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# Living, Eating and Learning: Children's Experiences of Change and Life in a Refugee Camp



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## **Abstract**

This is a study about children living in an unusual setting, a refugee camp. It recognizes that this situation causes disruption to children's lives but rather than focusing exclusively on this disruption, emphasizes the children's everyday experiences of continuity and change as interpreted through their position as social actors.

The study is based on 2 years of fieldwork conducted in Kala refugee camp in Zambia using participatory and child-centred research techniques. It studies the children's everyday lives in order to gain a picture of continuity and change, and in particular, how these are experienced by the children. Going to school, working and playing remain central to children's lives but these are experienced differently in the camp. By locating children as agents within their social context, this study considers the wider impact of the camp setting on children's experience of growing up.

Children's preoccupations reflect those of the social group but include a unique child perspective on these issues. Dependency on NGO provision of food is a key defining characteristic of their refugee experience. The impact of this reaches beyond provision of nutrition due to the importance of food in economic and social transactions, as a means of defining social relations and its symbolic role in everyday conversation. These combine to provide a forum for the negotiation of power relations between refugees and with the NGOs.

The study concludes that changes to lifestyle affect the way that children grow up and therefore have an impact on their ideas of identity and what is acceptable or desirable behaviour. Adults, who aim to 'socialise' children into appropriate behaviour, affect this, but ultimately children are active in authoring their own experiences, drawing influences from every aspect of their environment.

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## Glossary of Terms

<i>Chibwabwa</i>	Pumpkin Leaves
<i>Chisense</i>	Small-fry (dried fish)
<i>Citenge (Pl Fitenge)</i>	Sarong/wrap skirt
<i>Congomani</i>	Congolese
<i>Espaces Neutres</i>	Public spaces between sections
<i>Fitombolo or mabeignet</i>	Fritters
<i>Gogo</i>	Ballgame
<i>Ichicopo (chicopo)</i>	Container
<i>Intellectuel</i>	Intellectuals, educated people
<i>Jeton</i>	Ration Card
<i>Kalembula</i>	Bean Leaves
<i>Kange</i>	Skipping Game
<i>Kapenta</i>	Larger, more expensive small-fry
<i>Karamu</i>	Feast
<i>Karibu (Karibuni)</i>	Welcome (to several people)
<i>Katapa</i>	Cassava leaves
<i>Kibali</i>	Pass to leave the camp
<i>Kwacha</i>	Zambian Currency
<i>Lobola</i>	Brideprice
<i>Macondomi</i>	Condoms/Balloons
<i>Mingalo</i>	Game with bottle tops, similar to Marbles
<i>Muzungu</i>	White person
<i>Namba/Inamba</i>	Ballgame
<i>Njekele</i>	Peas
<i>Nsaka</i>	Meeting place or Kitchen
<i>Nshima</i>	Maize porridge (Bemba)
<i>Olo/Pusa</i>	Clapping/skipping game
<i>Palais</i>	Hut where unmarried boys/girls sleep
<i>Panado</i>	Paracetamol
<i>Salaula</i>	"to rummage through a pile" (Bemba) second-hand clothing
<i>Tennis</i>	Ballgame
<i>Tribalisme</i>	Tribalism – discriminating against tribes not one's own
<i>Tribu</i>	Tribe
<i>Tropicals</i>	Flip-flops
<i>Ugali</i>	Maize porridge (Swahili)
<i>Ukwipika</i>	To cook (also a game)
<i>Zale</i>	100 Kwacha

*Mwange* Mwange near Mporokoso is the sister Camp to Kala

## Abbreviations

AAH	Aktion Africa Hilfe (German NGO)
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
DfID	Department for International Development (UK Government)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
Hoso	Head of Sub-office (UNHCR)
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IP	Implementing Partner (of UNHCR)
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontiers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Program
WVI	World Vision International
CEDC	Children in especially difficult circumstances

## Organisations and Their Roles in the Camp

HODI	Community services, non formal education
AAH	Health, Water and Sanitation
WVI	Agriculture, Education, Buildings, Roads, Food distributions
WFP	Food Provision
Red Cross	Family reunification
GRZ	Security and policing
Right to Play	Child development through play
Foyer	An income generating project for women managed by HODI
Plein de Jeu	Catholic summer school organised by the refugees

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# Introduction

The aim of the research was to investigate the ways in which children experienced changes to their lifestyle as a result of living and growing up in a refugee camp. Given that this is so removed from their previous lives and that the transition had been made abruptly, change and difference were two issues which I expected to take precedence in the lives of the refugees. The thesis is an attempt to balance the fact that on a day-to-day level many of the activities were very similar to before, yet life in the camp was experienced as very different. The overriding issue, which emerged in almost every conversation, was food. This analysis explores why this issue was so dominant and the impact this has on children's experience of growing up.

Although previously children have been seen as a 'muted'<sup>1</sup> group (Ennew 1998:xviii) whose voices are rarely heard in ethnography, this thesis is a reflection of the fact that this is gradually changing. Previously, even where children were the focus, the ways in which they were treated often differed from the treatment of adults. This study puts children on an equal footing with adults not only through my methods and priorities, but also through the emerging data, which demonstrates that children's views are not only important for gaining an accurate impression of their lives, but also for gaining a complete picture of the community of which they are a part<sup>2</sup>.

Children are not just living in the camp, they are also growing up there. That this process is taking place in a context removed from life in Congo (The Democratic Republic of Congo) is not only instructive for the issues discussed in the latter part of this discussion regarding the importance of food and the social and symbolic changes due to life in the camp, it is also instructive regarding that process of growing up. In particular here I am interested in what is commonly referred to as socialization. However this concept implies a passive process, something which is done to children rather than something in which they are active. I rather consider this a process of *social learning*, a process which may involve others as teachers, but a process in

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<sup>1</sup> Ennew is here applying Ardener's phrase specifically to children.

<sup>2</sup> Seeking the views of children and of refugees, and the significance of their silence, is also important for policy.

which children are actively involved in constructing knowledge of cultural and social understandings and practices.

Children have not internalised the logic of social practices (Bourdieu 1977:87-88) in the way adults have and through social learning; through repetition of activities, observation of others and instructions by others, children are actively determining which of these continue and which do not. In the camp the times and opportunities for adults to influence social learning are different from other circumstances. There are also activities that children are not able to experience. It is this combination of the refugee context and the focus on children and processes of social learning which is particularly illuminating in understanding change in this context.

Based almost entirely on data gained from interactions with children, the thesis moves from conversations with them regarding their daily activities, to issues which emerge as important to them, to the wider significance of these to the wider community. On a material level, a key difference in lifestyle was in the means of getting food: receiving food from distributions rather than growing food or earning money in order to buy food. The picture of children's lives in Chapters Three and Four gives the context against which to evaluate how food pervades and impacts upon daily life. They indicate that issues regarding food made the experience of camp life one of difference. This is reflected on in later chapters with reference to theoretical concepts and anthropological literature.

Food structures lifestyles by structuring daily and seasonal activities, it is an important determinant of hierarchical and gendered relationships it also communicates these (Sutton 2001). Furthermore food was the lynchpin of relationships with the NGOs and UNHCR. It was the symbol of, and the key feature of a relationship of dependency and as a result was symbolic of what it is to be, and to live like a refugee. As a result food was a dominant part of childhood activities and experiences, affecting social learning from both child (student) and adult (teacher) perspectives.

The importance of food for the children emerged through its intrusion into every conversation which signalled its significance in every aspect of life. I was struck by

the way continual references to food and eating presented themselves in conversations, not just with the children, but with all refugees. They occurred both as rhetorical statements, which were repeated in an identical form by different people and in different contexts, and also as more spontaneous comments referring to specific events.

I focused on food when analysing the ideas and information I brought back from the field as a means of respecting the issues of importance to children (revealed in Chapter Four), which are therefore ultimately of interest and of importance to an anthropologist. My understanding of the reasons for so much conversation revolving around food is developed on several levels as demonstrated in the chapters on “Hungry Bodies” (Chapter Six) “Hungry People” (Chapter Seven) and “Hungry Minds” (Chapters Eight and Nine). What emerges in these discussions, however, is that this is not a move away from understanding processes of change and their effects on identity, social structures and culture (my original research topics). It is rather a different way of understanding these, through the way food affects social learning, being a constant reminder of, and thus a symbol of, changes to the social, symbolic and daily lives of the refugees.

By discussing the impact that food has on the various aspects of refugees’ lives, the second half of the thesis demonstrates in more depth, the impact that both food dependency and life in the refugee camp has on this social learning. By receiving food and as a result of living in a refugee camp, children are denied the opportunity to fully learn alternative means of subsistence and ways of supporting themselves, which are associated with their villages and towns of origin (discussed in Chapter Six). By growing up in a context where social relationships are disrupted by a change in the division of labour and activities and values associated with specific roles and relationships, their knowledge of appropriate behaviour is different from their parent’s (Chapter Seven). All of these factors affect children’s identity in the way that this incorporates what it is to be a refugee and what it is to be Congolese (Chapter Eight). Adults, in their role in raising children search for means to combat the impact of living in a refugee camp and talk about such issues in ways which counteract the impact of growing up away from home, dependent on and to a degree controlled by NGOs (Chapter Nine).

The result is a thesis which retains its focus on children, change and identity, but does so through the focus on food. This is not only the way in which the children and refugees experience these issues but also a lens through which the anthropologist is able to illuminate the many aspects of life which are a concern for refugee children and also to illuminate anthropological and wider concerns. Concerns such as power and resistance, social and economic relationships, group and individual identity in a context of change, childhood influences and learning and the impact of violent events on children and their lives.

Food is a fundamental part of life; it is (with water) the most basic need, a primary commodity and an elementary symbol. Its treatment in anthropology has proven informative on issues such as economics, identity and social relations. But in this context these issues have taken on an overriding importance in the lives of the people in question. They are less embedded and more to the fore due to the distorted way practices around food are experienced and imposed. In this thesis food is treated in various ways; as a substance that is consumed and has economic importance; as an element of social transactions; as a factor in social relationships; and as a part of conversation where it is used as both symbol and metaphor. In the camp such issues are often vocalised as deficiencies and thus the headings: “Hungry Bodies”, “Hungry People” and “Hungry Minds” are used to refer to and differentiate the physical, social and symbolic importance of food. Although these are taken in turn and treated as somewhat separate, they are often simply different ways of looking at the same processes and issues.

The ways food is addressed in anthropology are very diverse. For example, the quest for food is considered one of the main factors motivating our (physical) evolution and migration (Crowe 2000). The type of food we eat is seen as a reflection of historical and cultural values and practices (Fiddes 1991), and changes in food eating habits can be used as a way of analysing other changes over time (Clarkson and Crawford 2001). Food production and consumption can be a key site of interaction between nations, ideologies and economies, and often the incompatibility of the different parties in these interactions (Pottier 1999).

In economic anthropology food is discussed as a commodity, perhaps the “ultimate” or original, commodity (Lupton 1996:22). It is both exchangeable and edible, and therefore, intrinsically consumable; a commodity, but also a “good” with cultural values which can be used in both symbolic exchange, and more mundane economic transactions. When food is consumed it is not simply to alleviate hunger, but also to express a value or a relationship. In the refugee camp food is both given and consumed, it is received and rejected, the refugees are both hospitable and guests. Previous economic relations and processes are replaced by very different forms of these transactions.

Practices surrounding food are considered among the most important ways in which humans differentiate themselves from animals and therefore distance themselves from nature (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1978, Fiddes 1991). Many anthropological studies of food focus on the *why* of people’s eating habits, i.e. why people eat what they do, and where they do, and with whom, and prepared in such a way; they address the way other social structures impact on these choices (cf. Lupton 1996, Bringéus 2001, Fiddes 1991). The focus of this study is one where choice is severely limited, if it even exists! What I will be addressing is the way the lack of choice in many of these issues affects wider social structures and the way this is handled by the refugees.

Studying the experience of living in a refugee camp and considering the changes to lifestyle resulting from living in the camp will serve to enhance and illuminate many of existing ways that change has been previously studied in anthropology. A refugee camp is an unusual social, historical and political context given the obvious existence of unscheduled events (Bock 1974) and extraordinary experiences (Young and Goulet 1994). There is some value in looking back at such terms and the way change has been previously discussed in anthropology, but “culture change” is no longer considered a separate event. Change is interwoven into the fabric of experience. Previously in anthropology culture was considered static and change an event, something out of the ordinary. Currently however it is acknowledged that change is a constant element of cultures (Hastrup and Hervik 1994:2).

‘[C]ultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life’ (Bruner 1986:12). A

focus on children and childhood are particularly informative to a discussion of change as they are often sites where the continuity of social practices is performed, contested and potentially transformed. Refugees are living in a situation which is removed from the regulatory processes and constraints of the familiar context and are subject to the pressures of the new context. As a result what children experience as normal may be different from what their parents consider to be normal. Adults take measure to educate children in an attempt for continuity but children are less tied to previous practices and therefore more open to change and may become agents of change.

The discussion focuses on children as actors in society, addressing their activities in the face of the challenge of the refugee situation. Dependency and the disempowering nature of policy symbolised by food processes have an effect on processes of social learning and therefore on change and identity but life consists of more than just rules, regulations and the responses to them. This is one of the reasons that I have chosen to focus on everyday activities as a means of balancing representations of sameness with understandings of differences. It is the combination of these two elements which adds greater understanding to the way that change is experienced, especially in the impact this may have on the long-term effects to culture and meaning.

Reconciling the contrast between mundane practices and larger issues is particularly necessary given that the context of the refugee camp invokes a lack of, or the overshadowing of, the everyday with extraordinary events, events which are often at the forefront of accounts of such experiences both in academia and the media. A 'focus on the everyday is not banal or insignificant, for it aims to capture the indigenous stress' (Overing and Passes 2000:7). By using this approach, this thesis aims to reflect the refugees' own priorities, the issues of importance to them.

Two topics of this thesis are held up as prime examples of the everyday and of topics which have been taken for granted: 'people preparing communal meals or training and caring for children' (Overing and Passes 2000:9). Such activities are often presented as the backdrop for more "interesting" anthropological discussions on topics such as socialisation (Mayer 1970) or cultural relativism (Mead 1977) but it is important to recognise that they are of interest themselves as daily activities (Jackson 1998:5). Although perhaps an overstatement, it is true that as anthropologists 'We long to see



the remarkable, while we regard the world of the everyday as *unremarkable* and boring' (Overing and Passes 2000:9). The result of this, in a context such as the refugee camp, is that the unremarkable is drowned out by the many extraordinary factors. Within these there is much to be found of significance but perhaps just as significant are the minor changes to everyday activities confirming the need to 'overcome our tendency to denigrate the everyday' (*ibid*:9).

It is for this reason that the earlier chapters of the thesis are so important. Whilst they may not contribute directly to the argument of the later chapters, regarding the importance of food, they are necessary to enhance an understanding of why food is so important to the lives of the refugees because they give a picture of just what these lives consist of. Without this picture of the children's lives, it would not be possible to fully understand the importance of this particular feature of it.

Everyday practices are not 'merely the obscure background of social activity' (De Certeau 1988:xi), they are social activity in and of themselves. Thus this discussion is about the way the children themselves *experience* their own lives, the way they experience food distributions and the ripple effects of this central aspect to their lives. These everyday experiences are given as much attention as *an* experience such as the war in Congo and their flight to the camp, and as the accumulative experience of age (*ibid.* also Abrahams 1986:61).

The recognition that the experience of living in the camp is as important as the events which preceded this, is a reflection of the increasing willingness of anthropologists to give the same level of importance to the everyday as to extraordinary or special events which Abrahams attributes to the fact that experience has moved to 'the centre of our concerns' (1986:70). This equal weighting means that through experience (as lived but also as an analytical tool) the everyday is connected with the special and the individual is connected, or becomes representative of the group (Abrahams 1986:62). The impact of food practices in the camp is a particularly good demonstration of this. Recognising that conversations use food to express wider issues and thus turn food speech into a cultural expression enables the anthropologist to 'transcend individual experience' and recognise the ways in which these are representative (Bruner 1986:21).

To anthropologists behaviour can be less significant than the *experience* of behaviour (Scott 1985:46). The thesis, in addition to dealing with everyday events, aims to understand how the refugees feel about life in Kala camp through looking at meanings rather than events. Experience is related to and constructed through the received expressions of others' experiences and to past experiences of the individual (Bruner 1986:8). In spite of the many changes engendered by living in a refugee camp, '[n]ew experiences are screened against the experiential luggage, and if they make sense they are added to a stock of knowledge, skills and recipe for action' (Rudie 1994:29).

The importance therefore lies not in descriptions of everyday activities, but in the ways that children experience these activities and events; the meaning that they and their community give to them. For example there is the fact that they experience the relatively stable differences of life in the camp as change. This results from their experience of the long-term changes which continue as these differences are integrated and affect social values and acquire meaning. It is the way that children experience these differences and relate their lives to the past and to the relationship with UNHCR that makes food such a central issue, rather than the activities in and of themselves.

Experience is not passive, it involves 'not only actions and feelings but also reflections about those actions and feelings' (Bruner 1986:5). Life in the camp is not only lived, but experienced through the emotions it evokes and the ways in which it is constructed by the refugees. Experience is converted to knowledge (Rudie 1994:29), it is related to consciousness (Bruner *op cit.*), as well as to 'values, emotions and motives' (Hastrup and Hervik 1994:7). It is in this way that talking of food can be used instrumentally to express and challenge the *status quo* (Chapter Nine).

By focusing on people's experience of their lives and to a degree on bodily practices or bodily experiences, sensations and emotions, the discussion takes a phenomenological approach (Barnard and Spencer 1996:617). "Pure" phenomenology has its drawbacks in that '[a] good deal of behaviour, including speech, is automatic and unreflective, based on understandings that are seldom raised to the level of consciousness' (Scott 1985:46). However Jackson's social phenomenological

approach, which rejects the division between subjectivity and objectivity, seeing them instead as two different ways of experiencing the world (1996:20), is a more practical application. In the camp things normally taken for granted become issues of importance, making it necessary to combine reflections of the whole spectrum of experience, and thus this approach is particularly appropriate. This also counters Bourdieu's criticism that a focus on experience is limited to the 'taken for granted' or subjective aspects of it (1990:25). Social phenomenology does not limit experience to the individual but rather treats "the world" in which one is "being" as a social world (Jackson 1996:26-27).

Talking about how people live, cannot convey their experience of their lives. However the advantage in using such an approach is that the lived immediacy of their lives is included as a part of analysis. 'A central methodological problem facing anthropology today is how to deal with the flow of intersubjective human experience without dehumanising it, that is without deconstructing it *as experience* and transforming it into totalising professional models of knowledge' (Hastrup and Hervik 1994:9). The solution may be in achieving a balance between these two things, between everyday events and the way these are experienced, between behaviour and meaning.

### **The Anthropology of Childhood**

'[A]nthropological work on children and childhood has been extremely diverse and long-lived without being particularly coherent' (Rapport and Overing 2000:29). Historically in anthropology, the prime interest in studying children was 'as indices of extraneous (adult) anthropological concerns' (*ibid*): for the information this could provide about society as a whole, for example, through addressing socialisation (Mayer 1970). This is an approach which excludes children's own experiences and values. Children were unperceived or elusive, they were present but silent (Prout and James 1997:7). More recent studies treat children as a separate culture, which can also be unsatisfactory as it may result in a ghettoisation of children's lives.

For the first approach, adults are asked about children's lives rather than the children themselves, or children are studied to illuminate adults' lives. For the latter, it is assumed that adults know nothing about the lives of children and that children do not

know about adults' lives, or "culture" as a whole. In either case children are marginal figures, considered somewhat outside of culture (not yet socialised). This is refuted by current research including my own.

'Recent years have seen an explosion in theorising on the child' (Groves 2002:63), including notions such as the social construction of childhood (James and Prout 1997b:3). Conceptions of children are influenced by wider geopolitical and historical trends (Aries 1979), particularly "children in especially difficult circumstances" (CEDC). It can therefore happen that we are too quick to pathologise instances where childhood fails to conform to "Western" ideals. On the other hand the perspective I have taken comes from a "Western" ideal that '[c]hildren are important because they *are* children, [naïve and innocent] not because they will *become* adults' (Schwartzman 1978:19).

Something of a revolution in the anthropological study of children has been recently brought about, however, by the rise of more interpretive phenomenological and literary approaches. Here is a realization that children might be looked to for their own accounts of experience... as distinct from adults constructions and interpretations of these (Rapport and Overing 2000:31).

By focusing on what children talk about, my thesis is not just a discussion of "children's issues" but of "refugee issues" as these are often equivalent. Children's knowledge is not limited to the social world of childhood as children also participate in other social realms. They experience the tensions between being actors and agents, at times in a social world they "control", at others 'a part of a world of socio-cultural structures run by adults' (Rapport and Overing 2000:32 citing Hockey and James 1993). Children in the camp experience the frustrations and tensions resulting from their dislocation and reliance on UNHCR equally to adults and they express and experience this in their relationship to food in a similar way to adults.

'The child is, in many ways the paradigmatic 'other'' (Rapport and Overing 2000:29), but the adult-child dichotomy, if given too much importance, can obscure both diversity within experiences of childhood, and those experiences which are shared in varying degrees by adults and children. My approach treats children as any other group in a culture, as a part of society but with their own specific way of operating within this society (see also James and Prout 1997). Children in Kala camp taught me

many things not only about their own lives, but also more generally about life in the camp: the things people talk about; the way people spend their time; and the issues of importance to them, the primary one being food.

### **Refugee Studies**

The main themes into which writing on refugees can be divided are: the history, the causes, the responses (interventions and solutions) and the corresponding criticisms. Through the literature on refugees there emerges a series of issues which it seems imperative to include, to reiterate and to question. The most striking of these is the definition of refugee. Almost all accounts will start with an exploration of, or definition of the word “refugee”, generally contrasting official definitions with the writer’s own usage. This is an indication of the problematic nature of the “Convention”<sup>3</sup> definition and also the ambiguity of the term in general (Dona & Berry 1999:175). The second thing which emerges is the problematising of the assumption of homogeneity of refugees (Malkki 1995). The third is the increasing emphasis that refugees have agency and are active in authoring their experiences (Malkki 1996).

I wish to stress here the second and third aspects in my own work. There is a multiplicity of experiences and even between siblings and neighbours the experience cannot be said to be the same. The conclusions I have drawn cannot therefore be seen to represent all refugee children, they cannot even be seen to represent all children in Kala camp, but they can be seen as a counterpoint to other one-sided portrayals which ignore the everyday aspects which are the focus here. For this reason when I use the term “refugee” I intend to signify those Kala refugees whose lives I came to know something about during my fieldwork, whose lives and experiences may be generalisable but are not necessarily representative even of all refugees in Kala, and certainly not of all refugees.

Refugee camps may start as short-term emergency responses but often become long-term settlements. Kala camp was in its early days (established in August 2000), but as the resolution of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter DRC or Congo) was unpredictable there was no way of knowing how long it would need to

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<sup>3</sup>Drawn up in 1951 this is the key legal document regarding Refugees their rights and status. <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

stay open<sup>4</sup>. Usually the emphasis in camps (in terms of policy) is on promoting sustainability but very few camps achieve this. In Kala there is not enough land for this to be even attempted.<sup>5</sup>

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also focused on issues of return and reintegration in recent years as this is seen to be the most sustainable response to the large numbers of refugees in regions such as Africa. Such policies are affected by global issues and by international priorities, especially those of the funders. Return was also a main topic of conversation in the camp. For this reason I was especially interested in seeing how living in the camp would have an effect on future lives in Congo. To this end I was looking at issues of change and identity: how would significant material changes impact on identity and both cultural and everyday practices? I was also focusing on children and young people (hereafter referred to as children), partially as a way of redressing an imbalance in existing work, and partly because I felt that although children's experience is of "being" (James et al 1998:207), they are also still 'growing and becoming' at a faster rate than adults. Change as experienced by them would potentially have more significant long-term effects.

For both individuals and communities, becoming a refugee is one of the most transformative events possible. Change can be rapid and drastic or insidious and gradual, the effects on individual, family and community are therefore pervasive. This thesis looks at some of the changes and effects on people's lives and livelihoods of becoming a refugee. Many of the changes to the community stem from the cumulative effects of material changes: change of (and loss of) location and landscape, change of legal status, agency intervention and demographic changes but also from the continued introduction of new or altered services provided by UNHCR and as a result their expectations of the refugees. Thus life in the camp, whilst relatively stable, was often experienced as change.

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing refugees are beginning to be repatriated to Congo from Tanzania and imminently from Zambia but setbacks and instability continue.

<sup>5</sup> 'Those refugee households with access to at least 2.5 hectares of agricultural land, who have received agricultural inputs, having been in the refugee settlements for at least two successful harvests...and have consequently attained food self-sufficiency, will be phased out of food assistance' (WFP proposal for programmes in Zambia 2006 and 2007). The Zambian Government has only provided enough land for housing and limited agriculture.

In Kala refugee camp conversations about food and its importance were a reflection of the way it defined people in the camp as refugees and represented their experience of this and their dependence on UNHCR. Food also reflects the unpredictable nature of their refugee status in terms of its duration and even its hardships as well as playing a significant role in the social and symbolic changes due to its existence as one of the most important material substances, and one which could have a significant impact on most other material factors.

### **The Setting**

Zambia is a relatively stable country bordering several countries which at the time of my research were experiencing severe turmoil or civil war. For this reason it hosts a disproportionate number of refugees for its size and population<sup>6</sup>. In Zambia refugees are hosted in camps administered and funded by UNHCR in partnership with the Zambian Government. One of the refugee producing countries which borders Zambia is The Democratic Republic of Congo. As I was already proficient in speaking French, one of the national languages of Congo, I felt that it would be practical to choose to do research among Congolese refugees. Congo has been undergoing civil war since 1997 with various rebel groups backed by different international forces. In 2003 there was a peace agreement and a transitional government formed but many areas remain unstable. Many of the problems are caused or fuelled by Congo's mineral wealth as the different sides seek to control and use this.

This study focuses on the lives of the Congolese refugee children housed in Kala refugee camp in northern Zambia where research was carried out over a period of 18 months<sup>7</sup> (from January 2002 to July 2003). Kala camp was opened in August 2000 mostly to accommodate a "mop up" operation of self settled refugees along the border with Congo. UNHCR's initial practical role has now been reduced to a mainly administrative one. Other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are more involved in the practical running of the camp programmes each having its own separate area of responsibility, these NGOs are referred to as Implementing Partners (IPs).

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<sup>6</sup> Refugees make up 2.4% of the Zambian population which was 10,285,632 in the 2000 census (<http://www.thezambian.com/zambia/people.aspx>) with a refugee population of 250,940 (UNHCR)

<sup>7</sup> Research was funded by The Wenner Gren Foundation and the UK Economic and Social Research Council

The camp houses around 20,000<sup>8</sup> refugees in a relatively small area, around half of these are children. Kala camp is situated 27km from Kawambwa, a district capital in Luapula province. The land around the camp is not very fertile and the vegetation is mostly bush and trees, some of which have been cut down to build houses. The camp has a gravel road running through the middle with all the other roads leading off it in a grid like pattern. The official map in Appendix 5 seems stylised but the children's drawings in Fig 1, for example, demonstrate that this is a true representation.

The camp is made up of 33 sections each of which has 4 streets. The streets are long and straight and closely packed with houses on small plots of land. Houses vary but are mostly the same size. The variation is in the material that they are made from. Those with an income have a house built from bricks, poorer people live in houses made from mud plastered over a frame of woven sticks. Although the houses are fairly closely packed, between every section there are open spaces (*espaces neutres*). Some of these have public buildings such as schools and churches, others remain unallocated.

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<sup>8</sup> WFP figures.





Fig 1. Life in the Camp (primary schoolboy 15)

## **Social Setting**

There are three key aspects of life in the camp which have a significant impact on social relations within the community. The first of these is very simply that it is not a community *per se*. It is simply a collection of people who through similar circumstances have come to live in the same place at the same time. The social context is therefore artificial.

The structures of status and leadership are imposed by UNHCR, as are many of the rules and norms determining acceptable behaviour. These conventions of behaviour imposed from outside often contrast with, or even oppose, those which governed people's behaviour prior to living in the camp. In addition to the new rules of life in the camp, competing with former conventions and rules there are several different "traditions" within the camp. These are all influenced by UNHCR as a result of the refugees' dependency.

Given that the people living in the camp came together as a result of "circumstance" it is not surprising that they come from a diversity of backgrounds and origins which results in different experiences and therefore identities. They include people from urban and rural backgrounds, different tribal groups, different economic and educational backgrounds. There is therefore a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and practices represented in the camp. Furthermore rules imposed from "outside"<sup>9</sup>, by people who do not live in the camp, are not always consistent as UNHCR, GRZ and the individual NGOs all have their own policies which although generally consistent with one another, do not always directly map onto one another. The multitude of backgrounds from within, are therefore jostling simultaneously with one another and with those imposed from "outside", the following are some examples of this.

The education system follows the Congolese curriculum, but beating the children is forbidden and the materials available are mostly Zambian and therefore in English. HIV/AIDS programmes confuse the refugees as there are educational programmes which stress the use of condoms and others which actively discourage it for religious reasons. The refugees, as they are subject to Zambian law, also have to face very new

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<sup>9</sup> Although even the refugees could also be considered 'outsiders' in reference to the camp I use the term to signify those people who are not refugees.

attitudes to witchcraft whereby a person making an accusation is more likely to be punished than the accused<sup>10</sup>.

The social context of the camp is also somewhat out of the ordinary in the way that these factors have translated themselves into relationships on the ground both because of the physical layout of the camp, and because of the social environment. The physical layout of the camp, in its grid formation, proximity to “bush” and distance from rivers and lakes is very different from the environment which most people came from.

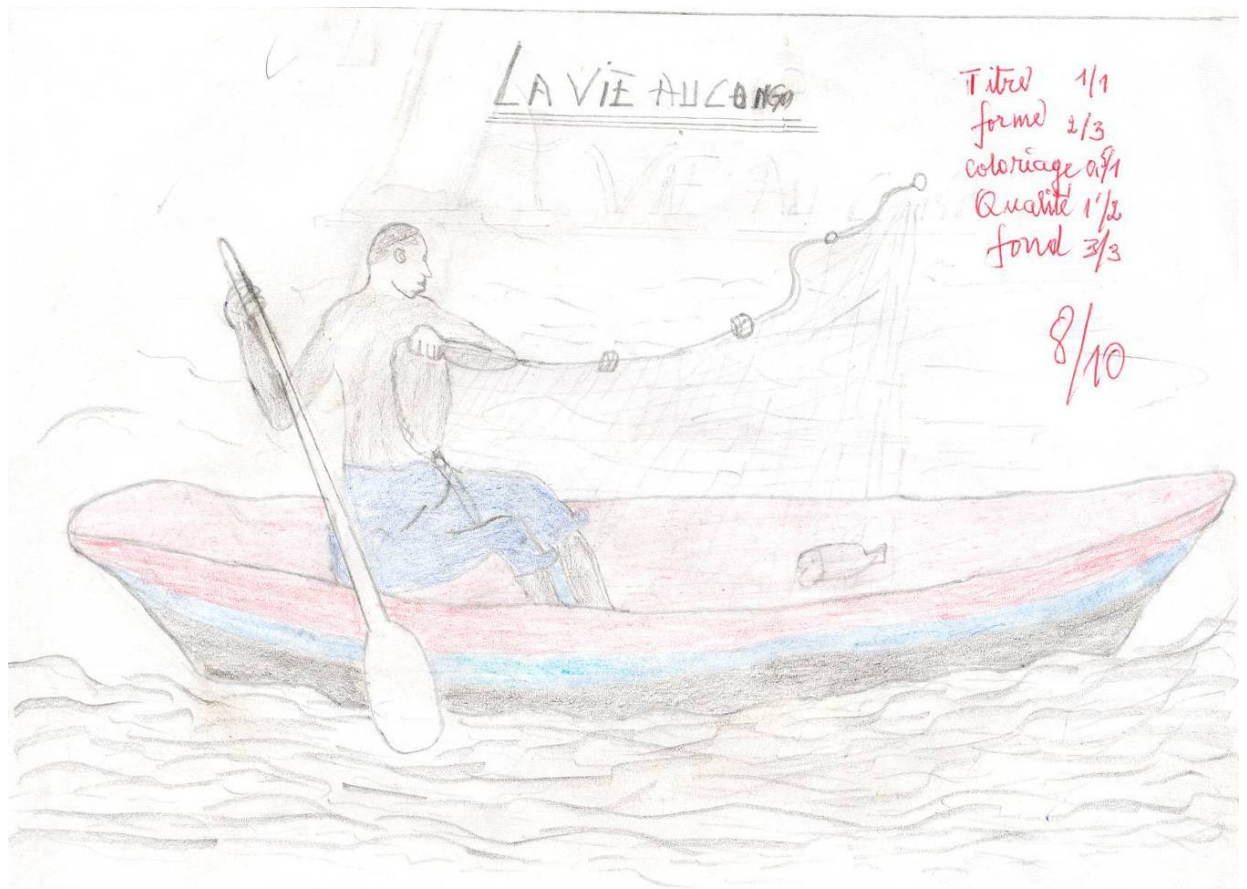
The refugees in Kala came from south-eastern regions of Congo (see Map in Appendix 5) Kala refugees are therefore from a mixture of rural and urban areas although the majority were rural. The fact that plots are allocated in order of arrival means that neighbours may be completely unknown to one another and even from different tribal groups. Yet they overlook every aspect of each others’ lives. The distance from the rivers and lakes means that people are removed from their previous means of providing for themselves and means of recreation (see Fig 2). This fact, together with the proximity to the bush and camp regulations<sup>11</sup> make people feel collectively confined and isolated.

Most refugees are Tabwa, from rural areas and with low or no level of education. Section Leaders tend to be elected on a tribal basis, people also feel that preference is given on this basis when hiring people or serving them at the hammer mill for example. This is the cause of some resentment from other tribal groups who feel disadvantaged by this. Another group seen to gain advantage from life in the camp are those with education or technical experience. These are in the minority but tend to be the people most likely to get jobs or prosper.

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<sup>10</sup> In Zambia if the accusation cannot be *proven* (very unlikely if not impossible in cases of witchcraft) then the accuser can be prosecuted for defamation of character.

<sup>11</sup> Zambian law states that the refugees should not be outside the camp without a pass.



Ce dessin montre la vie au Congo. La vie est grâce au lac qui est à côté de nous. ~~est~~ des pêcheurs qui pêchent dans le lac. Il y avait de mouvement, grâce au lac et de pêcheur, même des différents bateaux qui circulent sur le lac pour de différents mouvements de transport et des marchandises. On avait de l'argent grâce au lac qui est à côté de nous. La vie était très bien là. On ne souffrait jamais grâce au mouvement de lac et des pêcheurs.

Fig 2. This picture shows life in Congo, life was thanks to the lake which was nearby. The fishermen, fished in this lake. There was movement thanks to the lake and the fishermen, even different boat which travelled on the lake for transportation and carrying goods. We had money thanks to the lake which was next to us. Life was very good there. We never suffered thanks to the movement of the lake and the fishermen. (primary schoolboy 18)

The way that this often plays out is through a specific type of mistrust for one another, generally as a result of perceived competition for limited resources. This is evident in the rumours which abound in the camp. Mistrust is also manifest in competition for money, status and power, which is often done through the prioritisation of particular links involving tribes, kinship groups and other pre-existing affiliations. While I was in the camp there was a multitude of complaints regarding corruption and exploitation. These are discussed in Chapter Nine.

### **Listening to Children: Issues of Importance**

I am using here a local definition of “child” (See pages 85-6), one which encompasses over eighteens who are unmarried or still in school. My choice of approach comes from an attempt to balance the child focus (my priority) with the focus on food (their priority). The initial part of the thesis therefore focuses on continuity and normality within the changed context, it describes the everyday actions of playing, working and going to school; such activities were the overriding focus of children’s lives. These everyday activities, discussed in Chapter Three, counteract images and discussions elsewhere which emphasize change and lack of agency. Attention to change returns in the later part of this thesis but is limited to issues which emerged from conversations with children rather than those assumed to be an inherent part of their situation as a result of and inseparable from the refugee context.

This thesis therefore concentrates on food but reflects the importance that children give it by broadening the emphasis from the nutritional, survival focus to the wider impact that living in a context where nutrition and survival are contingent on a dependent relationship with UNHCR, a relationship which affects all aspects of life in the camp, including all relationships from the most personal to the most public.

### *Experiential Aspects of Refugee Life*

What emerges in both the literature and my research is that while there are aspects of the refugee “process” that may be common in form, experiences are not the same in substance. Different factors impact on the lives of refugees depending on their experiences in pre-flight, flight, reception, settlement and resettlement (stages

identified by Ager 1999:4-10). This is a cumulative experience and each stage will have a cumulative affect on experiences and identity. Therefore although I do not focus specifically on pre-flight or flight and only briefly on reception, these all inform children's actions and attitudes. They cannot therefore be considered absent.

Refugees experience considerable change both in the immediate transition to camp life and in the gradual long-term effects of this. Generally the community does not move as a whole, small groups and households flee and may be separated from their neighbours and from their extended or even immediate family. The social structure is disrupted and refugees must adapt to the new hegemony of the refugee camp. New settlements are made up of people from diverse backgrounds who may be hitherto unknown to one another. It is possible, therefore, that 'the anxieties of change centre upon the struggle to defend or recover a meaningful pattern of relationships' (Eisenbruch 1988:283). Not only are there significant effects on communities but also on individuals as a result. There is also a disruption of 'the continuity of an individual's concept of selfhood' as a result of the movement and losses they have experienced. This may not be entirely negative, it can be an experience of growth (*ibid.*:283-4). In Kala camp there is an alien combination of whole villages transposed into one or two sections of the camp combined with mixtures of people from diverse backgrounds in other sections and in the camp as a whole.

Whilst this broken down and mixed up community is a problem for children, those I worked with in the camp seemed to have at least some familiar people around them, even if only in the immediate household and they settled well and made new friends. Being subject to Zambian laws and camp policy and rules seemed to pose larger problems as did differences in climate, topography and camp organisation. Children's concerns seemed to focus more on the grid layout, high concentration of people and the fact that there was little or no land available for cultivation and no wildlife to hunt.

These factors caused significant changes in the lifestyles of all the refugees, primarily in terms of their "subsistence" activities which were no longer focused around agriculture, but around receiving, milling and preparing unfamiliar foods. These new subsistence activities were equally time consuming and difficult as the previous ones but were considered much less acceptable. This probably resulted from both their

unfamiliarity and the fact that they result from dependency on UNHCR for food rations, and therefore are experienced as an extension to the UN control over their lives, or rather the refugees' own lack of control over their activities.

Other important changes concerned changes to attitudes and values, especially with reference to education. In addition there were many new kinds of information to assimilate regarding the environment (cutting down trees, using fuel efficient stoves); health (especially AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, and hygiene); representation (in terms of electing Street and Section Leaders with equal numbers of female and male representatives); and social issues (such as sexual and gender based violence SGBV). These changes also came about as a result of the development programmes in the camp, the association with international agencies and the globalizing discourses they promote and are subject to.

In addition camp policies and rules had a large impact. Organisational interventions can affect the identities of those they are trying to help by depersonalising and reducing individuals to statistics or members of a collective, in order to be more efficient (Harrell-Bond et al 1992:212); in doing so the needs of individuals are overlooked. Programmes which are designed to meet the specific needs of groups such as women and children may have outcomes other than those intended and have a far ranging impact on the community.

## **Thesis Overview**

My methods, discussed in the following chapter and throughout, were an eclectic mixture of various ethnographic approaches involving both participant observation and a variety of child centred research techniques. These included traditional PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) methods such as: matrices, mapping and diagrams, and those more specifically designed for use with children: games, photography, song, artwork, videoing, theatre work (small role play exercises and larger pieces presented to an audience or my video camera) and getting children to interview each other using tape recorders. The use of visual materials in the thesis is important because of the way I used them as a tool in research and because they are an important aspect of the way children express themselves. It would be more usual in a thesis to have quotes, to

allow informants the space to use their own words. In the context of research with children however, I feel that they should also be given the space to express themselves through both images and words.

Children in the camp have many of the same kinds of preoccupations as children elsewhere: school, work and play. These activities are discussed in Chapter Three. There are things they miss from home, in particular the food which I will discuss later, but also income generating activities which are lacking in the camp and the proximity of a river or lake to fish, bathe and swim in. Children's conversations reflect a lack of trust for the NGOs, what they now miss about home and how they feel about returning (Chapter Four), and a preoccupation with food, study and earning money. The dependence on food embodies many of these other differences.

Issues of importance to children in general coincided with issues of importance to adults. Food is not just the main topic of conversation in my discussions with children, but also in the camp generally. The importance of food across generations demonstrates the value of listening to children, it also shows the degree to which food differences in the camp affect social issues and highlight other changes within the group and the effects of these. No matter what I wanted to be talking about, conversations always came back to food and the lack of it. The everyday vocabulary of food took on another dimension in the camp. Even greetings involve complaints of hunger or the "problem of peas" (discussed in Chapter Five). This thesis therefore follows other studies in anthropology which have used food as a focus to elicit other issues. Chapter Five looks at the way children's topics of conversation reflect the changes to their lives and introduces "Food" and the way that this will be used to discuss the other issues which emerge as important to children, such as identity, power and change in Chapters Six to Nine.

Children's conversations about food did not just reflect the fact that they should be receiving more, but also the desire that there was no need to receive at all, that they (and their parents) should have the opportunity to cultivate and provide for themselves. Daytime activities in the camp differ greatly from those in Congo as a result of the different food and the different way of getting food. Furthermore the economic context is a new one with the changing significance of food as a



commodity. (These issues are related to “Hungry Bodies” and are discussed in Chapter Six.)

“Hungry People” in Chapter Seven focuses on social aspects of food and reflects on the fact that when people spoke to me about hunger and lack of food this was both the literal problem of not receiving sufficient amounts, but also the problem of the monotony of their diets and the fact that they did not feel that they were getting the right kinds of food. Furthermore people were unable to be hospitable in the same way, or to socialise around food due to the restricted amounts. More importantly the structure of relations in the family (and the community) which centre around food were disrupted.

“Hungry Minds” relates to the importance of talking about food and using it as a symbol and metaphor, the ways that this impacts on identity and power relationships are discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine. The sensory importance of food to memory is demonstrated here especially as the children told me that people were most homesick at mealtimes because the poor quality of food made them really miss and wish for the variety and quality of foods from home. Children also talk of foods that used to be plentiful in Congo. Within this discussion reflecting on the relationship with the Congo and the past was another topic greatly discussed in the camp: “Returning to Congo”. Even children who were young enough to have no memory of Congo talked about “when we go back to Congo”, along with complaints that the UN would not allow or assist them to do so<sup>12</sup>.

It may be that the repetitive vocalisation of complaints about life in the camp was a means for the refugees to assert that they were not at home in Kala, a way of demonstrating to themselves and to others that they were not happy and could never enjoy life in the camp. By using food to engage with power relationships and to draw UNHCR into their concerns the refugees are reconstructing their agency and recreating their sense of control over their values and actions.

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<sup>12</sup> The UN will only assist return after they have made sure that there is no continuing threat and return without UN assistance would be extremely difficult.

As discussed above, anthropologists have long recognized the value of studying children for what this can demonstrate about society, however it is also important to recognise the value for anthropology in looking at children's experiences of their lives, their priorities and the things they talk about. Children make up a major part of a social group. Just as the realization that excluding women from anthropological discussions had resulted in the exclusion of important perspectives on social practices, and the exclusion of many practices, likewise the inclusion of children's perspectives reveals important issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

This thesis, therefore, is about the ways children experience change and the impact that living in a refugee camp has on their lives. It is about their everyday activities, experiences and influences, and the way that these are internalised transformed or rejected. As a result of the children's priorities this is also a thesis about food and its importance as both substance and symbol. Food is the symbol of what it is to be refugee and also of their dependency on UNHCR. By addressing food in this way however, the agency of the refugees is also revealed, and the ways in which they manipulate the resources available to them to carve out and recapture meaning and make sense of their experiences by relating them to the past and the future.

