with their place of origin, the temporal and fluid nature of “home” became clear. Nardelie, for example, declared that ‘what I experienced there is too much. With my family killed, I don’t even want to think about Congo.’⁵⁶ In their narratives of their violent experiences, there was a certain degree of personification of Congo, as if it were the country and not the people that committed these violent acts against them. The same thing came to my mind when I was listening to Lucien. He carefully seemed to pick his words, and described his feelings toward Congo as follows:

I loved my country. I loved it because I was ok. I was making money, I had a good job... I had a home. But when I think of the things that are now taking place... I hate it... I hate it.⁵⁷

According to Foote and Azaryahu, “sense of place” is constructed as “emotive bonds and attachments, both positive and negative, that people develop or experience in particular locations and environments (2009:96). I was stunned to hear about the power of violence as a destructive force to transform notions of place and home, as illustrated by Jules heart wrenching feelings about Butembo, his place of birth:

⁵⁶ Author’s interview with Nardelie.

⁵⁷ Author’s interview with Lucien.

The way I loved Butembo, the same way again I hate it. When I came here, whenever I would think about Butembo, I would feel really bad. I have lost everything there. I didn't even want to go into any interview, like this one, because the moment I would talk about Butembo, I would feel as if you were killing me.⁵⁸

Accordingly, Al-Rasheed argues that refugees "are people whose relationship with the country of origin is problematic and in most cases abruptly severed" (1994:202). I wondered how these perceptions impact the narratives of return of my informants.

Narratives of return

According to Gupta and Ferguson, the mobility of people in the context of a globalized world in which "the rapidly expanding and quickening mobility of people" has led to "a profound sense of loss of territorial roots" and "an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of people" (1992:9). Clifford, therefore, inquires what it means to speak of a "native land" (1988:275). Gupta and Ferguson argue that "the irony of our times" lies in their observation that while actual places and localities become more blurry and vague, the idea of a culturally and ethnically distinct people becomes stronger (1992:10). This is particularly visible in narratives of displaced people who cluster around remembered or "imagined" (Anderson 1983) homelands, places or communities, in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10-1). Leonard (1992), therefore, argues that "homeland" remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced people. According to Malkki, now more than ever, "people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases – not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places they can or will no longer corporally inhabit (1992:24).

Yet, of all twenty-seven Congolese refugees that participated in this study, only one cherished the desire of return. Aristride explained that 'my desire is, one day, after being resettled, to go back to Congo with my wife.'⁵⁹ He explained that he wanted to spend his last old days in Congo, as he stated that 'the body to be buried in my country is better, because I like my land so much. It is the utterly promised land to me.'⁶⁰ Yet, this example does not serve to reify the notion of "home" as a fixed location with an unchanging character (Massey 1994), since the "myth of return" does "not depend on whether people actually do go back,

⁵⁸ Author's interview with Jules.

⁵⁹ Author's interview with Aristride.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

but on whether they cherish this ‘homeland orientation’, and how it affects their lives” (Jansen and Löfving 2007:9). Indeed, Hage explains that expressions of nostalgia by people on the move are means by which a new “home” is build (1997:108). At the same time, Aristride worries that his children may forget about Congo, as he declared that ‘I wish my children would also know my.. their culture. But they don’t know it.’⁶¹ Interestingly, he intended to say ‘my culture’, but quickly changed his mind and said ‘their culture’. He was clearly confused as to what extent his children, of whom some have never seen Congo, still “belong” to the Congolese territory and culture. Therefore, he always ‘narrate[s] the story of Congo. How it looks like, and how it is a beautiful country. So they cannot forget their country... They shouldn’t forget their country.’⁶² Accordingly, in his study of Palestinian refugees in a camp in Jordan, Hart (2002:46-7) found that “great value is placed by many adults upon the continuation of the feeling for Palestine across generations”.

Yet, according to Jansen and Löfving, most work on migrants and refugees builds on a false assumption of authenticity attributed to the link between nationality, “homeland” territory, and the desire to return (2007:5). They argue that it is “simply presumed that the refugees’ ‘real identity’, if they were ‘allowed to be themselves’ (Kibreab 1999:397 in Jansen and Löfving 2007:5), is their belonging to an (ethno-)national category territorialized in relation to the ‘homeland and the past’” (*ibid.*). The assumption that refugees cannot belong to a territory other than their “own” has led many policy makers to assume that voluntary repatriation is the “natural solution” (Brun 2001:18). In this sense, return is unproblematic because refugees return to their fixed native places, like being put back in place (Allen and Turton 1996; Hammond 1999). However, Jansen and Löfving argue that the idea of a fixed, unchanging place is flawed in the sense that the “home” of refugees has not only been left behind in another place, it has also been left behind in another time and is, therefore, irrevocably lost, both spatially and temporally (2007:9).

Indeed, when I asked my informants about their views on return to Congo, I would usually get an emotional answer, clearly rejecting this idea. When the Congolese refugees fled to Uganda they were forced to leave behind their families, homes and belongings, entering Uganda solely carrying their “emotional baggage”. According to Russell, “refugee in Uganda has not provided the space or the opportunity to heal the effects of trauma, perpetuating the pain associated with the Congolese home” (2011:298). Indeed, Nardelie

⁶¹ Author’s interview with Aristride.

⁶² *Ibid.*

stated that ‘what can give me peace of mind is not to stay in Congo, or even a country near Congo.’⁶³ When Patrique tried to imagine his return to Congo, he declared that ‘even if I don’t go into a rebellion, I could stand there with a knife... When I see those people, I could do bad things’⁶⁴. He continued: ‘I prefer not to go there, because I have a wound in my heart.’⁶⁵ In this respect, Congolese refugees in Kampala appear to perceive “homeland” and “return” radically different from other refugee situations, in which the “myth of return” serves as a coping mechanism to try to come to terms with the hardships of protracted exile (see Hirschon 1989; Malkki 1995; Jansen and Löfving 2008; Al-Rasheed 1994). A major difference with most research on the “myth of return” is that they are usually not conducted in the country of first asylum, but in a resettlement country, where they are both physically and socially removed from traditional cultural norms and values. It could be argued that this remoteness could instigate a sense of nostalgia, whereas the minds of refugees in Africa are still occupied with their daily survival.

According to Al-Ali and Koser, narratives of return are largely determined by “motivations” of different migrant types to leave their country of origin – often “depicted in terms of a contrast between voluntary and involuntary migration” (2002:3). Indeed, Al-Rasheed rejects “the assumption that refugees’ attachment to their homeland and their desire to return are ‘natural’ givens”(1994:199). She argues that the desire to “go home” varies according to individual and collective experiences as well as social, political, and economic contexts. Indeed, while Aristride expressed his desire to return eventually, most outright rejected this possibility, as they claimed to have lost “all connection” with Congo. Célestin, for example, stated that ‘I cannot go back. Where will I be going to? I don’t know if my father is still alive, my mother... I don’t have anywhere to go.’⁶⁶ This is in line what Loizos defines as “the loss of capital entitlement, as well as dramatic disconnection from persons, object and environment invested with emotional attachments” (1981 in Jansen and Löfving 2007:10).

Unending war

The most common response to my inquiries about return and the hypothetical situation of peace was outright rejection. As Russell, I found that the possibility of peace in Congo is nearly nonexistent in the perceptions of the Congolese refugees in Kampala. Russell goes as far as to state that the question itself has become meaningless because if this

⁶³ Author’s interview with Nardelie.

⁶⁴ Author’s interview with Patrique.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Author’s interview with Célestin.

(2011:297). Indeed, Deborah explained that ‘all what is happening is that they change the name of the rebels’⁶⁷, herewith referring to the successive rebellions supported either by the Congolese or the Rwandan and Ugandan state. Accordingly, Célestin argued that he cannot return to Congo, because ‘I don’t think that peace can come back for even one year.’⁶⁸ Therefore, most feared that if they would return at some point, they would still risk their lives, as illustrated by Cecile, who stated: ‘where will I be going? I ran away from government, so if I go back, I will myself to die. So I cannot go back.’⁶⁹ As a result, she argued that she doesn’t even think about the very possibility of return.⁷⁰

Closely related is that most believed that if the war ends at the state level, it still would not bring peace in their personal lives, as illustrated by Sifa, who argued that ‘even if peace is back, *those people* will still be there.’⁷¹ Accordingly, Lucien declared that ‘the problem with me, personally, is not only based on wars. Those people that were hunting for me are still alive and they are there. Even if the war ends, while those people are still alive, I can’t go back.’⁷² Thus, when I asked my informants about “peace”, they could only imagine Galtung’s conception of “negative peace” or, “the absence of violence, absence of war” in Congo, instead of “positive peace”, the “integration of society” (1964:2), in which there is no direct threat of violence. Therefore, the “myth of return” is absent of the stories of my informants.

According to Dahya, adherence to the “myth of return” serves to simultaneously verify the membership of the migrant to the community of origin and the community in exile, “for a migrant to opt out of one means opting out of the other as well. The myth of return is an expression of one’s intention to continue to remain a member of both of them” (1973:268-9). Thus, it seems that by rejecting “the myth”, my informants also opt out of the Congolese community in exile. Indeed, I found that the sense of a Congolese community in exile was almost completely absent from the stories of my informants.

“Community” in exile

Although asylum is granted to end the fear of persecution, the majority of my informants insisted on the sense of insecurity experienced in exile. With this, they do not only refer to the limited institutional protection from UNHCR or the Ugandan government, they also

⁶⁷ Author’s interview with Deborah, 6 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 15 April 2013, Kampala.

⁶⁸ Author’s interview with Célestin.

⁶⁹ Author’s interview with Cecile.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Author’s interview with Sifa, 9 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 12 April 2013, Kampala.

⁷² Author’s interview with Lucien.

meant the lack of physical security. When I asked Nardelie about the lack of security, she lifted up her youngest child onto her lap, and quietly explained that ‘where we are now, we are even with those that have caused us to flee our country.’ Yet, she whispered: ‘you cannot know exactly the person who can do bad things to you.’⁷³ I realized that in times of war, both friends and foes, victims and perpetrators may be driven into exile in the same country where they are forced to live together. The proximity of Uganda to Congo adds to this dimension.

A few interviews later, my informants kept telling me how they feared for their lives in Kampala. Although some base their fear on the stories of others, several of my informants had experienced a violent attack, such as Lucien, who managed to escape after three months in rebel captivity, ten years ago. He explained that, one evening, some men broke into his house whilst his wife was alone at home. They carried guns and told his wife that they were there to kill Lucien. In an instance, his wife got her phone and informed Lucien not to come home that night. I inquired who those men were, and why he thought they wanted to kill him. Lucien explained that a few days later he received a phone call in which his attackers told him:

“You don’t need to know who we are. Just don’t tell yourself that you fled from Congo to Uganda because you thought Uganda is like heaven. Uganda is not like heaven, because we are going to get you anytime from now, and we are going to kill you.”⁷⁴

What I found particularly compelling about the stories of Lucien and many others, is the fear experienced in their homes. I wondered how my informants experienced “home” if they could not even feel safe in their houses, and more importantly, how they cope with such an endemic sense of insecurity.