In short, therefore, this thesis is about the lives of refugee children living in Kala camp, Zambia. It is about the effects of change on their identity and culture and about children's activities and preoccupations, it is about the social relationships children engage in and observe, altered by displacement and life in a new context. It is about the power differentials inherent in unequal relationships of age, status and dependence, but also about agency within those same relationships. Most importantly, in spite of the extraordinary setting, it is about the everyday lives of ordinary people. It is a thesis about the importance of food in every aspect of life and the way that, for both the refugees and the anthropologist, food is central in understanding, reflecting and demonstrating all of the above issues.

## **Chapter One**

### **Methods**

This chapter is both an introductory discussion to some of the methods I used and a more reflexive look at the more interpersonal processes of carrying out fieldwork, the people I interacted with and some of the ideas that they had of me. In terms of methodology, this chapter concentrates more on the philosophy and motivations behind my choice of methods. ‘Because we perceive as trivial many matters of everyday life, we end up actually refusing to see them’ we also do not realise that we are not seeing them (Overing and Passes 2000:10). Part of my approach was therefore to ensure that the everyday life in the camp was not eclipsed by the more surprising elements. The methods I used were chosen to reflect the children’s own concerns regarding their life in the camp. The specific tools I used will be discussed as they arise throughout the thesis.

#### **Communication 1: Dialogue**

Choice of language to learn was not straightforward as the refugees were a collection of people from diverse areas and with diverse backgrounds. Due to bad advice and daily time constraints imposed by UNHCR, I ended up with limited knowledge of Bemba and Swahili and was proficient in neither. As my language skills remained basic I was reliant on an interpreter most of the time.

Language was not the only issue which affected my communication; the information which I brought back from the field is the result of the relationships I formed with people in the camp. This means that it is not an absolute truth but at the same time this thesis is a truthful representation of those things revealed to me. For this reason this description of methodology is equally a description of people, relationships and processes as of methodological tools. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, what I had read and learnt prior to going into the field had a significant impact on both what I wished to learn about and the methods I intended to use.

In situations such as the refugee camp, one particular issue at the forefront of contact between researcher and informant is that of trust. Daniel and Knudsen's edited volume demonstrates several examples and reasons why trust is an important consideration in contexts involving refugees (1995). When people are less trusting there is the desire to conceal information. This is compounded by the fact that anthropological "rapport" is created through the researcher's impression management in an attempt to "fit in", essentially a process of revealing and concealing information. It is therefore not surprising that the participants should also conceal (Kulick 1995:11). This dual concealment can have possible consequences on the validity and reliability of the research. Building trust was therefore important to me as I negotiated my role in the camp.

Because I went to the field deliberately seeking to make certain types of relationships, I tried to "manage" people's perceptions of me to enable or make easier the formation of these relationships. Relationships I forged therefore reflected the practicalities of communication, such as the ability to speak French, but also my priorities in terms of who it would be beneficial to talk to for my fieldwork, and the impression I wanted them to have of me. On the other hand people's perception of me also depended on outside factors and as a result there were people who sought me out or responded to me in particular ways. Their motivations in doing so also affected the research. A further factor was the NGO impact on people's lives, my association with them and the fact that I was subject to their regulations (discussed below).

The above description of how relationships were formed seems contrived but this is the result of stepping back to analyse in retrospect. There were people who I simply met and made friends with, and those who I initially sought out instrumentally also became friends in ways external to the research relationship.

People's perceptions and ideas of me depended on many factors, both things which I did deliberately and external factors. Some of these I was aware of and tried to combat, or at least maintain an awareness of. These included: my white skin, the fact that I lived in Kawambwa, my clothes, my association with the NGOs, the fact that I drove a

car, the languages I spoke, the people I spent time with and my activities in the camp. There may of course have been others of which I was unaware.

No matter what I did to influence first impressions of myself, it was inevitable and out of my control: “White Person” *Muzungu* with all the associations that they already had in their minds about white people. The white people that they had known were colonials and farm owners. The first impression I made on most people was therefore “rich” and “powerful”. The idea at the forefront of everyone’s minds, no matter what I did, was that I had the power and the means to change things for them, to give them something if they only asked for it in the right way.

Children who I had worked with for some weeks would tell me that I should fire one of the UN national staff. When I explained (again) that I had no power with regard to the UN rather that they had the power to prevent me from being there, they told me that in that case I should go to his bosses and instruct them to fire him! This was an impression that I only managed to overcome in a small way over time by interacting with people.

The concealment of information is not particular to this research context, nor does it inevitably render the research invalid or useless. It is however an important consideration both in terms of the way I carried out my fieldwork and the way I am now writing about it, most strikingly the decision not to discuss trauma and negative experiences (this is discussed in Chapter Two). This thesis is a partial account in terms of what I had the time/space to include and what I wanted to include both in terms of the research and the writing, however, it is equally partial within this, in terms of the responses which the refugees gave; what they chose to reveal. The discussion therefore reflects a combination of both my and the children’s (and other refugees’) agenda.

There is always a certain degree of selectivity informed by purpose of description, realistic range and likely topics of analysis (Bickman and Rog 1998:235-6); it is never possible to describe *everything*. One decides what needs to be explained in part by deciding what is interesting and surprising, thus drawing on existing knowledge to define situations as different (Burawoy 1991:9). Living in Kawambwa gave me a

context for local comparison. Finding significance in practices which resemble the anthropologists own often requires a conscious effort whereas “difference” may stand out and bring itself to our attention. On the other hand it is precisely this attention to what one finds exotic or shocking that I am trying to overcome by focusing on the mundane and everyday activities described by children (in Chapter Three). This is also one of the reasons I chose to address issues of change, identity and power through the everyday substance of food and the activities which surround it (Chapters Six to Nine).

When doing research in conflict situations there is the risk identified by Robben of ‘ethnographic seduction’: being ‘led astray from an intended course’ (1995:83). Rather than simply abandoning analysis in favour of participation (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995:110), or losing objectivity through becoming too close to ones participants (Burawoy 1991:2) (both potential pitfalls for anthropologists), seduction works through the increased involvement of the ethnographer’s emotions (Robben and Nordstrom 1995:4). One becomes so ‘seduced’ by the account that both empathy and analytical detachment are lost (Robben 1995:86).

In my case, my initial reactions to talking of food in the camp may have been the result of this. I was vocal about the fact that, socially, the experience of living in camp was a negative one, but initially ignored the problem of hunger. In the early stages of my research, therefore, I reacted rather than analysed. Seduction occurs as people try to describe their experiences in such a way that the listener connects with their experience rather than just the events. Just as in Daniel’s discussion of the aesthetics of pain (1994:229) this is not easily communicable. As the later chapters of this thesis discuss, the refugees use food as a way of doing this and therefore so too does this thesis.

## **Communication 2: Context and Content**

The subjective nature of fieldwork and anthropological knowledge is one that has been much discussed in anthropology. Who I am determines what I know and what I can know. The information generated by my research is specific to my fieldwork. I use the word “generated” deliberately as in the ethnographic research situation, particularly one such as my own, information is not gathered but rather produced through

interactions between the researcher, the informants and the environment (both social and physical) in which we were interacting. As the process is specific to people and context, the resulting information is equally specific to my research. This is because information is generated and affected by not only the methods anthropologists chose to employ, but also the relationships we form with informants.

Furthermore the relationship between the researcher and the informant is built, not on the internal, who I think I am, but on the external, the refugees' perceptions or constructions of who I am and their particular way of "placing" me within the social structure as a result of my perceived characteristics (just as I do them) (Edwards 1993:187 and Fielding 1993:150). This is constructed by and altered by my relationship with them and their previous experience of people perceived to be like me. Likewise the questions I ask and my interpretation of the information I am given is mediated by my perception of who they are. Consequently this is different according to each individual I talked to and over time. All of this is constantly changing as the nature of our relationship changes; in the process of getting to know each other we not only learn more about one another, but choose to reveal more, or different things about ourselves as trust develops. This "knowledge" of one another is again subjective as people, like the past or the future, are empirically unknowable.

The above is true to some degree for every anthropologist and in every fieldwork situation but there were many elements of my research and constraints on my behaviour which I feel make this particularly relevant to my situation given the issues of trust (discussed in Chapter Five) and the child focus (Communication 3, this chapter).

As it is often the relationship between the ethnographer and the informant which produces the most meaningful insights, it is not always easy to back up these insights with empirical evidence. Whilst every level of the relationship cannot be rendered to the outsider (cf. Fielding 1993:147) and therefore neither can the source of the insights, the outsider can still be made aware of these underlying factors.

## Interactions

First entry into the camp was something which would have a big impact on the course of the research as the initial people I met generated many of my contacts and therefore influenced the way I proceeded. When I arrived in Kawambwa, the Community Services Co-ordinator was also the Education Co-ordinator, the first person she introduced me to in the camp was the refugee education administrator. I then left for Lusaka to buy a vehicle when I realised that I would need my own transport to and from the camp. When I returned, a new NGO (Hodi), had taken over the community services programme and so I spent some time with them. The first people that they introduced me to were the lady who ran the Foyer women's income generating group and the head of the social workers. These people had an impact on my research as they helped to form my first impressions and were instrumental in introducing me to other people in the camp.

My main concern in the camp was getting to know the children. Some of this had to be done through adults especially as much communication was done through an interpreter (see below). Initially some children were afraid of me, looking so different and I had various strategies for combating this. The most effective of these was to avoid eye contact and looking directly at very young children (toddlers) so that they could satisfy their curiosity without feeling threatened. With older children I would always greet them (I became proficient at a range of greetings in several languages which completely belied the fact that my ability often went no further) and shake hands. The intention was to communicate that if I could greet in their own language, I was not so strange, and they also got the opportunity to touch my strange white skin. Another challenge was to get them to see me as an individual. A typical conversation which I held daily in the camp was provoked by the fact that they called me *muzungu* (white person) and called this out to me continually:

'*Muzungu?*' I would reply, '*ni nani?*' who is that?

'*Wewe*' you

'*Teine*' it's not me. '*Mimi ni DaLusiya*' I am Lusiya (the refugees version of Lucy).



Initially I referred to myself as *BaLusiya* (taking my cue from others) *Ba* being a respectful prefix (Bemba). I later realised that *Da*, short for *dada* (sister Swahili) better served my purpose.

Just as I was deliberately having this conversation with children I met, there was another conversation which stemmed from the fact that a previous driver for UNHCR, regularly gave drinks cans to the children out of his car window. Children would approach me, or my car saying: *mpelenico ichicopo* (give me a container) and I replied *nshikwete* (I don't have any). I realised that in addition to wanting the *chicopo*, this simple conversation was a way that children used to engage with me (maybe they were aware of the limitation of my language skills) and it became somewhat of a ritual and was children's own way of "forming a relationship" by having a conversation.

I also extended this short conversation to my own ends by replying instead '*nshikwete, mpelenico ichicopo!*' I don't have any *you* give *me* a container! To which they would reply *nshikwete* and look confused or laugh (often depending on how many times we had had the same conversation – sometimes 3 or 4 times in one day). Thus through this conversation I was intending to imply: "Don't assume that I (as a white person) am able to give you everything you want - maybe you have something of value to me". Of course this is an ambitious aim for a short conversation and was only intended as a contribution towards conveying an impression of myself and of building the kind of relationship which I wished to have with children. The main advantage lay simply in the fact that an interaction was taking place.

By the time I left I was known in most parts of the camp as *Lusiya* rather than *muzungu* and many people knew me as "Lusiya who is here for the children". This meant that most children in the camp knew my name and many would greet me either simply by chanting it or in the conventional way.<sup>1</sup> This felt like quite an achievement

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<sup>1</sup> I was not always successful. One afternoon a small boy of about 2 ½ pulled an even younger girl towards me crying *zungu alo alo zungu alo*. Then he carried on straight past me to the open doorway and continued to shout *zungu alo* and wave. I looked outside but no-one was there and finally realised that they were both waving and calling to my empty car parked in front of the building!

but I have since heard that many white people are now referred to as Lusiyas so it may only have meant a change in signifier rather than signified.

I worked with small groups of children over a prolonged period and in this way built relationships with them over time. In the course of the research I also shared details about my life in the UK. Furthermore I made sure, if the children were carrying out a drawing activity, I did the same and as they explained their pictures to me, I explained mine to them.

Something which I did initially without thinking and through necessity, was to walk on foot through the camp. This may seem a mundane thing to do but it became clear that it had a great impact on the refugees who generally saw the NGO workers driving through the camp in their white Landcruisers. I later used this deliberately as both a research tool by asking the children to take me on a tour, or as a way of making myself seem approachable and making sure that more people had more direct contact with me.

Walking was a way to both observe and to be observed. The slower speed was one of the factors which contributed to this, but also the simple fact that I was travelling in the same way that the refugees themselves generally travelled, made me seem more "human" and therefore approachable. Although walking on foot was a good way of forming relationships and altering people's perceptions of me, I was able to observe much better from the car in spite of the increased speed, or rather because of it, as children did not have time to form crowds and follow me so I was able to see them carrying out their activities. I also ensured that when I was in the car I waved back at everyone who waved to me. Unintentionally, the fact that my car was red also helped as it distanced me from the UNHCR vehicles used by the NGOs (all white). This had both positive and negative impacts as to some this indication of difference implied superiority.

There were also people in the camp who treated me as inferior due to our respective statuses in particular contexts or because they had a level of knowledge which exceeded mine. Often people would correct my French, others would mock the way I dressed or some aspect of my behaviour. People at other times treated me more like an

equal, someone they could ask favours of and who would ask favours of them. There were women I shared sewing tips with, others with whom I could discuss aspects of children's upbringing and education.

### Choosing and Using Research Assistants

This section briefly discusses my relationships with my interpreters, (I have included more detailed information on their backgrounds and personalities in Appendix 2) as this also had an impact on the information gathered. Initially I looked for an interpreter through the Schools Administrator, as he was the one of the first people I met in the camp. It later turned out that he was a useful resource in many areas and given his knowledge of who had a good grasp of language skills, I came back to him for advice each time I needed to find a new interpreter.

My relationships with my interpreters indicates the way that they behaved with the children and thus were to a degree cyclical. With Fleur I had the closest relationship and she was the one who was most approachable to the children. I feel that, had the language skills not denied it, my relationship with Katabe would have developed similarly. Jacques on the other hand had different priorities. Working for me was not a necessary source of income, simply a welcome addition. His relationship with the children was based on the idea he held of who he was, clearly an adult and therefore worthy of respectful distance. He was never fully comfortable with sitting on the floor which I insisted we do together with the children.

My relationship with Jacques was no less valuable to me, but was filled with emotions such as impatience and at times irritation as well as respect and appreciation. My relationship with Fleur and to a lesser degree with Katabe, was based more on affection and sharing. These relationships were also reflected in the kinds of eating we did together. Fleur and I ate everyday meals together on a daily basis and therefore spent time together outside of research activities whereas the one occasion I ate at Jacques's house was a special meal for New Year but he had already eaten so we did not share the meal.

In addition to the official permission from the Zambian Government and the UN necessary to carry out research in the camp, there were also different levels of gatekeepers within the camp, depending on what I wanted to do. In the camp and surrounding area, status is an important aspect of people's lives and they feel their power/consequence very strongly. For this reason it was important to ensure that permission was sought at every stage and from anybody concerned. For example, when doing work with children from a particular street or section I had to first get permission from the section or street leader. If I wanted to use a building I had to ensure that permission was granted not only by the refugees responsible for the use of the building but also the NGO involved. This may seem like a fairly straightforward consideration but there were times when one particular stakeholder was overlooked and I had to do some serious grovelling.

### The Impact of the Research Context

I have discussed above some of the issues concerning my relationships with people in the camp which will have had an impact on my research. Here I address the environment or context in which the research was carried out and the ways in which this will have had an impact. I have already mentioned the way that I was perceived as rich or associated with UNHCR, this and some of the other features affecting my personal relationships come from the research context, existing relationships and previous experiences. One factor which had the most impact on my research was the need to retain UNHCR permission and goodwill, this meant that I had to operate within their guidelines and regulations.

These guidelines were designed for my safety but constrained my fieldwork. The most limiting of them was the fact that I was not able to live in the camp itself and instead had to stay in Kawambwa where the other NGO workers were based. It quickly became clear that I would need my own transport if I was to spend any significant time in the camp as regular lifts were not possible or reliable. This meant a harrowing hour long drive every morning and night negotiating potholes, chickens, goats and children. Sometimes the road turned into a river, making the potholes impossible to see. By the time I had driven home at night I was therefore often too exhausted to write up field notes.

In addition I was told that I should not be in the camp at any time unless NGO staff were also there<sup>2</sup>. In practice I was generally the first to arrive in the camp in the mornings and this did not seem to matter but more strict (and frustrating) was the rule that everyone had to be out of the camp by 4.30<sup>3</sup>. This meant that I was leaving the camp every evening just as the children were starting to come out into the streets to play! Weekends and holidays were days when I could negotiate access depending on the activities of other NGOs but I was not able to be there on a regular basis. Towards the end of the fieldwork period I did push these boundaries a little with productive results.

A further environmental aspect was the social and physical environment of the camp itself. The camp structure of long straight roads with closely packed houses had a great effect on life in the camp, but also on my research and the way I was perceived. There were certain places where I was especially familiar as I went often.

In terms of the social environment, many of the factors which impacted on people's lives, also had an impact on my research. These included the fact that people were members of different tribal groups, their differing origins from more or less rural areas of Congo and their levels of education. The fact that many people in the camp came from areas where there was little or no contact with white people had an effect, but of greater impact was probably the fact that many people's previous experiences associated me with a particular type of person and felt that I should slot into a particular type of social relationship. There were several people who had lived on or near a large cattle farm owned by Belgians. Their, and others', experience of relationships with white people was a paternalistic<sup>4</sup> one and in general the attitude was:

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<sup>2</sup> This was more strictly enforced, as early in the fieldwork I had been the only person from Kawambwa in the camp at the time of a mini 'riot'.

<sup>3</sup> General UNHCR regulations dictate that staff should be home by nightfall.

<sup>4</sup> Paternalism in similar contexts throughout Africa has been variously discussed cf Du Toit 1993 and Sylvain 2001.

you won't get unless you ask and you lose nothing by asking. Hence assistance was often "demanded" from me<sup>5</sup>.

The relationship the refugees had with the NGOs also affected their relationship with me. In general I was associated with the NGOs and so there was an expectation that my work was similar to theirs. When I visited the homes of several unaccompanied minors one day, the social worker who was taking me round remarked that people would assume that they were receiving something. This could therefore impact on the people who I visited and worked with as jealousy between individuals or groups was common in the camp. It was not just the expectation of receiving that coloured my relationships but also the mistrust that the refugees had for the NGOs (and each other).

Although I met with the children in a variety of places determined by their location within the camp, I don't feel that the impact of being in the church, for example, significantly affected the way that the research proceeded and what the children revealed. I did, however avoid the schools<sup>6</sup> as I felt that this would have an influence on my relationship with the children, given that our activities often involved pens and paper thus resembling schoolwork. As it was important for me to gain rapport with the children and for them to feel comfortable enough with me and the group setting to speak freely, it was therefore quite important that I chose sites that were enclosed spaces. Even in these buildings there was a lot of distraction and interference from other children trying to see in or to overhear what was being discussed. Children were not the only curious ones and it was much more difficult to tell adults to "leave us alone!"

The majority of my research activities with children took place in groups: this was a deliberate decision on my part. I felt that children would feel more comfortable with me if they were in a group. I also had much more flexibility in terms of the activities I could do in a group setting. This is probably a result of taking a lot of influence from

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<sup>5</sup> I say 'demanded' as this was reflected in the tone and wording, however it is important to remember that in Bemba, for example, there is no word for please and politeness and respect are conveyed in ways not possible in English so at times the 'rudeness' was simply an issue of language.

<sup>6</sup> Other than working through the school with secondary schoolchildren.

PRA activities, but it also meant that children felt able to talk in general terms rather than feeling that they had to specifically tell me about their own experiences when discussing potentially sensitive topics. I felt that these benefits significantly outweighed any constraining influence of the group.

The groups I worked with were generally mixed groups of similar ages. The qualitative rather than quantitative nature of the research meant that a relatively small “sample” of participants was used. Although I attempted to include a range of children in terms of age, whether they were school going or not, the length of time they had lived in the camp, and where they had lived prior to becoming a refugee, this was not done in any systematic way (see Appendix 3). Thus the results of this research can not be considered representative of every child in the camp. However the fact that many of the same issues were raised by most groups and individuals I spoke to indicates that they are issues of importance to a wide range of the camp population.

Finally there were adult sources of information. I spoke to older people about their lives as children, as did the children I worked with. I had various discussions with community service workers, with teachers and focus groups with mothers, fathers and the elderly. Towards the end of my fieldwork I had a weekly discussion group with self titled *intellectuals*. In later sections of the thesis I do not necessarily distinguish between sources of information in terms of the age of informants what I present is often a general picture of life in the camp combining information from a variety of sources in order not to ghettoise or give the impression of separate social worlds of children and adults.

### **Communication 3: Listening to Children**

Several aspects of this research led to specific methodological requirements. The most important of these are the fact that I was concentrating on the lives of children, and the

fact that the research, although not directed to experiences of violence, is nonetheless associated with this sensitive topic<sup>7</sup>.

### Doing Research with Children: Issues

Here I describe some of the theoretical issues from readings I did prior to going into the field which influenced my choice of methodological tools and the topic of my research. Over recent years, children's participation is increasingly seen as important. There is now an international framework for this in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that: A child has the "right to obtain and make known information and to express his or her views" (Ivan-Smith 1998:311). Although on an academic or policy level the value of children's participation is more widely acknowledged, common conceptions of children stand in the way of greater use of the participatory approach. These include ideas of 'children as less competent', or 'children as disruptive', or even 'children as innocents' needing to be protected from the responsibilities of participation (Jenks 1996, Hockey & James 1993). The fact that my research was with children meant that the techniques that I used were deliberately chosen to enable and encourage their full and free participation and expression.

There is an undeniable power imbalance in adult-child interaction which can not be reduced by inherent characteristics of the researcher<sup>8</sup>. Measures must therefore be put into place by the researcher to counteract this imbalance or reduce it where possible. Sensitivity to the existence of a power inequality alone does not make it disappear (Burawoy 1991:5) rather it enables us to address this issue using choice of methods and their implementation. The context of violence and fear, my adult status and my possible association with other more powerful outsiders rendered the need to address the power imbalance between myself and the children vital.

The characteristics of the adult-child relationship and its implications depend on the experience of the child in prior child-adult relations. The common identification of the

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<sup>7</sup> Sensitive topics have been defined as those having specific costs to the informant, and therefore specific ethical considerations (Lee & Renzetti 1993:4). These are culturally defined and are determined by the particular social context.

<sup>8</sup> Feminist methodologies address this problem by using women researchers. I also used children as researchers but this was a methodological tool rather than a removal of myself as an adult from the process. (Bergen 1993:201)



anthropologist as a child, in need of socialisation into cultural norms (cf. Briggs 1970) may in some situations aid in forming rapport with children but my own experience was that although adults may have considered me as “childlike” the children were very aware of the differences in our status, (cf. Abrahams 1986:52) a fact compounded by my whiteness.

In theory the fact that I was unmarried and had no children placed me in the category of child in the social context of my research but in practice it was assumed that, given my age, I must already have children. Even where people were aware that this was not the case, I fitted more easily into adult categories for other reasons such as my independence and level of education. Even though Briggs was childlike in her lack of *ihuma*, knowledge and skills, she still was not participating in children’s worlds. By classifying ourselves as childlike and assuming that our childlikeness is the same as children’s we are simplistically accepting and compounding the idea that children are simply incomplete adults.

Although international attitudes encourage children’s participation and their right to express their views, the reality of my research context was that children were not listened to by either their community or the camp administrators. I asked the children whether they felt that there were things that they knew that adults did not, and they said that although this is the case, it is difficult to communicate these things to adults without being considered cheeky. One parent when reflecting on this stated that, as children are more mobile than adults and travel to many places in the camp, they often hear news before the adults, but even when they pass this on, it is not believed until it is verified by another adult. “You can tell them things but they doubt you and sometimes they tell you you’re lying” (children in Group A). The exception to this was if it was something which had been taught at school. The child could then show their parents the schoolbook as proof. This however is not a true example of children “teaching” their parents, as the child becomes simply the intermediary between the parent and either the teacher or textbook.

Child-centred research methods and participatory techniques.

It is evident, from examining recent research with children, that a break has been made with past approaches and that research is still evolving as a result of ongoing debate. Child-centred research increasingly recognises the capabilities of children and focuses on hearing their views. Further, it works towards implementing children's ideas in policy and including children in decision-making processes (Christensen & James 2000). Hart (1997) and Legrand (2001:14), however, identify a gap in development work where participation is not being used to its full potential with children.

Doing research with children, a “muted group”, entails using forms of communication which do not “silence” them, or put them at a disadvantage. Child-centred techniques are effective in both opening channels of communication and obtaining information. In the small groups most of my methods involved activities paired with, or followed by discussions. Methods I used could mostly be classed as playful and included: games, photography, matrices, ranking and rating, mapping, artwork, videoing, theatre work (small role play exercises and larger pieces to present to an audience) and interviewing each other using tape recorders (Johnson et al 1998 contains descriptions of these kinds of methodological tools). Most often I used a drawing activity of some kind as although this was quite time consuming, the children enjoyed it and it was effective in forming a basis for discussion.

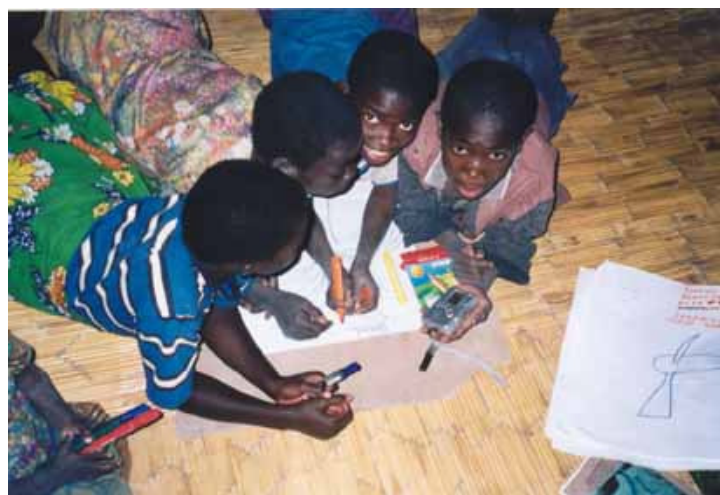


Fig. 3: Problem trees (Photograph taken by Atkinson)

The aim of such a wide range of methods was to encourage maximum involvement and inclusion of children having a wide range of age, capacity and skills. Furthermore several of the activities had an open focus to encourage children to open up in different ways on topics of importance to them. These are all “playful” methods and the value of playful aspects of fieldwork are starting to be recognised in anthropology.<sup>9</sup> Play helps children to learn and interact with others but children also play for enjoyment and to spend time with friends. Play as a research tool attempts to combine these elements. My research used a variety of research techniques which were all intended to be enjoyable for the children, whilst enabling learning about their lives. Such activities were also useful to create affinity, to relax the children and to create and maintain relationships. The success of these depended on the previous experiences of the children and they were therefore used with flexibility.

#### The value of play(ful research techniques)

The use of play in research shows parallels with the ways the definition and value of play arise in discussions of children’s play. This comes from the way in which play encompasses three elements: recreational, educational and social. When children and researchers play for recreational purposes, they are still building relationships and learning things, when the motivation is to learn, equally this is done in a fun and social way. To try to separate these aspects is to change the nature of the activity.

The question of whether or not an activity is “play” is particularly pertinent in my fieldwork as I was mostly introducing play-like activities as tools explicitly designed to elicit specific types of information rather than joining in with existing play activities. Many of the activities I carried out were based on child centred research techniques, they are therefore not the usual play activities for children in Kala. The “play” or recreational aspect of drawing for example, may have come precisely from the fact that it was something that the children rarely, if ever, had an opportunity to do otherwise. These activities produced different kinds of information from my observation of their usual play activities.

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<sup>9</sup>cf ‘From Play to Knowledge: A workshop on ethnographic methodology’. Held at University of Manchester 21 March 2005

Play activities in themselves do not automatically produce information which can be productively put to use for analysis. The most valuable information is produced through the interactions between the researcher and the “subjects”. Play’s usefulness often lies in the way it facilitates this interaction. For example, the result of the drawing competition was over 5,000 drawings produced independently of me, these were only useful against the backdrop of my interactions over time with children in the camp. Taken alone these drawings would, for example, have led to an overemphasis on trauma and war experiences, an issue I address in Chapter Two. It was my discussions with children which gave me the knowledge to judge the significant aspects of the drawings. Further, although these pictures more easily “stand alone”, there are many things which they cannot express which others, such as time lines and mapping exercises, can.

The following is not a comprehensive list of the methods I used, merely a few examples. Mapping is a method which shows many of the characteristics necessary for the kind of research I wanted to do: it is visual, interactive, involves physical activity and can be built upon and amended over time. It also takes what the children consider to be important as its focal point (Hart 1997:165-9).



Fig. 4: Drawing maps on the ground. (Photograph taken by Atkinson)

The use of theatre is another example of a means of communication for children, often considered additionally therapeutic (Cloma 1998:106 Hart 1997:189). The drama which I did with the children may have been therapeutic but I got the impression that mostly it was fun! The children included “comic” scenes where the bus kangaroos and jolts along the road, these were played for the children’s own enjoyment as my interpreter and I were the only observers. The boys also managed to drag out the “war” scenes longer and longer each time we went through them, creating dust and havoc in their enjoyment.

In these drama sketches of “Fleeing Congo” I learnt about children’s experiences during the war and in transit to the camp. I had been reluctant to evoke negative memories by introducing this topic into individual activities but this activity was designed as speculative and from the group’s collective experience rather than the experience of any individual child.

### PRA

The appropriateness of these methodologies was assessed in the field as I carried out research and they were adapted or discarded where necessary. For example in one of my early activities I asked the children to draw the most important person in their life. At the end of an hour I had drawings of houses, a river, flowers, etc. but from a group of 12 children only one had drawn a person. Was the problem in translation or a problem of understanding? After much thought, I decided that it might simply be that it is difficult to draw people. I went back to the camp the following day armed with tools and tactics. I had created sheets of templates of pictures of people from books to trace or copy but asked the children to first discuss in pairs the person that they would draw and why they were important in their lives.

This time I did get some pictures of people and some good discussion, but I found that the pictures were not as descriptive as some of the previous ones of houses. The children were more excited about the pictures I had provided and making sure that they made a faithful copy than in adding their own details to create a picture of people in their lives. On this occasion the play aspect of my methods got in the way of the “fieldwork”. The drawings still generated information, but not on the intended topic.

In general, I provided children with a means with which to express their knowledge and I demonstrated to them and others how this information could be valued. When the children explained maps they had drawn of areas of the camp which they considered to be important (the first activity that we did together), one group demonstrated the area at the entrance to the camp. My interpreter was frowning and explained in a doubtful voice “they are saying that this is the building where they hold the section leaders meetings”. When I confirmed that the children were right he was amazed that they knew something he didn’t. I pointedly reiterated that children often know different things from adults. I asked him to pass this on to the children as I wanted them to also feel confident in their knowledge and to understand that in our discussions they would be the teachers and I the ignorant pupil.<sup>10</sup> Although the interpreter took this point from me he was less willing to pass it on to the children.

Although my motivation for using drawing was to move communication away from adult controlled verbal arenas, in fact much of the information came from the discussions which were generated by the drawings. This information, although given verbally, was accessed through the drawings which were a key entry point to this information; a point for me to enter children’s worlds and for children to enter the topic under discussion. It is the combination of discussion and activity (and of different activities) which I feel worked so well in producing information and making the children feel comfortable and able to enjoy themselves in the process.

### *Combining Different Approaches*

Child-centred techniques share properties with participatory approaches. This is not so much a methodology, as an approach or a philosophy. The key features of participatory techniques are their interactive, empowering nature and informality: they use previously underestimated capacities and undeveloped skills. It was my intention that the children be included to the extent of their abilities in analysis and then

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<sup>10</sup> It was generally assumed by the community that when I worked with groups of children I was teaching them. I turned this assumption around to explain that in fact the children were teaching me.

consulted for feedback. The way I did this was indirectly by feeding the results into new activities or similar activities in different groups.

Factors such as the ability of the child, and their drawing preferences and experiences affect how well the use of play as a tool works and how it should be used. Some elements of child-centred research techniques are taken for granted in a Western context where children have relatively standardised levels of schooling age and ability. The issue of ability and experience makes this more problematic in the African context as age cannot be relied on to determine relevant research activities.

Differences in ability can lead to situations which cause a decrease in self esteem rather than the empowerment such methods are generally considered to promote (Chambers cited in Johnson & Ivan-Smith 1998:7). In one group of 12 children aged 12-16 there was only one child, Kisimba (15), who had never been to school. She could not write her own name and the pictures and symbols she was able to draw were not always recognisable. This was not a problem as far as my research went as we would discuss the pictures, but sometimes the other children in the group would make disparaging or mocking remarks. In this situation, the group environment and the use of drawing which were both intended to make the experience more comfortable and fun sometimes worked against those objectives.

Standard ethnographic tools such as semi-structured interviews focus group discussions and participant observation (cf. Baker & Hinton 1998, Bernard 1994, Omidon 1994) were used alongside participatory and child centred methods as a means of contextualising the data collected. Participant observation alone in this context involving rapid change would have been insufficient (Krulfeld 1994:147).

A defining factor of participant observation is that it 'is the study of people in their own time and space, in their own everyday lives' (Burawoy 1991:2). In my study I was only able to see one aspect of people's lives at a particular place and time. This is, to a certain extent, true of all ethnography but in this situation the lives themselves are changing and somewhat "out of context". Furthermore my presence was allotted to certain times of the day and week.

There were therefore aspects which I was only able to access through conversation rather than observation. Anthropologists cannot actually share the experiences of hardships with the people they study<sup>11</sup> (Hastrup 1993:732). Yet such studies are necessary in spite of the unusual methodological requirements (*ibid.*:727). In conjunction with the other techniques, participant observation was invaluable as a means of seeing in practice things which had been spoken of.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Doing research with children is inevitably ethically charged and it is for this reason that I spent so much time developing appropriate methods, since these are central to ethical considerations (Thomas & O’Kane 1998:336). The use of participatory methods, in placing a greater degree of control in the hands of the participants, were used as a way of reducing the power imbalance between researcher and participant and to reduce intrusive or confrontational aspects of fieldwork (Chambers 1997). It is important, however, not to overstate either the agency of the participants generally, or the empowering nature of the participatory approach used in my research. No matter what happened in the process of our discussions, I remained a white adult and they were inescapably refugee children dependant on aid provided by the West. What the playful methods achieved was not the disappearance of these categories or divisions, but the rapprochement of our positions as individuals who were known to one another.

Bernard (2000:21) identifies ethics as a part of methods. In order to be most ethical, a method must be the most accurate. Likewise in order to be the most accurate method, it must be the most ethical method. Furthermore ethics do not simply apply at the time of doing fieldwork, they are also involved in the process of writing up and analysis. I was explicit in my intentions when going into the field that I would not be dwelling on past experiences but on life in the camp. I was also wary of asking questions directly related to potentially traumatic experiences as I was not equipped with the counselling skills necessary to ensure that children would not experience any negative effects from

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<sup>11</sup> Can we ever truly *share* ‘experience’.



such discussions. However the open topics were designed to allow any subject to emerge, or be introduced by the children.

Children's ability to avoid uncomfortable topics was made apparent on several occasions. On one of these I had asked why, at a certain age children stop sleeping in same beds as their parents, and instead sleep in a *palais*.<sup>12</sup> Children avoided embarrassment by talking of the risk of the parent farting in bed thereby "satisfying" my need for an answer without elaborating on an uncomfortable topic.

The starting point for an anthropologist regarding ethics are the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) guidelines (ASA Web), but there is an ongoing debate regarding whether research with children requires additional or different ethical considerations to research with adults. I feel that the differences are of degree, rather than kind. All good, ethical research should consider the same issues, but in research with children, greater care may be advocated due to the increased power imbalance inherent in most adult-child relations (Alderson 1995:9, Lindsay 2000:19).

There is the additional ethical consideration of the "audience" of the information produced by research (Burawoy 1991:2). Although this research was not specifically intended to inform programmes or bring about change, it does contribute to ongoing discussions concerning both the attitudes to children in research and policy regarding refugees. The fact that it may be used to inform policy adds additional ethical dimensions as my portrayal may have a direct influence on people's lives (Camino 1994).

The opposite side of this problem is that participants may feel that change will happen, and that I will be able to bring it about. This was one area which was particularly ethically problematic for me; the issue of people's expectations not just of my research, but of me as an individual. A fact indicated to me in several conversations most often by people who were (relatively) unknown to me, and I to them. Many

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<sup>12</sup> This is a hut where unmarried boys/girls sleep in peer groups. It may be on the plot of their parent's house or on a separate plot. These are only used for sleeping in.

people in the camp felt they knew me and all had the expectation of asking for things from whites. This was true for both the participants of my research, and for the general camp population.

I tried to avoid this by encouraging people in the camp to communicate with the administrators directly regarding issues and problems raised and to not act as a mediator myself. This did not prevent me from involving myself in the participants' lives, but rather made clear the distinction between my help as an individual, and what lay within the domain of the NGOs or camp administration.

Given that core participants were spending a lot of time away from their normal activities and as some of these were economic activities (both personal and family) I made the decision to compensate them for their time and the effort they put into carrying out the activities and discussions with me. Rather than giving money I decided to give the children a snack at the end of each session, and a gift at the end of the week.

Although part of the philosophy of participation, with its emphasis on skill development and ownership of knowledge, is that it is an end in itself, I felt that in this case, where children came regularly over a long period of time it was necessary to give them something tangible in addition to these ephemeral benefits so that they had some evidence of the way I valued their information, and the fact that they gave up so much time to help me. I was guided by the staff in the camp and by the children themselves over what gifts were deemed to be appropriate, these included exercise books and pens, beans, soap, sugar and rice. Some gifts *could* be shared with the family and others were specifically for individuals alone. Other problems for the children or their families, caused by the time they spent with me, were minimized by them bringing siblings who they were responsible for into the sessions.

There are significant power imbalances inherent not only in my relationship with the refugees in my role as a researcher but also in the fact that I was an adult spending time with, and writing about children. This was in a research situation involving possibly vulnerable people and where I was perceived as allied with camp

administrators and donors. One of my responsibilities in representation is to balance the acknowledgement of such vulnerabilities with a demonstration of the agency and power that these people have without undermining that agency.

## **Images and Words**

The way the data is analysed and interpreted is of equal importance to the context or atmosphere in which it is collected and the results must be expressed in a way that does not trivialise or misinterpret children's voices (Ennew 1998:xix). 'Muted groups...are [often] unable to express their reality in ways that are acceptable to the dominant groups that control both means and modes of expression' (*ibid*:xviii). If children use different forms of communication to adults (Christensen & James 2000:7 Davis 1998:327), can the adult interpreting their information correctly understand and accurately render it to others? It is important that children's meanings are not lost in the analysis or interpretation of information. Visual methods therefore provoke the later challenge of communicating information in such a way that it loses neither its meaning nor its vibrancy.

The outcomes of my research were often visual representations of children's lives which challenged me to integrate visual, pictorial representations with written analysis. There are therefore many examples of the visual results of my research in this thesis. These are "direct quotes" from children. Both these and verbal quotes serve to remind the reader that the children's "voices" are as important as my writing and analysis. Their expression should have as much weight as my priorities.

The information I give after the quotes will vary depending on the amount of personal details I have regarding the speaker. Whilst maximum background information gives better context for the quotes, the nature of my methods means that this is generally not available. Where these quotes resulted from the competition, I have simply given the sex and age of the child where I have these details as these were not children I knew personally. Where they are from group work I have given the name where possible but in the group interactions, especially when using an interpreter it was not always easy to note down the speaker along with the quote.

The inclusion of the visual was therefore important in overcoming the problems identified both in research, and subsequently in the presentation and analysis. In the latter their usage was a challenge to both my skill in presenting them and the openness of the academic world which is to receive them. The former was complicated by the fact that children are not a homogeneous group, their ability to participate is affected by specific socio-cultural, economic, political and developmental issues, their social relations, empathy, sense of belonging and skills of self-control and co-operation. This also affected the appropriateness of the methods (Hart 1997:35). By using a wide range of methods, maximum involvement and inclusion of children having a wide range of age, capacity and skills was achieved.

When I present a drawing by the children in my writing, is it necessary that I indicate each time the aspects I consider relevant, the levels I see portrayed? To do so may seem to defeat the purpose of using the image, given that this is a duplication, yet if I include only the description, the reader no longer experiences the child's voice first hand.<sup>13</sup>

From the drawing competition it became clear that although some drawings could stand alone in expressing ideas [Fig. 5], in others background knowledge was necessary to recognise the relevance; for a stranger, meanings might be missed [Fig. 6]. For yet other drawings it was only the children's words that accompanied them that completed the expression of ideas [Fig. 7].

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<sup>13</sup> I have had to do this with the video as I have yet to resolve how to integrate this into the written other than in electronic versions.

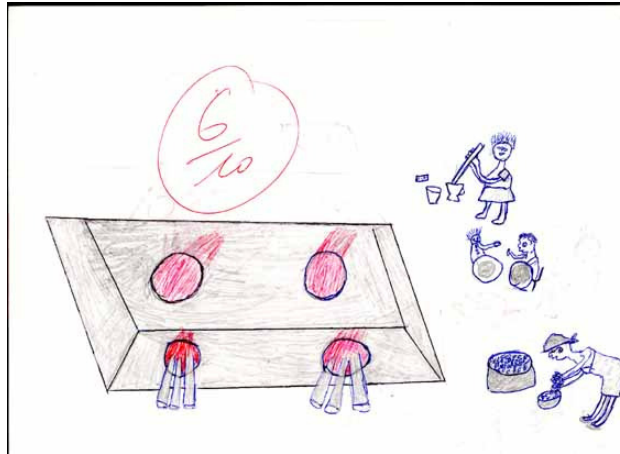


Fig 5: A fuel efficient stove built as part of the environmental programmes in the camp (primary schoolgirl).



Fig 6: The caption reads: 'This is the life of refugees in Kala camp. People are suffering from hunger.' But these types of tent houses are only used until a permanent house is built (primary school boy).



Fig 7: The caption reads: On the distribution days this is what people do. Those without money exchange mealie meal for smallfry, cassava, oil and so on (primary schoolboy).

One source of the challenge in presenting the images drawn by the children comes from the “important ways that the post-creation social life of objects impacts on both form and signification” (Blier 2005:95). The way I will use the pictures in my written discussion is different from the way they were used in the oral discussion for which they were originally drawn. The pictures, and thus the “draughtsmen”, through the part of themselves that they put into the images continue to affect both me and my discussion due to the agency of these images (Gell 1998:13-27).<sup>14</sup>

The issue arises of levels of analysis. A presentation of images alone could be considered simply raw data, but anthropologists’ work increasingly involves raw data

<sup>14</sup> This is a reference to Gell’s discussion which treats art objects (in the same way that Mauss does a gift) as persons or social agents (Gell 1998:9).

in the form of descriptive anecdotes or whole passages in the informants “own words”. In my case I simply include photographs and drawings as a form of quotation; they are the children’s expressions “in their own images”.

In terms of images presented here, I find drawings from the competition especially “quotable”. This is sometimes due to the written explanations which accompany them but also to the quality of the drawings. There is therefore little difference between using images in this way, and what is often done with words. A quote from a particularly eloquent speaker or a clearly recorded conversation may be used to articulate information absorbed gradually through experience or from a combination of sources. This is one of the strengths of carrying out ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher can *know* more than what they are directly *told*.

A relevant question here is whether play is just a way of getting better words or whether it is something different, something *more*? Undoubtedly words are an important part of communication and I too am often seduced by the ease with which they can be used. I find myself quoting from the subtitles of the “documentary” and searching for pictures where the children had written captions. This is not a contradiction, children should not be denied access to the verbal arena simply because it is seen as an “adult” domain. But what my research did was to offer them alternatives. Additionally the written/verbal remarks are generally produced by older children. It is therefore important to include pictures as an expression of the younger children’s points of view.