Hide and seek

Most of my informants explained that they had lived in more than three different places since the time of their arrival in Kampala, due to the perceived security threat, or directly experienced violence in their homes, like Lucien. Nardelie left her home in Kisenyi because there were people that threatened to kill her brother.⁷⁵ Jannie fled Nakulabye because people

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Author’s interview with Nardelie.

had stormed her house.⁷⁶ Currently, Jannie stays in the most south-western edge of Kampala, because ‘Congolese prefer to stay in town.’⁷⁷ She explained that ‘they don’t like to stay in a village, so that is why I prefer to stay in this place.’⁷⁸ Like Jannie, several of my informants explained that they prefer to stay in a hidden place away from other Congolese. The opportunity to hide in town was also frequently mentioned as a reason to leave or stay away from refugee settlements. A friend of Célestin, for example, told him that “life in the camp is very hard, because it is easy for someone to kill you.”⁷⁹ Therefore, Célestin reasoned that ‘if I had been staying the camp, these people would probably have killed us already.’⁸⁰ Reine, a twenty-seven year old women, who spent two years in Nakivale settlement in the southwest of the country, affirmed that there is a ‘total lack of security’ in Nakivale. When I asked her if she felt less insecure in Kampala, she responded that ‘security [in Kampala] is not enough, but at least it is better than there.’⁸¹

There are several areas in Kampala in which large proportions of Congolese can be found, such as Katwe and Nsambya. Since housing in ‘those ends’⁸² is generally cheap, many can afford to live there even without a steady income. However, as earlier illustrated by Jannie, most of my informant believe it is not good to stay together. Jules, for example, explained that he is no longer seeing other Congolese. He stated that ‘I try to protect myself by not getting close to other Congolese refugees.’⁸³ According to Hiram, staying in a group of Congolese could lead to a resumption of violence and hostilities between Congolese. He explained that ‘as long as there are so many Congolese around, it’s not good. The conflict could start from there, because you can never know who is a good person and who is a bad person.’⁸⁴ Indeed, Jannie declared that ‘we flee with the conflict. So, even when we reach here, we still have these conflicts.’⁸⁵ Accordingly, Russell argues that the continuation of conflict and violence from Congo to Uganda is “one of the most remarkable and damaging aspects of the lives of the Congolese in Kampala” (2011:296), and their ability to reconstruct a sense of home and belonging in exile.

⁷⁶ Author’s interview with Jannie.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Author’s interview with Célestin.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Author’s interview with Reine, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 10 April 2013, Kampala.

⁸² African way of referring to a place.

⁸³ Author’s interview with Jules.

⁸⁴ Author’s interview with Hiram.

⁸⁵ Author’s interview with Jannie.

Memorialized violence

As outlined in the previous paragraph, the relationship among Congolese refugees in Kampala is marked by fear and suspicion. According to Russell, the suspicion of most Congolese refugees towards each other is the result of the lived traumas in Congo (2011:297). Similarly, Riaño-Alcalá builds on the idea that the struggle of displaced persons to reconstruct their lives is closely linked to the challenges of making sense of the past in a social context where fear continues to be a source of dissemination (Jaramillo, Villa and Sánchez 2004 in Riaño-Alcalá 2008:1-2). In her case study of Colombian IDPs and refugees, she argues that a continuum of fear marks the experiences of displacement, migration and exile of Colombian forced migrants. Similar to the experiences of the Congolese in Kampala, She explains that fear is the result of “direct experiences with terror, threats and death previous to fleeing their home, which encompasses feelings of insecurity, anxiety and hope associated with the journey of exile, and the challenges and uncertainties of arriving into an unknown environment” (2008:2).

Unsurprisingly, I was informed that there is no such thing as the “Congolese community in Kampala, as I was referring to when I introduced my research to my informants. For example, Lucien explained that the Congolese in Kampala are not united. The problem, according to him, is that ‘they are from different areas in Congo with different cultures... Congo is a big country. It has many different tribes, each with its mother tongue.’⁸⁶ Although most of my informants expressed that their relationship to other ethnic Congolese before the start of war was good, Lucien’s statement implies that there was never a solid Congolese national identity to begin with. Several of my informants were Tutsis, with a long history of marginalization in Congo because they were not considered “authochtöne” (Vlassenrooth 2009). Marginalization and discrimination against Congolese Tutsis persists in exile, as illustrated by Nardelie, who simply felt rejected by her fellow Congolese. She explained that ‘when they see that you are tall, with a long nose, they call you a Rwandan. Even if you speak the same language, they say that you are not Congolese but Rwandan.’⁸⁷ Similarly, Jannie, declared that ‘these Congolese were saying that we were the problem, yet I was also seeing them as the cause of my problems.’⁸⁸ Thus, their current situation is strongly linked to their effort to make sense of the past.

⁸⁶ Author’s interview with Lucien.

⁸⁷ Author’s interview with Nardelie.

⁸⁸ Author’s interview with Jannie.

Suspicion and mistrust enters all layers of the Congolese population in exile in Uganda. Even Congolese friends were not fully trusted by my informants. Aristride, for example, who lives in such a hidden place that Alexis and I nearly gave up when we trying to follow his directions without any luck, explained that ‘sometimes I receive friends here. But, the bible says: “your first enemy is in your family.” So among the visitors that I receive, you never know. One can come out and betray me.’⁸⁹ This illustrates how deeply rooted the suspicion is in the lives of my informants. The consequence of fear and suspicion is that the Congolese in Kampala do not only lack a sense of “home” and “belonging”, they also lack a social network essential to their survival. For example, Grace explained to me that “when Congolese find something good, they will not tell others... They hide it from other Congolese”⁹⁰. In the next chapter I will analyse alternative ways in which my informants conceptualize “home” and deal with the endemic sense of insecurity in exile.

⁸⁹ Author’s interview with Aristride.

⁹⁰ Author’s interview with Grace.

Imagining “home”

The previous two chapters found that my informants do not envision their “home” either in Uganda nor Congo. According to Al-Ali and Koser, “home” can be imagined as “an abstract ideal, a longer for a nostalgic past or a utopian future” (2002:7). I found that my informants conceptualized “home” in two distinctive but complementary ways. First, they believe that, if they are granted the opportunity, they would find an ideal home outside Congo and Uganda through resettlement. This is imagined as Al-Ali and Koser’s “utopic future”, where they find peace, opportunities and a “sense of possibility” (Hage 1997). Yet, due to the limited opportunities for resettlement, and the recognition thereof, “home” is also imagined as a spiritual state of being of peace and security. In this sense, religion is employed to deal with the stress of displacement and exile. Indeed, Shoeb, Weinstein and Halpern, argue that “religion sustains many refugees in their process of uprooting, forced migration, and integration into the host country” (2007:443). In this chapter I will analyse how “home” is imagined in the absence of a physical home-place, and more specifically how religion is employed to cope with the liminal situation.

Utopic home

Kibreab argues that for most refugee populations in Africa, “return to the place from which one has been violently uprooted is an overriding preoccupation, bordering obsession” (1999:405). Yet, since return is not on the minds of my informants, this “obsession” is direct towards “resettlement”. This has made me particularly aware of my role as a researcher and the way my informants understood my visits. Although several had met researchers before, a white face is usually linked to “the West”. A common question I was asked, concerned my nationality, usually followed by a guess that I was either from America or Canada. Since they are both among the main states regularly receiving refugees, I understood where this guess was coming from. Although they never made a direct request, they would subtly ask me to pray that one day they may resettle to the Netherlands, where they know they would have a friend. This subtleness was clarified by Cecile, who, before we started the interview, stated that ‘when someone like you comes to our homes, the thing we think about is

resettlement. That is the way refugees are. That is just what is on our mind.⁹¹ Also Jules told me that ‘all we are after is the assistance of UNHCR, and that is resettlement.’⁹² Therefore, Alexis warned me not to ask directly about my informant’s desire for resettlement, as it could raise false hopes. I followed his instructions and clearly stated before the commencement of each interview that I was a student, and that their stories would not affect their individual cases in relation to assistance or resettlement. The general obsession with resettlement, and the fragility of the process became particularly clear when, through Hias, I was put in touch with four Congolese refugees that were selected for resettlement. Eventually, only one of them allowed me to interview him, but refused me to visit him at his home, fearing it could somehow ‘spoil everything.’⁹³

Despite these limitations, I did get to hear a little more about how my informants imagine resettlement. Several had a friend or a far relative abroad whom informed them about the conditions in their country of resettlement. Jannie, for example, explained that ‘they tell me that they are working and that their children are going to school. They stay in good conditions, and they don’t have any problem. They tell me they are doing really well.’⁹⁴ However, most of my informants don’t know anyone personally who was resettled, and get second hand information from their friends. Patrique, for example, declared that ‘when we talk amongst ourselves, we talk about the time that we shall also be resettled and get a good life.’⁹⁵ He continued that

personally, I don’t have any brother or sister that has been resettled, but those that do tell us about it. When I talk to them, I come to know what is happening in those countries of resettlement. I think maybe one day I will also get a chance, and my life will change.⁹⁶

When I asked Patrique what he thinks his life would be like if he would be resettled, he responded: ‘I would continue with my education. I dreamed of becoming a doctor. I would pursue that. Or, at least I can become a pilot. That is on my mind when I reach abroad.’⁹⁷ The conceptualization of resettlement and the “home” is thus imagined as a “sense of possibility” in an utopic future with opportunities for positive change, and general improvement of the quality of life, without those constraints experienced in Uganda. This understanding of

⁹¹ Author’s interview with Cecile.

⁹² Author’s interview with Jules.

⁹³ Author’s interview with Nimy, 5 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 17 April 2013, Kampala

⁹⁴ Author’s interview with Jannie.

⁹⁵ Author’s interview with Patrique.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

resettlement clearly passes for Hage's (1997) and Al-Ali and Koser's (2002) conceptualization of "home" as a "sense of possibility" and, or in, a "utopic future".

The majority of my informants recognized the limited opportunities for resettlement, as stated in the first chapter where Patrique understands this as a result of corruption. Thus, they realize that their chances are bleak to leave Uganda. Jules, for example, stated that only a 'miracle' can get him 'out of Africa.'⁹⁸

Church community

Since most of my informants realized that they are unlikely to leave Uganda within considerable time, almost everyone found comfort and solace in singing and praying in the church or at home. Despite that most of my informants expressed their fear and suspicion towards fellow Congolese, several were able to establish friendships based on mutual trust and support. Jules, for example, declared that he had at least one Congolese friend. He explained that 'he has become like a brother to me. He encourages me, and always tells me that before we die, we will come back to our normal position. That's the person I really take to be my friend and brother.'⁹⁹ Their mutual trust, however, could only be established through church, as explained by Lucien, who stated that 'one thing that tries to unite us [Congolese] here in Kampala is church. Only church. If you don't pray with somebody in the same church, it becomes difficult to become his friend, or he yours. Yeah, only church tries to unite us.'¹⁰⁰ I wondered why the church could be such a powerful unifying symbol, and in what ways it affect the conceptualization of "home".

The discrepancy between ideas of Congolese refugees as threatening physical security, while establishing friendships in church made me wonder about the ways in which my informants established a social identity. Levitt argues that "religion plays a critical role in identity construction, meaning making, and value formation" (2003:851). She continues that "migrants also use religion to create alternative allegiance and places of belonging" (*ibid*). Although most of my informants seemed to hold on to their Congolese identity by wearing traditional clothes, eating Congolese food and listening to Congolese music, the sense of belonging among my informants was largely based on church membership instead of nationality of ethnicity. Although several churches in Kampala were established by Congolese refugees, most of the churches of my informants included Congolese refugees,

⁹⁸ Author's interview with Jules.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Author's interview with Lucien.

Ugandan nationals and Rwandan and Burundian refugees. What they had in common is their faith.¹⁰¹ Patrique, for example, explained that ‘in our church, we have a mix of people. We are more or less with fifty. We are direct brothers and sisters’¹⁰². The small size and intimacy of these churches almost made it seem as if they were talking about their direct family members.