Using words may be the convention and certainly it is easier to integrate written quotes into a written analysis but I maintain that information can be gained from the visual which cannot be gleaned or projected through written imagery (Fig 8). I do not question that analysis and argument may be achieved more effectively through writing, the difference in my work is in the balance and way I combine visual imagery with this. The images do not merely illustrate, but demonstrate.



Fig. 8: This picture (taken by the children) is evocative of so many aspects of life in the camp, the key thing is the main activity; peeling peas, which is incredibly time consuming and hated by everyone. But it also conveys the outdoor public nature of life, the importance of the bicycle, the constant need to fetch water, the quality of materials given by the UN and their need to be supplemented...

I recently presented a paper discussing the topic of children's activities and then showed part of a documentary shot with the children on the same topic. The response from one listener/viewer was that the video had not shown anything new; that the paper had covered it all. Rather than a reflection on my limited video editing skills or the idea that my words were particularly rich and communicative, I took this comment as an indication that, as a discipline and in academia in general, we undervalue non-verbal forms of communication.<sup>15</sup>

When we see an image we may not be experienced enough in seeing the levels of meaning present [Figs 9&10] in this different register and therefore assume that greater density and layers of meaning are available in a text: That Geertz's 'thick description' only applies to words (1993). In the field, however, anthropologists are observers: we *observe and participate* rather than *read*<sup>16</sup> the world we are participating in. Although at the end of each day we are likely to convert our

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<sup>15</sup> The marginalisation of the visual is a topic discussed in Visual Anthropology which I therefore do not go into here (cf. Grimshaw 2005:205 and Morphy and Banks 1997).

<sup>16</sup> This is a reference to discussions of culture-as-a-text (Geertz op cit).



observations and experiences into words, we nonetheless, at this stage in the research process, value what is seen and experienced.



Fig. 9 Drawn by a secondary schoolboy (18)

- This is a picture of people receiving food.
- The food is from the UN
- The name of whoever donated the oil is generally printed on the tin.
- The food is carefully measured (the red cup is for measuring oil).
- The man giving the food is dressed in western style clothes, this is a reflection of the fact that women are more likely to wear traditional clothing than men, that Zambians are more likely to wear western style clothes than the Congolese, and that refugees cannot afford to buy western style clothes (plus *salaula* second hand clothes do not often contain jeans.)
- The women are wearing scarves. The refugees are less likely to have braids or extensions, especially older women.



Fig 10 This picture shows many of the things which are different in the camp but it especially demonstrates children's fascination with the 'exotic' in the focus on the lorries and the inclusion of the 'Motorola' radios (primary schoolboy).

In many ways the challenge I face is no different from that frequently experienced in all areas of anthropology, how to convert experience into words; or rather how to interpret others' and our own experience such that it can be rendered meaningful to colleagues and open to analysis (cf Hastrup and Hervik 1994). I simply avoid 'the assumption that translation is essentially a matter of verbal representation' (Asad 1986:160). I question the need for such a representation or rendering to be done through words alone and include other media in my discussions.

The inclusion of so many visual images in my writing might lead to its categorisation as "visual anthropology" but it is important to make a distinction. The children's photographs and drawings are more like tapes or transcripts of interviews, and fieldnotes, than they are like the visual anthropologist's photographs and films. Whilst all products of fieldwork are the result of interactions between the researcher and the informant, the two types of image appear at a different stage on the continuum of producer-process-product (Fabian cited in Crawford 1992:68) or perhaps more

tellingly that the anthropologist is located differently in the artist-index-recipient schema (Gell 1998:13-27).

The visual anthropologist, as a result of the process of fieldwork, has a product of their own creation resulting from their interaction with informants, whereas I have a product which is created by the informant as part of their interaction with me. The same process of interaction and negotiation has taken place, but in my case the children had control of the image that was produced, they were holding the camera<sup>17</sup>, or the pencil. The ethnographer's relationship to the "artefact" is different, the work which is left to do before presenting the information to an audience, and the time and process of analysis are therefore different. Likewise, although the images are created by the refugees themselves, this is not the same as the study of material culture as they were produced specifically as part of the research interaction; I shaped the thematic content and determined the form. In spite of the key differences there are important contributions that these fields can make to both the recognition of the importance of visuals and to the ways in which they can be included in a written discussion.

These fields, along with other disciplines, may provide some assistance in processing and expressing visual information but my experience suggests that the most necessary step will be to educate the "consumer" of such expressions to read them with as much skill as we read layers of meaning in textual expressions. The fact that anthropologists are all skilled at "observing" and finding the necessary relevance in the field is an indication that we are capable of "reading" analytical discussions which combine the verbal with the visual. Despite the central place of debates of representation in anthropology in recent years, there are issues which remain unresolved. It is evident that such debates need to be broadened to include non-verbal means of representation.

This discussion of methods, contributes to a growing body of literature on child-centred research techniques. The specific value of my research lies in the combination

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<sup>17</sup> Directing it in the case of the video.

and diversity of techniques and approaches and especially in the recognition that visual methods may necessitate visual presentation of results.

## Chapter Two

### **Representation: Out of the Shadows and into the Spotlight**

The shadows of the chapter's title are twofold. Firstly, children's experiences are often overshadowed by adult's experiences and further, children's interpretations of their own experience are overshadowed by adult's interpretations of them. Secondly, in this context, it is often assumed that children's lives are overshadowed by the spectre of war and violence which are taken as the most important factors in their lives. However, my research showed, that this is not of overriding importance to the children themselves. Children in the refugee camp go to school, do chores and play just like any other group of children. The focus should therefore be broadened to illuminate these aspects.

The relevance of global forces in refugee issues is undeniable both in the circumstances which lead to refugee-producing situations and the way that people are treated in refuge. This treatment includes perception and portrayal by academia and the media as well as treatment by host countries and intervention agencies. Representation is an issue which has been under much debate in anthropology<sup>1</sup> particularly with regards power of representation and the responsibility to subjects of research (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986). This section will therefore cover some of the more important ways in which popular and academic conceptions colour ideas and representations relevant to my research.

#### **Existing Representations**

Others' representations had a significant impact on the way that I approached the subject in the field. These formed a part of my "cultural baggage" which was necessarily an important issue in my preparation for the field. Going into the field I had certain expectations involving: images of a refugee camp, based on media representations of tents, starvation, misery and illness. Images of (refugee) children,

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<sup>1</sup> As demonstrated by the 1995 ASA conference and the 1989 meeting of the South Asian Anthropologists group. For summaries see Unnithan and Thin 1989 and Hughes-Freeland 1995.

especially African children, are often misrepresented as miserable and vulnerable (OAU 1992:75). They may be deliberately portrayed in this way by the media and NGOs to evoke sympathy. Such representations are in opposition to what recent literature on childhood says about children's capabilities.

Other accounts, especially of refugee children, created the expectation of trauma; an expectation that events of the recent past and horrors they had seen would remain in the forefront of people's minds, and that children might be especially affected by this. Likewise portrayal of children is shaped by many influences outside the specific context of study. Whilst important, such global issues cannot shed light on the everyday lived experiences of individuals and communities as they only make up a small proportion of the influences on people's lives and often act only indirectly. Such representations do not take into account the experiences of refugee children other than as tokenistic emotive symbols presented in Western terms and therefore are not representative of the children's true situation.

"A mother falls off her chair, the child has a plate in his hands, he sees his mother who has fallen off the chair and he starts to cry. The child says "Oh mother, mother give me some mealie meal" Mother says "you will spill it" The child says "I won't spill it" The mother gives him some mealie meal and not long after he drops it. Mother says "You see?""

"Here is a very beautiful school in Congo, here we are used to knocking with our hands, but in Congo we knocked at the door. Also in Congo we ate well, we cultivated without fear, we travelled without a travel permit."

"I am cutting down trees, I am arrested by an environmental officer who confiscates my axe. There are many trees in the camp and if you cut them down your axe is confiscated. In the camp there are lots of huts, in Congo there were beautiful houses."

"Life in Congo is very bad, the Rwandans and Kabila's soldiers fight each other. A Rwandan comes across a civilian, he grabs him and he decapitates him with his knife. The other people see this and they run away with their belongings. There were some who fell. I also hurt myself and I cried: life in Congo is very bad."

The above are captions written by children to go with their drawings about life in the refugee camp. They are all accurate, written from first hand experience, but this discussion considers their relevance to the representation of life in general for children in Kala refugee camp.

Current patterns of development and aid were born in African discourses whereby 'white men had written themselves into the present and future of the continent' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:691 see also Baaz 2001) through the concretization of Africa's need for reformation. Thus the patterns of dependence and of obligation began: '[t]he "native" would be brought into the European world, but as the recipient of a gift he could never return – except by acknowledging, gracefully, his own subordination' (*ibid.*). Some of these ideas continue both within and outside of Anthropology. This is particularly true in situations of famine and war where the images portrayed in the media are specifically intended to evoke a particular conception and reaction.

The fact that I was doing research in the context of a development project was therefore an important consideration. This was not just an *aspect* of their lives but in many ways *every* aspect of their lives. This produces a situation such as that depicted in *Imposing Aid*, where Harrell-Bond describes the entirely negative connotations of being a refugee in Africa, someone who is forced to ask for assistance as they have 'failed' in some way (1986:6). This is an important issue but is only part of a complex situation. In my fieldwork the meaning of what it is to be a refugee was also open to manipulation by the refugees themselves (see Malkki 1995b, 1996).

I often get the same reaction from people when I explain my research. The expectation is that I must have found it very difficult to spend time with "traumatised" children, or an assumption that my topic was PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) related. When I explain that the children were not, in my opinion "traumatised" the reaction is not only surprise, but sometimes disbelief; I must be mistaken. This has led me to ask: "Why do people *want* them to be traumatised?" This may come from the "universalist" understandings of children as described by Aries (1979), an assumption of what childhood is or should be, what children are or should be.

Children are often stereotyped differently from adults, they are perceived as "less cultured" and are therefore expected to react in more uniform/universal ways, not determined by their culture. In this way children are generally seen to be "closer to nature" (Toren 1996:92, see also James and Prout 1997b). Furthermore, emotions are

generally perceived in a similar way, as something inherent, natural, not learnt or cultured. Thus people must *feel* similarly in similar situations. Emotions are perceived as what makes us commonly *human* and therefore to fail to be traumatised by traumatic experiences is considered somehow *inhuman* (or irrational). Both children and adults are therefore expected to be “traumatised” as a result of the experiences that they have had, for to not be would make them somehow “less human”. Further if they are traumatised they will be more “vulnerable”, more “in need”, and therefore fit more easily into the patterns of intervention planned for them.

If there is no evidence of “trauma” then the assumption is that it must be buried or repressed and the child is therefore in even greater need of therapy. Furthermore media representations and any impression gained of refugees and other Africans in need of “intervention” revolves around the needy aspect. Images focus on children in ways which only reinforce the assumptions described above.

That children do not pay much attention to their “traumatic” experiences runs in opposition to the many accounts which exist of refugee children and their need for psychosocial care. Often there is the assumption of trauma to the exclusion of any consideration for other aspects of their lives. I will demonstrate in this thesis the need for a discussion to balance this view with a focus on other aspects. I do not deny that there are traumatised children and that this may well be an important area for study and intervention, but the anecdotal evidence of one aid worker in former Yugoslavia who stated that ‘every agency was running projects for psychosocial care but no-one was collecting the garbage’ (see also Pupavac 2001) is evidence of a tendency to ignore other aspects in a blinkered focus on the psychosocial. An underlying reason for this was that funding was readily available for such programmes but not for any other. This does not answer as an explanation, merely a demonstration of how deep-seated this predisposition to focus on “trauma” actually is.

### Trauma Versus the Everyday

My research is concerned with the fact that the only discourse through which agencies and academics relate to the experience of children whose lives have been touched by



war is one of trauma or victimhood<sup>2</sup>. Even where children are considered “survivors” rather than victims, this implicitly assumes that the defining feature of the children, or their lives, is their negative experiences. This thesis will demonstrate that their lives are more complete and more complex than this. The intention is to provide a counterpoint to studies which focus on children’s trauma to the exclusion of other important aspects of their lives. I do not reject the importance of such studies, my concern is merely that in taking this as the central viewpoint, other important aspects of children’s lives are obscured. Even when trauma is an aspect of children’s lives, it should not be assumed that it is the only, or even the most important one.

There is an important balance to negotiate in terms of how children’s activities and the issues of importance to them are portrayed. Although elements of their lives are happy and normal, to represent them in only these terms would oversimplify a complex situation. Just as I recognise how representations cause people to become defined by their suffering thus denying their agency, likewise I do not intend my focus on everyday practice and agency to negate their genuine problems and needs. To do so would be a betrayal of friends I have made and their expectation that I will be a voice to express their worries and needs.

Although I have no specific intention to affect policy, I maintain an awareness that for people dependent on aid to live, any representation could have significant implications. The children’s lives were products of, and continue to be affected by, forces outside of their control.<sup>3</sup> They are not passive within these constraints but there are still negative effects. Whilst my friends in Kala should not be symbolised merely as objects of pity with heartbreaking images to increase donations, neither should they be represented as people with no need of international assistance. One aim of this thesis is to represent them so that their needs as *they* perceive them can be better met or, at least understood and acknowledged.

The power imbalance between myself and the people with whom I was doing my research was operating on three levels: firstly in the relationship between researcher

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<sup>2</sup>I do not here enter into a discussion of trauma and the way it has been addressed in Academia and practice as this has been done extensively in Eyber 2001

<sup>3</sup> See Farmer 1999 for a broader discussion of the problems of an over emphasis of agency.

and researched; secondly in the adult-child relationship; and thirdly through our respective positions in the aid programme of which they were the recipients, discussed above. The various histories of representation in all three of these contexts are each a cautionary tale.

### The Language of Representation

Terms such as “refugee” and “children” have meanings which are variable and context dependent. Furthermore such terms become “loaded” with additional meanings which should not be taken for granted. “Children” as a socially constructed term is already loaded with meaning,<sup>4</sup> it can be used in a calculatingly emotive way; children as a category are often used deliberately as symbols especially to raise funds for development projects. A central aim of this study was to address issues and events from the perspective of children, to look at the unchanged aspects of children’s lives to counteract sensationalist images of children as innocent victims. “Child” is not a homogenous category either between or within cultures, children can differ from one another in important ways (cf. Boyden 1997). Neither is “childhood” a category bounded by specific ages; in the camp status and roles are gained gradually and adulthood is achieved through marriage and procreation rather than birthdays.

Just as the category “children” can mean different things depending on the context, the term refugee can also have differing definitions, as I discussed in the introduction. The ambiguity of meaning, whilst being the cause of confusion, can also be viewed positively. Ambiguity allows the refugees to formulate interpretations which correspond with their own understandings of experiences and situations (cf. Malkki 1995b). Malkki, in ‘Speechless Emissaries’ (1996), explores the forms and effects of humanitarian interventions in camps in Tanzania where refugees had different understandings of their status depending on whether they lived in camps or towns. Whilst I question her simplistic polar opposition of these two categories, her research demonstrates that “refugee identity” is contingent on social, historical and political contexts. Different groups have different understandings of what it is to be a refugee. In contrast, camp administrators have a preconceived image of an ideal refugee identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Children are generally assumed to be innocent, vulnerable, helpless etc (James et al 1998).

Labelling and representation by others are important aspects of identity, but it is important not to lose sight of individual experiences in addressing collective issues. In using a blanket label such as “refugee”, the lives and strategies of individuals and specific groups are often buried (Malkki 1996:378). Media representations do not reflect the reality of individuals’ lives which are made up of many seemingly mundane activities of great significance to the individuals in question. They also deny them active involvement in the creation of new networks and citizenship practices. The way the diversity of experiences and lives of refugees become reduced to one single category emerges from the literature as one key example of this.

“Refugee” as experienced by people in Kala camp had many facets which were context dependent; they did find that at times they were negatively labelled by the Zambians and name-called “refugee” in derogatory fashion, however this was only part of the story. Many children talked to me about being refugees in ways that evoked their rights. They transformed images of helplessness into ones of rights and obligations: “you [UNHCR] brought us here so you should feed us and look after us.”<sup>5</sup> Outsiders’ constructions of “refugeeness” which conflict with people’s self-definition may lead to increased problems of insecurity and can also lead to inappropriate interventions, but this thesis includes ways in which inappropriate interventions in Kala were often co-opted by the refugees and adapted to their own ends either in a practical manner or a rhetorical discursive way.

As discussed above, refugee *children* feature heavily in media images, portrayed as helpless and innocent. It is therefore important to balance this with both representations of “survivors” and of their everyday lives. More general studies have shown that many factors contribute to children’s ability to deal with extraordinary experiences<sup>6</sup> and their emotional consequences including family and community support, the events experienced, their previous socialisation, but also children’s personal capabilities (Ahearn et al 1999:219-222). My research demonstrates that families may have an impact on children’s reactions but children likewise influence

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<sup>5</sup> This particular group of children had been self settled on the Zambian border before being brought into the camp so this was literally true. They had literally been ‘brought here’ but also the war itself was blamed on America and international forces.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Five for further significance of this term.

the responses of their families. Children actively respond as individuals to the challenges of their situation, but cultural factors have a role in this. Some innovations by children did not have a positive effect on the community, for example where they eroded the authority of adults or expressed their feelings in “anti-social” behaviour.

## **Partial Representations**

### Children’s Lives: External Representations and Extraordinary Events

The following ethnographic examples, especially when seen against the backdrop of children’s daily lives, return to the issue of representation and demonstrate how taking one child’s experience as representative can be both inaccurate and harmful. During my first weeks in the camp I shadowed and was shown around by Hodi, the NGO responsible for Community services in the refugee camp. During this time I was introduced to people who were central to their programmes but I also had two children drawn to my attention. The first was simply pointed out to me as a boy who had tried to hang himself after fighting with a friend over a condom. He was about 7 or 8 years old and had been counselled by them. The second was an older boy aged 16 (who I call Chansa) who was an unaccompanied minor. He had been forced to play the role of chief mourner at a mock funeral given for his mother who was buried alive during the ceremony.

It is very disturbing to think of an 8 year old who will attempt suicide or a child forced to watch his mother buried alive, but without trying to trivialise the events or the children themselves, the reason I mention them here is to illustrate the attitudes and practices of the NGOs. In the context of the camp where I was working such experiences were in the minority. Yet these were the only individual children pointed out to me and so they formed my first impression of the lives and experiences of camp children.

The other children whose remarkable stories were equally outstanding I had to find out for myself. They included children caring for siblings or parents; children earning money to help support themselves and their families; children educating themselves and their siblings, to mention but a few of the remarkable things which children do seemingly as a matter of course. That experiences such as Chansa’s were the

exception very quickly became clear through both the fact that my research with other children revealed no other cases of this type, and that no other children were pointed out to me by Hodi whom I continued to work with on and off for the next 18 months.

Were these children pointed out to me because of a preconceived notion of what I as a researcher would be interested in? Or because of their perception that I, as a white person, would be able to encourage more donations if they could demonstrate the depth of need of these children? It later became clear that neither me nor my purpose in the camp had led the NGO to point out this boy to me. He was pointed out to everybody in a similar way.

When the camp celebrated World Refugee Day, people from outside the camp such as local government representatives and UNHCR staff were invited to participate. One was a newly arrived member of international staff at the UNHCR sub-office. During a basketball match I overheard the field officer point out Chansa to him “that’s the boy who watched his mother buried alive”. It is significant that it was necessary to say not only that he lost his mother in horrific circumstances but *how* was also revealed to strengthen the impact of the statement. The member of staff she was speaking to would not be spending any time in the camp as his work was office based. He would therefore have as his main reference point this day’s events, this boy and this story<sup>7</sup>. The only other refugees he would be likely to meet were the head of the Section Leaders and other “important” figures.

This attitude mirrored what I had seen before arriving in the camp in popular representations of refugees (See Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) for another discussion of visual images). Children are particularly “used” in this way and the following examples demonstrate how this attitude continues at different levels of camp administration. The first was published in the UNHCR ‘Refugees’ magazine (1999:24) and shows how a picture speaks a thousand words, but its “voice” is influenced by the caption.

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<sup>7</sup> If indeed a short sentence can be seen to be a ‘story’ it certainly can’t be seen to be ‘his’ story.

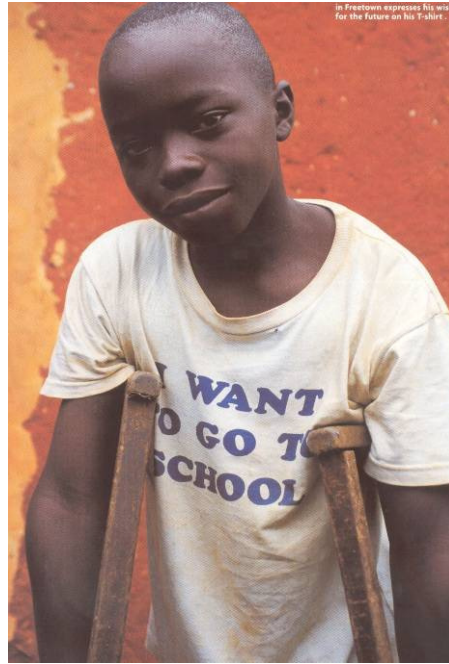


Fig. 11 I want to go to school

The caption reads: 'A mutilated Sierra Leonean boy in Freetown expresses his wishes for the future on his T-shirt'

My experience of children and clothing in the refugee camps leads me to add a little context to this picture.<sup>8</sup> At all celebration days a certain number of such T-shirts are produced for the participants to wear. These are much sought after as not only are people in the camp desperate for clothing, but also they demonstrate a certain status gained by the fact that one is linked to the NGOs and participated in such an event. To counteract this picture I have included some photographs of my own of other issues about which children express themselves through their clothing.

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<sup>8</sup> Although I am speculating as to how much of the context will be the same in this different situation I am confident that many similar features come into play.



Fig. 12 A child expresses his needs as a refugee (“Please look after this bear”).



Fig. 13 A child exerts and expresses his identity (“I’m a little African”).

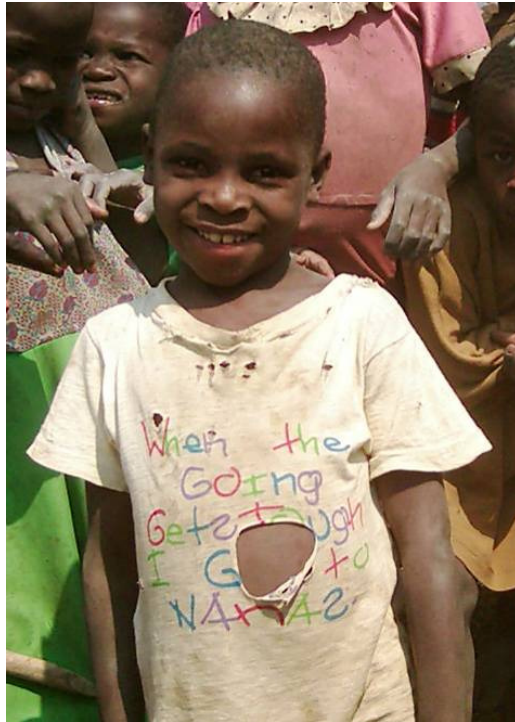


Fig. 14 A child demonstrates his strategy regarding conflict situations (“When the going gets tough I go to Nana’s”).



Fig. 15 A child expresses her philosophy regarding success (“Huggers are always winners”).

My captions are deliberately exaggerated and ironic but are they any further from the truth than the one in the UNHCR magazine? This boy did not design the T-shirt he is wearing any more than the children above did. The children in question often do not even understand what is written on their clothes (I was frequently asked to translate these). Most of their clothes are second-hand either from donations or bought in the



market as *salaula*.<sup>9</sup> The main criteria in choosing clothes are the colour and whether they fit. Those with slogans or writing are particularly sought after for image reasons but what they say is immaterial.

My captions also use the relatively neutral “child”<sup>10</sup> without any qualification. The magazine has chosen “mutilated” a term which implies “victim” (of deliberate harm) and evokes pity even though the child looks to be happy and in good health. I do not mean to negate the fact that many children do have a strong wish to go to school but in Kala camp those who wish to, all have that opportunity at least to primary level and many do not wish it. This is not therefore an issue of prime importance to children, only to the NGOs who are trying to encourage non school going children into the classroom when the children may prefer to be earning money for their families.<sup>11</sup> (This may therefore also be the case in other UN projects.)

My second example concerns a video produced, I believe, for UNHCR Geneva. I have not seen the video or spoken to those shooting it as my attempts to get details from the field officer were blocked. I am therefore unable to state whose priorities were represented by this video. A team of filmmakers came from Europe to make a film about the lives of refugee children which was to be shown to European school children. The film was shot in various refugee camps, Kala being the last location. Before coming to Kala the crew contacted the field officer to arrange the details: They had plenty of footage of boys and so wanted to focus on girls in Kala, therefore could she (the field officer) organise some girls from the camp to be in the film. Specifically they wanted girls who had been gang-raped, or made pregnant as a result of forced sex with soldiers. These people clearly had a fixed agenda, they had decided without having been in the camp that such events make up refugee children’s lives. That they should chose to portray a minority as representing such a diverse group of children seemed to be the complete antithesis of what I intended through my fieldwork.

This issue also revealed conflicting attitudes demonstrated by the field officer. She stated that after this experience she would never again trust a documentary as the way

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<sup>9</sup> Salaula (Bemba "to rummage through a pile.") is second hand clothing donated in Western countries and sold in bulk to traders who then sell individual items. See Tranberg Hansen 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Although it is certainly not entirely neutral, see above.

<sup>11</sup> Although this was not the only reason stopping children from coming to school, it was one often cited.

they capture what they wanted to represent was to create a series of artificial situations which would best demonstrate their point. She also related the request made by the film-crew as an amusing anecdote, obviously recognising how inappropriate it was for them to have made such a request. Yet she herself had done something similar on a smaller scale at World Refugee Day with Chansa.

Whilst recognising the prejudiced nature of the request which would obviously colour the view of the people watching the video, she denied me the opportunity to be in touch with the film-crew and discuss it with them (refusing to give me their contact details and acting defensively when I asked), or (to my knowledge) do anything herself to try and present a more balanced view when they carried out the filming. This seems a clear example of how, whilst privately recognising the inappropriateness of their request, professionally she saw the value of this type of representation, be it to influence public opinion or to encourage donations. And yes, in spite of the fact that they wanted girls, Chansa was one of the children chosen to be in the video.

What I wish to discuss here is why such representations are prominent and especially why I feel that they are both incorrect and inappropriate. Such representations are useful to NGOs as they concern issues which are easily identified as worthy of donations. A mutilated boy or a violated girl evoke pity and therefore provoke giving. Education is also a quantifiable issue and improvements or statistics can easily be used to show value for money in annual reports, it is also one of the key International Development Targets.<sup>12</sup>

The people producing such images are most likely aware of the impressions they give and probably chose to do so deliberately. I am not questioning that they thought they had good reason for doing so. The photograph was in a magazine produced by the 'public information section' of UNHCR and may be of key importance in encouraging donations. The video may have been produced for similar reasons or in an attempt to counteract images such as those portrayed in the British tabloids regarding asylum seekers. What I challenge is the way that they unquestioningly make themselves complicit in a discourse which duplicates the "patterns of

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<sup>12</sup> 'Universal primary education in all countries by 2015' agreed at the World Summit on Social Development in 1995 (FIAS Web1)

dependence and obligation” discussed previously in this chapter. I challenge the necessity of having the recipients of aid appear “helpless” and pitiful.

One secondary schoolboy, when describing (in an essay) his experiences as a refugee, expressed his own feelings on this matter:

This interminable war forced me to leave my beautiful country and to come here and submit to this life which exhausts and disgusts me, the life of a refugee... The life which is constantly controlled by the infamous principle “open your hands so that I can give to you”. What shame! [How pitiful!] What dependence!

It is difficult to insist that such images should not be used if the result were to be a decrease in funding and therefore that the recipients of aid, children and their families were to suffer. On the other hand it may be that the only reason that such images are “necessary” to secure funding is the fact that they are used. Aid agencies use such images to raise public awareness but I question their easy acceptance and use of existing prejudices and attitudes. They could be raising awareness that giving should not be determined by what the donor feels are acceptable areas of assistance, but should include areas which the recipients prioritise as areas of assistance. Current feelings of superiority for gifts or donations are located in a discourse which, as discussed above, reaches back to the colonial era. Although NGOs are now aware of this few encourage individual donors to recognise it. There are, however, cases which take the opposite approach, more and more donors are beginning to see how constructing people as helpless can lead to dependency on aid. Donors such as the Department for International Development (DfID) will not fund programmes which do so.

Representations such as those discussed above depict children as victims of circumstances outside of their control, as helpless to do anything to overcome these other than by asking for aid. They also imply that such circumstances are the key defining feature of who the children are “A Mutilated Sierra Leonean Boy” “The boy who watched his mother buried alive”. They are not untrue but they are incorrect in that they are partial. They take one event or circumstance as pivotal to understanding the lives of these children. They also take one event in the life of one child as representing the lives of all children in the camp, or in similar circumstances. Not

only are they incomplete, they also take an exception and present it as the rule, ignoring other, possibly more relevant aspects of children's lives. Chansa could equally have been referred to as "the boy who walked out of school as he felt the level of teaching sub-standard" this would be equally true but gives a very different impression and invokes a different type of image.

### Children's Lives: Internal Representations and the Everyday

From my research it emerged that children's activities are varied but seem to fall into a distinct pattern; there is an element of routine to much of what they do and on the surface children's lives are not substantially different from in Congo. Children go to school, do chores and play games. Working is an important part of children's lives both in terms of their duty to do chores at home, and the ability to earn money. Both of these are affected by life in the camp as chores involve less or no agricultural work, and opportunities to earn money are limited for both adults and children. Play is another important part of children's lives and the social geography of the camp has had an impact here too, further the materials available to make toys are different. Nonetheless children take every opportunity to play and are extremely innovative (sometimes with the help of older siblings) in finding new ways of creating toys from the materials available.

I therefore decided to shoot my own video directed by the children to give them a voice in their representation to others. The video produced as a result comes mostly from the children with my own input being secondary.<sup>13</sup> The things they chose for me to film were the everyday activities of children: at work, at play and at school. These are the same issues which emerged as important from other aspects of my research (see Chapter Three).

One statement, "As life was in Congo, here it is the same." was repeated in various forms throughout all the commentaries stressing that life in the camp is not so different from life in Congo, that children's main activities follow the same pattern. There was no indication here or in my other research that experience of the war was central to defining who these children are, rather it is their daily activities and role in

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<sup>13</sup> I recognise however that the children were aware of my own priorities and this may have been a powerful influence, further, due to a combination of logistical constraints and the fact that the video was shot towards the end of my time in Zambia, the children were unable to have any involvement in its editing.

the community that defines who they are. Children do not dwell on the past but are more concerned with the present and the future, with getting food, gaining status in the community through their actions and returning to Congo where they can cultivate their fields once more.

If I remain true to the representation the children would wish to present of themselves I must also include the fact that they are very eager to be on the receiving end of aid. One group of children, when asked to write (in the form of a letter) what they wished people in England to know about them stated this openly, asking especially for clothes and shoes and this attitude was repeated elsewhere in similar statements. However children's attitude towards aid was not disempowering and was located in historical and traditional relationships of rights and obligations, of power and leadership. Distributions were seen as a right, one which was generally being inadequately upheld. One group in particular were very vocal about this stating over and over again: "you brought us here so you have to look after us".

#### Picturing the Past: What Relevance to the Present?

A central aspect of post-modernism in Anthropology is the recognition that any ethnography or representation is partial, (reflexivity is intended to combat this by demonstrating what is included and why). A degree of selectivity on the part of the ethnographer is always present and sometimes conscious and necessary but certain exclusions are more problematic than others. The drawings I present in the following section are an example of this. The issue is that they contrasted so heavily with the picture that I had gained from children through every other aspect of my research. The decision of whether or not to show them was ethically charged. The conclusions that one might draw from some drawings from two categories of pictures in particular, "Leaving Congo" and "Life in Congo", are in such total opposition to the conclusions I have drawn from the rest of my research that it seemed impossible to assimilate the two.

My concern was not primarily that it was ethically wrong to exclude them from this discussion, as something which might call my other conclusions into question. Rather my concern was that if I were to show these pictures that they might, in the viewer's

mind, grow out of proportion and outweigh the other issues and conclusions I talk about and therefore give an incorrect impression of these children's lives and preoccupations. This was compounded by the fact that other than setting the titles for the competition and relaying it to the schools administrator, I had no involvement with their production. I have no indication of how this may have been conveyed to the children by their teachers, or how the teachers may have influenced the children. I have had no discussions with the children to follow up why they drew the things they did. Many of the pictures are accompanied by commentaries which explain the picture but not necessarily why that subject was chosen.

When the reader looks at figs 16 and 17, two contrasting pictures both from the same category in the competition, which would stick in the mind? Which would be most shocking or significant to the reader? Given the context of my life and "Western" conceptions of childhood the violent ones as they were the ones I myself found most shocking and therefore felt the reader would too. But what I want to consider is which might the children most remember or find the most significant? Why did they draw them? (In order to give a better indication of these contrasts I have included some more examples at the end of this chapter.)



Fig 16 Life in Congo



Fig 17 Life in Congo



My activities did not focus directly on the war but just as the categories in this competition were open to this interpretation, I also included in my research other general discussions which could be related to the war, regarding life in Congo and the journey to the camp. I did not discourage the children from speaking on ANY topic that they chose. Yet violent experiences were almost never mentioned in any other context and the children did not show any signs of trauma.<sup>14</sup>

After more than eighteen months fieldwork with some of these children, I could not believe that these representations outweighed everything else that the children had communicated to me. So I continued to ask, why draw the pictures? However a better question may be *Why not?* I had been approaching these pictures from a biased point of view. I was shocked by what was depicted in them and I was wondering what a psychologist or therapist would make of them. In short I was seeing something pathological in them. I was pathologising the children's experiences and their reactions to them through my own reactions, and my reactions were a result of my own cultural values and experiences. These are values which assume that childhood should be innocent and carefree, yet even without the war this would not necessarily have been the reality for children's living in Congo (or elsewhere).

There is the assumption also that there must be lasting psychological effects of such negative experiences but such psychological issues are related to expectations of normality which are culturally determined (cf Scheper-Hughes 1987:2). Some studies suggest that 'young people brought up in communities which require them to be independent from an early age, such as nomadic pastoralists, respond to the challenges of conflict-induced displacement relatively well' (Hart 2002:6.1). Increasingly theorists question the assumption of trauma and rather consider resilience (*ibid*:7.3).

So why draw the pictures?

Children may have been influenced by stories they heard rather than what they had seen. This is borne out by the fact that several of the pictures were identical to each other and possibly traced from a book or from each other.

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<sup>14</sup> As I discussed earlier, I have no training in psychology which would assist in identifying trauma but to my knowledge the children showed none of the standard indicators (Eyber 2001:18-20 and Olujic 1998:318).



*Voici cette illustration montrant la vie que nous  
 menions au Congo. Etant civil, quand un  
 militaire te demande l'argent, Et vous refuser  
 en l'ayant dans la poche. Il se met à vous  
 fouetter, et vous ravir tout l'argent accompagné  
 de fouet.*

Fig. 18a Here is this picture which shows the life that we lived in Congo...  
 (secondary schoolboy 18)



Fig. 18b

They may have been influenced by teachers urging them to show the *muzungu* (white person) how horrific it was. However from conversations with children I am aware that some of them did witness death and destruction first hand, so this is not a comprehensive explanation. The explanation which makes most sense to me is simply that these drawings depict events which, although disturbing, have been assimilated by the children due to their experience, expectations and a cultural background of independence.

In spite of having experienced war, children in the camp, just as all over the world, have a romanticised idea about war and soldiers. These children's favourite films are war films and karate films, they play with guns that they make themselves with incredibly accurate detail, and many boys want to be soldiers when they grow up. Due to the generally high mortality rates, extended family and smallness of many communities, most children experience death much sooner and closer than in the western context and are therefore more able to assimilate it. Funerals are not carried out by professionals and so there is a closer association with death and a direct experience of dead bodies. Children explained to me what they do when a neighbour has suffered a bereavement. You need to go and visit them to "help them to cry".

I cannot offer any firm conclusion as to why these images were produced given my other findings, I have simply suggested several alternative explanations to the initial assumption of "trauma". I do not deny that trauma remains a possibility, but if it is treated as the *only* possibility then the mind is closed off to other issues of importance to children.

#### An Inclusive Focus

Reflecting on these issues whilst referring back to the initial three quotes from children regarding their experiences I return to the question of which can be considered to contain the most "truth"? Which is most representative of life in Kala refugee camp? The first quote evokes such an "everyday" image that it would be impossible, without being aware of the context, to situate it as a description of life in a refugee camp, yet it is the explanation of a drawing which depicts just that (see fig. 19). This discussion has demonstrated that this is indeed a correct representation of life in the camp where children work, play and go to school just as they always have done; they respect parents and elders but also misbehave and are punished.



Fig 19 Life in the Refugee Camp (primary schoolgirl)

The two linked quotes which come second, express the dissonance felt by the children living in such a different context. Children may still go to school but the schools are different, the houses they live in more temporary and aspects of life have changed; there are new regulations and people to enforce them. Once again the accuracy of this impression is upheld by my research as discussed here; the context of children's everyday lives has changed.

The third quote paints another very different picture of children's lives and the events and experiences which have taken place. Whilst again, the number of drawings depicting such events show these to be important experiences, they are of events in the past, events which do not seem to be a focus of children's thoughts or actions in the camp. So in answer to my questions all three descriptions are true but all are partial. None of them alone can give a representation of life in the camp as they all describe separately, what is in fact integrated in the lives of the children.

Whilst the final description evokes images closest to those most prominent in media representations and often in academic writings, it is in fact the one which was least evident in children's discussions of their lives. I do not, however, suggest it should be ignored. Just as notions of trauma and negative experiences should not be *assumed* in the study of children affected by war, neither is it intended that this study should be seen as representative of *all* children in similar contexts. What I have demonstrated here is simply the importance of not presuming anything, and to consider everyday aspects of children's "normal" lives as important even when working with children whose experiences have been more traumatic.

The spotlight can therefore be broadened to encompass more than one aspect of children's lives. Daily activities are not just the scenery or context, they are the locations in which children play out their lives and as such should not be cast into the shadows. In this thesis I concentrate the discussion on the normality and the differences caused by life in the camp. This is not a complete rejection of a focus on negative experiences but an acknowledgement that this alone can only provide a partial and distorted picture. My thesis is formulated to counterbalance such narrowly focused work, but also reflects the way that children in Kala talk about their lives.

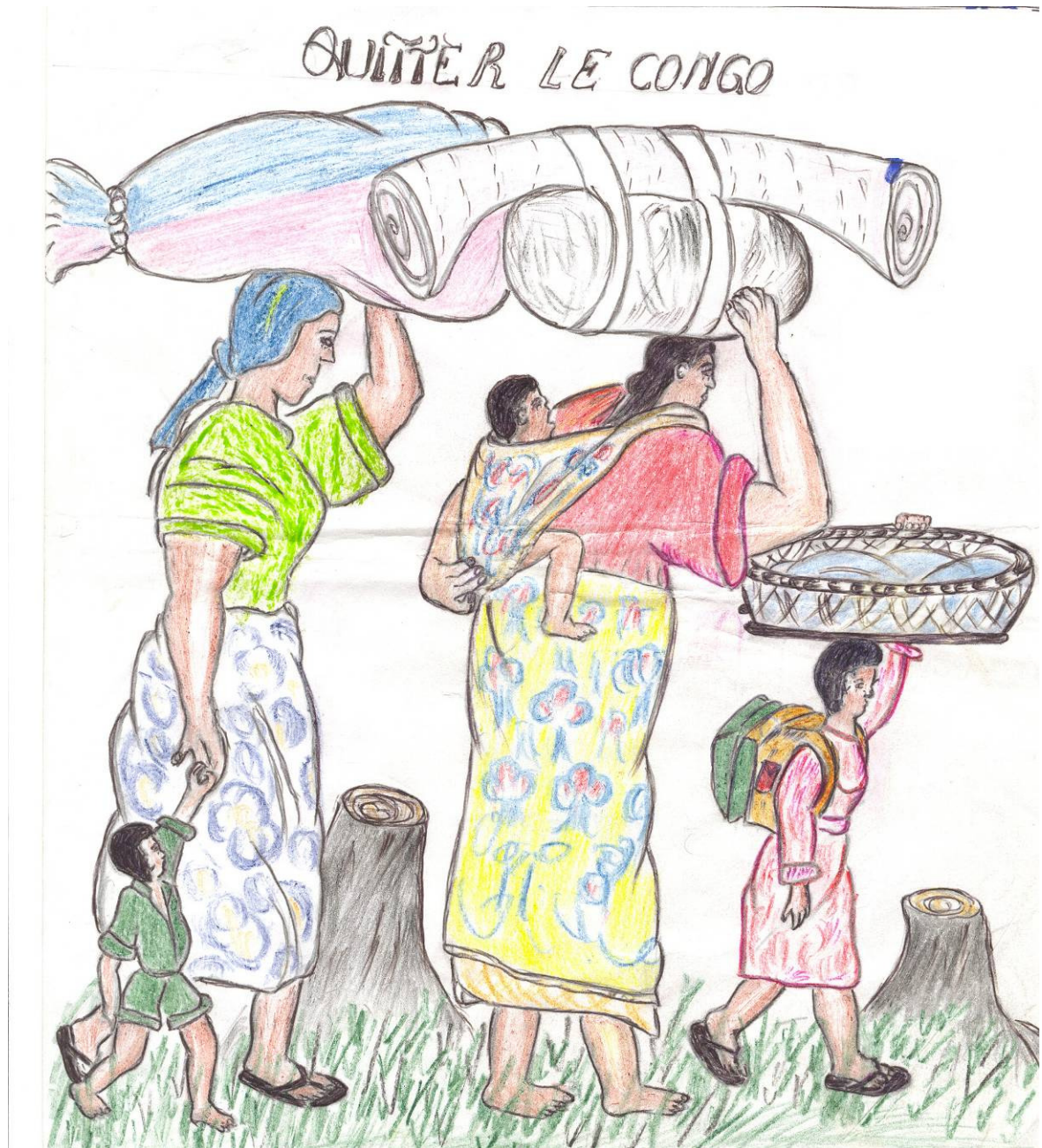


Fig 20 Leaving Congo



Fig 21 Leaving Congo





Fig 22 Leaving Congo



Fig 23 Leaving Congo

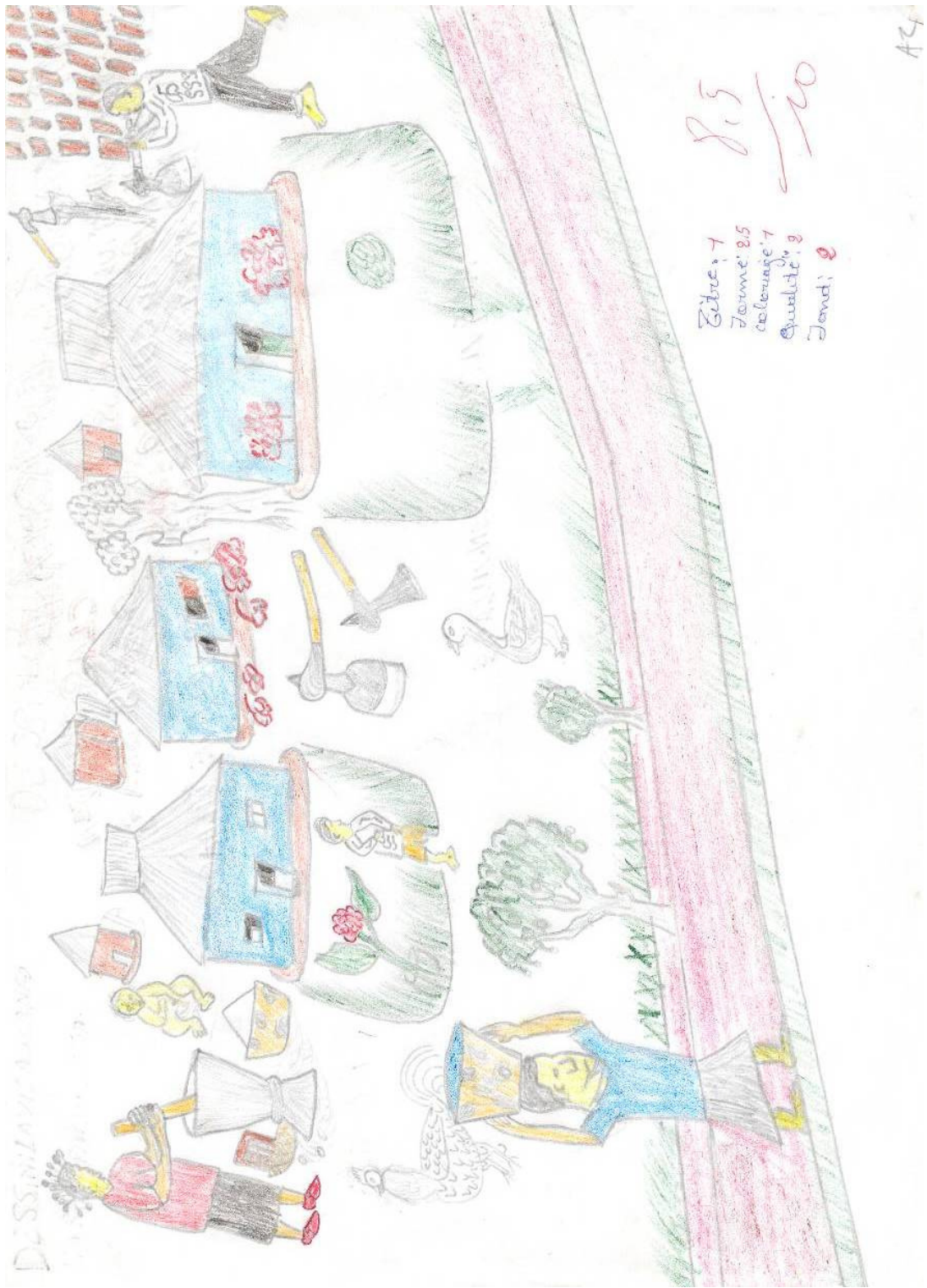


Fig 24 Life in Congo

2011  
19

# La Vie Au Congo

KAWAMBWA



Fig 25 Life in Congo

## Chapter Three

### **How Children “Operate” in Difficult Circumstances: Children’s Activities in Kala Refugee Camp.**

In the previous chapters I have discussed the research context and my interactions doing fieldwork in the camp. The following two chapters will discuss the information resulting from these in a relatively undigested form which will be elaborated and analysed in more depth in Chapters Six to Nine. I have chosen to organise these two chapters into children’s activities (this chapter) and their preoccupations (Chapter Four). This division is an over-simplification, it is meaningful only in the way I use it rather than in any inherent differences or distinctions that the children might make. Children’s activities *are* their preoccupations; the issues of importance to them are clearly linked to the things they do. By dividing them in this way we gain a clearer picture of their lives leading more logically towards the issues in the later chapters of the thesis. In this chapter the children’s descriptions and illustrations, are presented in order to evoke the children’s lives.

This chapter will play an important role in counteracting sensationalist media images of children as innocent victims. It addresses issues and events “from the perspective of children”, and considers the unchanged aspects of children’s lives. By discussing children’s everyday activities it will place emphasis on the normality and stress children’s agency thus counteracting images which emphasise change and lack of agency. In order to achieve this, the terminology used to shape and express the focus of my study was chosen carefully. At both the planning, research and writing phases I was conscious that terms would be paired with the word “children”, a loaded term. The other reason for taking care over vocabulary is that, in the situation of the refugee camp a label can have instant material significance in terms of how people are treated and what they might receive. These labels are both imposed by others (NGOs and UNHCR) and used by refugees who use them both instrumentally (and therefore usually temporarily) and to define themselves (see Chapter Eight).

I decided to discuss the way children “operate” in the camp, the intention being to describe children’s lives and activities without having a “problem” at the centre of analysis - a problem such as war, trauma or displacement. “*Coping*” with life in the camp might be a more obvious term to use but although coping is a positive and strong action it also carries with it connotations of a “victim”. There is the expectation of a negative event and the emphasis is on this, which further implies a reactionary situation. Likewise reacting, responding or adapting to life in the camp were rejected as they transform an actor into a *reactor* thus diminishing agency. The term “strategy” was also rejected as it implies a concrete and conscious response. Furthermore the above terms place their whole emphasis on change. Whilst this is obviously a central topic in this study, to talk of it in such terms would eclipse the other facet, that of continuity.

“Operate” maintains the sense of what I would be studying without falling into these two pitfalls and therefore reflects the priorities of my representation. The appropriateness emerged more clearly throughout the study as I observed that the children’s attitude and main preoccupation was simply getting on with everyday life; continuing to operate in a new context.

“Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances” is a label coined by professionals and academics to cover a range of children whose lives are considered not to conform to a “normal” childhood (whatever that may be) (c.f. Olujić 1998). Whilst the term might be easily applied to the children in this refugee camp, its application poses many questions. What is the meaning of difficult? Who decides that a child is in “difficult circumstances”? Which aspect of children’s lives are the ones they themselves find difficult and what do they perceive as the implications of this? I reject this categorization in my decision to focus on the ways children operate; their main activities and how they feel about these. The issues that they talk about (in Chapter Four) are also a good indication of aspects of their lives they consider problematic.

### **Children in the Camp**

According to UNHCR statistics, children make up about 50% of the camp population. This figure is for those aged 18 or under which does not take into account the local

definition of what it is to be a child. There are several terms (in Swahili, Bemba and other languages) denoting the different stages of childhood but adulthood is attained by having children yourself, or by getting married, thus leaving childhood. Although this definition implies that one can remain a child indefinitely, cultural expectations link it to chronological age; it is expected that one will have children by a certain age and therefore become an adult by that age. This broader definition of childhood may render official statistics inaccurate.

When talking about children and their activities, ‘we necessarily implicate adults who themselves construct childhood in different ways. We cannot isolate children from their social experience with adults nor the particular places in which these social relationships occur’ (Sibley 1995:137). Culturally children are very important to the refugees and the children themselves are aware of this. They found it very difficult to imagine a life without children and would find this very negative. Children’s idea of their importance often revolves around the practical but children also told me that children are “the joy that there is in life”. So their value is not entirely in their labour.

There are other reasons for the importance given to children: one is to repopulate a country whose population is seen by the refugees to have been decimated by the war, another is to have another name on the ration card. However considering the size of many families prior to their arrival in the camp it can be seen that these may simply be new justifications for existing ideas and practices. The reason for the perceived need for justification is rooted in the refugees’ mistrust of Camp administrators and their association with Americans who they blame for the war. They see attempts to introduce family planning as attempts to reduce the population of Congo.

### Children’s Experiences

It cannot be denied that some children in the camp have undergone traumatic experiences, there are also children who have experienced loss and grief in a more “everyday” form. My experiences with children, however, indicate that such occurrences are neither commonplace, nor an overriding preoccupation, (as discussed in Chapter Two). When children drew a timeline of their whole lives, depicting important events the war was not mentioned. For most of the children, life as a

refugee is about trying to establish as much normalcy as possible. For many an overriding concern in the camp is obtaining an education or working to earn money.

## Children's Activities

Many of the exercises I carried out with the children concerned their activities. They included drawing time lines and from these compiling a list of activities which were then ranked and rated; giving the children cameras to photograph “children’s activities”; holding a drawing competition in the school<sup>1</sup> and many others. The predominance of this topic was firstly because it was straightforward; a concrete topic which the children could discuss in a straightforward manner, and also methodologically straightforward in terms of the activities I could use to gather data and promote discussion. Secondly because, through talking to the children about their activities, I could find out about their lives, make comparisons with them about their lives in the camp compared to their lives in Congo and through this discover their attitudes to their experiences.

Through asking the children to draw a timeline of a typical day and then discussing this with them I was able to get a picture of daily life for these children and also to see how this would differ between children who did/did not go to school. They also drew a comparative timeline for their life in Congo providing a way of exploring changes. For a typical day for a child in the camp see Fig. 26.



Fig 26 Timeline: a day in the camp.

Wake up, get dressed, sweep, cook breakfast, wash the dishes, fetch water...

<sup>1</sup> This included categories of, for the younger children: My home, My family, My favourite activity. For the older children: Life in the camp, Life in Congo, Leaving Congo.



The above drawing was done by a boy aged 12 who goes to school and who had, at the time, lived in the camp for 18 months. As we can see, a great deal of emphasis is put on chores both inside and outside of the home. From the timelines of other children and from other activities this emerged as a general pattern, whether the child was school-going or not. The main differences are that the type of chores expected of a child differ according to their age and gender (gender differences increased with age).

Emerging from the timeline activity, the children produced drawings of each activity or a symbol representing it (including other activities not on the timelines). They then used these to rank the activities in terms of their importance. Once again work activities emerged as more important, although with some play activities mixed in. In a further exercise, groups of children were given a camera and asked to take photographs of children's activities. Fig. 27 shows the resulting pictures for one of the groups.

More of the pictures are of play rather than work activities, contradicting observations and conclusions made elsewhere, that work dominates play in both time and importance. This is probably a result of one of the following reasons, either I failed to fully appreciate the amount of play in the camp as I left each night at 4.30pm or work activities were felt by the children to be less interesting to photograph. This could also be a result of the problems of translating "activity" described later. Alternatively it may be that while other people were working the children in the research groups were also doing chores and were therefore unable to take photos of them.

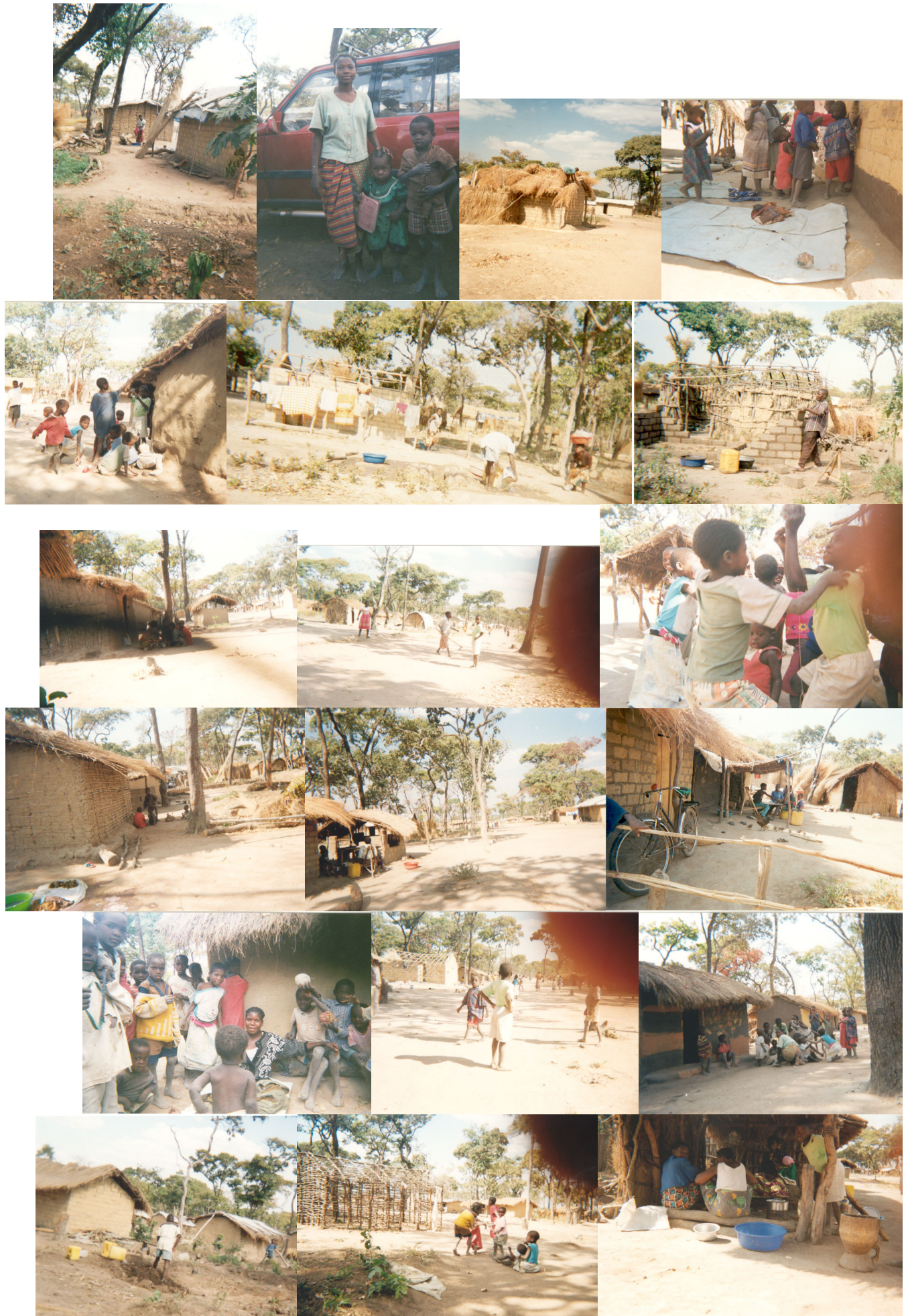


Fig 27 Children's activities.

I have tried to retain the balance in this study between work and play as studies of children from the majority world often concentrate on work and this ‘has led to an obfuscation of more ordinary everyday aspects of majority world children’s childhoods’ (Punch 2003:281). From my research it emerged that children’s activities are varied but seem to fall into a distinct pattern, there is an element of routine to some of what they do. Children’s activities are varied but can be broadly classified as work, school and play. If these activities can be taken as an indication, children’s lives are not substantially different from in Congo. This is indeed a point made often by one group of older children, quoted substantially in the following passages.

This group of children (aged 16-19) worked with me on the project of making a documentary film about children’s lives in the camp, the film I decided to make in reaction the documentary discussed in Chapter Two. The planning and direction was all done by the children within the broad heading of ‘Life in the Camp’ and I was “cameraman”. Of course it was not this simple, they were aware of many of my interests before hand and this no doubt affected the things we did, furthermore, as cameraman I was constantly there, able to start filming whenever I wished, able to interject in the interviews and to ask them to ask other questions on my behalf. Furthermore, all of the attitudes towards me as discussed in Chapter One were in play.

On the other hand this was a group of well educated young people who did not hesitate to correct me or educate me when they thought I was wrong, or to question me about many issues. For this reason I am confident that they also had their own priorities and agenda which they wanted to present using the film. This is demonstrated in the fact that so much time was spent on footage of people making bricks when this was one of the key activities for boys of their age. The fact that the one girl who was part of this group was often unable to come with us as she had work to do at home whereas the boys generally were more flexible is instructive in itself as well as a warning as to the possible male bias of the film.

I have quoted excerpts from their commentary on the video in this chapter and through out, these are designated by “film”. They are talking off the cuff in their third language (French) it is for this reason that their speech is somewhat stilted in spite of

their excellent command of the language. I have chosen to represent it exactly the thesis to avoid imposing an extra level of interpretation.

### **School, Work and Play**

The following discussion describes children's activities divided under the headings School, Work and Play. The divisions are not straightforward as '[i]t is notoriously difficult to define 'play' and 'work' because they include a wide range of activities and are concepts which are both socially and culturally constructed' (Punch 2003:278), Work is more readily associated with 'majority world' childhoods and play with minority world (*ibid*:278). Further, work and play are not necessarily distinct and some activities can combine elements of the two, likewise at times they can be taking place simultaneously (Katz 1991:503). In spite of the fact that in many studies work and school are counterposed (James and Prout 1997d:227), both work and play have educational or learning elements thus the separation of schooling may also be inappropriate. Play 'involves learning through activities that are enjoyable, often self motivated and all-absorbing. It is both autonomous and social' (Smith 2000:79) however for the purpose of this discussion I have taken a simplistic approach to dividing these activities for ease of description.

#### School

Going to school establishes a daily routine similar to that of Congo and is part of a reassertion of normality at play in Kala. 'The importance attached to schooling is due not simply to the beliefs about the value of education itself but also to a conviction about the role that school plays in offering children a sense of protection, normality and routine when all around is chaos' (Hart 2002:6.2). However, there are also ways in which schooling in the camp creates more difference than normality. The fact that teachers are paid, that schooling is free, and the limited post primary options are all contributing factors.

Schooling in the camp is free to everyone, it is heavily promoted and the aim is to have all children of school age in primary education for the above reasons but also because it is one of the programmes which contribute to a Worldwide Development Aim regarding Literacy and is an easily quantifiable activity that the UN and other

NGOs can use to justify funding. For this reason UNHCR funds Primary Education but not Secondary Education (although post-Secondary is funded!). The schools in the camp are run according to the Congolese education system and the language of education is French with some Swahili. Primary school pupils are at school for a half day, and another school with another set of pupils with different teachers and a different headmaster has the building for the other half of the day. This is alternated weekly so that pupils who are at school in the morning one week will be at school in the afternoon the next.

Although Secondary Education is not covered by UNHCR funding provision, and there are therefore no salaries available for the teachers, the teachers facilitated by the education co-ordinator had decided among themselves to split the wages for primary teachers equally between primary and secondary teachers. This had been approved by UNHCR. Prior to this there was a system whereby pupils would bring some of their food ration as payment. This scheme was ended during a period of half rations in favour of salary sharing. With this exception, education is completely free in the camp with all books and materials provided as the Education Co-ordinator from World Vision would also provide materials for the Secondary school from within the general budget. (Secondary education is still limited, by lack of specialist materials and lack of qualified teachers among the refugees.)

Attitudes towards schooling have changed considerably among people in the camp, particularly people from rural areas. One of the reasons for this is that regular income in the camp is only available to those with a high level of education such as teachers and nurses. I believe that this had an even higher impact on attitudes, although not necessarily on uptake, than the fact that schooling is free. Whilst the greater number of pupils attending school may be accounted for by people who were previously unable to afford it, this does not demonstrate a change in attitude. Women attending literacy classes, and the number of children from families who previously saw no value in schooling (or schooling above a certain level) are a better indication of this.

One teacher who had also taught in Congo described to me the difference in attitude he saw from his pupils and their parents. In Congo, education was considered useless, pupils considered themselves above teachers due to their ability to earn more from

fishing than the teacher did, and would openly mock them. Their only interest in school was learning enough to get by in their trade, just basic reading and mathematics. This teacher, as many others, did not get a wage and lived by taking his pupils to labour in his fields and making them bring contributions as school fees. In the camp he noticed that it was more like in the colonial times and people were again coming to see the importance of education. Education is now considered valuable; people see the teachers (one of the few groups able to find regular paid work) who receive a salary and who get respect from the community and are deciding that maybe they, or their children, should go to school so they can get similar benefits.



Fig 28 Mother is Pounding, Father shouts at her because the children have not been to school (primary schoolgirl 11)

This is also reflected in the fact that many children wish to be teachers when they grow up. This was described by parents as a new phenomenon where previously they wished to be soldiers or fishermen (these still featured as desirable professions). The section of the drawing competition “my favourite activity” was interpreted by some as

“my favourite work” and thus produced the following pictures of “What I want to do when I grow up”.



Fig. 29 I will be a teacher (primary schoolboy)



Fig 30 Kalonda (primary schoolgirl 15)  
I like to study as studies are very important. In my life I also will be a teacher, I will be president, whatever it takes I will be a teacher.

In the camp children are generally very appreciative of the opportunity to go to school, this may be because it gives them to opportunity to meet up with friends and play (as in Punch 2003:289) but my experience elsewhere in Africa has demonstrated that children’s attitudes to school were very different to what is often found in the UK for example. This is also the case in the camp where education is considered a privilege. Although it is a “right” in the camp, it wasn’t in Congo and is therefore treated as an opportunity to be taken advantage of rather than taken for granted or seen as an obligation. This, however, is an attitude which cannot be taken as universal.

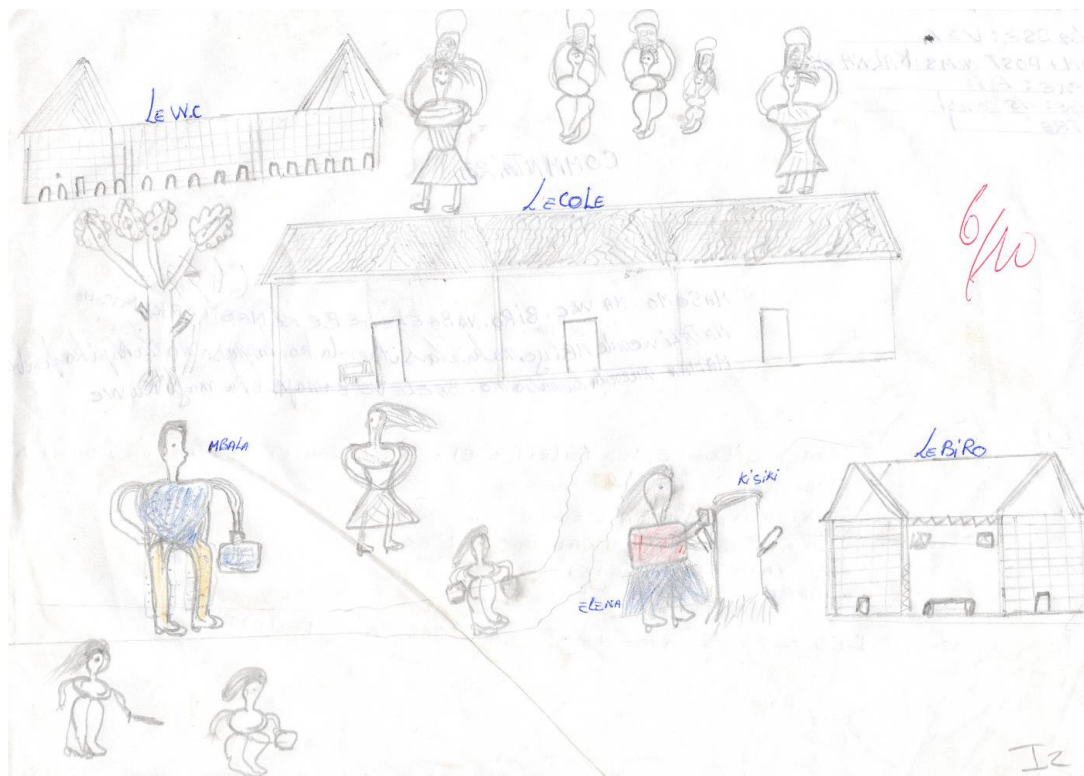


Fig. 31  
 Here is the school, the toilets, the office and the pupils go to school  
 Natalie go quickly to school. I refuse, I won't go to school. I'm going to whip you.  
 Mother I will go to school.  
 The pupils take water to the toilets. (primary schoolgirl 15)

Older boys who had previously had little or no schooling (such as those in my group D) preferred to spend the day playing or watching football, or going to the cinema.



Even school-going children would take time off if there was paid work available. Some children chose not to go to school at all in favour of earning as much money as opportunity allowed, often a necessity rather than a choice, and older girls often stayed home to carry out domestic work especially if they married.

In school the classrooms were often full to over-flowing. Some of the more recently built schools had brick buildings with concrete floors and tin roofs. Others were mud plastered over a wooden frame with mud floors, thatched roofs and no windows. The desks and benches were fixed to the floor and in most classes children sat squashed 3 or 4 to a desk. One of the biggest problems for the teachers was the wide range of ages in the lower classes. Often older children who had not previously attended school would drop out rather than have children up to 10 years younger than them in higher grades, or in the same class progressing faster than they did. This was made worse by the fact that children who failed to pass the year were on show to the whole school and parents at prize giving. The teachers told me that this was deliberate to “humiliate them into doing better”. Some boys in one of my groups avoided this by going to the adult literacy classes thus gaining basic skills.

### Work

As I stated in the previous chapter, my intention is not to pathologise children’s lives and will therefore be challenging the theoretical writing and policy regarding children’s work which until recently approached the subject from the perspective of the harm that it causes. This, as with most other work regarding children, has its roots in the history of the West. ‘Internationally child labour is cast as a blight, an illness, or a snag in an otherwise healthy capitalist world order’ (Levine 1999:141). In the past there has been a clash between Western ideas of what childhood should be (‘children should play and study but not work’ (Punch 2003:277)) and the realities of many children’s lives, especially in the “Third World” ‘rendering deviant or criminal much of working class life and many children’s everyday activities’ (James and Prout 1997b:4).

Other research has addressed children’s work solely from an adult and functionalist perspective categorizing it as “socialization, education, training, and play” (Nieuwenhuys 1996:237), in anthropology especially, the focus has been on

socialization. This follows a pattern of thought which ignores the value of children's work both to communities and to children themselves in the present, and instead focuses on the future, the time when children will become adults and therefore "full" members of the community.

My research therefore contributes to the growing body of literature demonstrating that the importance is in realising that for children to work 'is not necessarily detrimental' (Punch 2003:279) and that there is more to children's work than their exploitation (cf. Levine 1999, Katz 1991). This has emerged as children's own points of view have been taken into account. In my fieldwork the importance of work in children's lives was repeatedly revealed through many research activities and the discussions surrounding them. The timelines children drew of their daily lives (discussed above) revealed just how much time children spent doing chores. But it was the discussions which revealed more fully their attitudes towards work as a positive experience.

I will not be using the phrase "Child Labour" in this thesis as it evokes images of suffering, of factory work, children in the mills and down coal mines. Negative attitudes to children's work are often rooted in assumptions that children's status is passive and dependent (Nieuwenhuys 1996:238). This attitude denies children's capacity to fulfil both a valuable and necessary role in the community and in doing so to gain status; as occurs in many non Western contexts. '[T]he opportunity to engage in some form of employment may offer stability and a means to enhance self esteem in the midst of great uncertainty' (Hart 2002:6.4).

I became aware that my interpreter was using *kazi* (work) when I used *activité* she explained that there was no word for activity in Swahili. This is significant in itself and although it may have skewed interpretations, children, whether school-going or not, have many work activities that they expect and are expected to perform and this is important for them in establishing their role in the community. Work activities generally start at a very young age with children imitating or assisting their mother or older siblings.

On an average day children will get up, do their chores, go to school in the afternoon and play in the evening. If they are at school in the morning they do some chores

before leaving for school and others in the afternoon. Children's chores include sweeping the house and the plot, preparing food, cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, ironing, fetching firewood, helping to make charcoal, helping in the fields, pounding, taking grain to the hammer mill, going to the market, looking after younger siblings, looking after elderly relatives, drawing and transporting water and going to food distribution. Chores depend on the child's age and the number of siblings they have. There don't seem to be substantial changes from life in Congo.

Anyway the life, the activities of children is not different from that of Congo. As usual children get up in the morning and start to sweep so that the plot should be clean. This is also the life of children therefore they have had this education starting from at home. Their parents teach them or even instruct them that they should be a bit clean and then also that they can also maintain the plot in a good condition. That is children's habit, there is no big change. As life was in Congo, here it is the same.

The mother scolds her daughter as the girl has not done her chores. She dared to go out walking before doing what she had to at home. So the mother is furious and this is why she is scolding her daughter (film).

There is a difference between chores done by girls and boys but these only become marked as they get older or get married. The following suggests that this may be because of the lack of agricultural tasks. I explained that if I got married I would expect my husband to share chores and gave the example of my sister, who hates vacuuming (I explained this as sweeping) so her husband does this and she looks after the garden. Kisimba's response (Aged 12 Group C) was that if she was his wife he would have to beat her... a lot. (I never saw men sweep in the camp which might explain the reaction but then again I rarely saw men cook or fetch water or wash clothes....).

In Congo the most important work activities involved working in the fields. Many refugees were from rural areas relying solely on subsistence but even refugees from urban areas had fields in their villages which they cultivated for food. In some cases people continued to cultivate in the camp but to a much lesser extent as the plots for farming were much smaller than those in the village and available only to a minority of families. Those without a field would grow a few vegetables on the small plot the house was built on. In the camp when children talked about work activities it was

more likely to be in the home, sweeping, or cooking. In spite of the fact that superficially such activities seem to be equivalent to chores in Congo, the differences were held to be very important such as the time it takes to do chores, the difference in preparing different foods. There are also new chores associated with receiving food such as the very time consuming queuing or the constant need to peel peas; “Life in the camp, it’s just peeling peas” (Group B).

The work that is done in order to have food has been replaced in the camp. Rather than ploughing, sowing, tending and harvesting, the work that must be done is queuing, transporting, exchanging and preparing. Living in the camp is denying children the opportunity to ‘acquire and use agricultural knowledge in the course of their everyday lives’ (Katz 1991:508). Children are ‘not being prepared for the world they are likely to face as adults’ (*ibid.*:509) (or as older children) if they return to Congo and their family recommences agricultural activities. In addition to this, in order to receive there is the need to conform to the category of “refugee”: to be registered and counted and to live according to a certain set of rules and practices.

The children’s film confirmed and illustrated the strong sense of responsibility which children in the camp have in terms of the chores they must perform. It further demonstrated the way that such activities contribute to children’s status.

When they have money they will give some of it to their parents to buy small-fry and things like that.

There is a contribution before matriculation [at Secondary school]. ...the straw, the sticks and the cord are for this building here. They are trying to add other classrooms as so many more pupils come each year. The other buildings are wooden but this time they added a brick building. All this from the labours of the pupils (film).

Having grown up in an environment where work was something to be avoided where possible even whilst accepting that it had to be done, these children’s attitude to their chores surprised me. I was trying to find out their least favourite chore and I asked: if there was one activity that they could get out of doing what would it be? Reply: “They are all important activities and all are necessary”. I tried again. If you had a slave who

you could make do one thing instead of you having to do it what would you make them do? Puzzled looks.

They did not seem to understand the question or be able to answer it and I tried other ways to get the question across. I gave examples of my own least favourite activities and why I disliked them (ironing because it makes me too hot) but these examples were just met with a stunned silence. Children seemed shocked to think that there were chores that I would avoid.

On the other hand they do have a very clear idea of hierarchy in terms of who should be doing which chores. You can ask anyone younger than you to do things if you are able, therefore they as children do many chores. The only time I saw an example of children as a group objecting to work imposed by adults was when they were asked to work at the schools as part of the consideration for matriculating the following year. They had to contribute to the construction of primary school buildings by making and carrying bricks and gathering other materials. The children's attitudes to this may stem partially from their parents attitudes as their parents were very resentful. What parents seemed to resent was not that the children were working, but that they were not getting paid for this work. They mistrusted the teachers which led to rumours that the teachers were selling the fruits of the children's labour and they therefore felt that they should be getting a share of this money. There was little evidence as to whether this was true but there was definite evidence that school buildings, for which there was no budget, were being built from these bricks and hay.

Children also work to earn money; the ability to earn money was important in the camp especially as it was so much more difficult. The kinds of activities children can do are varied according to age. In Congo many of these activities revolved around agriculture or fishing. One boy described his activities helping his uncle with the goats for which he might receive a new outfit for school; other boys would fish and sell their catch. Girls might help out at a market stall selling excess produce in return for a share in the proceeds. Children also had a role in providing food for the family outside of tending the fields. They would fish or hunt, or collect wild fruits to eat or sell.

Many children remarked on the lack of game in Zambia where there is almost no wildlife outside of the game reserves. Even rats are much harder to come by because the refugees do not own land. One mother described to me how good a rat catcher her eldest son was “he would often come home with enough meat for us all to have for supper, but here he does not even bother to go hunting there is not much chance of catching even one rat”<sup>1</sup>.

There is also a lack of the small birds which younger boys can hunt with their catapults. These are both activities which ‘straddle[] the line between play and work’ (Katz 1991:498). As the possibility for such activities is lacking, so too is the freedom and enjoyment which goes along with them. One area in which children were able to continue in their food production was in gathering wild foods such as mushrooms and wild onions. Children will often gather these to sell, especially mushrooms which are plentiful for a few days of the year but soon gone. The ones considered the best only grow at the very beginning of the rainy season. These can be used as a different relish, or sold in the market. Generally considered too ‘trivial’ for adults such activities give children an enjoyable opportunity to contribute. Children tend to leave the camp in small groups, only occasionally accompanied by an adult, so the time spent gathering mushrooms is also freedom time away from the camp and other chores (Katz 1991:499). The enjoyment is, however, balanced by the fact that (given that it is the rainy season) there is the risk of rain and they may have to walk long distances.

The easiest way for children to earn money in the camp is to sell such wild foods. But children do find other ways, they sell sweets or paraffin around the camp but for this they need capital. I was often asked by children who knew me to buy large bags of sweets or a litre of paraffin in Kawambwa where it was cheaper than in the camp and they could then sell it on piecemeal for a profit. Without me these children would have simply made the 60km round trip by bicycle to buy the goods themselves. I asked Kisimba (Group C) what he would do with the profit from selling paraffin and he said buy some clothes for himself and maybe a dress for his baby sister.

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike the popular advertising campaign in the UK leads us to believe, rats are a normal food source not one turned to in times of starvation.

Children could also earn money by buying *njেকে* (peas) after food distribution on behalf of a Tanzanian businessman who would sell them at a profit in Tanzania. It was easy for him to make a profit as peas were very unpopular in the camp and therefore worth very little to the refugees. Children would buy quantities from different people and be given a slight commission. For the smaller children food distribution days also presented the opportunity to scavenge for individual pieces of dropped grain or meal to exchange in the market for fritters or bread.

More formal employment could be gained from the Zambians who employed the refugees to do piece-work but were initially notorious for cheating them or paying very badly. Very often payment was in kind, in the form of sweet potatoes or (preferably) cassava which could then be either consumed by the family or sold at the market. In the dry season older boys were employed in the camp to construct houses and Mupenda (17) used this as a way to save money during the school holidays to support himself when he went back to school.

They have taken the initiative to manage so they are making bricks, it is a contract. They have seen that as life here is difficult, they saw that they could also make the effort to get a bit of money. They are pupils they do not have clothes. Now, so that they can have clothes they are going to work so that they can buy clothes (film).

Some of the older girls might do knitting to earn some money, or sell things at the market, but there was little else for girls to do without leaving the camp. One of the ways for girls to earn money was through formal or informal prostitution. By informal I mean that a woman or girl who wanted to get some *chisense* (dried fish) as a bit of variety of relish could sleep with a man who sold fish in the market in exchange for a *chicopo* (a measure). Girls “could start to have sex to get a small amount of money to buy clothes because life is difficult” (Kiwele secondary schoolgirl). Alternatively a long-term relationship might be formed with a man in a paid job in which case clothes and gifts would be bought for her as well as food. This was especially effective for children as men could also be threatened with the gender committee and made to pay compensation for sleeping with children.

In Congo, relationships between boys and girls proceeded in terms of the boys’ ability to provide clothing and food, but in the camp the situation is somewhat distorted by

the context. Boys find it harder to get money or possessions which might attract a girl to them. People in paid work can easily keep several wives or girlfriends but these are the minority. On the other hand needs are so much more pronounced that it takes less to gain a girlfriend or wife. In the camp where basic food rations are provided by WFP two people can support themselves with much lower incomes. Likewise *lobola* (brideprice) is much less than in Congo as the poorer people in the camp are struggling to have even adequate blankets or food utensils. Thus whilst these things may be more expensive, fewer gifts are needed. The result is a decrease in the age at which marriage takes place.

### Play

Whilst categorisations of play as educational (cf Mills and Mills 2000) are important in their recognition of play as an important aspect of child development, and of the child as autonomous and central to their own games, thus combating the trivialisation of play which ‘has often been typified as irrational, trivial, non-productive and decidedly something other than work’ (Goldman 1998:xv). However, I criticise this for addressing play and other children’s activities in functionalist terms which place children in the category of “adults in the making”. The value found in such activities is therefore only in turning the child into a person who will be a better adult member of society. Rather than assessing the role play has for the children, it asks what role play has for society. Whilst I am aware of the dangers inherent in viewing children as a sub-culture, separate from their wider society, I also feel that weight must be given to the children’s own interpretations of what they do.

Phrases such as “play is for children what work is for adults” (Smith 2000:80) see also Goldman 1998:xv), whilst helping to combat the trivialisation of play, only move us further away from the meaning that play has for the children themselves. It is especially unhelpful in a context such as this where *work* is for children what *work* is for adults. Surely the most important distinction that should be drawn here is in terms of the reasons children have for these two distinct categories of activity. ‘When asked, the school children indicated that playing was what they mainly did to enjoy themselves’ (Punch 2003:286 my emphasis). Thus here play signifies ‘voluntary and pleasurable activities which have no extrinsic goals’ (*ibid.*:278).



It is true that play may be ‘how children come to construct, experience and implement their models of the world’ (Goldman 1998:xvi) and equating play with work or with learning and socialization is certainly important when addressing the adult’s attitudes to play such as in Katz’s discussion of Howa children (1991:504): ‘When play and work are separated, play becomes trivialized as “childish” activity in the eyes of adults’ (*ibid*:509). For the children, however, I felt there was a distinction between these things. Work is an activity which defines children’s roles but this is an activity which comes from outside.

In the camp, children are educated to work by adults (or older children), people from outside their own category. They are educated into play by peers. Children *want* to do and enjoy play activities, and dodged obligations and manipulated situations in order to be able to play. Goldman’s assertion that ‘play is the predominant activity of early childhood’ (1998:4) is true, but it is important to bear in mind that children in Kala camp are required to perform work activities and therefore play time is gradually eaten into by work. This period of ‘early childhood’ may therefore end sooner than in other contexts, demonstrating that different work activities can ‘affect the ‘social age of children’ (James and Prout 1997:4 citing Solberg).

Organised activities available to children outside of school are limited. There is the junior branch of the Red Cross which is run on a fairly military style system of standing to attention, saluting and marching. The juniors are 12-18 year olds and although there are some girls in this group, it is made up primarily of boys. The children learn about diseases and simple first aid. Some of this is done through a system of songs, actions and sketches about, for example, malaria. There is a strict hierarchy within the juniors, some youths have a position of authority over others in the group.

Right to Play, an NGO, run programmes in the camp to encourage play and to teach adults of the community the value of play for children. These include providing facilities and training for the teachers to do more sports activities in the schools and teaching them about the role of sports and play in child development. The Catholic Church also organised a summer school called *Plein de Jeu* to help entertain children during the summer holidays.

The main obstacles to play in Kala are the lack of materials and of places to play. The *espaces neutres* are heavily contested between groups of children and adults. Hodi did try to create more formal play spaces for children by installing see-saws and slides but these all broke before they were even a day old due to the inexperience of the children, the range of age groups wishing to use them and the number of children competing to play on them.

Children's play activities vary according to their age and sex. In this discussion of play I will address toys and games separately for simplicity, though they are integral to each other. Toys are for playing (games) with and many games require toys or equipment. Most toys in the camp are homemade involving considerable skill. In addition, the kinds of materials needed are more difficult to find than in Congo, and others are not available at all. Toys are usually made by children or their older siblings. The materials used in the construction of such toys come from what others discard, or from natural sources.

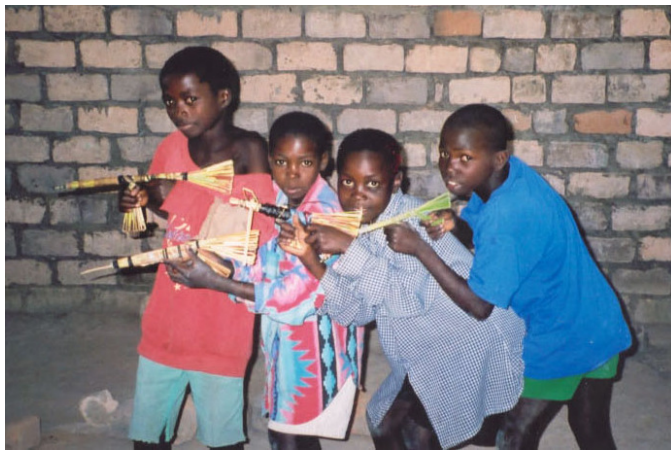
The most common toys seen in the camp are the footballs used mostly by the boys. These are made from balls of rags bound tightly then wrapped in plastic (usually from plastic bags) and then bound round and round with string (from food sacks or wool from old clothes, usually many scraps tied together which may be a mixture of both). The best balls include another component which one hopes is not discarded after use but rather misappropriated new. This is the condom readily distributed by health workers and other anti-AIDS projects. "They blew up the condom, then got thread and wound it over the condom, then wrapped it in carrier bags. Then they put the cloth on the outside and sewed it up" (film).

Condoms are a much sought after commodity in the camp, not only by children; men also use them to replace faulty valves on their bicycle inner tubes. Children occasionally exchange their cry of *mpelenico ichicopo* (give me a container/empty can) whenever they saw someone perceived as able to give, with *mpelenico macondomi*. Children also call balloons (sometimes given out during celebrations)

*macondomi* as they fulfil the same function although are of a lower and less durable quality in children's eyes.<sup>2</sup>

From my own experience and conversations in the camp I am relatively confident that the ease with which children get their hands on condoms is a reflection of the attitude towards HIV, its existence, transmission, source, and the fact that Catholic groups employed to run HIV/AIDS prevention workshops in the camp taught that condoms have pores large enough to allow the HIV virus to pass through. Just how coveted condoms are by children is demonstrated by the seven year old boy who attempted suicide after arguing with a friend over one.<sup>3</sup>

Other toys to be made are guns made from straw and string, (Fig. 32)



hats made from leaves and straw, glasses made from straw and a whistle from straw and plastic, (Fig. 33)



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<sup>2</sup> On a serious note it is hoped that as much effort is going into educating people into the proper use and disposal of condoms as to their distribution or the rate of transmission of HIV and other STD's to children could be serious.

<sup>3</sup> This is obviously a serious event and demonstrates more than simply the importance of condoms.

dolls made from clay or cloth, (Fig. 34)



models of cameras (Fig 35), cars or animals made from clay.



Fig. 35 These children followed me and my team when we were shooting the film and everytime I turned around they “took my picture”. So I took theirs.

Kites made from plastic bags, sticks and string, draught boards from cardboard using bottle tops as counters. Wool for young girls to practice knitting or crochet is obtained from unravelling old jumpers (and needles from straw or wire). Almost any container upended can become a drum to be beaten while others dance.

Cars are a popular toy and are made from any material available. Clay lorries can be made to articulate using sticks or straw, a bus made from straw has seats, a steering wheel and other features.



Fig. 36 This boy's father helped him to make the motorbike. The stick underneath at the back bumps against rungs between the 2 pieces of foam that make up the back wheel (from old *tropicals* (flip-flops)) this stick is tied to rest against the empty plastic bottle (in yellow) which amplifies the vibrations thus as the boy pushes the motorbike along it makes a noise like a motorbike engine.

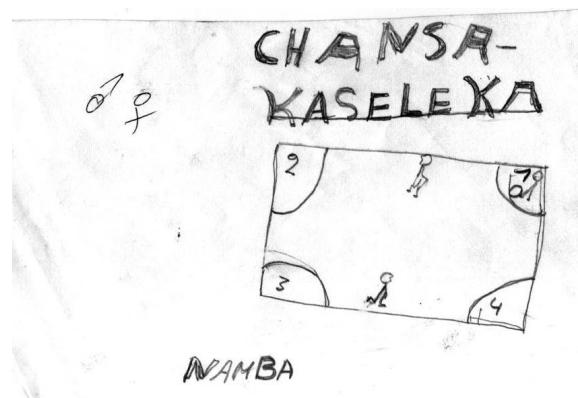
Less common toys are home made whip and tops and hoop and sticks from old bicycle wheels (Fig. 37).