Membership at the church also seemed to help my informants to make sense of their displacement and exile, in an almost therapeutic way, as illustrated by Dulcine:

When I have a lot of thoughts, I go to church and I meet with people so I can talk to them. We normally talk about life in general, and the ways in which someone can survive. We pray together, and we have hope that anytime this life can change.¹⁰³

Through church, they know they are not alone in their struggle to survive. Dulcine continued that ‘the people I meet in church are the ones that know the kind of life I have.’¹⁰⁴ Apparently, this kind of understanding and trust can only be constructing within the spatial boundaries of the church.

Social network

The sense of belonging constructed in church is not only based on a common faith, but also through the social network established based on their membership to a particular church. Especially after their arrival in Uganda, the presence of the church helped my informants to survive the first weeks or months of their exile. When I asked my informants what happened after they arrived in Kampala, almost all of them replied that they were either directed or searched themselves for a church to get assisted from. Patrique, for example, heard people talk Kiswahili at the bus park. He explained that approached them and

I told them my story, and about the sickness of my wife. They felt pity for me and directed me to a church here in Katwe. They told me: ‘when you reach here, talk to the pastor and he will definitely receive you’. He received me, and that is how I started up my life.¹⁰⁵

While Patrique and his family stayed at the church until he could afford a place of his own, the majority of my informants were offered a place to sleep at the home of a church member. Thus, there exists a strong sense of solidarity and empathy towards the refugees that newly

¹⁰¹ This appeared to be true both for Christians and Muslims.

¹⁰² Author’s interview with Patrique.

¹⁰³ Author’s interview with Dulcine, 6 years in Uganda. Interview conducted on 11 April 2013, Kampala.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Author’s interview with Patrique.

arrived and came to church. Most surprisingly, these individuals that would provide shelter and food were usually Ugandan nationals whom my informants had never met until they met at church.

Another story which explained the importance of the church in the lives of the Congolese refugees in Kampala came from Lucien. During the conflict, Lucien was separated from his wife when he was abducted by Mai Mai rebels¹⁰⁶ while his wife was taken by RCD¹⁰⁷ rebels and used as a sex slave. After he managed to escape the Mai Mai, and heard his wife was taken too, he fled to Kampala believing his wife was killed. One day in March, 2008, when Lucien was in church, the pastor called him outside and told him that he got a phone call from someone asking for Lucien. The pastor directed the person to church, and that is when Lucien was reunited with his wife and children. In this sense, the church is like a central meeting point to be reunited with your loved ones, like the kind of place you tell your child to go to in case he or she gets lost.

The functionality of the church was also expressed in the stories of my informants about their current lives in exile. Although most of my informants have shifted homes and churches frequently during the years of exile, the church remains the epicentre of their social life and social network. Their friends are usually the ones that pray with them in church, and can help them when they have a problem. When Deborah's son fell sick, and she could not afford the treatment, she decided to go to a private hospital. The women of her church raised half of the money. In order to get the other half, she saved money from her work as a tailor. The majority of her costumers were the members of her church, as she explained that 'the church brought me some costumers. So, I work for my church mates, and even Ugandans are getting used to me now.'¹⁰⁸ She added that through her tailoring, 'I manage to pay rent and feed my children.'¹⁰⁹ Also Olivier explained about his friend Patrique that 'we met here in church. Whenever I have something, I can share it with him. If he gets some information, he can let me know. Things like that.'¹¹⁰ This stands in sharp contrast to the relationships among Congolese outside the church, as illustrated by Grace in the previous chapter, who stated that 'when Congolese find something, they will not tell others... they hide it from other

¹⁰⁶ Rebel group supported by the Congolese government.

¹⁰⁷ Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie. Rebel group supported by the Rwandan government.

¹⁰⁸ Author's interview with Deborah.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Author's interview with Olivier.

Congolese.¹¹¹ Thus, the church is not only a meaningful place for worship and prayer, it also fulfils a functional role. Membership is a mechanism of survival, as it creates a platform for social interaction, and the social network essential to their survival.

During my interviews with the Congolese refugees, I found that the functionality of the church does not only benefit church members; also church leaders profit from their religious activities. Like Grace, Patrique is currently trying to set up his own church in Kampala. In addition to conveying the religious message, it also serves a different purpose. First of all, it gives him a goal in life due to the lack of more formal livelihood opportunities in Uganda, and a means of self-identification that Jules was lacking, as stated in the first chapter. In addition, he seeks financial security. He explained that 'I can pray for someone, and if this prayer is answered, this person can give me something small.'¹¹² He observed that in other churches, the pastor of the church is usually given money by its members to pay rent and other expenditures. Therefore, he reasoned that 'if I set up my own church, I can be the manager and also receive the advantages that my pastor is getting.'¹¹³ I noticed how he aimed to show and consolidate his influence on the religious and Congolese community in his area, as he would introduce me to many other Congolese to include in my research. Before the start of each interview, he would stand up, stretch out his arms and proclaim several prayers and blessings. Since it is not necessary to do any studies to become a pastor, it is fairly easy to start your own church in Uganda with limited resources, which makes it a worthwhile livelihood strategy.

Spiritual home

As I explained in the previous section, church is an important institution and medium through which my informants try to reconstruct their lives and construct a sense of belonging in exile. Yet, I also found that church, and particularly religion gain a deeper meaning in the lives of the Congolese refugees in Kampala in their search for "home". Previous research found that many immigrants have turned to religion to ease the stress of transition and to find meaning in a new social world (Handlin 1951; Herberg 1955; Miller 1977 in Muzamdar and Mazumdar 2009:256). According to my informants, religion does not only help them to deal with challenges in their current lives in a practical sense, it also helps them to temporarily forget their traumas and fear, and feel at peace for a moment. Nicia, for

¹¹¹ Author's interview with Grace.

¹¹² Author's interview with Patrique.

¹¹³ Ibid.

example explained that when she ‘was seeing that my life was becoming worthless, I said, let me focus on God. That is how I understood those lessons of bible.’¹¹⁴ Through religion and bible studies, Nicia attempted to make sense of her life in exile. Indeed, in their study of Iraqi refugees in Michigan, Shoeb (et al. 2007:457), found that “religious coping is motivated by a search for meaning, intimacy and self”.

Although religion has always been in the lives of my informants – they usually grew up with a church in their village or town which they would regularly attend – I do believe that religion has obtained a different meaning in exile. For example, when I asked Jannie if and how the church in Uganda differs from church in Congo, she responded that ‘church in Uganda is better.’¹¹⁵ A bit confused, I asked her why and in what ways. She elaborated that

It is maybe better here, because I have been through so many problems. When I was in Congo, I was not praying a lot. Maybe I started praying because of all these problems. Now I feel helped. When I go to church I feel some peace in my heart.¹¹⁶

Yet, they usually argued that they lacked the time to go to church as much as they want to, because they are constantly trying to survive and look for ways to earn some money or get something to eat.¹¹⁷ Church helps them to forget their troubles and regain hope for the future. In the midst of their suffering, they can feel happy and peace in their hearts, as illustrated by Reine and Olivier, whom stated that ‘when I pray, I feel peace.’¹¹⁸ and ‘when I am in the choir and I sing, I feel very happy.’¹¹⁹ respectively. Several of my informants, such as Célestin and Tristan even write their own songs, in which Célestin worships God, and Tristan asks ‘will this be forever?’, herewith referring to the liminal space he incorporates.

Although all of my informants found a sense of peace and home in the church, there was one exception. Since his displacement, Jules is no longer going to church, despite the encouragement of his wife. I wondered why he could be the only one refusing to go to church. he stated that:

I am no longer that Christian of a long time ago. This is because of the conditions of life. We really suffer a lot. Like, for us, we change our way of thinking. People think that when you get

¹¹⁴ Author’s interview with Nicia.

¹¹⁵ Author’s interview with Jannie.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Author’s interview with Nardelie.

¹¹⁸ Author’s interview with Reine.

¹¹⁹ Author’s interview with Olivier.

problems, you start to think more, but this is not true: you reflect less. I find there is really no hope.¹²⁰

Confused but glad that I met Jules and could hear his story, I realized that religion is not only a collective social practice, it is also a personal choice and experienced individually. Not everyone may find comfort and relief in religion.

In the church, through worshipping and meeting fellow Christians¹²¹, my informants were in a place where they could forget and feel safe. My informants temporarily felt unaffected by the problems and challenges they face in exile. This point was illustrated by Lucien, who explained that

Church gives comfort. It brings the hearts of people together. It clears, cools.. Let me say, the church is good because, apart from the church in Uganda, with the problems we face here, the Congolese would have died through stress. We are so stressed, but church at least pacifies. For me, when I am in church, mostly when I play my guitar and sing, I feel some... some.. I feel different. When I am out of the church, my problems come back again.¹²²

Lucien's comment illustrates how the church experience of refugees can be an "abstract ideal" (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:7) of "home". Yet, it also demonstrates how it is a temporal but powerful escape to a spiritual home, after which they return to reality. The imagining of a spiritual home was particularly strong articulated by Aristride, who claimed there is a 'heavenly home'¹²³, where he believes he may only reach after leaving the physical world:

I stand on God's promises. I know that everything has an end. We are in the kind of wilderness life, where we are not safe. So, we know that there is a day that this life will have an end. We know that we are all just passengers. One day there will be the heavenly home that all of us are fixating on. We are fixing on the heavenly life where we all meet. All these problems will have an end. This life is just a temporary life. I know there is a promised life ahead of us. God has promised that one day we shall reach home, where we won't have to cry again for difficulties and challenges. That is the one that makes me forget¹²⁴.

Similarly, Shoeb (et al. 2007:458) illustrate the importance of faith in understanding the construct of identity, home, and future for Iraqi refugees in Michigan. They explain that "the

¹²⁰ Author's interview with Jules.

¹²¹ The majority of my sample was Christian. Three were Muslim, and expressed similar feelings towards the mosque and praying.

¹²² Author's interview with Lucien.

¹²³ Author's interview with Aristride.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

commitments" of Iraqi refugees "to Islam is not only lifelong, but also lifewide". They found that "the allusions to liminality and homelessness widespread in the descriptions of dislocation, uprooting and exile are replaced by an alternative home that transcends time and space". Similarly, Gozdziaik (2002 in Shoeb et al. 2007:458) illustrates how Islam offers a sustainable threat in the lives of Kosovar Albanians and help them to overcome the threat of discontinuity that arises with displacement.

Finally, I could place the role of religion in the lives of the Congolese refugees in the larger context. From the first day of my fieldwork, I noticed the religious images and calendars of the walls of my informants' homes (see author's photographs below). I realized that the spirituality and sense of home experienced in the church were extended to the interiors of their houses. Accordingly, Mazumdar and Mazumdar argue that home spaces and material artefacts are significant in the creation of the sacred in the home, which facilitates a multi-layered experience of place (2009:264-5). Thus, by decorating their homes with religious images and biblical texts, such as the Psalm in Célestin's home, aides the experience of the spiritual home at the physical home, aimed at warding off the general sense of insecurity experienced in their homes. When I asked Célestin about the Psalm, he responded that it was his favourite part of the bible, and that it gives him hope and strength, as it states that "He renews my strength", "I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me" and "I will live in the house of the lord.



Conclusion

The central theme of this thesis was the relationship between people and place in the aftermath of forced migration. It sought to uncover the dynamics affecting this relationship by exploring the narratives of “home” and “belonging” embedded in refugee experiences of displacement and exile. It aimed to provide an answer to the question: How do Congolese refugees construct a sense of “home” and “belonging” in the landscapes of power of Kampala, Uganda? In order to answer this question, I organized my data in three chapters.