## Games

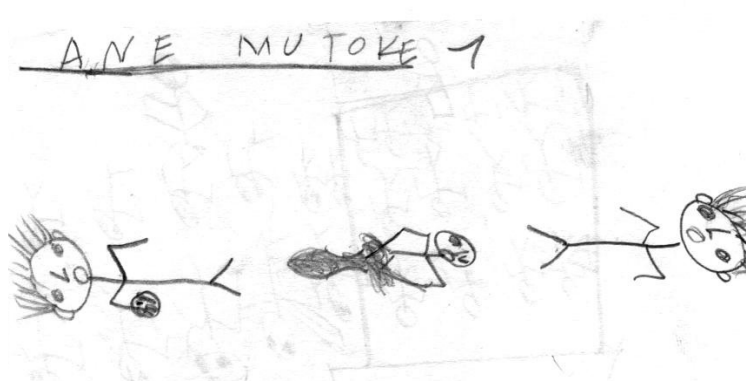
The children play a variety of games many of them involving a ball:

**Olo/Pusa**, (girls) The name for this game comes from *same* and *opposite*. Girls form two teams of three, one team is called *Olo*, the other *Pusa*. The teams line up facing each other. The first girl from each team (facing one another) start to play. They clap their hands and skip to a rhythm. On the final beat they must land with one foot forwards. If the girls land with their opposite feet forwards then the *opposite* team has won, if the same foot is forwards then the *same* team wins. Whichever girl won plays the next player from the other team. A team wins when the third player on the other side is beaten.

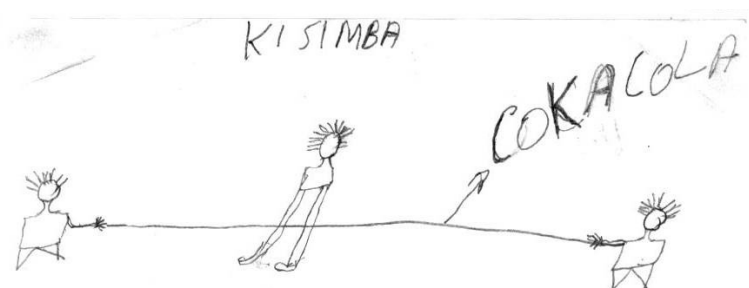


**Namba**, This game shares some characteristics with rounders but there are many differences. *Namba* is played with a ball but no other equipment. A pitch is marked out on the ground and the players are divided into two teams. Before starting they choose a score which must be reached before the game can be won. The “fielding” team choose a bowler and the other team all start from the same corner. The bowler throws the ball to a member of the other team, and he calls out this person’s name they must then kick it as far as possible and, whilst the fielders are chasing it, the whole team runs around the grid at their own pace as far as they can go. For each side of the square they complete they count one. This continues until one member of the team wins by successfully reaching the number of runs specified at the start (80 in the game I watched), or if all the team is out.

Someone can go out in a variety of ways: by failing to kick the ball when the “bowler” throws it to them, by kicking the ball when the bowler has designated another player, if one of the fielders throws the ball and it hits them, or if the bowler asks them “*Namba?*” and they reply wrongly. *Namba* is the number of “runs” scored at any moment and the bowler (depending on his or her maths skills) can easily tell a wrong answer as the corner they are standing in will indicate whether it should be a multiple of four plus 0, 1, 2 or 3. *Namba* can be played by both girls and boys in mixed or single sex groups.

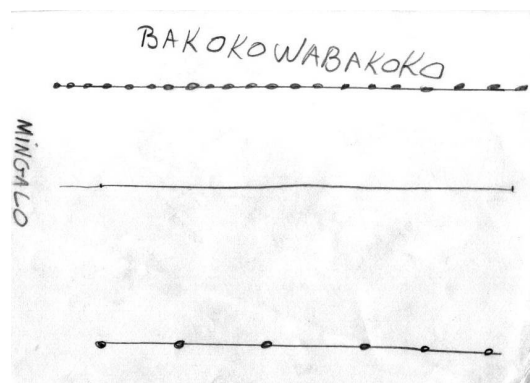


*Gogo* (girls), seemed, from the pictures, to be like piggy-in-the-middle, but it is rather a game where the two outer players must attempt to hit the girl in the middle with the ball (and they are not at all gentle). In the meantime she must try to fulfil a task before this can happen. The task may be passing a slipper around her legs 100 times, or filling a bottle with dust and then emptying it. As soon as she is hit by the ball she must swap with one of the other players.



*Kange* (girls), is quite like French skipping where 2 girls stand with a loop of wool passed around their legs and a third girl jumps over the string in a particular

combination of jumps depending on the rhyme she is reciting “coca, cola, fanta, mai” with the last word she must jump with 2 feet instead of one and then she passes to the next verse with a different combination of jumps, all the while the wool is moving steadily higher up her friends legs. If she makes a mistake she must give her place to one of the others and so it starts again.



**Mingalo** (boys) is a game played with bottle tops. These are laid out in a line then each player has to win bottle tops by hitting them with his own counter from a set distance. The play continues until the tops are all won and then different variations take place until one boy has won all the counters.

**“Tennis”** (girls), the only similarity of this game to the game we know by the same name is the ball which is used to play it. This game relies on a small ball with a good bounce as the player must bounce the ball 5 times, then 5 times between her legs front to back, then 5 times back to front, then 5 times whilst lifting her leg over the ball, then 5 times through a loop made by her arm (by holding onto the hem of a skirt or a sleeve), again this continues with a seemingly infinite number of variations until the ball is not bounced properly and then one of the girl’s friends takes over and tries to do better. Sometimes in this game the player picks up at the stage they left off last time it was their turn, to save doing the same routines over and over.

**Card games** are a definite favourite but cards are not easy to come by as they are relatively expensive. This may be one reason for their popularity, another may be the fact that you can play cards with adults as well. Younger children will often play with make believe cards made from squares of cardboard.



As you will note from the above descriptions, most of these games are for girls. For boys the main game was **football**; most of the boys' leisure activities seemed to revolve around playing (or watching) football. When I asked one group of boys (aged 7-10) what games they played other than football, they came up with a whole list of other games such as shooting, saving, tackling, dribbling, in other words, football, in all its guises.

Another game for older boys is draughts, men also play this game and girls do not. It seems that for boys, games continue, for women however this was not the case. I do not mean to imply that their leisure activities ceased as they were still able to take part in traditional dance and singing in the choir etc., but the games they played as girls are no longer considered suitable for women.

Another game which is popular with the girls and the younger boys is *ukwipika* (to cook) and other types of playing house. In the former the children take a small amount of food (cooked) from their mother and a small pot and pretend to cook over a fire and then eat. Playing house can be done on two scales. Either the children build a house that is very small as if for dolls, or they mark out walls with heaps of dust, old bricks, stones or sticks stuck in the ground. The latter are much bigger and the children can move around inside them. It is quite difficult to get photographs of these as while the children are still playing; they all want to be in the picture and crowds come from all around. But I found that in spite of the amount of effort that goes into the construction of such houses, if I waited until the following day in the hope that they would be deserted, they were generally partially or wholly destroyed or dismantled.

The pictures below are of one of these, a slightly bigger project than usual involving many children. This was constructed on one of the *espaces neutres* between sections. Although the walls seem permanent I took these photos at dusk one evening and intended to return the following morning when I could get a clearer picture with fewer children but although some of the walls remained, nothing resembled this project as I had seen it the previous evening. Because of the number of children trying to be in the

pictures it is not easy to see the scale of the house but there were more than a dozen rooms some of which are shown here.



Fig. 38

As shown by the above photographs, quite a wide variety of age groups were involved in this project, although several of these came rushing over as soon as they saw the camera. The above house has more rooms than an ordinary house (play or real) would have but each one has been given a purpose which is shown by the objects inside the room such as mats for sleeping on or containers representing food and other objects.



Fig 39



Fig 40

Figs 39 and 40 above are typical play houses in the streets in front of the children's own homes, once the props are taken away the walls of the house soon revert back to dust on the street.

The exception to the impermanence of these houses was a small play house that my documentary group discovered and took me to see. This had been built like a miniature version of a real house. The boys had made their own mould for bricks and had made the bricks themselves. They were in the process of laying the roof slats while I was there, in preparation for the thatching. Unfortunately I didn't see the finished house as this was just before my departure but even unthatched it was very impressive. In fact it was a combination of a playhouse and a *palais* and the boys said that they would use it as such.

The cinema is a very popular activity in the camp, especially with the older children. There is no board of certification and the preferred titles are full of violence. The films are mostly in English as they are bought in Zambia. The box office can be paid in cash or measures of maize or mealie meal. One of the things many parents complained about in the camp was their sons sneaking off to the cinema with stolen food from the family stores.

Another leisure activity considered less than desirable by the community is drinking at "Titanic" and other bars.

We are in a refugee camp, as usual people, like in Congo, drank to relax and also here people drink. Sometimes it is traditional drinks, sometimes

soft drinks, Simba, Castle<sup>4</sup> and so they are there inside drinking. The children are here just for the music, outside. Inside, sometimes they are youths aged 15, 16 and older; you just need something to pay with, others are invited by their big brothers or friends: “Let’s go for a drink!” (film).

Although we have seen that many activities are the same as in Congo, the social and physical geography of the camp, affect work play and school as does lack of materials and facilities (eg. wire or a lake). Differences in schooling and work activities inevitably have an effect on the time children have to play. Time spent at the hammer mill but not in the fields was longer for girls but less for boys. Some children experienced an increase in the time available to play, others a decrease. A further factor affecting this is schooling, many more children were attending school, than would have been the case in Congo thus affecting the time available to both work and play.

The effects are not the same for all children as can be seen from the following two examples. One group of boys felt that the grid layout of the camp gave them more freedom to go places without their parents knowing. In the village as soon as they were on a path, people knew where that path went and therefore could stop them and demand why they were going there. In the camp there are many shortcuts between the houses and generally only 2 directions you can leave in which could lead anywhere. Parents therefore do not know whether children are going to the cinema, to play football, or to the bush for firewood.

On the other hand a group of girls found that they had less freedom as they were more visible in the camp than in the village. As soon as they were outside of the village people could not see them or know what they were doing. In the camp because there is a dense population and nowhere to play other than in the streets, play activities are more easily visible to adults of the community. (This group of girls live in a section where most people know them and each other and all attend the same church, therefore all have a more vested interest in the behaviour of these girls which may have contributed to this.)

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<sup>4</sup> Simba and Castle are South African bottled beers

The group who demonstrated most of the above games to me took great pleasure in doing so. The enjoyment which was evident from their behaviour and demeanour demonstrated just how important children's games are as an activity in their lives in spite of the fact that they are not much talked about. It can be seen from the descriptions that there are elements which fit the explanation for games as educational but they are not seen in this way by the children.

## **Conclusion**

If childhood is constructed, '[t]here is not one childhood, but many, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in society produce different experiences' (James and Prout 1997a:xiii). Thus the above descriptions are specific to the research context. That Congolese children experience childhood differently to British children may seem obvious but it is therefore also true that children in the refugee camp will experience childhood differently to Congolese children in Congo. On a more local level within the camp, children's lives and experiences were not all the same. This is demonstrated by the fact that the children in the different groups I worked with behaved differently and had different priorities from each other. My first group were outspoken in their complaints and very mistrusting of the UN, a later group focused more on things they missed from home, another on the problems of earning money. These differences may be explained by tribal difference, time in the camp, where they came from in Congo. But they demonstrate that experience, social interactions, and context are what give meaning to the term childhood.

In conclusion then, if childhood is socially constructed I wish to address the question raised by Punch: 'How is childhood defined: does it depend on activities performed such as work and play?' what distinguishes it from adulthood (Punch 2003:290). In the camp it is defined by status and social interactions. Childlike status was determined by your behaviour to others and theirs to you, whilst this included activities performed, they were not the only defining feature. One way in which activities were important was to maintain continuity between Congolese childhood and camp childhood, yet at the same time children's activities, as many others were also markers of the difference between life in Congo and life in the camp.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Issues of importance to Children**

In Chapter Two I discussed the ways in which I aimed to reduce the pathologisation of children's experiences by talking about continuity in their lives rather than focusing entirely on difference. Many of the examples in this chapter develop this further by focusing on children's interests and priorities which are not so different from those of children from many other contexts, including our own "Western" one. Thus by reducing the exoticisation and likening these children to others who are not refugees it is much more difficult to see their lives as abnormal.

There is a fine balance here as by making the children's lives more familiar there is the risk of trivialising important differences and the concerns emerging from these. Even within the issues of continuity there is change but this will emerge more in the second part of this chapter which reflects children's interests and priorities by focusing on issues of importance to children which arise specifically from camp life and emerged repeatedly in conversations. As I discussed previously, trauma did not arise in our discussions and this is therefore not included as an issue of importance.

In the process of carrying out the filming of the documentary I learnt, through the attitudes and comments of those "directing", how seriously young people take their image, ability to earn money and education. Even the fact that a gender balanced group became one with only one girl who was rarely able to join us due to family commitments was informative. Whilst addressing children's comments in this way it is important for both the reader and myself to keep in mind that these discussions were generated by activities chosen by myself, and although the children often controlled and diverted the discussions, these were based on topics which I introduced.

## **Identity and Role**

There are various categories of people in the camp. Many of these categories were created upon arrival in the camp: (*mkimbisi* (refugee), *les enfants non accompagnés* (unaccompanied minors), *les vulnerables*, *le Chef de Section*, *SGBV* (Sexual and gender based violence), *gender* (as SGBV or referring to what the refugees perceive as UNHCR's love for women over men)) others were created by the war (*Banyamulenge* (a group of rebels), *les rebels* (rebels generally) *Congolais*). Still others existed before the war and continue to operate (*vijana* (youth), *mtoto* (child), *Tabwa*, *Luba* (tribal groups)), some may come to have a greater significance in the camp. Words like "*Intellectuelles*" are unclear as they existed previously but have a greater significance in the camp given the mix between urban and rural, educated and illiterate, especially given the new value accorded to education.

These labels and their changing significance are indications of how things important in people's ways of distinguishing themselves from others, their ways of classifying things of importance, have changed with their arrival in the camp. There are new dynamics as a result of the war, new dynamics as a result of life in the camp, old dynamics continue either as before or with new significance. It would be an over simplification to decide that this alone is an indication of changes in identity but there are parallels between these categories and other aspects of change.

Theoretical discussions of identity, self and personhood often present contrasting definitions of these conceptual ideas (Jackson and Carp 1990; Sokefeld 1999; Ochs and Capps 1996). A discussion of identity raises questions such as: at what point do self and identity change? Is this different for children? Can you add elements without taking away? How do connections between people affect these issues and how are they affected by it? This chapter relates elements of the things children told me about their lives to their identity. How do children contrast what they know about themselves, and what they know themselves to be, with the way others think of them? (These questions and issues are all discussed further in Chapter Eight.)

One of the foremost preoccupations of children is duty. Obligations to family and community are taken seriously by most children as seen in their attitudes to chores. In



outlining daily activities it is clear that chores must be done before any leisure activities can be undertaken. Children's role in the community is understood by all and especially by the children themselves. Ntensya (13) said that when she thought of Congo what she thought about were her grandparents who had been unable to flee with the family. Whilst living in Congo she had spent time doing chores for them and she worried how they would be coping now that she was not there.

One activity I did with the children revealed a lot about such attitudes. I told them a story and asked them to imagine that no-one in the world could have children anymore. As they grew older there would be no-one younger than them. The general response was:

“I would leave home and live elsewhere, where you can have children”

This idea prevailed until I explained that the whole world was similarly affected when the children then made the following observations on this situation:

“It would be quiet in the village with no children running round”

“Even when children just go to school it gets quieter”

“Who would look after the elderly? Who would get water for them?”

“If the mother is ill the children fetch water” I asked, “wouldn't the neighbours do this?” They replied, “Maybe for one day but that's all. What about the other days?”

“If they can't have children then they can't be adults therefore it would be very strange if it is everyone who can't have them.”

“It must be witchcraft”

“It is not good to not have children”

“Having children *c'est la joie qu'il y a sur la terre.*”

The above statements demonstrate not only the worth and role that individual children (as members of the community) see in the group “children”, they also demonstrate the sense of worth that children see in themselves as individuals. Not only do they express a wish to have children themselves, thus recognising the status and labour gained from this, but they also demonstrate the importance that they give to their own roles, helping elderly grandparents, sick parents, enlivening the neighbourhood. They

not only have a strong sense of their role in the community: the part they play, the jobs they do and how this fits in with the role of others, but they also see the value of both this role and of themselves.

On the other hand children are also aware of the problems of their status as children, the necessity of demonstrating respect to all who are older than them. There are visible and proscribed ways of demonstrating respect. This generally entails bending, making themselves smaller than adults or kneeling and is mainly done when giving something to an elder. They demonstrated to me the different postures necessary. If the object is just something like a book then you simply bob a little when handing it to the adult. “When asked to bring water you kneel to give it to them and stay kneeling until they have finished and return the cup to you”. “If they are sipping or they know they will take a long time, they will tell you to get up” rather than wait kneeling. When serving food at mealtimes, the food is placed on the mat or table, the children then go to the adults and call them to eat. They do this by kneeling next to them and saying “*Karibuni*” (you are welcome, polite form) sometimes whilst clapping the hands (another sign of respect which is also done when greeting or thanking). When the adults respond the child can get up.

The main problem with being a child is that adults or older children can always send you off to do things for them. “Some adults are constantly asking you to fetch things – if you refuse it is a big problem, you are denied food”. Laughing the children told me that they go and play elsewhere to avoid being available to run errands as: “If there are several children it is not so bad as the adult will send one then the other, then the other, but if you are alone, it is always you!” As children get older they can always send younger children to do things for them but if they have been asked directly to do something they can’t delegate, “it would be impolite to your father” (whoever sent you). The above discussion applied to one-off errands. For chores “we are used to doing these and don’t wait to be asked... if there are several children they take it in turns and do not argue” I wondered about this and so asked them to clarify. They said that fighting between brothers and sisters only happens “if the brother is lazy, if he eats but does not clean and never fetches water”.

A further example of the way children feel about their obligations was highlighted when I reversed the above story so that there were no adults, only children. The comments arising from this demonstrated that there was no thought of being liberated from duty, no freedom to play all day, as would have been my first reaction as a child, but to think immediately about the increased work involved. In my experience this attitude is not unusual in the African context but life in the camp and NGO policies are affecting this attitude in unforeseen ways which will be discussed later.

In spite of various opinions regarding the value of children's work discussed in the previous chapter, children's attitudes reflect the importance of 'work as one of the most critical domains in which poor children can contest and negotiate childhood' (Nieuwenhuys 1996:238). Children not only contest and negotiate childhood, but also, using work children determine their role and status in the family and the community. This is done both by doing everyday chores and the practice of sending people to run errands. "Without work life would be almost impossible...nature only gives us the means to exist to the extent that we know how to wring/snatch these from it through out energy, our intelligence and our efforts" (secondary schoolboy 22).

When older children send younger children on errands, their status is confirmed. Older children also do different types of chores, or do them differently. Gradually children carry out "adult" activities as 'although children can do much adult work, some tasks require further physical ability and/or a certain knowledge or skill... competence built up through practice' (Punch 2003:285 see also Katz 1991). As discussed in the previous chapter children's social age is affected by the work they do, this is particularly important in a situation where few children are aware of or pay attention to their numerical age and status must be achieved in other ways.

Paid work is especially important to children as income generating opportunities affect self image. Children may identify their ability to contribute financially as 'fundamental for their self-respect' (Birch 2001:5). "Young people in the camp improve their lives by working, for example by cultivating, selling, finding contracts or other activities" (Musampwa secondary schoolboy).

In the camp children can often be seen literally as a meal ticket. The refugees would often discuss the need to have lots of children in order to repopulate their country. As in many other contexts, they also are motivated by the need to have many children to take care of them in old age, but in the camp there is a further motivation: to have an extra family member on the ration card. As soon as a baby is born and registered the family receives an extra person's ration even though the baby itself will not be consuming any of it, and this is a powerful motivation to have children.

A feature of this research was to enable children's voices to be heard and I therefore spoke to the children about whether adults listen to children. In general the response was no. The most balanced view was [for the matter of witnessing someone beating someone else] "you can tell a man and if he is sensible he will listen but if not he will accuse you of lying" but the general consensus agreed that: "Adults are often too impatient to listen to children, they often don't believe them so therefore they need to see proof or hear it from someone else who has heard." "They think you are lying because you are a child. They will say: how can this child know when we [adults] do not know" Group A).

An example they gave me concerned the cameras I had given them to take photos of their activities: "they didn't believe there was a film in the camera. They only believed it when they saw the film". One adult endorsed this saying that he also doubts his children at first when they tell him things but when he checks they are often right. He put this down to the fact that children are more mobile: they play away from home or with children from other sections whereas he himself generally stays at home. Generally the children said that "adults can't learn from children as they have no confidence in them". Yet the children are aware that "there are things we know that they don't know".

Children are also conscious of their role as "the nation of tomorrow" and many of them reflect on the future, either through the ways that they will be able to improve life in Congo: "I will participate with courage in the development of my village in particular and the development of our country in general" (Bwisha secondary schoolgirl 17).

Because my main concern is to be minister of education in the Congolese government to try to review and redress education in its entirety. All over the world people consider the youth, they are the nation of tomorrow. But not in our country which does not even worry about the education of our youth this is why I am breaking myself into a thousand pieces to safeguard my destroyed country (secondary schoolboy 18).

Alternatively they think of the future on a personal level and how they can improve their lives: “Life depends on food, housing, clothes and fortune. And especially improving life is ensured by work” (secondary schoolboy 22).

I who am 18 would like to build a dignified future... this future rests in my imagination in which the surroundings are impressive, of trees filled with good fruit, of a morning sun shining over there on the horizon, of the melody all along the route the work of nightingales and other songbirds...to have honest employment, to manage joyfully my home (*foyer*)... However my future seems to be the bank of a body (course) of water, of which I am on the other side and in order to achieve it I must cross this river which is unfortunately infected with dangerous animals, one finds in it crocodiles, snakes, caimans, hippopotamuses... To succeed in this I have fashioned a fitting slogan “endurance, dynamism and perseverance” (secondary schoolboy).

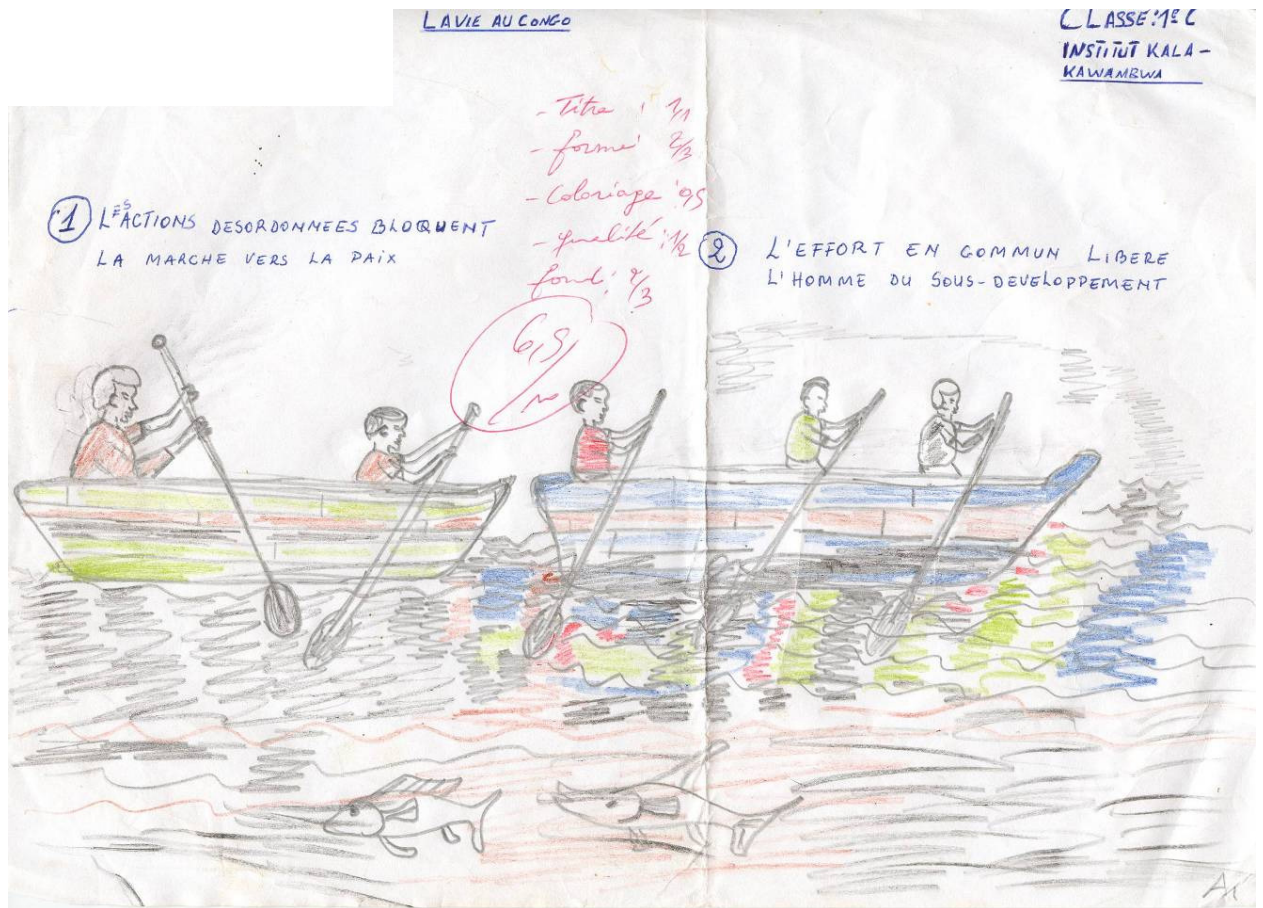


Fig. 41 Disorganised actions block the road to peace

Working together free man from underdevelopment (secondary schoolboy)

Image

Image and the way that they look is important for children in the camp, from very young children who paint their faces with dust,



Fig 42

to slightly older girls who scar their cheeks to form beauty spots,



Fig 43

to much older children trying to impress specific members of the opposite sex, with clothing, behaviour and hairstyles. Children in the camp continue to be preoccupied with the way they look.

It was most important for the children, and the refugees in general to distinguish themselves from Zambians and they did this whenever the opportunity arose whether that was in emphasising their different pronunciation of similar names, emphasising their hospitality or through their image - styles of clothing were especially important in this. Congolese, of either sex favour much brighter colours than the Zambians as did the children. Congolese women and girls wear their *fitenge* (sarong-skirts) crossed right over left where Zambian women wear theirs crossed left over right.

On special occasions Zambian women's outfits are likely to be a skirt and a blouse where the Congolese women wear a blouse with two *fitenge*, with the outer one worn folded to half the length of the inner one.



Fig. 44

There are also several styles of braiding hair which were specifically Congolese. If you look closely many of the pictures drawn by the children, depict women with the hairstyle below which is the most easily identified as Congolese.



Fig. 45

All of these things, even when not relevant practices to the children, were things that they were proud of, and the differences were expressed by the children in terms of “they do not know how...”

The importance of the differences in styles of dress was also highlighted by the fact that I (by chance initially) crossed my *citenge* over the Congolese way and at celebrations I mostly (in this case deliberately) wore Congolese style outfits with the blouse and two *fitenge*. It was a cause for excitement that I wore a *citenge* outfit at all (*à l'africaine*) but the most important thing was that I was dressed in a *Congomani*



(Congolese person's) outfit. When I did so people would instruct me on the intricacies of how it should be worn. When I asked the children why it was important to wear two fitenge in this way they gave me practical reasons but their pride in the Congolese way of doing things went beyond the practical.

If a primary aspect of image for children was to identify themselves as Congolese, no less important was the need to enhance their looks. As the above images demonstrate different age groups did this in different ways. The younger children mostly used natural substances of a temporary nature such as dust, and mud. As we saw in the previous chapter they would make themselves glasses from dried grass and hats from leaves. Girls who were slightly older would use more sophisticated techniques for more long-term effects. Facial scarring, until recently practiced by the Tabwa women, is no longer carried out but the two girls in the second photograph have done a different type of scarring which does not alter the texture of the skin, merely its colour. Mumba (14) who is older than the two pictured here described the process to me. There is a particular plant which they find in the bush and the viscous liquid from inside is dotted onto the cheeks. This must then be left for several days whilst it burns its way into the skin. It can be very uncomfortable and although she had tried it, it hurt too much, so she had washed it off before it had had the desired effect of creating two dark spots.

There are other natural substances which both girls and boys use to colour their lips and fingernails by leaving the substance on until it has stained the nails. In terms of clothing, in addition to the bright colours mentioned above, there is also the preference for clothing with slogans (discussed in Chapter One). Then there are the different types of hair style, relevant for both boys and girls.



Fig. 46 Three sisters braiding each others' hair, photograph taken by children from Group A for the category "children's activities".

The girls change their hair style in the way it is braided, the boys in the way it is cut. The barbers in the market have drawings of the styles they can do. Pictured below is one of the more fashionable styles for boys. Another boy has expressed his admiration for a football player (Zidane) by having his name cut into his hair.



Fig. 47



Fig. 48

In addition to being a way of enhancing beauty and desirability for young Congolese, image is also important in expressing status and character. Modesty which is less important for young children becomes steadily more important as they grow older. Trousers are not worn by girls of any age and it is very unusual to find a Congolese woman in the camp who wear them (I only met two). As girls grow older their skirt lengths get longer. Only young girls can wear a skirt which is above the knees and even then a longer skirt is preferable. The need to keep oneself appropriately covered can also affect the playing of games which may cause clothing to reveal more than it

should. This is one reason why older girls (and women) are not seen playing sports or other games. Even in the NGO sponsored sports, girls are reluctant to play unless they can find concealing clothing to wear.

This awareness starts at quite a young age and in the video a (pre-teen) girl playing “tennis” initially wanted to hold onto her hem to create a hoop to bounce the ball through but eventually settled for holding onto her sleeve cuff as her skirt would ride too high. Likewise girls, when playing games which require lifting the leg will hold the hem of their skirts to keep it from riding up too high. Such practices are maintained and upheld by older girls and parents reminding the younger ones and were not just important in front of boys. The group of older girls I worked with remarked to me on several occasions that I should tuck my skirt around my legs<sup>1</sup> even though they and my female interpreter were the only people there.

Covering the legs was also important for boys although in their case it was an issue of status rather than modesty. In the previous chapter we heard how boys from the Secondary school would work through the summer holidays to buy themselves trousers to wear for school. Only young boys wear shorts so once they are in their teens they will do their utmost to have long trousers but this is especially important for occasions or places which demand a level of smartness such as school or church. Most children stated that money they earned from working would be spent on buying new clothes. “They hope that after having done this work they will have something to buy clothes, trousers, they are pupils, if they have clothes they can go to school” (Film).

Lack of clothing was one factor identified as preventing children from attending school and some donated clothing was distributed to school children identified as being in particular need. On the other hand, some primary teachers initially demanded that boys wear *shorts* to attend school and this again led to some boys dropping out of school as they remarked “if you only have one pair of trousers, you are not going to

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<sup>1</sup> I wore appropriately long skirts but they were sometimes affected by my position sitting on the floor.

cut them up for school as then you will not have any long trousers.” (This did not continue under WVI policy.)

One of the ways in which image is important is revealed in the way that children react to having their photograph taken. Posing for pictures is done in particularly formulaic ways. If at all possible children like to have their picture taken standing with a car in the background and many pictures taken in the camp have this.



Fig. 49

If there is no car, then an object in the hand will do and in the portraits I took of all of the children working in my groups they each insisted on holding a Dictaphone, a pencil case, a clipboard or whatever was to hand. In one group I was hit by a sense of familiarity in several of the photos and I noticed that all of the girls had taken it in turns to wear the same multicoloured knitted band around their heads to have some adornment.

It is also important that photographs should show the whole person and I was criticised by the children in Groups A and B for having chopped off their feet in some of these pictures. This was just one instance demonstrating that children were not prepared to simply be grateful recipients of things given to them; why be grateful for something which is not of the appropriate quality? This was especially the case as I

had included the feet in some shots and not in others so there was the added element of unfairness that some got a good picture and others didn't.

Another common feature of photographs was the types of pose that boys would adopt both in front of the still camera and sometimes the video. This is a type of fighting stance associated in my mind with a stereotypical martial arts posture. Boys would also do this to me at other times and I was never sure if they were inviting me to take their picture or whether this was simply a way of showing off.



Fig. 50



Fig. 51

It is important, when looking at identity, to keep a perspective regarding context or scale. Of course things like image and role are very important but more important on a general scale are the fact that these children are refugees, they are Congolese, they are individuals. I did an exercise with groups of children from the Secondary school where I asked them to write as many sentences as they liked starting with “I am...” This may have become an exercise in the limits of language competency as although I did not specify which language they should use, in the context of the school building many of them may have associated this with the need to operate in French and also to show off their command of this language.

I can only speculate but I think it unlikely that a similar exercise carried out in Congo would have included so many references to being Congolese so high up on the list and of course they would not include “I am a refugee”. This does not demonstrate any change to a sense of self, simply that the fluidity of identity can lead to certain features being more relevant in certain settings. It may be that these are elements of identity which they most feel threatened about, or simply that they are the key features which can contrast them or ally them with surrounding groups. In this situation being Congolese in contrast to the Zambians but also unifying different

tribes<sup>2</sup> within the camp. This was context dependent as “Tribalism”<sup>3</sup> was also something identified as a problem by the refugees.

In the exercise where the children drew timelines of their whole lives in order to demonstrate important or memorable events, many of them included what they considered to be important markers of age such as learning to sit up but also important events were being bought items of clothing by their parents, doing jobs which meant that they earned some money or got some clothing in return. Thus levels of competence discussed in the previous chapter, together with visible external markers of age and status are important to the children.

Identity also affected my research in that perceptions of me and children’s relationships with me affected what they said in these interactions, such as the requests for gifts and complaints about camp policy. So in the forefront of my own mind, equally, was the idea that their perception of me was colouring the information they gave me. Did they complain only to me? Were the topics which kept arising only arising because of who I was, or who they thought I was? How much should I filter out certain things? It was only later that I questioned my right to filter things at all. I also then realised that I was missing the relevance of some of the things being said by assuming their perception of me to be of greater importance than their need to tell me (or anyone) these things and the ways in which they told them. What follows is a discussion of some of these issues.

## **Camp Issues**

Whilst I was ostensibly determining the topics for discussion by determining the exercises to take place in my sessions with the children, I was not in control of the children’s voices. Inevitably there were topics which came up unexpectedly. Sometimes this was due to a misunderstanding or miscommunication regarding the

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<sup>2</sup> *Tribu* was a term used unproblematically by the refugees and I translate it here as tribe and use it in the same way. Likewise *tribalisme*.

<sup>3</sup> Favouritism according to tribal group, especially when it came to choosing people for jobs or serving people quicker in the queue for the hammer mill.



exercise, or simply due to unanticipated results or ways of carrying out an exercise. This was valuable as it often gave unforeseen insights into children's lives. More often, however, the unexpected topics arose as children used the forum of our meetings to communicate to me the issues of most importance to them. These issues continued to reappear until gradually they were not "unexpected topics" at all. Eventually I was tailoring my methods to try to elicit or encourage *new* topics when the common ones threatened to monopolise the discussions. In this way our meetings sometimes became contests over who controlled the topic. Would the children's agenda take precedence and the conversation revolve around issues of importance to them, or would I be able to divert the discussion towards new topics or those which I considered to be of most importance to my research? I eventually realised that the topics of importance to the children *were* of interest to me, not only because of their importance to children, but also because they were different ways of discussing the topics I intended to research.

The following is therefore an examination of those topics which through no design of mine, repeatedly emerged in the discussions among the different groups of children. Sometimes the views about them were contradictory but most often they were repetitive and therefore emphasized what had already been said. There is a common thread which runs through these topics, that of UNHCR and NGO control or intervention. An element of this is the lack of trust that the children, and others in the camp had both for those who seemingly controlled their lives, and often also for each other. This emerged in different ways from all topics.

### Facilities

Remarks on the topic of education were the most contradictory. In general when children were asked to dwell on positive aspects of life in the camp, education was one of the first and most important things to be mentioned (along with the provision of clean water). "In spite of the fact that we fled the war and lost other things, firstly I would like to say even if we have the negative name of a displaced person, a refugee, I don't count that because before there were times when I couldn't manage to go to school because of these conditions" (of war) (secondary schoolboy 22).

Education in the camp was provided free and was available to all as a permanent feature of the UNHCR budget. This was seen to be positive especially as books and all necessary materials were also provided “even the exercise books we get from UNHCR” (secondary schoolgirl 15). In contrast to this, education in Congo was not free and in addition to providing their own materials any children who wanted to attend school had to bring something for the teacher or spend part of their school time tending the teacher’s fields.

In terms of the negative aspects, however, children equally complained about schools and teachers. The non-permanent school buildings were dusty and had thatched roofs which were damp and leaky during the rainy season. The main cause for complaint however came from rumour and mistrust: that the teachers were stealing; that the bricks and building materials that the children had been asked to contribute to were being sold rather than used to build new classrooms. The push to persuade all children in the camp to attend school may have added to the mistrust, especially as education had not been valued in Congo.

Discussions about the provision of medical care were also contradictory. Once again the main point in its favour is that it is free, and easily accessible (in terms of distance). The main complaint was that: they gave “headache tablets for stomach problems and stomach tablets for headaches”. Two explanations for this given by AAH are that either people are not familiar with the form of the drugs provided by the NGO, so when they see a round white tablet they automatically assume that it is *Panado* (paracetamol), or that there is a shortage of a particular drug and so the nearest alternative (or a complementary drug) is given in order not to send people away empty handed.

To a certain extent these explanations do not really matter, or whether the children’s (and their community’s) complaint is true. What strikes me as most interesting is that firstly, the complaint is phrased in an almost identical fashion by anyone who voices an opinion on the subject. Children (and adults) do not say they give the wrong medication, or they mix up the medication they say: they gave “headache tablets for

stomach problems and stomach tablets for headaches”, thus demonstrating the role of this phrase in popular discourse and as an idiom of the refugees’ relationship with the NGOs.

Secondly, when I turned this around and asked groups A and B “has this ever happened to you?” only Helène said that it had. So what is at play here is a combination of rumour, lack of trust for authority, an unfamiliarity with the drugs and possible incompetence or corruption of staff at the hospital. As with the teachers, clinic and hospital staff are educated and have a regular income which, over time, has allowed them to invest in other enterprises and increase their income even more, so socio-economic differences also apply.

### Food

The main thing, however, which came up again and again in conversations with the children, and with everyone in the camp was food. Initially I interpreted this as an attempt to get more food by talking to someone perceived as having the power to change things. This was possibly an element of what motivated them to talk to me as people also complained to me about lack of clothing and other things but this was not done in the same way or to the same degree. I later came to realise the prime importance that food had for the refugees for a diversity of purposes and that this was not connected to me alone. The education co-ordinator told me of her embarrassment when a representative of a donor organisation came to the camp and interviewed a young boy. His answer to every question concerned the lack of food. For example when she asked him about school he replied that he could not concentrate in class as he was too hungry to do well in his studies.

In addition to talking about hunger, the importance of food arose in other types of conversations. In one of the initial exercises I asked the children to draw a plan of the camp, or an area of the camp that was important to them and several groups chose to draw the food distribution building.<sup>4</sup> This was also one of the sights that the children

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<sup>4</sup> Others chose schools and the clinic

chose to photograph to record places of interest in the camp, and likewise this was one of the places which appeared in many of the pictures from the competition 'La vie au camp'.

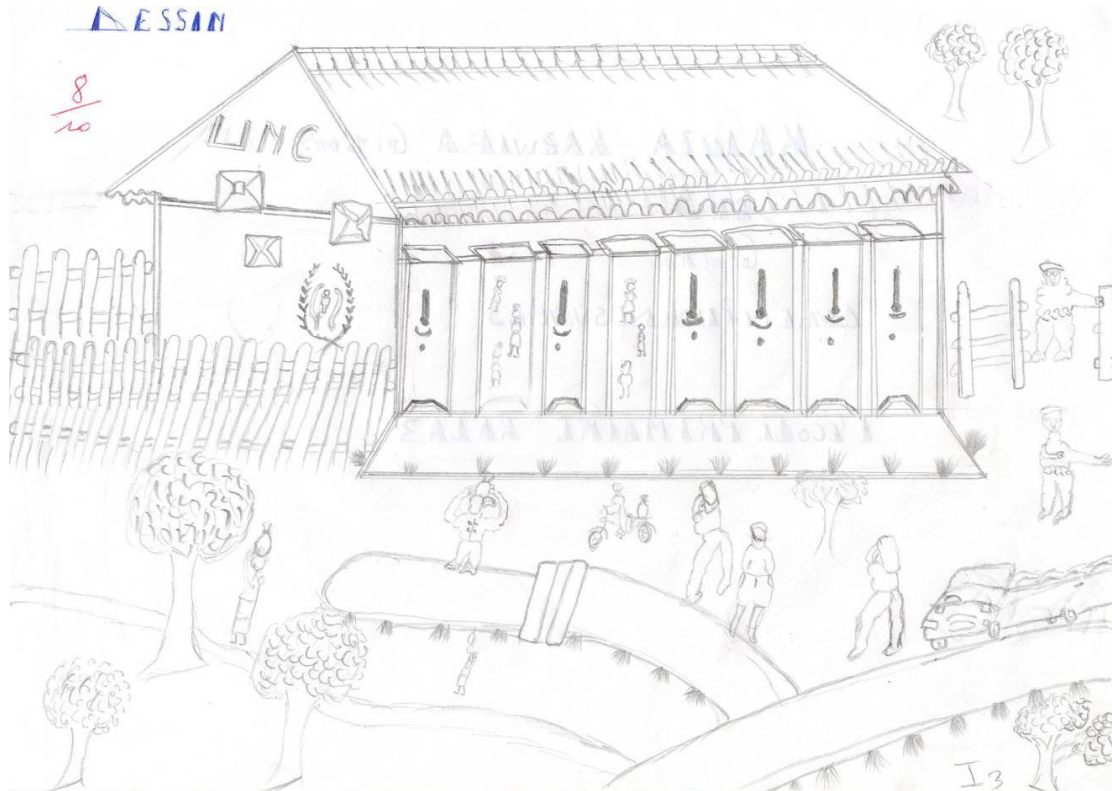


Fig. 52 (primary schoolboy).

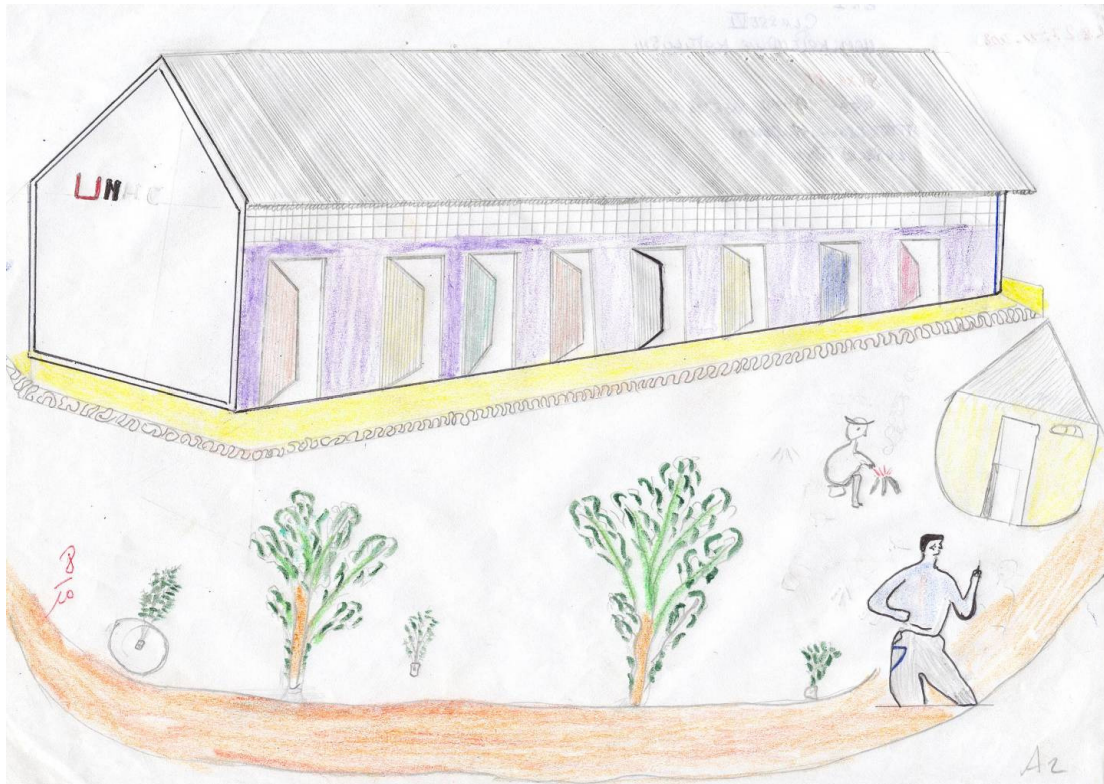


Fig. 53 (primary schoolgirl).