The first chapters describes the landscapes of power from the perspective of my informants, and how they affect their notion of “home” and “belonging”. I found that, although my informants expressed a strong desire to leave Uganda, they have a present life in which they need to survive, make a livelihood, and thus through their social action construct the place where they are physically present. Their efforts to survive, however, are largely constraint by structural limitations, such as a general confusion among authorities and employers about the right of refugees to work in Uganda, and widespread discriminatory treatment towards Congolese refugees seeking employment. Yet, most of my informants developed strategies to overcome these constraints, such as entrusting a respected local leader to introduce them to prospective employers. Thus, refugees are not passive victims lacking agency to take care of themselves, they are active agents who are able to develop strategies and function socially. Yet, despite their efforts to contest the landscapes of power and circumvent the structural limitations in exile are severely limited due to the fact that they are not territorially anchored in Ugandan society. Although previous research found that the lack of right accorded to refugees in Africa leads to a strong desire to return to the country of origin, the opposite is true in the current context. Instead of return, “home” is collectively imagined in a utopic future.

In the second chapter I analysed why my informants did not adhere to the “myth of return” commonly found in other studies of migrants. Instead of imagining Congo as a nostalgic homeland, Congo reminded my informants of the violence and traumas experienced before their flight. These violent and traumatic experiences are memorialized as such that they perpetuate the pain associated with the Congolese home. They believed that their homes in Congo were both lost in time and space, as everything that entailed “home” has been destroyed by war. Furthermore, my informants held no belief in the hypothetical

situation of a durable and positive peace in Congo. They believe that if they return while the same government, or the same people that tried to kill them are still present, they would directly risk their lives. The inexistence of narratives of return is also the result of a lack of a Congolese community in Kampala. My informants seemed to avoid any contact with fellow Congolese refugees, fearing the conflict may rise up again. They prefer to stay in hidden areas away from other Congolese. As pointed out, adherence to the “myth” is not only based on the actual wish to return, it also serves as a unifying symbol for the community in exile.

In the third chapter I explored alternative ways in which “home” is imagined by my informants. I found that there are two general but complementary ways to consider “home”. Since my informants do not cherish the desire to return to Congo, nor to stay in Uganda, they collectively imagine “home” as an “utopic future” where they will regain a “sense of possibility”. The only means through which to reach this utopic future is resettlement. Yet, since there are only few Congolese cases of resettlement, a temporary “home” is also imagined as an abstract ideal, or a spiritual state of being experienced in church through singing and prayers. As soon as they leave the church, they return to their physical home, where they experience insecurity and fear. Yet, in order to extend the spiritual home to their physical dwelling, my informants decorate their houses with religious images. I found that the church derives this powerful impact on the Congolese refugees by provided them with social space for social interaction, which is considered to offer peace and security. Due to a strong sense of solidarity, my informants establish a social network in church deemed necessary for their survival. In this sense, membership at the church is both meaningful and functional in their effort to reconstruct a sense of home and belonging.

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List of interviews

| | | |
|---------------|---------|--|
| 22 March 2013 | Kampala | Access to Justice programme manager at RLP |
| 1 April 2013 | Kampala | Operations Officer at IOM Uganda |
| 8 April 2013 | Kampala | Nardeli (40), 6 years in Uganda Jannie (41), 5 years in Uganda Jules (41), 5 years in Uganda |
| 9 April 2013 | Kampala | Patrique (46), 5 years in Uganda Olivier (42), 9 years in Uganda |
| 10 April 2013 | Kampala | Aristide (47), 13 years in Uganda Reine (27), 5 years in Uganda Estelle (37), 4 years in Uganda Boris (42), 7 years in Uganda |
| 11 April 2013 | Kampala | Dulcine (33), 6 years in Uganda Benjamin (39), 8 years in Uganda |

| | | |
|---------------|---------|--|
| 12 April 2013 | Kampala | Sifa (34), 9 years in Uganda Lucien (39), 10 years in Uganda |
| 13 April 2013 | Kampala | Senior Protection Officer at Hias |
| 15 April 2013 | Kampala | Deborah (39), 6 years in Uganda Célestin (19), 5 years in Uganda, Old Kampala Rishi (29), 6 years in Uganda, Old Kampala |
| 16 April 2013 | Kampala | Reverent Father Michael Lingisi (48), 15 years in Uganda Tristan (44), 5 years in Uganda Giordani (37), 12 years in Uganda Rolf (39), 6 years in Uganda |
| 17 April 2013 | Kampala | Nimy (36), 5 years in Uganda Hiram (25), 5 years in Uganda |
| 18 April 2013 | Kampala | Cecile (44), 7 years in Uganda Merveille (38), 5 years in Uganda |
| 19 April 2013 | Kampala | Grace (48), 8 years in Uganda Nicia (33), 10 years in Uganda |

Appendix 1. Topic Guide

I. profile participant

II. Pre-war life in Congo

- A. Childhood and family
- B. Village and community
- C. Sense of place and belonging

III. Memory of violence and flight

- A. Personal and communal experience of conflict
- B. Direct cause and circumstances flight

IV. Arrival

- A. Crossing border and arrival in Kampala
- B. Assistance at arrival
- C. Refugee Status Determination

V. Life in Kampala

- A. Assistance
- B. Livelihood opportunities
- C. State services
- D. Home environment and neighbours
- E. Congolese community

VI. Coping mechanisms

- A. Generally

B. Church and religion

C. Durable solutions

D. Future

Appendix 2. Consent forms

A. French consent form

Formulaire de Consentement

Titre de l'étude: Réfugiés urbains Congolais vivant à Kampala

Nom de la personne Roselinde den Boer
faisant la recherche: Drift 6, Utrecht University
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Nom de l'interprète: Alexis Kalitanyi
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P.O. Box 33903 Kampala, Uganda
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Nom de superviseur: Dr. JolleDemmers
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1. But de l'étude

Le but de ce travail de recherche est de mieux comprendre la vie que mènent les réfugiés urbains Congolais vivant à Kampala et ayant vécu en Ouganda pendant plus de cinq ans. L'objectif est de comprendre leur idée sur le ménage dans un contexte de migration forcée.