In the video children were able to demonstrate just how big a feature of their lives this building is by showing the detail of food distributions.

The food is well organised, at the beginning is the salt, after getting salt you get soap second. After the salt and the soap thirdly you receive oil and the measure you see is for 1 month. After the oil move on to receive *njekele* (peas) for relish. At the end you receive maize...After filling the measure they cut to have the right amount. After receiving they give back the ration card and the owner keeps that (film).

On distribution days many children would not be present at our discussion sessions as they would be needed to either queue on behalf of their parents or assist in the transportation of food. Likewise the need to mill the grain was another cause of absence.

Children's conversations about food did not just reflect the inadequacy of food distributions, but also indicated a disinclination to receive at all, a wish that they (and their parents) could have the opportunity to cultivate and provide for themselves. In Chapter Three the photographs taken by Team 1 included several pictures of the

preparation and consumption of food, the other groups likewise. But there were no pictures of farming in any of the groups' photographs. The problem with the lack of agriculture (or lakes for fishing) for children in the camp is not just the lack of income but because 'learning about the environment – about farming, animal husbandry, and the use of local resources – is an aspect of socialization essential to maintaining and reproducing society' (Katz 1991:489). Thus when they return to Congo they will lack the necessary skills.

Children also expressed nostalgia for foods which they had had in Congo but could no longer get in the camp. In the plans that they drew of their homes in Congo and their homes in the camp many included pictures of fruit trees. In the camp the only trees established enough to give fruit were the pawpaw trees. Some of the comments children made about this emerged after I asked them to draw (in groups) things that were better in Congo than in the camp<sup>5</sup>. "These people are in the rice fields, here there is not rice, I miss eating rice". "These are people fishing, fish is good to eat and also to sell. Here the fish is dried already and rotten". "We are cutting sugar cane, here you can only get sugar cane from the Zambians and you have to pay for it. At home we had it in the garden so just had to go and get it". "These are some orange trees, I miss eating oranges and here there are no trees in the camp." They ended this discussion by saying: "in Congo there are other things but they are here also therefore we have just drawn the things that we miss."

Food was not important just as a general issue, the problem also related to different types of foods and the way that these were valued above or below others. My "Friday gifts"<sup>6</sup> were appreciated much more than the daily biscuits as they were "*real*" food (rice, beans, or *chisense*). Cassava had a high value too but yellow maize and *njekele* (peas) were at the bottom of the scale.

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<sup>5</sup> I also asked them to draw pictures of what was better in the camp than in Congo in order to balance this.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter One

## **Social Learning**

Children's lives are also influenced by the adults in them. This is an important consideration for this thesis. Children are autonomous social actors making sense of the world as they experience it and the messages they receive from others, but many of these messages (often the most powerful ones) come from adults and much of their experience of the world is mediated by adults. Therefore many of the statements I heard from children may be a repetition of what adults (and especially their parents) have said to them. This has some significance for my research but perhaps not as much as might be assumed given that, as I stated initially, my aim is to treat children as a part of society and not separate from it.

In order to integrate this issue into my understanding of children's lives, I will address briefly here the processes by which children receive such messages from adults, to look at how children learn: I prefer the term social learning to socialisation as socialisation is something which happens *to* children whereas social learning is something which they actively do yet which retains the possibility of "teachers" in the process. However, as mentioned previously, foci on socialisation in anthropology in the past have led to the overlooking of childhoods with the focus on children's futures rather than their present. The way socialisation has been used in anthropology has also been criticised by Morton for ignoring 'culturally distinctive forms of subjectivity, creativity, deviation, learning, and emotional experience' (1996 cited in Stephens 1998:530).

Children are not empty vessels to be filled, they are active participants in their own social learning; they 'learn social structure by gaining understandings of culturally defined contexts of action and the appropriate behaviours of relatively high and low status participants within them' (Stephens 1998:530 citing Morton), but they also enact and contest these. Unlike Mead's assumption that children 'have little choice except to become adults like their parents' (1963:197) it is currently acknowledged that the influence of parents is only part of a much larger range of factors which contribute to children's constructions of appropriate behaviour. Adults' attitudes and behaviours towards children are important and are a part of what shapes children's

experiences of childhood but they are not simply received blindly. Children ‘at once reflect, resist and reinterpret adult conceptions’ (Rapport and Overing 2000:32).

In the later chapters I will discuss things that people say: speech acts, in general, but here I wish to consider the fact that children are an important audience for such statements. What I learnt from the children may often be a result of those things the adults most wanted the children to learn or understand, those things that they were communicating to the children through the

socializing potential of the informal, mundane, and often pervasive narrative accounts that people give of their personal experiences...even when such stories are told informally and without didactic intent, even when they are not addressed specifically to the young, they may play a powerful role in childhood socialization (Miller et al 1990:294).

These messages may have been made more forcefully to the children as they were outside of their usual milieu. There is the conflict in refuge between new and old influences on their lives, the children are negotiating and choosing between that which they learnt and experienced in Congo and that which they are experiencing in the camp. This may cause conflicts with their parents’ priorities resulting in certain messages becoming more stressed in the camp than they would have been in Congo. Often statements are important to counteract what the children are seeing. It may be in the camp that, ‘the socialization of children has become a critical site for the contestation, construction, and reconstruction of [] identity’ (Morton 1996:22 quoted in Stephens).

Children are not only affected by what is happening to them, the ways in which their lives are different, but also by the changes that they are seeing in adults lives and the experiences of the wider community. They witness what is happening to adults, changes in family structure, changes in the behaviour of others and changes in things they are taught (by both the NGOs and in school). Their lives may in fact be more affected by these changes than by the war as ‘the *experience* of war, famine and plague is continuous with ordinary social experience; people place it in social meaning and incorporate it with their accumulated culture’ (Hastrup 1993:730 citing Davis).



Children observe who is successful in the camp and why, they also see the community's reactions to this; success is not just determined by money but also by status. Achieving success through business is highly valued as the Congolese are considered especially gifted with the ability to use money to make money. New influences emerge from observing employment patterns, which are dependent on UNHCR and NGO policies. This has led to education being equated with money and to the inclusion of more women both in employment and authority (with the election of female street and section leaders). Children take ideas from what they see and construct their own ideas of what it is to be successful as demonstrated by the pictures of future jobs shown on Chapter 3.

Thus children talk about issues which were previously - and continue to be - important, such as role and identity. It may be that these have taken on greater importance as the context increases their need to be contested. Children also talk about changes to the education and health provision as a result of living in the camp. Overwhelmingly, however, children talk about food. The reasons for the importance of these topics is the context of change. These topics may also present messages for the wider community. Children are growing up and are therefore negotiating changes through the aging process as well as through camp life. Such discussions demonstrate how children engage with their changing experiences and manage the differences in their lifestyle. They are also a reflection and demonstration of their mistrust for some of the forces or people who have an impact on their lives.



## **Chapter Five**

# **Emerging Issues: Perceptions of Change and its Consequences.**

This chapter follows and clarifies the progression, from the children's activities and discussions, to the issues which emerge from these, to the overriding topic "Food" which encompasses many of these concerns. It gives an overview of the underlying causes which led children to talk so often about food by looking at the ways dependence for food is implicated in activities, relationships and discussions: in identity, change and power. In doing so this chapter introduces the rest of the thesis which focuses on the way food is used and talked about in the camp for consumption, in social transactions and the building of social relationships, in constituting and reinforcing identity and in negotiating power relationships. These are all factors which make up the environment in which children are growing up and as a result affect their social learning.

We have seen in the preceding chapter that certain things have a great impact on children's lives to the extent that children talk about them on a regular basis. Although titled 'Issues of Importance to Children', it discussed these in the form of "topics" rather than issues. The reason for this is that this is the way that they were communicated by the children. The rest of the thesis takes these topics in combination and discusses the issues which underlie them, issues such as trust, identity, power and change. In this chapter I will be focusing on perceptions and experiences of change, the feature of life which has created the conditions for these topics, and on food, the topic which dominated the children's discussions.

Changes to the social and material environment will affect social learning but equally changes to social learning will affect the social environment created by the children. This chapter, through giving an overview of the way change has been understood in anthropology, will therefore address why some of the characteristics of camp life have significant consequences for change. The value of using food analytically also

emerges from the discussion of the many ways it has been previously used in Anthropology. By using food in this way the reasons that children talk so much about it become clear from the way that it is implicated in every aspect of life.

The following chapters may appear to contain less of the children's voices. As food was not a topic which formed part of my research and only became a focus after I returned from the field, I did not carry out activities with the children specifically on this topic. On the other hand the fact that it became a focus at all is dependent on the children's conversations as it is a reflection of how often it emerged. My discussion, which will elaborate on different reasons for its constant appearance, addresses the children as members of the social group and therefore looks equally at why the *community* talks about food, as why children do, as these coincide and overlap.

In the this and the following chapters it becomes clear the extent of information my research, which primarily involved talking to the children, provided about the life of adults, and camp life in general. This is not simply because children repeat what adults say, but rather because children are as much a part of their society as adults are and they therefore have knowledge similar to adults' knowledge about that society. The things which I learnt from children and from observation, enable me to discuss the issues mentioned above. To make the following chapters read as though they are simply about children's lives and to give only examples which relate directly to children would be a misrepresentation. In the following chapters, therefore, even when I am not talking specifically about children, they are the ones informing my analysis and conclusions. Rather than learning about children from adults, as has occurred previously in anthropology, I often learnt about adults' lives through my discussions with the children.

Treating children as a completely separate group not only causes ghettoisation, discussed in the Introduction, but also denies the areas of interface between adults' and children's lives. To speak of these groups as separate also denies the changing status of a child over time. The movement between these two categories not only happens inevitably but also involves shifting back and forth between the categories depending on the interactions and processes experienced at any one time and depending on the individuals concerned (Prout 2005:79). It is important to remember

that the idea that there are separate domains of childhood and adulthood is itself socially constructed (Moss & Petrie 2002:21).

We – children and non-children – live in a cultural world which is complex, and where people participate in different cultural fields, each with its own norms, values and preferred activities. An individual can be multi-, inter- and intra-culturally competent. That is they may understand the forms and values of many cultures and move within and between them (*ibid*:123).

Thus children move between the larger social group, the child specific groups and others which are more specific or intermediate. ‘Distinctive cultures arise when people spend time together as a group that has some inferred demarcation from other groups’ (*ibid*:123). In the camp, children are much more likely to spend time with adults than previously given the increased time spent doing chores, the limited spaces for children’s recreation and the cramped living conditions described in previous chapters. This means that children spend less time exclusively with people who share child specific concerns and more time in the company or context of adults where they ‘interact with adults within the framework of adult culture, often using adult cultural forms’ (Moss and Petrie 2002:123) thus there is a larger area of interface between adult concerns and children’s concerns in the refugee camp.

Children, as all people, do not live in isolation, although they are ‘actively engaged in constituting the ideas and practices that will inform [their] adult life. This is not to say that the child can alone make meaning out of its experience...the process of making meaning is always mediated by relations with others’ (Toren 1996:94). Furthermore in the camp, in contrast to the minority world, there is less need or opportunity to segregate children away from ‘dangerous strangers’ and therefore the wider community and there are no separate bedrooms<sup>1</sup>, playrooms or solitary meals which further separate children from adults (Moss and Petrie 2002:123). As a result, more time is spent in the company of and interacting with adults. This is not to suggest that children do not have their own specificities and concerns, simply to suggest why it is that, in this particular context, children’s concerns coincide so closely with adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Other than the *Palais* which are only used for sleeping.

Referring back to the issue of representation discussed in Chapter Two, my representation, in the following chapters will follow the children's lead. The fact that (in discussing food) the thesis has taken on a new focus to reflect the priorities of the children has not supplanted the original focus on change and identity. Understandings of identity and change in this context are enhanced by the focus on food as they are affected by dependence on the UN discussed in Chapter 8. Thus aspects of my explanation regarding why so much conversation revolved around food respond equally to that initial research question. Food is expressive in both an evocative and an analytical way; it is good for the anthropologist *and* the refugees to think with (Levi-Strauss 1966).

In addition to the changes to lifestyle resulting from living in the camp, children's comments reflect the necessity of assimilating new kinds of information coming from IP programmes regarding the environment, health and social issues discussed in Chapter Nine. The accumulative nature of these new experiences is what especially makes them "*extraordinary* experiences" (Young and Goulet 1994) and the fact that they do not fit with prior experience means that there are no existing means of integrating these into cultural understandings of the world, or of giving them cultural meaning. Therefore new ways are found.

In the camp vocabulary is indicative of change and its impact. If everyone uses a French<sup>2</sup> or English word (even when speaking Bemba or Tabwa) this is often indicative of the fact that it describes something outside of prior knowledge or vocabulary, that it is new and doesn't fit with past experiences. This can be something simple like "lunch" or more problematic and difficult to understand like "SGBV". It even applies to some Swahili words like the ubiquitous *njekele*. But these words are more than mere extensions of vocabulary, they are all markers of experience. Their existence in everyday language as much as the things associated with them is what signifies that those who share the vocabulary have also shared an experience.

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<sup>2</sup> Congolese Swahili differs from what the Congolese refer to as 'Swahili borra' in that there are many French words integrated into the language

What we gain from the discussion of children's lives, their activities and the topics that they talk about in the previous chapters is equally an impression of absences as of presences. They do not just pay attention to new things in their lives, but also to the absence of old things. These often emerge as different aspects of the same topic. The absence of land to farm and the presence of food distributions are two sides of the same coin.

These absences are spoken about with nostalgia but were also expressed in terms of resentment for the current situation, exacerbated by presences such as new rules, systems and ways of interacting which are in conflict with experiences in the past. When children complain, they are making comparisons and therefore reflecting on change. Complaints about school reflect the change in values regarding education and teaching, complaints about the clinic reflect the power of outsiders over the medicalised body and food rations, complaints about food reflect the changes in lifestyle and social relationships.

These complaints and comparisons are an underlying feature of the children's descriptions of their activities and their discussions. Comparison between life in Congo and life in the camp was introduced by me but also emerged in general discussions independent of me and my questions. The children were not simply reflecting on how life was but projecting onto how life will be when they return. The comparison in its Janus focus is therefore not as straightforward as a simple discussion of change. The constant comparison between life in Congo and life in the camp often implies rather more fundamental reflections on such issues as power and identity, both affected by living in the camp as discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Cultures have elements which promote the status quo and inhibit change, as well as those which encourage change. The maintenance of cultural boundaries is one such mechanism (Ferraro 1995:336). For example Hutu refugees redefined group membership in terms of shared experience rather than location in order to draw a distinct boundary between themselves and others (Malkki 1996:381). The children's emphasis on Congolese-ness in discussion and practice also fulfils this function thus change is affected by whether a practice fits ideas of Congolese-ness or not.

Stability or continuity is important; people cling to certainties and will therefore change the least amount necessary to maintain the status quo. Alternative reactions to experiences include suppressing the experience, or reorganising things to 'accommodate the new reality' as part of existing meaning (Young and Goulet 1994:8). It is useful here to consider Bourdieu's theory of 'Habitus': 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions'; behaviour is determined by principles which structure practices and representations. These are collectively constituted and regulated without the need for rules (Bourdieu 1977:72).

This theory of culture has its uses in this context as it accounts for agency and diversity. It also discusses what will happen in a situation of change by stating that 'practices produced by the habitus... enabl[e] agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu 1977:72). However, Bourdieu, whilst allowing for diversity within the system does not allow for change of the habitus itself, simply for its reproduction. In the situation of the refugee camp changes to 'the conditions in which this habitus is operating' (*ibid*:78) will lead to changes in what is considered *thinkable*, acceptable and possible and therefore to changes in practice (*ibid*:77&78). Furthermore the agent is not only a 'producer and reproducer of objective meaning' (Bourdieu 1977:79) but also active in adapting and altering meaning and practices to their own ends.

Changes to meaning may be more likely to happen in the camp as innovators and inventors, 'tend to be marginal people living on the fringes of society. Not bound by traditions and conventions, these marginal people can see problems and their solutions with a fresh perspective' (Ferraro 1995:331 emphasis removed). In the refugee camp all inhabitants could be considered marginal, especially in terms of power and this is especially true for children who are experimenting with but not yet committed to such conventions.

Furthermore in Kala, with its new structures of authority and disrupted social structure, it is conceivable that people may feel less bound by their 'traditions and conventions' and therefore more likely to do things differently. The situation regarding marriage and divorce and changing sexual morality is one example of this, a situation which resembles that described by refugees elsewhere as: 'moral decay.



Things were no longer as they used to be, they would say. Women were becoming prostitutes, men were polygamists, divorce rates were going up' (Turner n.d.:2). Conventions may not be easily applicable in the new situation and people may not only be more *able* to innovate, but *need* to innovate to fit their old practices to the new context.

As children are less immersed in former practices and conventions, they are less likely to internalise 'the rationale' and make it their own (Bourdieu 1977:87-88). Practice and convention are not necessarily communicated verbally; social learning is not always didactic but rather 'schemes pass from practice to practice without going through discourse or consciousness' (*ibid.*). As I discuss in Chapter Nine, however, the lack of activities through which adults can communicate appropriate practice to children has led to the need for and emergence of alternative forms of transmitting these, one of which is verbal communication.

Children, not having the same experience as adults, do not evaluate new or altered practices against previous ones but against their relevance to the current context. If a practice is appropriate to camp life it's acceptance by children will not necessarily be dependent on its compatibility with the way life was lived in Congo. Generation conflicts may result, caused by different habitus produced by different 'conditions of existence which imposed different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable' (Bourdieu 1977:78).

The long-term effect of this can only be speculated but if we take account of Bourdieu's assertion that 'practical estimates give disproportionate weight to early experiences' and that these become 'the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience' (Bourdieu 1977:78) this may indeed have a significant impact. The effects may not fully emerge until some time in the future, or on return to Congo when the older generation try to reassert the previous practices. In the camp, as I discussed above (this chapter), priorities and practices of different generations often (but not always) coincide.

Thus Bourdieu's theory is a useful tool in understanding the impact of growing up in a refugee camp but I use habitus more flexibly than he intended. I treat the system of

dispositions that he refers to as something which may change especially when transposed to a different context. The change to the pattern of practices is therefore a change to the habitus. The speed and degree of change that refugees experience makes this a particular case of change, but nonetheless, change is a feature of all cultures and therefore of all habitus.

The physical and material changes that have taken place for these refugees are among the most acute that people can experience, not least because of their involuntary and rapid nature. One of the consequences of rapid change is that '[e]xtraordinary experiences tend to challenge one's conception of reality in the sense that normal ways of classifying perceptual data are no longer adequate' (Young and Goulet 1994:7-8). For the refugees in Kala camp there are the events which have caused flight which could be classed as 'extraordinary experiences'. An "event", as I use it here, may not be a sudden occurrence but rather a process such as the political and social context which made flight necessary.

In addition to these events there is the accumulative 'extraordinary' experience of living in a refugee camp, a way of life which differs in important ways from the way of life in Congo in terms of the different location, structure, means of production, activities and so on including UN intervention and separation from family or other community members. 'Sometimes seemingly well-established norms can come in 'for review' when material conditions change' (Pottier 1999:24). This is what I witnessed in the refugee camp. As I discussed above it is changes to meaning or patterns of behaviour, the 'redefinition of norms and expectations' (*ibid*:24), which had the most impact.

Some differences are acceptable, even welcomed but others are either too different or wrongly different. For the children, for example, receiving was considered a more acceptable change than the inability to produce their own food as it fits with prior understandings of rich foreigners, landowners and farmers. One of the problems with the current changes to their lives is in its uncertainty (Camino and Krulfeld 1994). Life under Mobutu had many problems but at least people knew what they were dealing with, a fact which was openly stated by some refugees who did not like living

with soldiers and corruption but this was nonetheless familiar and they knew how to deal with them.

### Change and the Individual

Individuals and therefore identity, are important aspects of practice as the group is made up of individuals. Changes to the way people conceive of themselves as individuals and as a group affect practice and meaning. Changes to people's practices will not necessarily bring about change to meanings. However, it is the changing meanings or new meanings given to the changes in practices which have more long-term consequences. Chapter Eight therefore addresses the ways in which changes to people's lifestyles and practices are internalised by them and affect identity as they search for meaning in new contexts.

The amalgamation of these individual choices is at the heart of change and stability. Whilst being individual, these choices are also influenced by others' expectations and the social consequences of an action (Bourdieu 1977:73). It is the changes in the *pattern* of these choices which will bring about significant long-term change and will determine its direction. One important change discussed in the preceding chapters concerns attitudes to education due to both employment policies and IP encouragement. With many women especially, attending adult literacy classes, these women take their children with them. Others encourage children to go to school and the result of both these things will probably be a long term change in attitude towards education and also in the norms of attending school. However such "long-term" changes can also be affected by subsequent events, several teachers commented that current attitudes reflect those held in colonial times which were eroded in the intervening years by Mobutu's policies.

As people share conventional understandings, an individual's behaviour is rarely random and separated from the behaviour and understandings of others (Bock 1974:203-5). However, individuals will be more or less flexible than each other in their adaptations to the changing situation; they will hold differently to the past, and to different aspects of the past. '[C]ontinued efforts are made to achieve a fit between disruption and strategies of resolution by drawing on familiar cultural patterns' (Jules-Rosette 1978:54).

The way change is experienced by the refugees is as events which ‘cannot be reliably predicted’ (Bock 1974: 206) or easily fit cultural mechanisms or explanations, or as unscheduled events. It is not straightforward to predict which events are unscheduled but it might be safe to predict that elements of life in the refugee camp will fall into this category given that it is an entirely new and all encompassing experience.

### Change and the Refugees

Studies of refugees focusing on change are inclined to concentrate on acculturation and re-acculturation (cf. Dona and Berry 1998 and Camino and Krulfeld 1994). These tend to be studies which focus on resettlement and the ways people adapt or integrate into other cultures. In situations such as in Africa, however, we see examples of massive numbers of refugees living in camps or settlements which become their long term homes, and whilst they interact with the host population their main focus is the rest of the camp population. These people do not have the same relationship to their hosts as in the types of situations of acculturation mentioned above nor is this aspect of “culture contact” comparable.

In Kala, “contact” occurs more in terms of contact with refugees from different areas of Congo, and perhaps more significantly, with the IPs and their programmes<sup>3</sup>. The latter effect closer contact with international values and the international development discourse. Inherent in this relationship is a different kind of power dynamic which will be discussed in terms of “agency intervention” in Chapter Nine. Confrontations can reinforce appropriate behaviour (Bourdieu 1977:81) but new confrontations especially between *different* agents (other refugees, Zambians or IPs) may also lead to new or different behaviour becoming common practice. In the refugee situation received ideas may be those imposed by camp administrators, or practical solutions in dealing with a new environment.

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<sup>3</sup> Although most of the IP staff were in fact Zambian I treat them as different here due to their specific characteristics in terms of education levels and attitudes which comes from their association with international NGOs and donors.

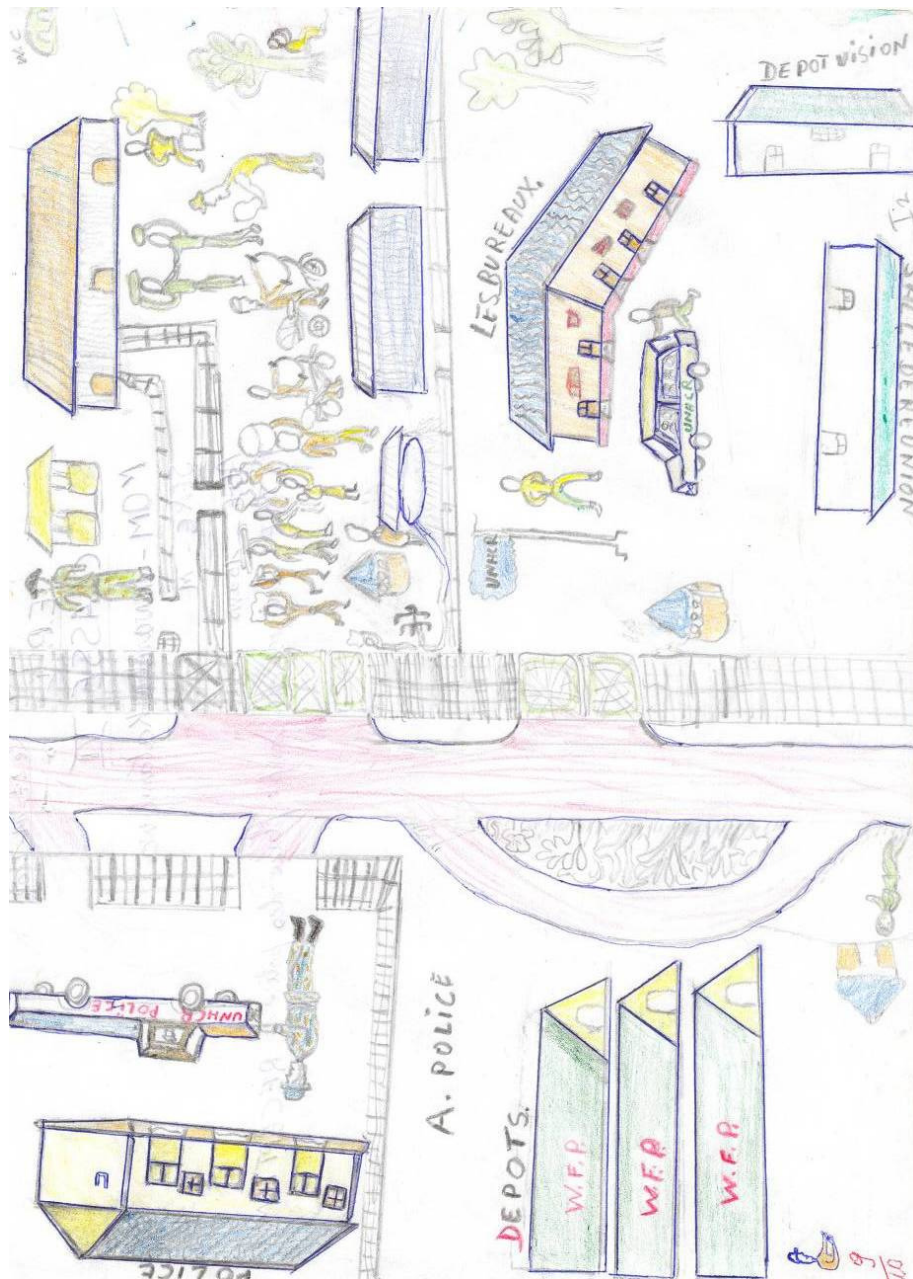


Fig. 54 Life in the camp (primary schoolgirl).

Change and the Future

As I mentioned above, the children construct life in Congo in terms of both the past and the future, thus memory plays an important role in the way that they interpret their experiences. Change is like memory in the way that it is involved in a Janus-like focus, looking back and forwards. Change also *involves* memory: memories constitute

‘the links of continuity between past and present, between who we are and who we think we are’ (Antze & Lambek 1996:xvii). The present also has an impact on this process as the example of urban Zambians demonstrates: ‘They are caught in a process of seeking new identities and self-definitions while managing the day-to-day struggles of urban survival’ (Jules-Rosette 1978:54). The refugees likewise are preoccupied by the everyday subsistence tasks but are also repeatedly confronted by the new context’s impact on things previously taken for granted and the need to reconcile the present with both (imagined) past and imagined future.

Past, present and memory are all important in constituting and imagining the future and in change and continuity. All three are involved in change on both long-term and everyday levels and the balance between them. As discussed previously, the way that change occurs largely depends on the way that individuals react. This is affected by their “culture” but also by other factors such as age, economics and the individual person.

Change is an undeniable facet of being a refugee, where differences are ever present and where the past and the future are fought for in the negotiations of practice. The input of people from different social milieu and those associated with international organisations make this ever more problematic. As discussed in the previous chapter, childhood and adolescence are periods of growing and changing. Change may therefore be something that children negotiate more easily than adults, on the other hand this double transition may simply cause a doubling of the tensions and potential conflicts and contradictions (James and Prout (1997d:235).

Furthermore, given the impact of adult concerns on children’s lives and the social learning which is a part of this process, children also become subject to attempts by the adults to maintain continuity with past ways of doing things and therefore childhood is a site where change and continuity are particularly contested. To be a child is ‘to be both a symbol of change, in a socio-cultural milieu *and* an aspect of continuity in socio-cultural reproduction’ (Rapport and Overing 2000:32).

## **The Importance of Food**

Change has had a significant impact on the refugees' lives and the specific areas where this is felt by the children were identified in the previous chapter. Education, health and identity generally arise only when conversation is specific to these subjects. Food, on the other hand, is a topic which can arise in any context. One of the reasons for food's importance is, however, linked to the presence of change. As Goody demonstrates in *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982), the persistence of indigenous foodways 'contribute[s] to an individual's sense of well-being in times of rapid change' (cited in Levitas 1983:13). Goody relates the acceptance or rejection of food in such contexts, not to the structural compatibility of new food and consumption practices but to culturally specific modes of production and communication and changes in these (*ibid*:13).

That food permeated every aspect of conversation and arose in almost any discussion is not surprising if we take the view of Counihan and Van Esterik that: 'Food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is a central pawn in political strategies of states, households and individuals. Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds and contradictions. Eating is an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships' (1997:1). The following chapters map many of these enactments of economics, social relations, identity and politics through the discussions of food. In the final two chapters especially, I discuss the power and identity relationships in which the refugees use food in the way identified by Pottier: "As the most powerful instrument for expressing and shaping interactions between humans, food is the primary gift and the repository of condensed social meanings... Food derives its power from the web of interrelations it evokes" (Pottier 1996:240).

The following chapters will therefore discuss the way that dependence on distributed food has had an impact on identity, social relationships, and above all change as changes to food practices become changes to other (economic, kinship) systems. This includes food, production, exchange and consumption, but also the ways in which food is talked about and used in discursive practices. This is a further reason for focusing on food rather than education and health as these do not have the same scope for demonstrating wider community issues. This is also therefore a reason why the

children talk about it more. Food is also more closely linked to experience and subjectivity in the way that it is embodied and embodies (Lupton 1996:1). Children, who experience things more physically than adults, are therefore more likely to experience this more strongly (Sibley 1995).

'Good to eat' 'Good to think'<sup>4</sup> Good to express

The fact that most conversation in the camp, revolved around food, rather than enhancing my understanding of the problem, initially proved to be a barrier. I was living in Kawambwa with the IP staff and therefore had a greater understanding of the programmes and distributions than I would otherwise have had. When I arrived in the camp the refugees were on half rations and had been for some months, since the violence escalated in Afghanistan and food was needed for relief there. Half rations meant that the refugees were given “7 days food to last for 14 days”.<sup>5</sup> But even this was dependent on food being available. For some of this time there were no beans available so they just received maize. Further the UN does not distribute retrospectively so if there is a shortage one week or month, this is not made up for in subsequent weeks, it is therefore difficult to keep some food in reserve.

I therefore found it understandable that the children should complain about shortages of food, especially as those who went to school had (at the time) to pay a proportion of food towards some of the teachers’ salaries. Although I found the frequency and length with which complaints of hunger would arise in discussions with children somewhat frustrating, I did not question this.

When the refugees were put back onto “normal” rations I expected these complaints to stop. That they did not was my first indication that there was something at play beyond a simple food shortage. Complaints about the quantity of food received continued in spite of the refugees receiving double what they had previously. Within the first few distributions, the section leaders had complained that they were not getting the correct amount, that the measures were too small or maybe that they had been changed. They felt that they were not getting the same amount as the refugees in

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<sup>4</sup> Levi Strauss (1966)

<sup>5</sup> The refugees’ way of referring to half rations



Mwange camp<sup>6</sup> who, according to rumour, received a full bottle of cooking oil each at distributions.

The complaints continued to the extent that UNHCR/WVI/WFP invited the section leaders to a demonstration of how the measures used during food distributions corresponded to the weights specified by WFP. The outcome of this complaint<sup>7</sup> was less interesting to me than the fact that only weeks after having food rations doubled, the refugees were complaining vociferously about food amounts when the measures had not been changed in the meantime.

This was the first indication that the refugees were using food as a substitute for talking about other things. In addition to the fact that the lack of food was more than a nutritional problem, it also became obvious over time that the language of hunger was used in discussing wider issues. Food in itself is often used as a symbol (Bringéus 2001, Counihan and Van Esterik 1997), but in the camp it is also used discursively and expressively as a metaphor.

Certainties which produced accepted meanings have been lost and there is therefore the quest for a replacement. The hungry minds are, in a sense, hungry for meaning or certainty in their lives. The metaphorical hunger which I speak of here does not displace or deny physical hunger but rather works with and increases it. Physical hunger is a reminder of the other types of hunger but is also felt more strongly as a result of them.

It is also important to take into account, 'the totality of complex, cultural approaches to food production and use. Sensitivity to cultural *perspectives* requires more than the simplistic 'people X enjoy food Y'' (Pottier 1999:16). The diversity of local (Congolese) understandings of hunger are demonstrated below:

Among the Ntomba of Lake Tumba, 'hunger' denotes the absence of rice from the diet (Pagezy 1985), while 'prolonged hunger' among the Aluund denotes social breakdown and moral decline (De Boeck 1994). It is easy to advocate respect for food *preferences* (for example 'the Ntomba eat rice') much harder to

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<sup>6</sup> Mwange near Mporokoso is the sister Camp to Kala. Many Kala refugees have relatives and friends there.

<sup>7</sup> WVI expected to be vindicated in the amounts distributed, but in fact the measure for oil was found to be short and was subsequently adjusted.

appreciate *perspectives*... (as when hunger is equated with social and moral decline) (Pottier 1999:14-15).

In addition to the layers of meaning given to food by the refugee, there are also the many anthropological ways of understanding and using food practices to construct meaning: ‘the study of food and eating is important both for its own sake since food is utterly essential to human existence...and because the subfield has proved valuable for debating and advancing anthropological theory and research methods’ (Mintz and Du Bois 2002:99). Thus looking at food is useful here in discussing intervention, trust, identity, power, change, memory.

Food has been a topic of interest for anthropologists for a very long time and continues to be an important topic (Mintz and Du Bois 2002:100 and Dare 1999:2), although other commentators feel that it could have been given more attention: ‘Had we truly heeded native priorities, food – “the main daily business” of most societies-might well have constituted anthropologies primary focus’ (Levitas 1983:8).

The pervasive effects of food distributions come from the way ‘[f]ood and drink touch society in every conceivable way’ (Clarkson and Crawford 2001:1). The centrality of food to the life of the refugees emerged through my interactions with children. My realisation that other issues were expressed through statements about food crystallised as a result of an interview with Kilufya (18), who was responsible for her 4 younger siblings. Although they had arrived as “unaccompanied minors” the fact of her age meant that they lived together in a “child-headed household” rather than with foster parents. I was asking her how her activities in the camp differed from those in Congo. From her discussion of these “activities”: “boiling manioc or sweet potatoes and eating them with the neighbours” in the afternoon, it was revealed that food is also a leisure activity in Congo, a sociable way of passing the time. However there is another element which I did not fully appreciate until I returned to the UK and reviewed some of the issues: The importance of *talking* about food and the ways in which this is done.

No matter what I wanted to be talking about, conversations always returned to the topic of food and the lack of it. On the most basic everyday level, the vocabulary of

food took on another dimension in the camp; even standard greetings were transformed, a common greeting (Bemba) in the camp would go as follows:

<i>Muli shani?</i>	How are you?
<i>pa nonno</i>	A bit (OK)
<i>ni naani?</i>	What's wrong?
<i>Njekele</i>	<i>Njekele</i> (Peas)

This could be heard in Tabwa, Bemba, Swahili, French and I expect, in the other languages I was not familiar with. In French it could be more overt, rather than responding “a bit OK” sometimes people would reply with “*je souffre*”. What? “*Njekele*”. *Souffrir* here is used in the context of the phrase “*souffrir de faim*” which is closer to starvation than hunger. When it is abbreviated in this way “I am suffering” means I am hungry, but also implies other types of suffering. My knowledge of this greeting is necessarily limited to my experience of it and it is therefore possible that it was specifically directed at me as a “rich white woman”. The formulaic nature of the greeting and the diversity of people I heard it from, however, leads me to believe that this is not the case.

The above are new ways of greeting specific to the camp but even the typical afternoon greeting (Bemba) *mwalileni?* (Are you satisfied? or Have you eaten?) takes on a new edge in this situation, as very few people felt they were eating enough. This is a greeting which was fraught with problems both for me and for the Bemba, for different reasons. For fear of witchcraft, (either provoking it or accusations of it) they could not reply *Bweno* (very well). The standard answer even in times of plenty or in Kawambwa was simply *pa nonno* (a bit) or *ea Mukwai* (yes). Yet when I followed their lead, I was mocked for being fat and therefore lying: *of course* I had eaten well! It is therefore difficult to explain the nuances of how this is different in the camp but people were less likely to be non-committal and more likely to openly complain of suffering as described above.

Issues such as “hunger” and “home”, discussed in this thesis, are not solely academic, but their importance in everyday usage is not always evident in academic treatments. The ideas are formulated around a need to rationalise, yet ideas such as home, for example more often have an emotive and embodied, almost instinctual basis. In deconstructing terms and denying essentialist meanings, we are in danger of denying

experience, emotions and realities. “Homesickness” and “hunger” are experienced as real. The reality of emotions and feelings, though not always expressible, is undeniable. Further, if the people we research essentialise a term, we should honour and reflect their point of view (Barth 1969:2). In this way using food in my thesis mirrors the refugees use of food and provides a concrete, intimate substance which acts on our senses, as a reminder of the fact that my study involves people and their activities, bodies, and emotions.

There are many parts in the following chapters which may seem to explain why *refugees* talk so much about food rather than why *children* talk about food. However, “Studies of children are beginning to emerge as significant for mainstream analyses of relations between adults” (Toren 1996:93). Conclusions about food in the camp were generalisable from children to adults. My observations and interactions with adults, confirmed the impressions formed through discussions with the children, these are integrated in the discussion rather than treated separately as “adults issues” and “children’s issues”. There are times when I refer simply to “refugee” rather than refugee children however neither category is homogenous and by using these terms I intend to signify a specific group of people in the camp rather than the totality of persons who can be designated such.

In addition to reflecting children’s preoccupation with the topic of food, the following discussion is also a result of the richness of food as ‘a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour’ (Barthes 1997:21). Such richness is used both by the refugees as they negotiate life in the camp, and by the anthropologist as she negotiates her understanding of this process and attempts to communicate this to others.

As children experience more through their senses and bodies, it is not surprising therefore that food is particularly important to them, however this discussion, and the remainder of the thesis demonstrates that this is only a small part of the reason for their repeated discussions of food. Relationships with parents and siblings are demarcated partially through food. They “play” at cooking and they “work” at it. Their time is restricted by the need to prepare peas, their clothes by the fact that their

families have no fields. If food penetrates every aspect of camp life it is unsurprising that it also penetrates every aspect of children's lives and conversations.

## **Conclusion**

At the start of this chapter I identified memory, power, identity and change as key issues which emerged through my discussions with children. Memory (and home), in the fact that children are constantly making comparisons, looking back to their former lives. Power, because many aspects of refugees' lives and relationships are controlled and informed by power imbalances that do not fit with the power structures they experienced in the past.

Identity, because for the children being a "refugee" has an impact on their lives and their self image, and because this time of disruption means that all refugees have been caused to rethink things previously taken for granted and create a new way of life. For children this is doubly important as it is happening at a time when they are creating, negotiating and establishing a separate identity for themselves as part of, but as an individual within, a community.

Talking about food in the camp may therefore be a means of expressing the many aspects of their lifestyle which people have had to adapt, or change completely through a concrete aspect which is easier to talk about. For the remainder of the thesis I will be addressing this through looking at the different types of complaints and conversations there were regarding food. I have formulated this in terms of "hungry bodies", "hungry people" and "hungry minds". This hunger is both an issue of food and a more existential hunger.

Given that food was the main topic of conversation, and that several of the activities carried out by children (or no longer carried out by them) involved the consumption or preparation of food, the thesis continues to fulfil its intention that it would be about children's activities and their preoccupations. Dependence on UNHCR for food has led to many changes to people's lifestyles and the different ways that this has occurred are discussed in the following chapters. Chapter Six (Hungry Bodies) looks at material changes, Chapter Seven (Hungry People) the consequential social changes,

Chapter Eight (Hungry Minds) changes to identity. Hungry minds then continues in Chapter Nine with a discussion of the ways food is used to protest in an attempt to regain control and resist the imposition of further external structures which will affect change to both social activities and their meaning. All of these changes are integrated into the process of social learning as children incorporate them into their patterns of behaviour.

## Chapter Six

# Hungry Bodies: Consumption

Children's lives, their activities and experiences have been altered significantly by the changed means of production. These changes encompass their work activities, the foods they eat and their standard of living. Their lifestyle is also changed as a result of the different activities of their family and community. '[C]hanges in the organisation of production radically transform the system of categories and beliefs' (Douglas 1990:xiii) and changes in food production and consumption in the refugee camp are both the cause of, and the result of changes in the wider economic and social context.

This chapter looks at the way that food's everyday, sensory and embodied nature reinforces the impact of dependence on UNHCR and the consequences of this for children's social learning. The different types of food and the different means of acquiring it are a constant reminder of the different lifestyle that camp living necessitates. This chapter looks specifically at consumption and exchange: what people eat, how they prepare it and where they get it from, how food as a substance is valued, treated and transformed.

In addition to this '[t]o eat is a behaviour that develops beyond its own ends, replacing, summing up, and signaling other behaviours, and it is precisely for these reasons that it is a sign' (Barthes 1997:25). Food and eating are therefore not only associated with change, but also represent change in general. This chapter therefore lays the ground for Chapters Seven to Nine.

### The Family Meal

In Kala refugee camp describing a typical family meal is very simple as in general everyone eats the same thing. Food is provided by WFP and so a typical meal consists of *ugali* (maize meal porridge) and *njekele* (peas). For those lucky enough to have some land to cultivate the monotony of this diet two to three times a day may be supplemented with the occasional meal of cassava or sweet potatoes, (though this is

seasonal) or a different relish in the form of *katapa* (cassava leaves) or *kalembula* (sweet potato leaves). The food is served either in the saucepan or in enamel pots and is placed in the centre of the table, if there is one, or on a mat on the floor. When the food is ready a bowl of water or a bowl and a jug of water are passed around. If there was soap in the rations at food distribution this will also be included so that each family member can wash their hands. They take it in turns to pour for each other either from the jug or using a cup to scoop water from the bowl and pour.

Before eating people often say Grace as a large majority of people in the refugee camp are Christian. People serve themselves from the pots by first breaking off a lump of *ugali* and kneading it in their right hand, this is then rolled in the fingers to form a ball



Fig. 55 Fleur's children eating Maize (in their new house), rolling it in their hands to create a ball

and then it is dipped into the relish. Relish is a general word used to describe what accompanies the staple *ugali* it could be meat, beans or vegetables, with some kind of sauce. In the camp the relish is usually *njekele*. If the relish is something mushy like *njekele* it will stick to the ball of *ugali*, if it is pieces like *chisense*, the thumb is used to hold some onto the ball of *ugali* and this is then placed in the mouth. After the



meal, hands are washed again, this time people often need to use their fingernails to scrape away the dried on coating of *ugali* which clings especially to the cuticle.

Eating is a sensory practice, the taste, smell and warmth of the food adding to the feeling of fullness as the food satisfies hunger. In this case there is also the element of touch on the hands, the clean feeling of hands after washing away the dust of the day, the way the water feels pleasantly warm, or shockingly cold, the feel of the *ugali* and of the wet stickiness of the relish (peas are starchier and therefore have a different feel to most other relishes), the itchy feeling as food dries onto the hands.

The above descriptions are restricted to things which I witnessed people eating while I was in the camp; I saw them cooked by the refugees and by Zambians in Kawambwa. I have no direct knowledge of what people ate in the evenings, as I had to be out of the camp by 4.30pm everyday. I was only in the camp once to see an evening meal. What was eaten was very similar to a lunchtime meal, on this occasion *chisense* was the relish. This indicates that evening meals are similar to midday meals. This is certainly the case in Kawambwa and is supported by comments made by the children regarding eating peas morning noon and night.

There are several differences between meals eaten at home (in the camp), and those eaten as part of the camp celebrations such as World Refugee Day but perhaps the most important is that the latter do not come from a carefully rationed store and there is generally plenty to eat, as much as is wanted. The other, and possibly more important, difference is that there is always meat, or a choice of meats, as well as a vegetable relish (often cabbage and *katapa*). There is sometimes even rice as well as *ugali*. In many ways these celebration days are similar to other celebrations such as New Year's Day where special food is eaten to mark the occasion.

Group D boys described for me an imaginary celebratory feast (*Karamu*) which they would eat on their return to Congo, and it was similar to these in the inclusion of a variety of dishes, "Chicken, also duck, beef, goat and pork, it must have chicken and duck and beef, *nshima*, rice, sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes. To drink soft drinks, tea, eat fritters and bread. Also eat vegetables, bean leaves, *sombe* (*katapa*), *chibwabwa*, *kalembula*, rape, cabbage. NOT *njekele* and the *sombe* must be good"

(Another group said “the *sombe* here is not good, not like in Congo, here there is no seasoning”).

### *Children*

Babies and infants are fed by another family member in the same way that the person would feed themselves. Children may eat separately from adults, especially if the older family members will eat later. However, another important aspect of eating together is table manners. Mealtimes are commonly useful occasions for bringing up children:

During a meal, it was obvious that children were inferior to adults, yet adulthood appeared to be something worth striving for. At the same time mealtimes provided a chance for children to imitate adult behaviour and acquire certain knowledge, skills and norms without any need for those to be pointed out directly (Bringéus 2001:171).

This perhaps applies more in the Western setting Bringéus describes, where children may have fewer opportunities to observe adults. In the camp, children are made aware of their social position on other occasions, but mealtimes are nonetheless times when the family sits together in close proximity in a structured setting and are therefore important for demonstrating to children appropriate behaviour such as the respectful postures described by the children in Chapter Four.

When I ate lunch with Fleur, her children ate in a separate room. I questioned this as it made me feel uncomfortable to know that I might be the cause. Fleur explained that in fact it was because her eldest son was embarrassed to eat with me as he made such a mess dropping food at the table. Although a lack of chairs may have been a factor, the children ate at the same time as us so this was not a case of them eating what was left after we had finished.

### Food Distributions

In the refugee camp food is received from WFP at “food distributions”. Equal rations are given to all regardless of age or need. When I first arrived in the camp, there were logistical problems affecting these distributions. These mainly concerned the transportation of food. As I stated in Chapter Five, the refugees were on half rations yet even these were not always arriving on time. Quite often food distribution was

done fortnightly or even weekly rather than monthly, depending on the amount of maize and other foodstuffs available. The problem with this was that people were unable to plan for their rations as they had no idea how long they would need to last, they also used up any reserves that they might have built up.

Refugees are therefore not only subject to the rationing of UNHCR/WFP, but as a result of this, they are also subject to their own rationing. (Children stealing from family stores to go to the cinema was therefore especially problematic.) There is the need to ensure that there is still food remaining at the end of the month, a process made more difficult by the above problems. If there are no beans one week, or the maize is late, they need to have some food in reserve. This cannot be easily replenished given that UNHCR do not distribute retrospectively.

Previously, especially when GM maize was still being distributed, maize was ground by WFP in the camp and then distributed as maize meal. The problem with this was that the three hammer-mills in the camp often broke down, with the result that distribution was delayed. Further, there was generally slightly less maize after the milling than before. It was decided that the refugees should start to receive their maize in grains and be responsible for the grinding themselves at the hammer mills in the camp. This was a way of resolving the problem of delays in distribution as people can pound maize to eat and at least will not go hungry. It was also a way for UNHCR to try to make the people in the camp more “self sufficient” as they now have to pay a proportion of their food rations to have it milled.

Children have an important role at food distributions: “Sometimes the mother is busy at home so they give the ration card to the child to go ahead”. They also help in the transportation of food “She is balancing the weight as she has younger siblings she cannot carry it all. She will carry it on her head.” Children also attend distributions to scavenge: “Some peas have been dropped, the children take advantage of this to pick up maize and peas” (film).

### Unfamiliar food

WFP who provide the food for distribution, consider primarily nutritional value and availability in deciding what to distribute and although refugees in sub-Saharan Africa are given different foods to refugees in Eastern Europe, for example, on a micro level familiarity and preference is not taken into consideration. '[C]entrally designed policies and regional cultural conventions are never experienced in the same way' by all people (Pottier 1999:27). The division of 'food that was "good for you, but not good" from food that was "good, but not good for you"' distinguishes 'our cultural conception of the need for nourishment and the search for pleasure' (Mead 1997:14) and may be why WFP do not respond to the refugees dissatisfaction with quantity and their complaints about the peas.

The distribution of maize meal is appropriate for those who have always used this as a staple, but many in the camp are used to using cassava meal to make *ugali* and maize is therefore both unfamiliar and inappropriate. Given that both are used to make *ugali*, this may not seem such a change, but there are important differences. Cassava meal cooks more quickly, it also has a sheen to it when cooked and therefore maize meal *ugali* seems very dull and unappetising in comparison. It has a different taste (although staple foods are usually "background accompaniment" they nonetheless have a subtle taste, if this changes then it becomes a noticeable intrusion into other flavours) and a different texture (softer but more chewy) resulting in a different feel in the mouth, a different way of chewing and also a different feel in the hand. Some people in the camp are particularly unhappy not to be able to give this to babies being weaned and will try to find work locally in order to earn some cassava. One of the girls filmed in the camp was pounding cassava for this reason "She is pounding Cassava. It is for the baby's gruel. They eat maize meal. They got the Cassava that she is pounding, from Zambians. It was bought. This is why her mother asked her to pound this morning" (film).

For a time even those used to maize meal found the distributed food unfamiliar as the maize was being imported from the US and it was therefore yellow maize. This made *ugali* with an alien colour and taste and although (scientifically) superior in terms of nutrition, was judged by the children as greatly inferior. The *ugali* made from yellow

maize had a much less subtle taste, but also looked unappetising to people used to a much more neutral white background to their food. Many staple foods are in fact white if you take potatoes, pasta, bread or rice as examples, colours of foods combined on a plate are important (Lupton 1996:10) and the neutrality of colour and flavour may well be recommending factors of a staple food, given that it is often combined with various relishes.



Fig. 56 Life in a refugee camp... I remember when I was in Congo (note the colour of the ugali) (primary schoolgirl 15)

The colour of food is important, sight might not be the prime sense used in eating but it is nonetheless an important one, evident in the fact that presentation is considered important in restaurants. In the camp the *ugali* is turned over in the bowl so that it is smooth. If food *looks* unappetising this certainly has an impact on the eater. Likewise if it looks unfamiliar this contributes to the unfamiliar taste. US maize was referred to as “Yellow Maize” in the Children’s complaints without mentioning its taste, as though the unpleasant taste was signified by its colour. Other issues of unfamiliarity arose regarding the oil and the relish. The type of oil donated depended on the country donating it but for people from very rural areas whose experience of oil was limited to palm oil, any of the sunflower, vegetable or Soya oils were unfamiliar (and therefore not right) in colour, taste and consistency. This is important as oil is used primarily to flavour foods.

Regarding the relish, when I first arrived in the camp, several children spoke of the beans “we get now are not as good as the ones we got at first” (Boy 12), the problem was that these took longer to cook. This was completely eclipsed, however, when beans were replaced entirely by *njekele* a completely unfamiliar food which (for the majority<sup>1</sup>) had an unfamiliar taste, texture and which people did not know how to cook.

When peas were first distributed in the camp the refugees were not given any guidance on how to cook them in spite of the fact that they are an unfamiliar food. The refugees used their experiences of cooking beans which were familiar, to inform their cooking of peas which resulted in undercooked peas making people ill. “Peas are not good they give you stomach ache” “An old man on my street was sick from eating peas” (Helene Group B). Gradually, through experience and the advice of a small minority of people in the camp who had cooked them before, the refugees started to soak the peas and then to remove their “skins”.

The problem with the relish was not limited to its quality, combined with this was the monotony of food consumed in the camp. Not only “from Monday to Sunday, *njekele*” (Bupe 14) but also morning noon and night the only options provided by

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<sup>1</sup> Only one family I knew had had them before.

WFP were *ugali* with *njekele* or *ugali* without. “UNHCR I would like to declare to you that these peas that we are eating, we are fed up with eating them, you could change a bit!” (primary schoolboy). If people wanted variety they had to obtain a different relish from other sources by buying, bartering or growing other relishes. None of these were easy or straightforward. This is also the reason for the children’s appreciation of their Friday gifts.

An important aspect of food is its familiarity. Foods which are everyday parts of a meal to one group of people can be completely abhorrent to another. The refugees were used to eating dogs, cats and snakes, which the Zambians would not consider food at all, but group D boys described with disgust the eating of Okra (which is very slimy). So when I planned a birthday party for the children in the camp<sup>2</sup> I should not have been surprised at their disappointment. I had spent a lot of time and money finding the right foods to demonstrate the kind of foods we eat at children’s parties in the UK (mainly sandwiches, crisps and jelly). I had thought that since they were familiar with bread and liked sweet things, that there would not be anything too problematic, but I was wrong. The only things which were not rejected were the sausages, and some rice which my housemate had (luckily) suggested I include.



Fig. 57 Is this food?!

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<sup>2</sup> This was to celebrate my birthday as children generally do not know their birthdays. I was throwing a birthday party as part of a continual process whereby I tried to share information about myself and life in the UK as they shared aspects of their lives with me.

Even the sweet desserts were unpopular and eventually were finished by the adults who were using the room after we had finished. The children were persuaded to taste the crisps when they were informed that they were maize, but still did not like them, they also, in spite of eating the sandwiches left feeling hungry. The following week they complained that I had not given them their usual “Friday gift”. I explained that the party, together with the party bags (containing a toy, stickers and sweets) had been their Friday gift. At this point I was told, (aggressively) “we were not even full, we had to spend the afternoon hungry as we had missed our lunch to eat with you.” This highlights the issue that children in the camp, as many children I have known, are very reluctant to try new foods and that the unfamiliarity of food in the camp may therefore have been particularly problematic for the children.

The problem with the party food was that it was unfamiliar and also therefore not considered “food” at all. Whilst there was possibly a degree of the “Christmas in the Kalahari”<sup>3</sup> attitude here, reducing any social status I might have achieved for my hospitality, in this case I feel that the children genuinely did not care how much money I had spent or what I had provided. They were simply letting me know that it had not been *real* food (see also Chapter Seven). Whilst James describes children’s delight in consuming ‘non-foods’; sweets with no nutritional value, the children in the camp were more concerned with their (and the community’s) power over categorisations of *real* food (James 1979). This is an isolated example, but it demonstrates the way that the children and their community feel about the food that they are being given at the distributions.

What people see as normal, special and different foods depends on their prior experiences. Peas are a slightly special food in Tanzania, not a luxury but better than the everyday, which is why a Tanzanian businessman would come to the camp to buy peas from the refugees. To the people living in the camp, however, they are both unfamiliar and unwanted, associated with being poor, dependent and lacking the freedom to choose.

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to Richard Lee’s experiences (1984)



## **Hunger: Empty Bellies**

One thing that the Zambians remarked upon and that I noticed myself on the occasions when I saw refugees eating, (publicly) was the amount of food that the Congolese eat; they seemed to have much larger helpings than the Zambians. This may be one reason why refugees in Kala camp, although they are receiving a carefully calculated amount, find food rations insufficient. ‘Questions as basic as ‘can food requirements be measured?’... remain without satisfactory answers’ (Pottier 1999:19). The food rations are calculated by the WFP in terms of what is necessary to survive, not what is necessary to be happy or feel satisfied. In the case of these refugees, they are not getting as much food as they are used to eating and so are constantly “hungry”. “When we were in Congo we had food of our own labour and this was plenty” (boy 12).

A further problem with the insufficiency of the food distributions is that people are not used to having to measure when cooking. Marguerite recounted to me one of her neighbours’ surprised comments when she (Marguerite) instructed her daughter to boil three cups of water for the *ugali*. “You measure your *ugali!*”<sup>4</sup> People are more used to judging with the eye what will be the right quantity of food. For this reason especially when they first arrived in the camp, people found themselves at the end of the month with no mealie meal remaining.

An added element to this is the attitude I found generally, not just in the camp, and is possibly borne out of hardship. If something is on offer, people take as much as they possibly can, as they may not get another opportunity. This was brought home to me on two occasions in the camp. One was New Year’s Day when I had taken some sweets to give to children in the camp, I was trying to give them all one or two sweets each but they were all crowding in and grabbing even when they had already received some. This was made worse by the fact that they were aware of all the other children in the area who had noticed that something was going on and heading towards us at a run.

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<sup>4</sup> The water goes into the pan first and the amount of meal added is determined by this, thus measuring the water is measuring the *ugali*.

The second example occurred when some people visiting the camp bought bread from Foyer and asked the ladies there to give this out to the children who gather when anything unusual is happening. Initially the woman giving out the bread told all of the children to form a queue and she would give some to each, but the queues very quickly became scrums of children grabbing from her hands and in the end, to ensure that some of the children further away also got some bread, she started to throw pieces to them. It may seem very dehumanising (like ducks in a pond) but it was the best and fairest way to give out the bread in this situation. Tea given out during workshops was already sweetened as when people were left to serve themselves they would add spoonfuls far beyond what they needed simply because it was there and they can't be sure when they will next get any.

Differences experienced in relation to the foods eaten in the camp are concerned with taste, with quantity and with the need to acquire new habits of food preparation, there is also the monotony of eating the same foods continually. The above discussion has concentrated on food as something which is eaten and the associated cultural values, but the family meal is the end of a long process and the key changes experienced by children in Kala refugee camp were not simply related to the food which was eaten, but to how the food came to be on the table. There are wide ranging economic, social and cultural practices around food its transformation. The second part of this chapter will discuss the journey of food before it reaches the table.

### Activities

As I have mentioned above, food preparation is an important aspect of life in the camp. The way that maize is milled by machinery means that the traditional way of soaking it before pounding it is not possible, and the taste is therefore different. To cook *ugali*, first of all water is boiled on a fire or brazier, then a small amount of maize meal is stirred in, and more is sprinkled on top. This is put back to boil and when it starts to bubble the maize on top is stirred into the liquid below. The porridge is then left to continue cooking. Stirring the porridge is an arduous task done with a flat wooden spoon.



Fig. 58 When I asked the children to bring some toys they had made one boy brought a stirring stick he was making.

As stirring takes such force, and as the pots that the refugees are given have no handles, the pot is held between the feet as the *ugali* is stirred. In spite of the fact that this is a very arduous and skilful task (one which I never mastered) girls of relatively young ages are often given sole responsibility for preparing a meal. *Ugali* made with cassava meal is prepared in a similar way although it takes less time, and less effort as it is somewhat softer, but more skill as it is stickier.



Fig. 59 I have drawn this to show you that when we were in Congo we lived very well, without difficulty. Because at home in Congo we ate *ugali* with lots of fish. But here in the camp we just eat *ugali* with peas, this is my worry (secondary schoolgirl 17).

In the camp, people usually cook over one brazier or one fire so it is necessary for one or more of the dishes to stand. The relish is generally prepared before the *ugali* as the *ugali* can dry out if left after cooking. The relish, if it is peas, can take several hours to prepare and cook. The peas are left to soak (overnight) and when they have swollen to

their full shape and size, are peeled by one or more people. This can be a sociable task but due to the low level of skill involved, it is usually children who do most of this. It was difficult to choose a term to describe this activity but as the French term used is *epulcher*, I have used the English peel.

What this job entails is taking each pea and removing its skin. A handful of peas from the water are held in one hand while one pea is held in the finger tips breaking the skin with the fingers or nail of one hand and then squeezing the pea out of its skin with the finger tips of the other hand. The skin is dropped onto the mat one is sitting on and the pea is dropped into the pot and the next pea skinned. Not only is this a time consuming and boring task, “peeling peas controls our life” (Group C) it also becomes painful in its later stages; the fingers cramp and the skin becomes sensitive from being wet for such a long time.



Fig. 60 Peeling Peas. Picture taken by children in Group C on the topic of children's activities

The peas are then boiled with salt and oil (if available) for flavour until they are so soft that they resemble almost a lumpy paste. Some people who were familiar with peas prior to living in the camp, also prepare them with the skins still on, but this

takes longer and therefore uses up more fuel. Most people do not risk using this other method as they were ill when they first cooked peas in this way.

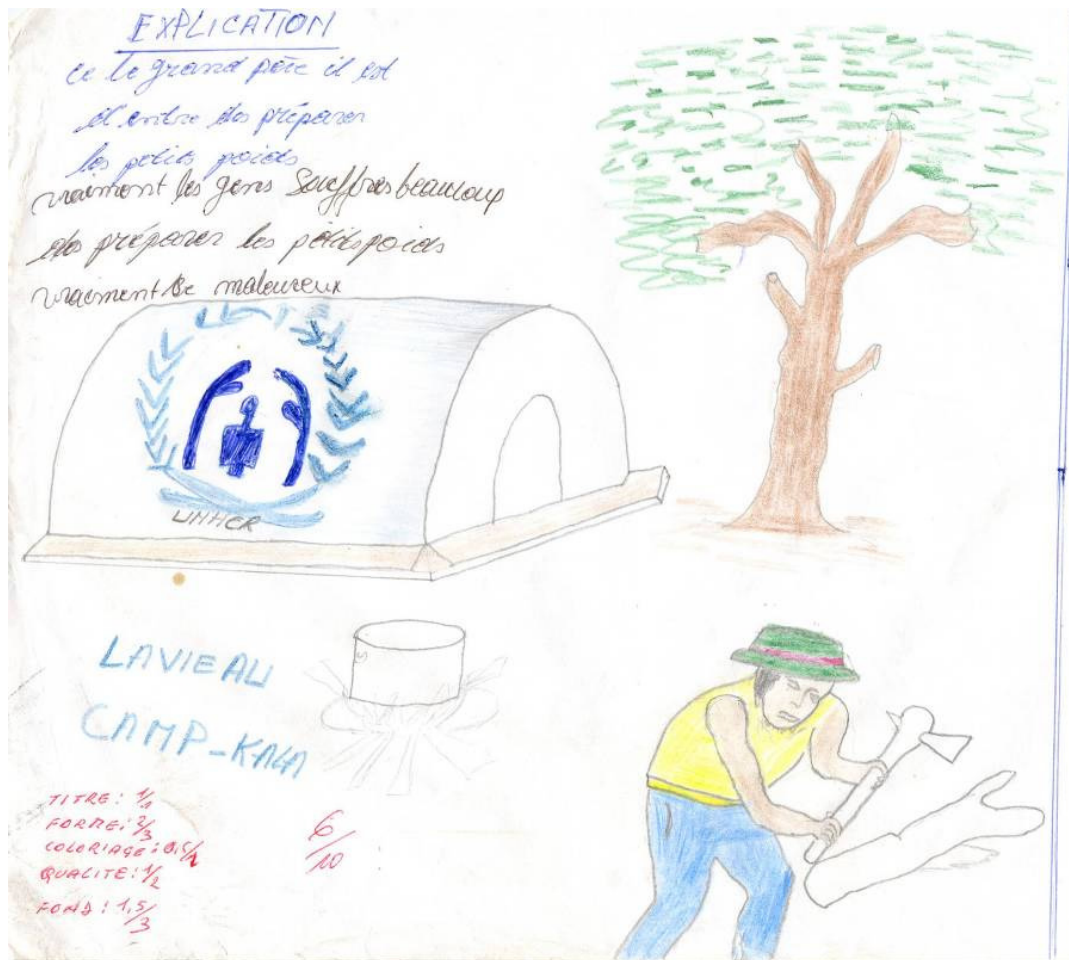


Fig. 61 It's the grandfather and he is cooking peas. People really suffer a lot from cooking peas, it's really miserable (primary schoolgirl 15).

Other relishes eaten in the camp are beans, which used to be distributed and were therefore very common. For variety people buy or exchange food for dried fish.

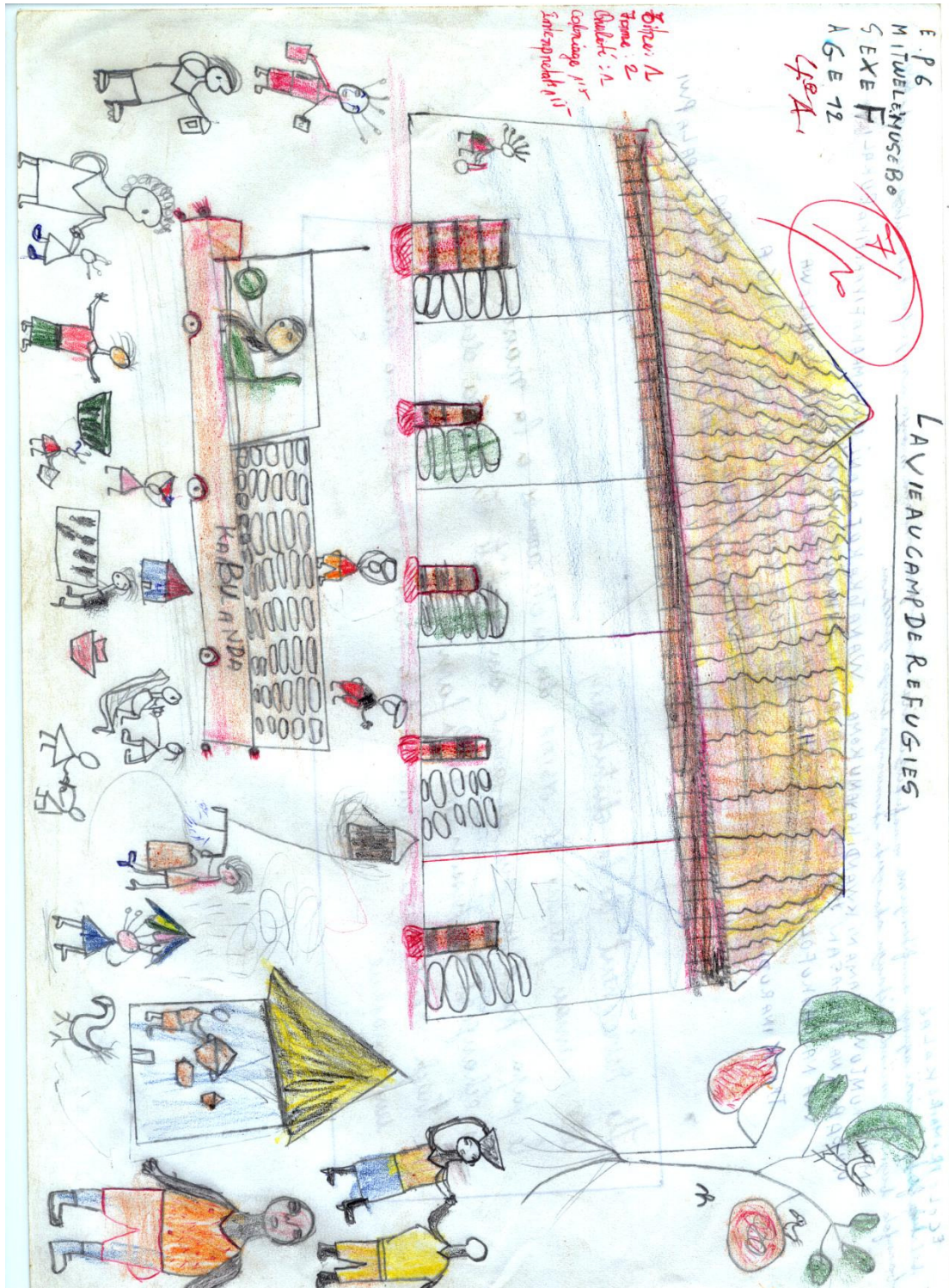


Fig. 62 They are coming back from the distribution. This woman makes *nshima* as soon as she gets back to the house, this man carries a bag of flour on his head, there are two of them. They exchange fish for the mealie meal. The truck goes back with the mealie meal, it's raining. My sister has an umbrella (primary schoolgirl 12).

There are larger dried fish on sale in the market, but I never ate with anyone who had prepared these. More common were the smaller *chisense*, or *kapenta*, these are fried with some tomatoes and maybe a bit of onion. Whereas the bigger fish are soaked before cooking to soften them, these are still dry and crunchy to eat.

What most people eat to get some variety are things that they can grow in their smaller plots, or buy cheaply, and these are generally greens. Greens are not grown solely for this purpose, but are usually the leaves of another food plant such as beans, pumpkin, or cassava. Of the first two, *kalembula* (bean leaves, Bemba) are more common in the camp than *chibwabwa* (pumpkin leaves). They are both prepared in the same way, by being steamed with some tomatoes after having their stems and the tough central veins removed. Cassava leaves make a dish called *Katapa* (Bemba) or *Sombe* (Swahili) which is a speciality in the camp. This is important as cassava is a plant whose tubers can only be harvested after two years. *Katapa* is cooked slightly differently<sup>5</sup> from the other greens. Groundnuts are pounded into a powder and sieved before being added and this makes a paste which coats the leaves and adds flavour. As with all foods such dishes are seasonal and although leaves are found on these food plants throughout their cultivation, there are certain times of the year when cassava leaves in particular are too tough to be eaten.

The above are the foods generally eaten by people in the camp at main meal times but there are other foods which would have been eaten as snacks. Children talked a great deal about the scarcity of these but there were some to be had. Many were eaten raw such as bananas, papaya, oranges, sugarcane and cassava, others were cooked, such as roast or boiled maize and groundnuts. Other foods which had formerly been classed as snacks were more likely to be eaten as a meal such as boiled or roast sweet potatoes or boiled cassava. (However, some of the younger children came to our sessions eating sweet potatoes, which demonstrates that it was still eaten as a snack.) Another variation on a meal was *la bouille*, fed to newly weaned babies and sometimes eaten for breakfast. This is a more liquid porridge made from maize meal and eaten with a spoon. In the camp people also occasionally ate this for lunch.

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<sup>5</sup> In Zambia and Malawi other greens are cooked in a similar way and the dish is called *ifisashi*, but in



Food and the way we use and manipulate it is the ultimate demonstration of ‘human ability to adapt to and exploit the resources of the natural environment’ (Crowe 2000:6). According to Levi Strauss, ‘Cooking effects mediation’ (1978:476) it is the transformation from natural to cultural, yet the food in the camp has already been variously transformed. The “raw” material of a meal, food, does not ‘constitute an unmarked pole’ as Levi-Strauss suggests (*ibid*:478). It is already marked due to processes of production and the economic and social transactions which have taken place prior to its arrival in the home. (Although similarly I would question the notion that even food in the fields is “unprocessed”).

It is nonetheless important that food is ‘not just cooked; the process must be carried out in some particular way’ (*ibid.*). This is most important in the camp as, due to the food’s already ‘marked’ nature, the transformation is not from nature to culture (Levi-Strauss 1978:480), but rather of “whose culture”? It is the playing out of self and other oppositions, taking food which has already been transformed by “other” culture and transforming it into food of the refugees own. Thus even had peas been valued previously, their association with, and thus transformation by, the UN would potentially cause them to become devalued (*ibid.*:485). This may also be a reason for the emphasis placed on Cassava rather than maize.

Receiving food entails waiting around in your section to be called, then long queues at the distribution hall and an arduous journey home carrying the rations. The maize is now distributed as whole grains, which means there are fewer delays of the distribution but more time spent queuing at the hammer mills. This route to the table is in stark contrast to the former means of procuring food through cultivation.

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the camp I only knew *Katapa* to be cooked with groundnuts.

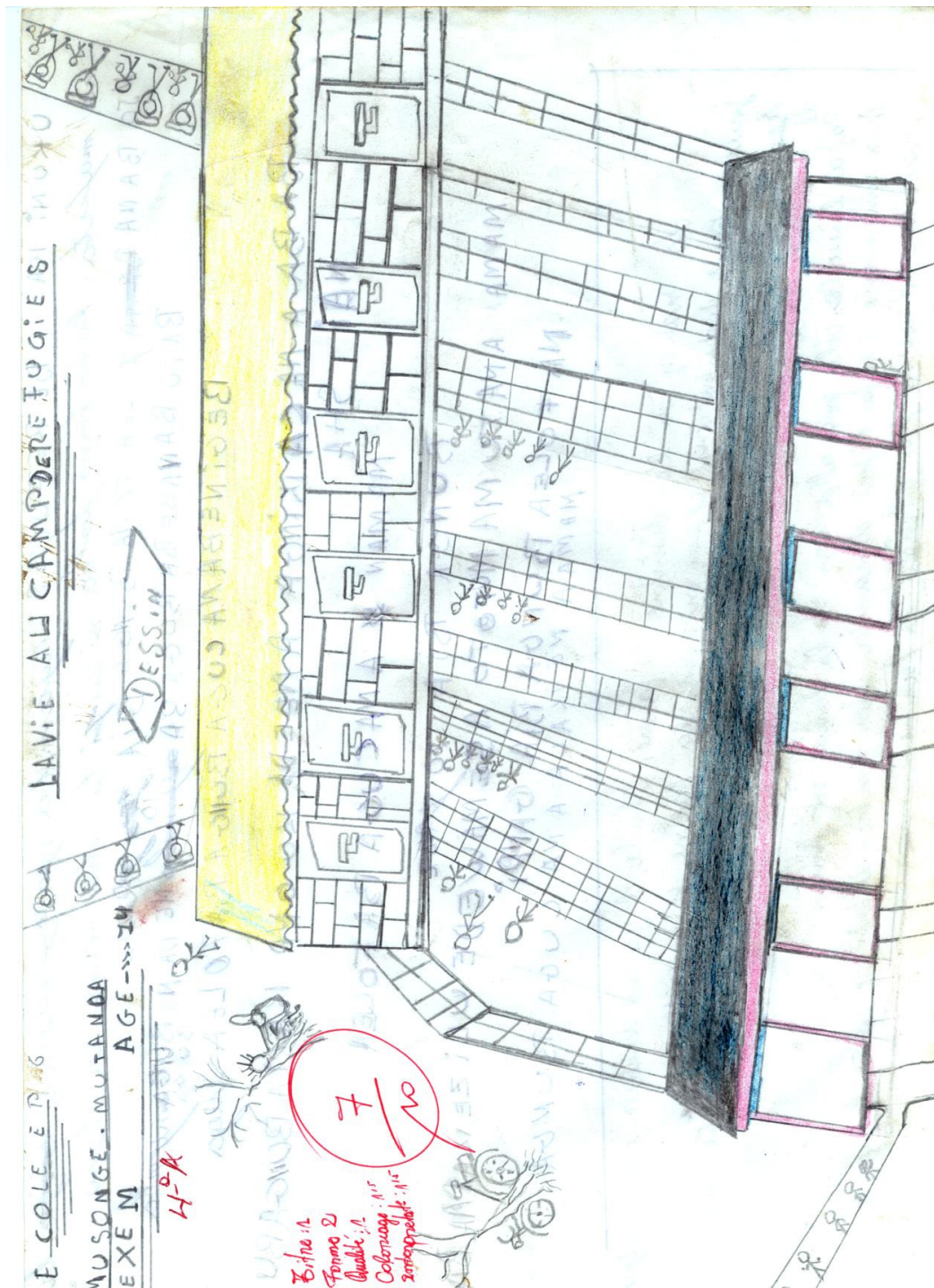


Fig. 63 The building where they distribute mealie meal, oil, there is a gap of a few days between two distributions and then they give mealie meal for ten days. Some take the mealie meal home, others exchange it for other things they need more. Papa leaves his bike to go and see if they have run out of mealie meal. Mother send the child to see how many days they will give mealie meal for. Mother is sitting waiting for the mealie meal (primary schoolboy 14).

Two girls in Group D told me that they had to get up and start to queue at 5am even though the mills only opened at 8.30 just to be certain that their maize would be milled that morning, others complained of the problems of waiting in the hot sun to queue for the mills, of the problems of people from some tribal groups being served before others. When the mills break down, people will sometimes take the maize by bicycle to be milled in a Zambian village about 15 km away.

Agriculture would have been the main source of food for most of the refugees before they came to live in the camp. As is the norm in much of Africa, even urban dwellers retain their roots in the village and keep some land there for farming. This change in the way that food is obtained from producing to receiving is probably the biggest change in people's lives in the camp. As we saw in Chapter Three, children feel this loss very strongly, not just in terms of their own activities, but also in terms of their parent's activities. Many of the refugees brought hoes with them when they fled although some eventually left these by the road as they were heavy to carry. This demonstrates not only how important agriculture was to their lives in Congo (unsurprising as it was their means of survival) but also that they had every intention of continuing to cultivate in refuge.

Some people are able to cultivate in the camp and IP programmes operate to administer this. There are small fields which have been allocated to certain people but these are not big enough for people to be self sufficient and therefore only used to supplement distributed food. While I was there more fields became available and they were allocated by Hodi (community services) in conjunction with WVI (agriculture). Hodi decided that the fields should go to women-headed households as this was a group felt to be particularly in need. When people are given a field they are also given the necessary equipment to clear and cultivate the land with. The number of refugees able to take advantage of such programmes, however, is few as there are only enough fields for a minority.

Those who had fields would generally grow cassava, and sweet potatoes, both of which have leaves that can be used as a relish. The year before I left the camp the rain was insufficient and the harvest poor, especially as the quality of the land in the fields was judged to be inferior to that which they were used to. One person (adult)

commented that it was lucky that the harvest had been good the previous season (during half rations) as the availability of sweet potatoes had been important in preventing hunger.

Agriculture was not the only activity which had a much reduced role in food provision in the refugee camp. Other means of getting food in Congo, by raising animals, by hunting, and by gathering wild foods were no longer possible. The children experienced a significant reduction in the possibilities for them to earn money by helping to tend animals. This was a reflection of the small numbers of animals in the camps. There was not enough space in the camp for animals such as goats but there were refugees with chickens and ducks. The number of people who could afford to make the initial investment was very small. The amount of space available was a further hindrance. The density of housing also meant that chickens needed feeding more than in a village environment.

Hunting was another source of food in Congo which was much missed in Zambia. In Zambia, outside the game management areas, there is no game above the size of rats as it has all been hunted already. On only one occasion was I aware of someone in the camp selling *nyama* (meat) which turned out to be monkey meat, this would have been hunted at some distance from the camp (illegally in Congo?) and the offer to sell was whispered out of the side of someone's mouth. The only comments children made about game and hunting, were that there wasn't any in Zambia but that it had been plentiful in Congo.



Fig. 64 Life in Congo (primary schoolboy 12).

In Zambia it was considered impossible even to hunt for rats and the tiny birds that children shoot down with catapults. This was due mainly to the density of population living in the camp. Adults discussed their worries that children were not learning the skills needed to use the catapults in the camp, but when children spoke about their changing role in food production, which was limited to piece-work, fetching mushrooms and wild onions, this was in terms of the inability to earn money (and therefore gain status and independence) rather than loss of skills.

In spite of the fact that food is distributed to the refugees at the distribution centre, the market is central to life in the camp. “We cannot just wait for what we are receiving, it is little” (film). It was one of the first public amenities to be set up after the camp was established and was set up by the refugees themselves. The market in the camp is better in many ways than the market in Kawambwa, although, the children state that it is less good than what they are used to. There are brick built shops around the perimeter selling fabrics, plastic goods and *salaula* and in the centre there are wooden market stalls for food sales. Here people can sell things that they have grown, exchange part of what they receive at food distributions, and buy foods such as dried

fish brought in from Kawambwa or Kashikishi. Women also sell fritters and bread that they have baked and roast cassava and peanuts.

The market is important as there are certain foods that are not distributed but are necessary for meals cooked by the refugees such as tomatoes and onions. Although there is this one main market in the camp, there are also more informal markets set up by spreading sheets on the ground by the hammer mills and along the path from the distribution centre to the camp. In this way people can exchange their maize conveniently in areas where they will have maize with them, and the sellers can take advantage of impulse buying! “They [children outside of the hammer-mill] bought that [tomatoes] with money but they are bartering for maize or mealie meal. When they have received some mealie meal or maize, they will also sell that in turn, in order to try to balance life in the camp” (film).

The activities which preoccupy the children the most are those which are necessary to put food on the table, yet in spite of the similarity in cooking methods in Congo, these similarities simply serve as a reminder of the differences. There is a change in terms of who is responsible, the amount of time it takes and the level of effort. There is also the necessity of transforming the food, not simply from raw to cooked, but from alien to Congolese.

### Food as Commodity

Food should not be treated as simply a substance consumed by eating. In the camp it is often the only commodity which is available either for exchange, or sale. The boundary between money and food becomes indistinguishable. The scarcity of one can indicate or cause the scarcity of the other and has the same implications. Thus the complaints by children about the lack of clothes distributed are a reflection on dependency, an inability to grow their own food and therefore to earn money. Food is an integral part of people's lives, not just to eat, but also because of the activities surrounding it; the work people do in order to be able to eat. In this section I will be discussing another element of this, the economic relations between work and food, and the economic significance of food.

Food is literally the only commodity available to many of the refugees as there is limited paid work available. The link between work and food is generally perceived to be closer when the community lives in a subsistence economy. As quotes from children throughout this chapter demonstrate, barter often takes the place of buying and selling goods. Even those who are earning will also barter as well as buy. The main market in the camp uses mostly cash and credit but elsewhere most transactions are barter or give a choice of cash or barter. The impromptu market on distribution days is a prime example of this with people exchanging paraffin, sugar cane or vegetables for goods their customers have just received from WFP. “They are exchanging – bartering with maize, njekele, oil and sometimes money too. This is the little market very near to the *reception*. The lady here is buying fritters with maize. We never stop trying to improve life in the camp. Sometimes it’s the children who come to sell things while their parents are busy receiving” (Film).



Fig. 65

1. The distribution centre for the refugees
  2. Someone is receiving flour (Mealie meal)
  3. The lorry is transporting flour for the refugees
  4. They are calling them do give them flour
  5. Someone has already received, he is buying fritters
  6. He is buying 3 heaps of tomatoes
- (Primary schoolboy 13) See also Pictures in Chapter 1

On distribution days children gather dropped grains until they have enough for a fritter or two. At the small markets by the hammer-mill a small quantity of the maize brought for milling can buy tomatoes or rape. But cash can be used as well. Food is not only bartered for other commodities but also for services such as the hammer-mill or the video-cinema. The other service often exchanged for food is sex.

Although it was possible to sell non-food items, received from UNHCR on first entering the camp, this was not a sustainable action and the only items distributed which were not necessary for day to day living were those received by relatives registered as a separate household but living together, and the waterproof “tents”, which were only necessary as a supplementary layer on the thatched roof once the house was built. Food was received on a regular basis and could therefore be consumed by both eating and exchange.

As I discussed in Chapters Three and Four, work is something which preoccupies children in the camp, not just work as a duty, but also the ability to earn money. This is partly because it is something that they were used to doing in Congo, “parents were free to save (money), it was easy to earn money” “At home even the children knew how to earn money, but here we do not have any money” “we lead a horrible life and if we earn some money we must multiply it”<sup>6</sup>. But as the above quotations demonstrate, it is also because the economic conditions in the camp mean that material contributions from any family member are doubly important. This also means that there is greater status which can be gained by children (or any family member) for material contributions in the family: “the parents no longer have the money to support their children, the latter are called on to surpass themselves” (Ilunga (F)). The types of work available in the camp are varied; *paid* work is not a distinction which can be easily made, nor is it a useful category here. Even piecework for the Zambians is often paid in food.

The boundary between paid and unpaid work is not clear-cut given the link between work and provision. The main result of work is generally subsistence whether this is

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<sup>6</sup> These are quotes by a group of children which formed the basis of a series of tableaux that they



directly produced through labour or indirectly through money. There is little substantial difference between growing food to eat, and growing food to sell as the money earned is often used to buy more/other food. Likewise with charcoal production, making things like mortars or sieves or even tailoring, a commodity is produced which is then sold to gain food. Discussions of work should also not be confined to activities which produce tangible material results. Some work, such as that done in the family, is done as an obligation to others, other work is more materially productive, other work reproductive (Moser 1993:27-36). Given that all types of work are done in the context of social relations, all work done by any member of a social network is linked to productive work done by other members of that network, even if it only indirectly enables or supports the productive work. “Her mother is away and so she has left the baby with her big sister” (film).

In the refugee camp the relationship between food and money is at times formalised as in many ways food is literally money. People offer things for sale priced at “a bottle of oil” or 5,000 kwacha. Entrance into the cinema is “a cup of maize” (or maize meal), “a bowl of peas” or 100 kwacha. (Yet boys find it easier to “steal” food from the family store for the cinema than they would money.) At other times the relationship between food and money is more implicit. The wages for paid work are not called salaries, rather they are “incentives” and the rate of pay is based on the fact that the refugees receive food rations already. Work, food and money are therefore closely interrelated.

### Food Strategies

When walking from the distribution centre on distribution days it would be easy to think (mistakenly) that the refugees are getting too much food, due to the impromptu market on the path back to the camp, selling or exchanging rations on the way. For some it is a question of insufficient quantity in certain goods which leads them to exchange. “She is trying to exchange it for mealie meal... As we are in mealie meal crisis (shortage) we long for that” (film).

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performed.

Others will sell or exchange their rations in order to get food they know or prefer, or even to be able to buy some dried fish or vegetables to give variety. “It also helps at home for relish, that which is missing at home” (film). This selling and exchanging of rations led to people retaining a much reduced quantity of the staple food, and was also fraught with conflict given WFP restrictions on the exchange or sale of received food.

When I was first in the camp it became clear that refugees were leaving. I was told by several people that this was due to half rations. People were deciding that it was better to suffer at home than to suffer in the camp. The worry for the NGO workers was that people would be even worse off in Congo as in addition to the fighting which was still taking place, there had been no planting, there would therefore be no harvest and competition for food would be greater. For the refugees, however, many expressed that since they were hungry here, they would rather be hungry at home.

One theory among the IPs was that some of those leaving, especially those who left at the start of the planting season might have settled along the borders and would harvest their own food, then in the later months re-enter Zambia through a transit centre (preferably one in a different area to avoid being recognised) and register as new arrivals. This is one of the “coping” or profiting strategies practiced by the refugees but was considered to be a big problem by the UN and IPs. These people are known as “recyclers”.



Fig. 66 These are the refugees who get off the bus, they go into the enclosure with their belonging. They are subjected to the inspection to find “recyclers” to whom one cannot give some things. The people who are carrying things go into the building. (Primary schoolgirl 13)

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, one of the things that children associate with their national identity emerges in the pride they demonstrate in the Congolese reputation as businessmen, especially as traders. In the camp, as elsewhere, money begets money. People with paid work can afford bicycles which they hire out for others to use, they can afford to buy things in bulk and then sell them on. Children also practice this: “Once he has something i.e. 2.5 Pin (2,500 kwacha) he will buy a bottle and then sell it on, it is done by measure, one measure for 4 *Zale* [400 Kw] and so goes life in Kala camp for young people” (film).

The enterprising nature of the Congolese means that many are trying to make the most of opportunities offered to them. In the camp success is generally limited to people with some education or training, NGO policies had direct implications for determining who was able to find paid work as they required certificates proving educational qualifications, a situation very different from Congo. In spite of the UN emphasis on equality, the way this plays out is to create stark socioeconomic inequalities given the Congolese ability to take money and multiply it.