2. Procédure et durée

Les participants seront posé quelques questions en rapport avec leur vie à Kampala en ce qui concerne l'habitat, des moyens de gagner la vie et l'assistance. Il y aura la possibilité de faire un ou deux interviews de suivi. Chaque interview va durer entre une et deux heures.

3. Gê et risques

Il n'y a pas de risques liées à votre participation à ce travail de recherche qui soient au-delà des risques que vous pouvez encourir dans votre vie de tous les jours. Quelques questions sont très les souvenirs traumatisants que vous auriez vécus dans le passé du passé. La curiosité des voisins pourrait attirer des questions au sujet de ce travail de recherche.

4. Avantage

Les participants ne vont pas bénéficier directement de ce travail de recherche. L'objectif est

de mieux comprendre la vie que mènent les réfugiés Congolais à Kampala. À long terme cette compréhension pourrait conduire à des changements de la politique en la matière

5. Déclaration de confidentialité

La participation à ce travail de recherche est confidentielle. L'information sera gardée de façon sécurisée sur mon ordinateur portable personnel dans un dossier protégé par un mot de passe. En cas de publication ou de présentation résultant de ce travail de recherche, aucune information d'identification ne sera communiquée.

6. Droit de poser des questions

Veuillez contacter Roselinde den Boer au numéro de téléphone +256 793202476 ou envoyer en email à r.denboer@student.uu.nl pour vos questions, vos plaintes ou vos préoccupations à propos de ce travail de recherche. Vous pouvez également appeler ce même numéro si vous vous sentez blessé(e) par ce travail de recherche. Au cours des interviews vous pouvez poser n'importe quelle question ou apporter votre contribution en rapport avec ce travail de recherche.

7. Compensation pour votre participation

Les participants ne seront pas payés pour leur participation. Toutefois, les frais de transport seront remboursés.

8. La participation volontaire

La participation à ce travail de recherche est à caractère volontaire. Vous pouvez quitter à tout moment. Vous n'êtes pas obligé(e) de répondre aux questions qui vous mettent mal à l'aise. Si vous refusez de participer à ce travail de recherche ou si vous vous en retirez, cela ne va vous causer aucune conséquence négative

Pour participer à ce travail de recherche vous devez être âgé(e) de 18 ans ou plus. Si vous acceptez de participer à ce travail de recherche et êtes d'accord avec l'information fournie ci-haut, veuillez signer ci-après et indiquez la date.

Vous serez donné une copie du consentement pour que vous puissiez la garder pour vous-même.

Signature du/de la participant(e)

Date

Signature de la personne faisant la recherche

Date

B. Kiswahili consent form

Informed Consent Form

Kichwa cha utafiti: Wakimbizi wakongomani mjini Kampala

Mtafiti: Roselinde den Boer
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Msimamizi: Dr. JolleDemmers
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1. Lengo la utafiti

Lengo la utafiti huu ni kuelewa maisha ya wakimbizi wakongomani mjini Kampala ambao wameishi Uganda kwa zaidi ya miaka mitano. Lengo ni kuelewa wazo lao kuhusu "nyumbani" katika mazingira ya uhamiaji wa kulazimishwa..

2. Utaratibu na muda

Washiriki wataulizwa maswali mbalimbali yanayohusiana na maisha yao mjini Kampala kuhusu manyumba na /ginsi wanaishi, na kuhusu misaada. Kutakuwa na uwezekano wa mahojiano (interview) moja au mbili ya ufwatiliaji. Kila mahojiano itamaliza muda kati ya saa moja na saa mbili.

3. Usumbufu na hatari

Hakuna hatari ya kushiriki katika utafiti huu zaidi ya vitu vyenye munapitia katika maisha ya kila siku. Maswali mengine ni binafsi sana na inaweza kusababisha usumbufu. Maswali mengine yanaweza kukumbusha vitu ambavyo ulipitia na kukuumiza. Kiriozite (udadisi) ya majirani inaweza kuleta maswali juu ya utafiti huu.

4. Faida

Washiriki hawatapata faida ya moja kwa moja kutoka kwa utafiti huu. Lengo ni kuelewa zaidi maisha ya wakimbizi wakongomani mjini Kampala. Hivyo kujua hii inaweza kuleta mabadiriko ya sheria.

5. Taarifa ya siri

Kushiriki katika utafiti huu ni siri. Habari itawekwa na kulindwa katika compyuta yangu binafsi katika faili ambayo amefungwa na neno la siri. Wakati ku imprime na kutoa majibu

ya utafiti huu hakuna habari ambayo inatambulika itawekwa wazi.

6. Haki ya kuuliza maswali

Tafadhali wasiliana na Roselinde den Boer kwa namba ya simu +256 793202476 au kutuma barua pepe kwa r.denboer@students.uu.nl kwa maswali, malalamiko au wasiwasi kuhusu utafiti huu. Unaweza pia kupigia namba hii ikiwa unajisikia kama utafiti huu umekuumiza. Wakati wa mahojiano unaweza kuuliza swalı lolote au kutoa mchango unaohusiana na utafiti.

7. Malipo kwa ajili ya kushiriki

Washiriki hawatalipwa kwa ajili ya kushiriki. Lakini watarudishiwa għarama za usafiri.

8. Kushiriki bila kulazimishwa

Kushiriki katika utafiti huu inategemexha kupenda kwako. Unawexa kuacha wakati wowote. Huhitaji kujibu maswali ambayo hujisikii vizuri kuyajibu. Hakuna matokeo mabaya ya kukataa kushiriki au kutoka katika utafiti huu.

Kushiriki katika utafiti huu ni lazima uwe na umri wa miaka 18 au zaidi. Kama unakubali kushiriki katika utafiti huu na habari namna ilivyoelezwa hapo juu, tafadhali weka saini chini na uandike tarehe. Utapewa kopi ya fomu hii ya kukubali kwa ajili ya kumbukumbu yako mwenyewe.

Mshiriki

tarehe

Mtafiti

tarehe