There is also preferential treatment given to women, especially single women with dependants. This was a policy intended to ensure that incomes were going to those who needed them the most, however there were unforeseen implications of this. One of my friends told of how his wife had been trying to get a divorce, the sole reason being that she had been consistently refused paid work as her husband was working for WVI. She had worked in Congo and wanted to do so in the camp, she had all the necessary qualifications, and she felt that the only thing stopping her was her marriage. The solution therefore was divorce (See also Turner n.d.).

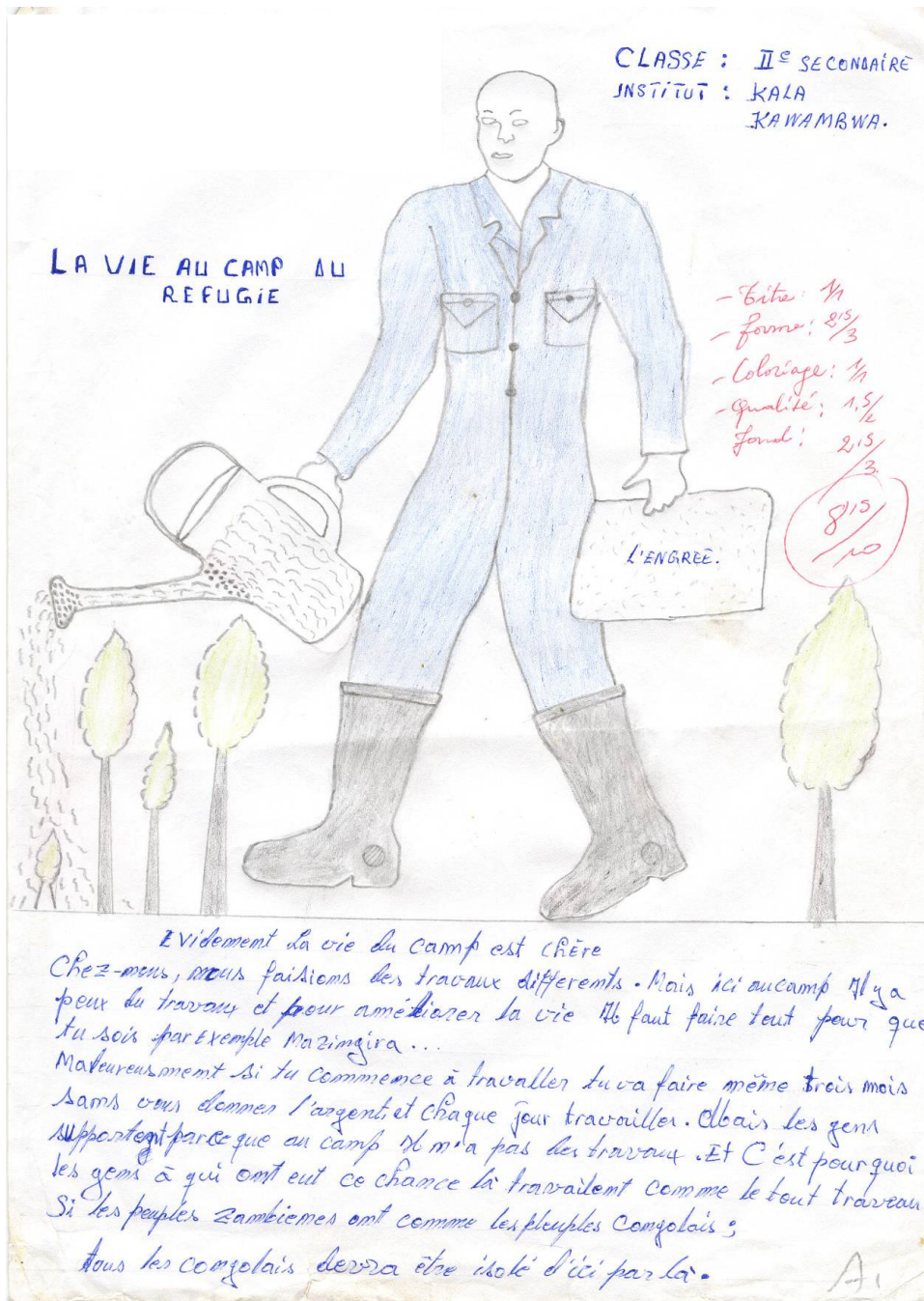


Fig. 67 At home we did different kind of work but here in the camp there is little work, so to improve life you must do all you can to be, for example an environment officer. Unfortunately if you start working you will work even three months without getting paid, and working every day. People put up with it because it is the camp, there isn't work. That's why people who have had that luck, work. (Secondary schoolboy 20)

For people who are unable to get paid work or take advantage of the opportunities available to others through IP programmes, the only way to get money or goods was by selling or bartering food received at distributions or working for food as discussed above. Food could then be exchanged or sold: “after earning something they will buy themselves, dresses and shoes and other things that they need” (film).

Even though food was distributed by UNHCR getting money was necessary, not only to supplement the food, but also to buy clothing and other non-food goods. Although most people arrived in the camp with “essential” belongings and clothing, and each household received cooking pots and blankets from UNHCR, these items are not everlasting, as is evident from some of the photographs of people, especially children, in the camp. Clothing was very soon worn out, so too were pots and blankets and when these needed replacing, such goods could only be bought with money.

There were some existing mechanisms in the camp which were used to distribute wealth, and family obligations played an important part in these. Jean trained his brother-in-law as a tailor and employed his brother to manage agricultural production in a scheme he had with the Zambians. People who were earning could also employ others to make bricks, build, care for children, or could invite less well off people to live and eat with them in return for doing housework. There was also the informal prostitution mentioned above and forming relationships and marriages with people in employment.

In addition to these there was the practice of demanding compensation for wrongs done. Many refugees took advantage of this and even set people up deliberately in compromising situations. This practice became easier with the camp policies on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). A committee was established to deal with cases of domestic violence but this was adapted by the refugees to include adultery and was most often used for this. In this role it was used as a threat; a husband would send his wife to seduce a man with an income and would then “catch” them in a compromising situation. The threat of the SGBV committee would then be used to extract payment.

Another way of getting “money” was by getting food “dishonestly” from UNHCR, by exploiting the system. There were families who had ration cards in both Mwange and Kala camp and would cycle between the camps for the different distribution days. Once the UN became aware of this they co-ordinated the distribution days in both camps and this was the cause of a serious riot<sup>7</sup> in Kala camp with the refugees marching towards Kawambwa and all IP staff being evacuated from there. Refugees leaving the camp would also sell their ration cards to people who were remaining who could then receive extra rations in their name. Again UNHCR put into practice measures to prevent this and at one stage reregistered all of the refugees to eliminate the “problem”. The final way of getting distributions was the practice described above referred to as “recycling”. There were even some Bembe<sup>8</sup> refugees who arrived, it was rumoured from camps in Tanzania. They told me that they had come to Kala as they had heard that refugees in Zambia were receiving milk and rice at food distributions.

People’s attitudes and reactions to food are more than an indication of their tastes and habits. As will be discussed in the following chapters, food is more than a simple substance and eating has purposes other than feeding the body. Food is a substance which is socially transformed on its route from seed to field to UN to distributions to household to table. At each stage of transformation it takes on new meaning. These processes and associations are different from those familiar to the refugees prior to living in the camp, this is just one aspect of change. Perhaps more important are the changes to what is eaten and the scope people have for determining the variety and quantity of what they will eat. The impossibility of feeling satisfied after a meal feeds the other types of hunger felt by the refugees. In addition to these changes, they are accompanied by changes to the activities surrounding food procurement and preparation.

## **Conclusion**

The economic practices described in this chapter resemble those which would have taken place in Congo, with food playing a central role in activities such as barter and the distribution of wealth through social relations. In the camp, however, the weight

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<sup>7</sup> Just prior to my arrival

of the context produces key differences through the limitations that it places on people's activities and on the scope they have to innovate and increase their wealth. More important is the fact that the wealth that they are dealing with is received wealth and until the refugees have transformed it or multiplied it through their own actions is not truly their own.

Food practices are the most time consuming and significant activities and they are also the most basic. Thus even where the current situation may seem to resemble life in Congo, minor changes to food practices amplify and affect the entirety of people's lives. Social learning is dependent on children's experiences and environment, and changing food practices are therefore responsible for changes to the context in which this takes place. In addition to food's everyday sensory and embodied nature, eating is an everyday, repetitive, yet symbolic practice. The considerable time spent on food provision and preparation makes this the most significant activity in the refugee camp. Food is therefore a constant reminder of refugee status and the dependency and limited choices inherent in this.

It is the linking of food to all aspects of life which further emphasises the way that the refugee status and dependence on UNHCR for food affect all aspects of life. Received food, being marked by its previous economic and social transactions, is more difficult to culturally transform into something the refugees have ownership of. This marked nature highlights the refugees' relationship with not only the UN and NGOs with whom they have daily contact, but also with the unseen international bodies who donate the food or the money that buys it.

It is the wider implication of the changes to food and food practices which lend greater significance to food distributions in the camp. Food is a constant reminder of the differences to lifestyle. The different types of food and lack of choice are repeated indicators of the refugees' limited ability to choose and their limited ability as individuals and as a group to have an impact on their food and on their economic situation. The food in the camp has such a contrasting route to the table compared to in Congo and daily activities are different as a result. The consequences for the

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<sup>8</sup> The Bembe are a different ethnic/tribal group to the Bemba previously discussed.



children's social learning are in the limited opportunities available for practical training in food production and income generation and in the changes to what they learn from observation.



## Chapter Seven

### **Hungry People: Structures and Relationships**

The patterns and transactions outlined in the preceding chapters will now be considered from the perspective of social relationships. As I have demonstrated, the issue of food in the refugee camp is not just a nutritional one and in its journey to the table food is associated with a range of areas of anthropological interest. In this chapter I will be focusing on boredom, gender and kinship (family structures and relatedness). In effect this is a discussion of the social impact of living in the refugee camp through a discussion of the social impact of changing food practices. The pattern and intricacies of social relationships are affected by life in the camp and by all of the projects and policies implemented by UNHCR. Once again, however, these are best understood by focusing on the impact of food distributions as this is the aspect of camp life which, through the many references made to it by the children, emerged as both most visible, and having the greatest impact.

As members of a community, children interact with other members in different ways, they also experience interactions between other people even if these do not directly implicate them. For this reason this chapter focuses on the wider network of relationships of the community in which children are living. This chapter demonstrates that many of these relationships, and the processes through which they are constituted, often parallel children's relationships or directly touch children's lives. For example gender relationships between husbands and wives are relationships between mothers and fathers; these affect the children of that relationship. Moreover the ways children construct and are located in status relationships follow the same processes as other community members' status relationships. These form an important resource for children who observe patterns of relationships and use these as a source of information when they are constructing their ideas of conventional and or desirable relationships.

Food is an activity, a way of passing the time: eating, preparing, cultivating, buying, and in the camp queuing, are all activities. The amount of time children spent talking about food in the camp, is indicative not only of how important food is to them, but also of the amount of time spent involved in activities related to food, its provision, preparation and consumption. These activities have been discussed in the previous chapter(s) but the following chapters will take the discussion beyond the activities as physical actions. It is not simply an issue of work being unfamiliar or more difficult, but rather of the value given to it.

Initially, given the evidence of food distributions, it was difficult to understand children's constant complaints about food, especially when the refugees were again given full rations. Thinking analytically about the ways in which social and emotional behaviour and relationships are affected by the lack of food, I realised that hunger goes beyond calories. The children were also culturally or socially lacking food - enough food and the right kinds of food. I came to see that food shortages were affecting interactions within the community, that there was a "social starvation" which led to a change in social behaviour. Lack of food also symbolised a lack of the other things and these also inform this discussion. Thus it is the changed physical, social and cultural context which has an effect on individual reactions and on social relationships.

In refugee programmes such as this one, where the settlement is long term but with no possibility of sustainability, there is a tension between relief and development, the presence of these two elements compounded the problems inherent in existing relationships in the camp. Food needs to be distributed and other basic needs met in the same way as a relief project, but because of the long-term nature of the programme and the semi-permanent settlement of the refugees, this is combined with programmes which more closely resemble a development project.

UNHCR does appear to prioritise<sup>1</sup> seeking a greater understanding of the processes and meanings hidden in the behaviour of the refugees. They focus on material needs in order to enable "protection". Where community service programs are implemented,

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<sup>1</sup> At head office level steps are being taken to change this but at the level of the project these are not yet noticeable

this is related to other issues designated important by UNHCR such as Gender and HIV/AIDS.

### **Structuring Daily Lives**

Food as well as a substance is also an activity and the lives of the children, are largely taken up with activities around food. Whilst boredom is a factor, more importantly the temporal processes or practices surrounding food have a structuring impact on the lives of people on both a daily basis and over longer periods of time.

Children's routines, as discussed earlier, revolve around mealtimes, it was very important and they were insistent (understandably) that I timetable my own activities with them such that they did not disrupt these. If children were at school in the afternoon, then they had to have time to eat, wash and prepare for school after they had left me. As was confirmed after my birthday party, the midday meal was the most important one and it was unthinkable to miss this. The afternoon sessions with the children could therefore be more flexible as far as they were concerned. School holidays also played a large part in structuring children's years, not because this was "free time"<sup>2</sup> but because this was the time when children could work to earn money, by making bricks for example. "They hope that after having done this work they will have something to buy clothes, trousers, they are pupils, if they have clothes they can go to school" (Film) or "Some get contracts with the Zambians during the rainy season (agricultural work)" (Ilunga secondary schoolgirl).

Our experience of a day is affected by what we eat and when and the values and activities associated with the foods we have eaten (Barthes 1997:20). Days are structured around meals, around cultivation or commerce to get the ingredients, around food preparation activities and around the mealtime itself. In the camp these elements remain but the structure itself is different. New elements introduced include the necessity of queueing for long hours at hammer mills. On days of food distribution time can be wasted hanging around at home waiting for the section to be called,

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<sup>2</sup> I mistakenly thought that by waiting until after the exams, the secondary school students would have less demands on their time, and be more able to do a project with me. What actually happened that they were all either busy in the camp, or desperate to leave the camp to find (agricultural) piece work with the Zambians.

sometimes in vain. This is a monthly marker of time and many people take days off school or work in order to be available if they are called.

Plots are very small so time spent cultivating is much reduced but time is also spent gathering wild fruits from the bush or doing piece work in exchange for food or money to buy food. The latter is a relatively new activity for many as “here in the camp we do not have things to sell, like sugar cane, mangoes, avocados, tomatoes, lemons, oranges” (Musampwa secondary schoolboy).

Food preparation also has different timing as methods differ due to the lack of variety of food, the need to be as efficient and conserve as much as possible. Much more time is spent peeling peas, but people go to the hammer mill rather than pound their maize. The day has to be even more structured around mealtimes in the camp as there is not enough food to have snacks throughout the day so to miss a meal is much more serious. Most of the food preparation work in the camp is tedious, time consuming and repetitive such as the preparation of peas described in the previous chapter.

Food does not only structure the day, there are many food rhythms, days, weeks, months and years, as I discussed in Chapter Six, meals also have their own structure. In terms of working in the fields or gathering wild fruits, children’s food practices are seasonal. As elsewhere (Katz 1991) seasonal foods break the monotony, and are much looked forward to (Sutton 2001:29). But in the camp where the first rains mean mushrooms or the anticipation of sweet potatoes soon to be harvested the importance is so much greater as “regarding food we suffer a lot because they give us peas every month and we are not used to eating peas every day” (Musampwa). The other seasonal aspect is the possibility of feasts and celebrations which are much anticipated and saved and prepared for (New Year) or resented as limited to too few (World Refugee Day).

### Activities of Value

In Chapter Three I demonstrated that there were many games that children could, and did play, but for them, and especially slightly older children and adults, the activities that were most obviously lacking were work activities, such as tending crops: “it is

through work that we merit to live and that we affirm our dignity as free beings”  
(secondary schoolboy 22).



Fig. 68 There are lots of trees in my field but thanks to my efforts, I cut them down and I can cultivate. (Primary schoolboy 13)

The discontentment of the adults on this score is also passed down to the children through their interactions.

One of the biggest problems in the camp, identified by both the refugees and the NGOs was boredom. There was a high concentration of people in a very small area in the same way that one would find in a small town, but unlike a town, there were very few facilities and almost no recreational facilities. Some of those that were available, such as the cinema, cost money. Others, such as playing football, required more space than was readily available<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> There was one large football pitch at the entrance to the camp but this was mostly used by adults. For most of the children it was a long distance from their homes.

The acts of cultivating, hunting and fishing have been replaced with the acts of queuing and receiving. This is also a kind of work and is labour intensive in terms of time (and in a different way to agriculture in terms of effort too). However children's comments imply that queuing is the wrong kind of work. Although it is hard work, it feels like time wasted, there is no "job satisfaction", it is not the kind of work that you can take pride in, or that can be done well or badly as the boy quoted above does from his farming. It is refugee work, something that is only done as a refugee. In short, in spite of the fact that the end result is food on the table, there is little value in it, nor status to be gained from it.

When working in the fields, or hunting, tasks are delineated in terms of age and ability. Skills are learnt, children can advance from "helping" to working independently and there are many jobs that they can do on their own (Katz 1991:501). When collecting food from distribution, however, children work mostly as 'helpers' holding a place in the queue, or guarding the grain. Children also come to help their parents to transport the food:

"There are children who also come [I ask *Is it for themselves or for the family?*] It's for the family so they send someone from the family to come and receive. ... the mother comes after to help carry the food."

"The child is there to guard the maize. The parents have gone home with another load that they have received, so they left this child to guard the rest, so that it can't be moved by other people."

"The boy has already been served, he is going home. His mother wanted to give him a heavy bundle, it seems he failed [to carry it]. Children often come to help their parents to transport the food" (film).

There is no social value to this kind of work, to receiving; everybody receives equally, no matter what their skills, behaviour, industriousness or position in society. The only necessary work is to be a refugee, to behave in the appropriate manner of a refugee, to have fled. Receiving food does not result from anything specific about an individual but rather from membership of the group "refugee", a status which is *imposed* (by circumstance or other people) not *earned*. There is therefore little or no social value to the "work" associated with receiving food distributions. Whether you queue *well* or



not, you still receive the same quantity. This however also lifts children towards the level of adults.

There are jobs associated with receiving food that children can do independently: “To improve their lives young people in the camp have adapted the system of bartering that which they receive from UNHCR...taking those means to go and sell them outside the camp” (Ilunga, secondary schoolgirl). But this is simply one example of the ways in which “We never stop trying to improve life in the camp” (film) and it is still operating within the confines of food distribution; it is enabled by it and therefore devalued by it. Furthermore, there are few opportunities for children to contribute to the household economy in any way other than food for direct consumption. Usually exchange and barter is done for a different kind of food, the main way for children to earn *money* with which to buy clothes or other non food items is by doing work outside of this category of production.

### Food Consumption

It is not just the provision and preparation of food which acts as, or necessitates an activity, a way of passing the time. The consumption of food is also an activity. This is an activity that is taken for granted to the extent that when I asked the children “if, in a day you could only do one thing, what would it be?” Eating was not even considered in the ensuing discussion in spite of the fact that they had clearly demonstrated its importance through general conversation and other activities. Thus eating is taken for granted. It is part of the fabric of everyday life, it only becomes questioned when it is lacking: in its insufficiency (quantity) or inadequacy (quality).

Yet simultaneously food consumption can be a leisure activity. When I asked people how they celebrate New Year (this is the key celebration day rather than Christmas) the main response I got was that no-one would be eating *njekele*, every family in the camp would make sure that they had something better at least *chisense*, or *kapenta* if not chicken or meat. The fact that eating *is* an activity, a way of passing the time, was brought home to me in my interview with Kilufya, discussed in Chapter Five.

The social activities of eating sweet potatoes, manioc or groundnuts with neighbours are lacking in the camp. My own experiences living with Zambians included such activities, these are kinds of food that you pick at rather than making them part of a meal. But this was not something that I had witnessed in the camp, because there was not enough (of the right kinds of food) available. Both Zambian and Congolese people made a clear distinction between this kind of eating and mealtimes.

As elsewhere there are key elements of a meal: *ugali* is ‘the defining component of a proper meal’ (Carsten 1995:228). In Kala and for the Zambians I knew likewise, unless the staple, *ugali/nshima* was present, then it was not a meal<sup>4</sup> and they had therefore not *eaten*. The description of my birthday party in Chapter Six was an example of this. From it we can understand that there are different types of hunger relating to different “lacks”. It is not merely food that is lacking, but certain types of food, and the different feelings and activities which are associated with different types of food. What I was seeing in the camp was a reaction to all these absences.

### **Structuring relationships**

Food is also identified by Sutton as structuring relationships in terms of time and identity. (2001) One way in which relationships are formed, concreted and maintained is through relationships of exchange. ‘The Gift’ will be discussed in Chapter Nine however, hospitality and celebrations (funded by UNHCR) are also aspect of this and these are discussed here. Food normally structures relationships with outsiders through hospitality, and with family members by providing for each other, supporting each other and eating together on a regular basis.

Food has an influence on the structure of relationships between members of the community not just in terms of status but also in terms of trust. Even in Congo it was important to hide from the neighbours if you were eating some good food as they may become suspicious of how you came to have something better than them (and accuse you of being a witch) or try to get what you have (by bewitching you in some way). Although generally there is little need for concealment in the camp as most people are equal and those with paid work are well known, when the need does arise there is

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<sup>4</sup> The exception being if they ate rice instead, this could be eaten as a meal but does not fill the stomach in the same way as *ugali*.

little opportunity for privacy either in the preparation or the consumption of food. Both plots and houses are small and generally overlooked on all sides. Some eat inside as Fleur did when I had lunch with her, others don't have space to do so. As I will explain in Chapter Nine, trust in the camp is very low and so the need to be careful and conceal is often greater even though it is more difficult.

On New Years Day I went into the camp to get a feel for the atmosphere. There was a feeling of celebration very different from any other time I had spent in the camp. Paul, a friend from the camp, was asking some children what they had eaten. One small boy replied, "*chisense*" yet Paul was very quick to tease him "*Bongo!*". I asked him why he was calling the boy a liar but he pointed out the boys legs which very obviously had chicken fat rubbed into the shins. Thus concealment of eating habits is practiced from an early age. "from living in the camp people have become more economical and transparent in the management of food" (Tundwa secondary schoolgirl). Complaints about food, however, may just be another way of concealing.

None of the above is particularly surprising given a local context which prioritises (economic) status, what is noticeable, however, is the lack of those practices which would normally counterbalance, or combat some of the effects of this. Furthermore people often cannot help each other as they are occupied with helping themselves. The example, of Kilufya in Chapter Five, demonstrates that it is not merely the fact of eating sweet potatoes which is lacking, but the fact of eating them socially, with the neighbours. Just as eating *nshima* and relish is something necessary for physical sustenance, daytime snacks are necessary for social sustenance. It is much more difficult to form and maintain relationships with neighbours<sup>5</sup> if you cannot spend time eating and chatting around a brazier, or fire. Eating, preparing and queuing together are all social activities and so the ways that food practices differ in the camp affect the ways that people are, or can be, social together. "Snacks" are a common way that children are fed by the whole community, and therefore as snacks are reduced, children's positions in wider social networks are less clear.

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<sup>5</sup> With whom there may already be significant divisive characteristics

The result of this is that instead of eating and socialising together in a relaxed atmosphere, people are together at “work” times, when queuing for distribution, or the hammer mills. Although rumours are divisive in other ways, one of the main ways that people interact is through discussions which develop into rumours. My own behaviour, in eating lunch at the home of my interpreter caused her to be the subject of many such rumours. It was considered unthinkable that I would be eating *ugali*,<sup>6</sup> therefore people speculated about what we were eating and made comments to Fleur that they would come one day and eat what we were having.

I do not wish to imply that there are no families who snack or who eat and socialise together, indeed there are, but from what I was able to observe<sup>7</sup> this is carried out mostly along lines of kinship affiliation, and is limited to those who have the means to carry out such acts. Marguerite who worked as a teacher helped her parents and brother-in-law with money and food, they shared a field contributing labour and receiving food. As we saw previously, Jean provided work for relatives. The ladies at foyer who all shared the same source of income, often socialised together, sharing food as they worked together (often seeming as at home there as at their houses).

In the camp, as in Congo, the structure of social relations is centred around food, both in the family and between friends. Children’s comments indicate that hospitality is an important aspect of Congolese identity and relationships just as the roles of the father as provider, and the mother as the preparer are in gender relations. Food sharing and hospitality are ‘[f]ound throughout Africa’, in different forms, however ‘these food transfers may turn extra secretive when poverty deepens and the ideal of household self-sufficiency becomes difficult to uphold’ (Pottier 1999:19).

Food is a social issue both at mealtimes and whilst socialising in the afternoons by sharing foods. Thus the lack of food in the camp is not just a nutritional issue. Food is also a social substance. The ability to invite people for a meal is affected, the practice of children in a village eating meals with whoever they happen to be visiting is less feasible because food rations are given to feed a specific number of mouths. My own

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<sup>6</sup> Unless people saw me eat it, they did not believe it possible that a white person would eat African food.

<sup>7</sup> Bearing in mind this was limited due to time constraints and the internal and hidden nature of such activities.

behaviour towards the refugees was also affected as I tried not to be in a situation where I was invited to eat, especially in a household where I was not aware of a source of income. Although I ate my lunch regularly at the house of my interpreter, I gave food items in return.

Inclusion and boundaries 'Food unites and food divides' (Bringéus 2001:xii).

### *Hospitality*

Hospitality is a practice which is 'incompatible with good housekeeping' (Bringéus 2001:xi) but it 'cements communities together and...establishe[s] ties of obligation and obedience' (Clarkson and Crawford 2001:1). The Congolese value hospitality highly as one of the things which define them. In the camp there are far fewer "invitations", nonetheless invitations, as in Congo are generally accepted. In the camp eating inside removes the necessity of offering hospitality to passers by, thus emphasising the boundaries of the household. Depending on the location of the house, passers by may be many, especially where people live on one of the main streets or routes to a particular amenity. The refugees have had to contract their social networks in order not to be overwhelmed.

One of the fundamental aspects of hospitality is not only having enough food to offer, but also having the right kind of food. There is a distinction here between casual invitations offered on the spot, and formal invitations offered in advance. I was invited to the house of a friend but after the invitation he agonised over what he could offer me as I didn't eat meat. Meat can hold a symbolic role at meals, not only as something celebratory or special, but also a chicken is taken when visiting people, and a chicken is slaughtered in honour of a visit. In the end I was given rice and sugar at my friend's house, a combination of two luxury items. At the celebration days the people who were cooking were also very pleased to know and have remembered that I was vegetarian and therefore provide me with eggs, thus proving themselves good hosts.

### Status Relationships

One of the ways in which people came to be defined, or to define themselves as included in, or excluded from an “elite” group was with regards their involvement in key events organised by the IPs or UNHCR. Celebration days in the camp create a clear distinction between who is invited and who is not. World Refugee Day is one of the extreme examples, with the whole day seeming to be set up for the entertainment of people invited from outside of the camp. The extent of the involvement for most of the refugees is to provide entertainment for the guests, or to watch from the sidelines. Children are always on the outside of this, even on occasions ostensibly in their honour.



Fig. 69 Children watch the Education day celebrations. Fences have been erected to stop them from pushing too far forwards.

The first time I attended, it confirmed a half formed impression I had of such occasions and I wrote in my fieldnotes that they:

seem to take place only for the entertainment of invited guests and with little consideration for the refugees unless they are directly involved. The shelters which provide shade from the sun are only big enough to house those invited, others have to stand in the full sun and watch as the guests are given drinks and cakes and then taken off to be fed.

I realised later that at events such as this, where there are many refugees taking part in the parade, even those involved are not included in catering arrangements. This is the same for children who paraded at Congolese Education Day.



Fig. 70

The second year I was in the camp, there was a lot of arguing before it was agreed that those parading on Work Refugee Day would at least receive a drink (but of lesser quality than the guests) and a cake.

After International Women's Day I asked the children whether they had attended and enjoyed the celebrations. I received many comments regarding the way people feel excluded unless they are actually taking part, that they are not invited, that it is not *for* them. Several had not bothered to attend as it was too hot to sit exposed in the sun.



Fig. 71 Children try to protect themselves from the heat of the sun

Those who had attended complained that “the guests are taken away to be fed but we had to hurry home to cook and eat, then we are too tired to return the afternoon sports” (girl 12). It is also hurtful to see everyone going off for lunch when they themselves are not invited. For this reason it was generally only the children who attended such events unless they were actively involved partly because they are the ones with the free time and are less bothered by the sun and standing around.



Fig. 72 Children climb onto anthills and into the trees so that they can see the football match.



At the lunches there are often children whose curiosity leads them to make or find holes in the walls to see what is being eaten. What they see is large amounts of meat being eaten, the non-refugee invited guests are served first before any of the refugees, and are served by the refugees.



Fig. 73 I particularly appreciate the irony of the banner in this picture: “Hand in hand for our children, everything for our children”

Congolese Education Day was the first of such celebrations that I attended. This was organised and funded purely by the teachers in the camp, yet it was organised along similar lines, with clear distinctions of status, demonstrating that the refugees also act along these lines. The following is another excerpt from my field notes on that day:

After the speeches it was time for the performances by the children and it was by far the best part of the day. It was also enjoyed by the children who had seemed very bored during the speeches. Unfortunately it had to be cut short as we were running so late a bit ironical really as this should mostly have been a day for them [the children].

That this day was organised by the teachers in the camp indicates that this attitude reflects cultural norms in DRC.



Fig. 74 Drama sketch

Once again, the people who one would have been expected to be the main focus of the celebration (in this case the children), were only there for entertainment and display. Such '[f]ood events encode and regulate key social relations' especially 'community solidarity and political ranking' (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:3), in this case between the NGOs (and Zambian local VIPs) and the refugees and between teachers and pupils.

The result of this is that there is a clear line drawn between those who are invited, and those who are not, those who get to eat, and those who don't. Even within this group there are people who receive an "official" T-shirt or cap commemorating the day, which serves as a reminder to others whenever they wear it that they have this status. The official attitude to this is that it is necessary to maintain these distinctions of status and to invite people from outside the camp in order to maintain good relationships with the local population. Good relationships within the camp are not mentioned and it is not recognised as insensitive, it is simply the way it has always been done.

Status is often determined by food practices: provision, preparation and eating. Older siblings will share food and snacks and feed the younger ones but to do this they often get to share the younger ones food. Mumba (15) who often brought her toddler brother to our discussion groups would always take his biscuit from him as soon as they were outside and bite off half before giving him the remainder.

The relationship with UNHCR partially fits into this method of determining status but in other ways is outside of the normal practices of generosity and hospitality. Although the UN is seen as very rich, and although they are the providers of food, socially they do not act in the appropriate way to slot themselves into the social order. Poor people ration and count out food (Sutton 2001:26) and so too do the UN, they are constantly thinking about quantity and making sure no-one gets more than they have to give them. The UN constitutes this as fairness, the refugees as meanness in the face of the UN's wealth. In the context of the Congolese who pride themselves on being so commercially minded this does not completely deny them their status as *givers*, yet it excludes them from a social structure within the camp population.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Political Power and Status in the Community*

In the eyes of the UN all refugees are equal including children, they receive equal rations and are all treated equally. This has an inevitable impact on the rights and obligations of traditional leaders. The chiefs no longer have a role or status. Democratically elected leaders now hold positions of "Section Leader" and "Street Leader" (English terms used by the IPs). The term most commonly used by the refugees, is the French "*Chef de Section*" and "*Chef de Rue*" *Chef* here literally means "head" but it is also the word for chief, *Chef de Village* or *Chef de Localité*. It is onto these traditional leadership roles that the elected leaders in the camp most closely map. (See also Chapter Nine regarding power)

The main advantage that the role of Section Leader has is in the prestige and also the fact that Section Leaders are invited as representatives of their communities to celebrations and to workshops. At the celebrations they get to eat the food provided for invited guests and the workshops are also catered. There are also specific positions of responsibility within the Section Leaders. These are referred to as the Ministers, for example there is the "*Ministre de L'Education*", "*Ministre de L'Agriculture*" and so on.

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 9 for a more in depth discussion of this topic

Other ways of gaining power in the camp include being employed in positions of authority. People also gain social status from their economic status, if they have money they can build bigger or better houses, they can also afford to have more wives, to lend money and to give patronage. These are all characteristics which marked Chiefs in Congo.

Children's perceptions of Section Leaders and other people of importance in the camp demonstrate the way that they experience these roles. Leaders were described as people having influence and power but also guilty of corruption. "People see the Section Leader waiting alongside the Zambians and they say that the Section Leaders are stealing food" (Kalembwe secondary schoolboy). On the other hand they saw Section Leaders as people who could be approached for help, for example in the story that a group of children wrote for me about a refugee girl (Lia) (Appendix 4), the Section Leader (along with the social workers), was instrumental in reuniting Lia (an unaccompanied minor) with her mother. Perhaps this is because they do not blame the Section Leaders for their corruption "The people in charge of the camp [UN] often corrupt the Section and Street Leaders" (Musampwa). For me the Section Leaders were important as representatives to approach when I wanted to do research with children in a particular section. They operated as gatekeepers, but also as shortcuts into areas of the camp and populations with whom I had not previously had contact.

One boy told me that his ambition was to be president of Congo, to do this he felt that you had to be someone who spoke a lot of languages such as Kamata or Kipili, both people he felt to have a good chance of being president of Congo as they speak languages. The reason for this is that these are the two people most often interpreting the speeches at the celebration days. The children see them standing at the front of everyone else, addressing everyone with the microphone, not just for a short speech but for the whole celebration and this makes them important people. They are the most visible and inevitably gain the most status from being associated with the NGOs.

### Gender relationships

As I stated at the start of this chapter, the gender relationships I discuss here are those associated with adults more than children, but these are important for social learning as they are roles which children pay close attention to in experimenting with their own relationships and activities, as well as having a direct impact on children's lives when they manifest as relationships between their parents.

Gender relationships are a vocalised concern of both the refugees and the NGOs but very often this plays out as a tension between the two points of view. NGO policies have the effect of further distorting a relationship which is already under considerable stress as a result of the different social context. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the division of labour is demarcated along gender lines. Within agriculture women traditionally carry out different tasks to men, in terms of domestic work. This is also clearly divided with women carrying out the majority of tasks involving cooking and child care. This is mitigated by the fact that women are able to delegate much of their work to the children of the household: "the advantage of children is that they help their parents in all work at home and do everything that their parents want them to do" (Kasongo) or if there are none, to younger kin. Men, however, are seen to have the main responsibility for "providing for the family", and it is in that way that they confirm/fulfil their role and maintain status.



Fig. 75 Mother asks father for money to buy food, the child is hitting the tree (Primary schoolboy 14)

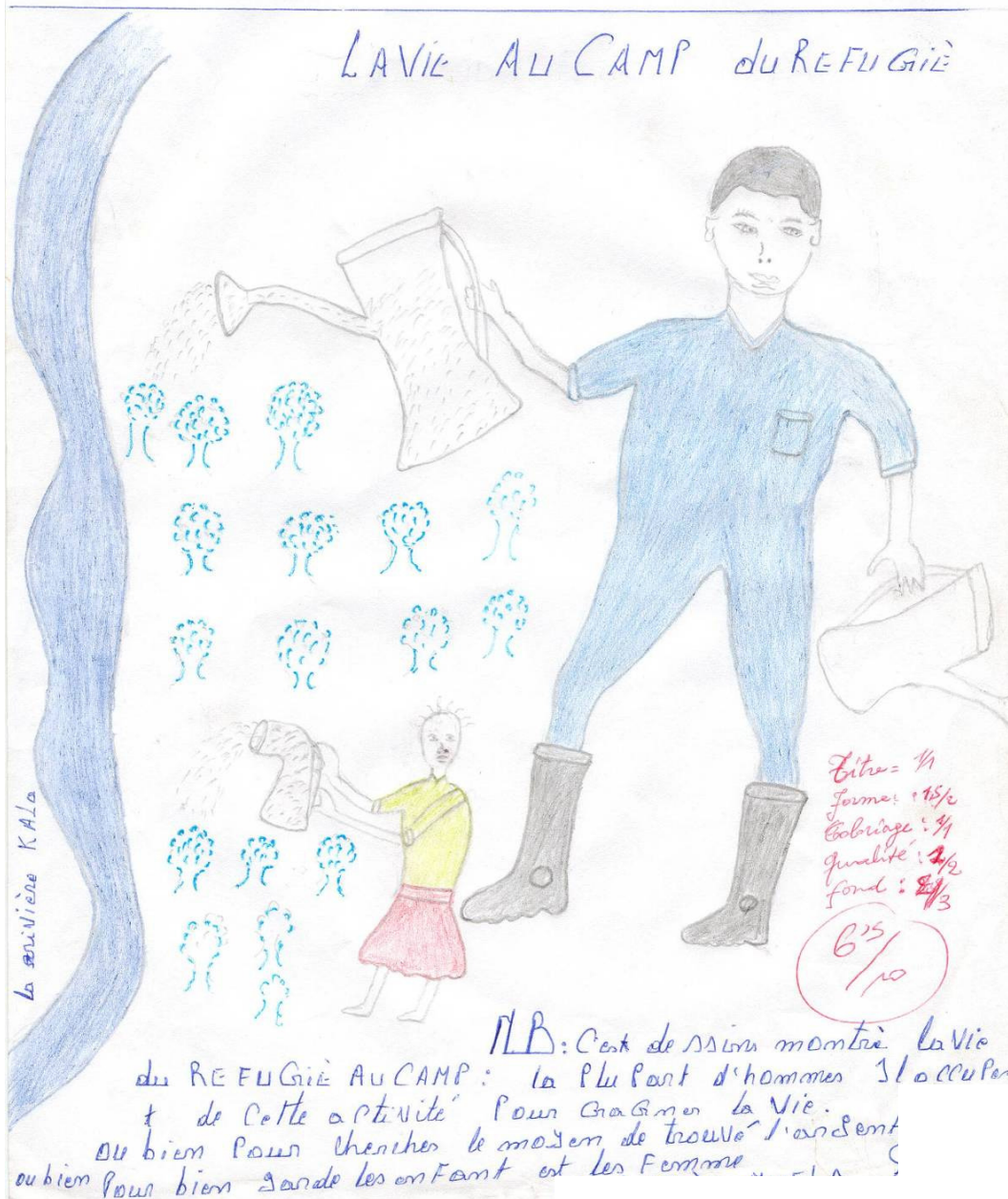


Fig. 76 This picture shows life in the refugee camp, most men do this activity to earn their living or to seek the means of getting money or to take care of their children and their wives. (Secondary schoolboy 20)

In the camp this is the pivotal issue which is affected by the dependence on food distributions. What we see in the camp is that these relations within the family are severely disrupted with many consequential effects. The husband loses his authority, sometimes the wife will lose respect for him to the point of divorcing him for

someone who has a job and so can buy little extras. The husband is no longer the provider, usually it is the women who go to queue and collect the food distributions with help from the children. Men can therefore no longer be seen as solely responsible for the food within the household, if anyone has this responsibility it is UNHCR. This is compounded by the fact that UN policies intercede more directly in relationships between husbands and wives by forbidding “domestic violence”.

Domestic violence is one of the aspects of gender relationships which most concern the NGOs this comes under the broader heading of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). A man beating his wife (just as parents beating their children) is not considered to be out of the ordinary by the people living in the camp. Demonstrated by Kisimba’s (12 year old boy) response to a wife who expected her husband to share chores (my sister) described in Chapter Three “if she was my wife I would have to beat her Soooo much”. SGBV is however a key focus of the NGOs as gender violence can be increased in refugee contexts. One man’s reaction to this policy reflects its impact on the community through men’s perceived loss of authority: “but how can we get our wives to do what we tell them if we can’t beat them?” Other UNHCR policies also concern empowering women such as having female section and street leaders.

Further UNHCR and the IPs, following the many critiques on male bias in development programmes and the advantageous outcomes of using women as a means of supporting whole families and targeting those most in need, have put into place many policies which prioritise women. To give a few examples, the parcels of land for cultivation were distributed among female headed households, the main income generation project, *foyer*, is run by women, and the skills training carried out there is for women<sup>9</sup> and women (especially those who do not have a husband who is employed) are prioritised when hiring for work. As I have already discussed with relation to children, relationships between men and women are often economic relationships. A man with a job can easily afford a wife, and often even more than one wife.

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<sup>9</sup> This was already established when I arrived but I think it was the first and continued to be a focus. There are others, tailoring, carpentry, but these much smaller numbers and in more marginal locations. Foyer, is paraded to all visiting outsiders as a success story.



There is an assumption that women automatically pass on benefits to the whole household and especially children<sup>10</sup> as a result there is a prioritisation of women in programming. This, along with SGBV programmes gives the impression to men in the camp that, as one group of men complained frustratedly, the UN is only here for the women and cares only for them, not the men. The result is unfortunately that SGBV may be *increased* by a combination of these policies and the frustrations inherent in refugeeness. In order to combat such problems, what need to be addressed are the issues at the root of the problem.

The case of masculinity and women's empowerment in a Tanzanian refugee camp quoted in Chapter Five demonstrates that neither the policy, nor the consequent effect on gender relations is specific to Kala refugee camp. The Burundian refugees see the changes in gender relations as 'moral decay' (Turner n.d.:2) and men feel disempowered as a result.

'Women find UNHCR a better husband.' By this they meant that men ideally should provide for their wives and children, while women and children should obey and respect the men. But in the camp, according to the refugees, UNHCR (or merely the white man) would provide food for everybody, irrespective of age, gender, or status. So, according to this reasoning, the women only respect and obey UNHCR (*ibid.*).

As we can see, the above issues involved in the changing gender relationships, although not entirely food related, are compounded by the fact that food is distributed by the UN rather than produced by the refugees. Women working is not a new phenomenon, but paired with the poverty and the powerlessness and unproductivity of most men in the camp, the result is a severe disjuncture between the expectations and the reality of gender relations.

Programme approaches such as those described above 'separate[] mothers and their children from the full range of structural factors that regulate household food supply and internal distribution' (Pottier 1999:26) and also separate them from the *social* structures in which food is normally located. This especially affects children as they observe relationships between adults as a way of informing their present and future

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<sup>10</sup> Which is often true and in general such attitudes are preferable to those preceding them which prioritised men

relationships. Through observing and interacting as son, daughter, nephew/niece, they learn the system and can interact as mother, father, aunt uncle (Bourdieu 1977:89). The impact on children's lives is not just in the influences they see and hear in the camp, but also in the way this it plays out in family relationships as is discussed in the following section.

### Family Relations

The structure of relations in the family is also centred around food; the father is the provider, the mother the preparer. There is a strict gender division both in terms of agricultural tasks and food preparation.



Fig. 77 Mother is pounding in front of the house, father comes home from the field. The child goes to meet his father. (Primary schoolgirl 13)

This is also true in terms of who gets the best food within the household. In the camp these relations within the family are severely disrupted. As we have seen above the husband, and therefore the father is no longer the provider. The resulting effects on family relations is reflected in a song sung by a younger child (aged 3) in one of my sessions, a song about “Papa *uweni*” describing how *father* UN provides for them

through food distribution and has authority over people living in the camp. When I told the field officer about this she was flattered seeing only the positive aspects of this but there are many negative consequences in the disruption this causes to family relations. The authority of the parents over the children is also eroded as the children can see that food comes to them from the UN with varied and often disruptive effects. “we, the children of today, we do not respect our parents, it really happens it’s because of UNHCR because they give us the same amount of mealie meal, the same piece of soap. So how can the children respect their parents?” (Kimpinde secondary schoolgirl).

Parent-child relations are formed in considerable part, in terms of provision and care. Parents provide food for the children and teach them how to provide food for themselves through cultivation and preparation methods. Children, in return for the food that their parents provide, must show them respect, one important way of doing this is through obedience and performing chores and other tasks described in Chapter Four.



Fig. 78 “My House” My father has two wives, they are pounding. Father is eating dinner. Me, I am sweeping. (Primary schoolboy 15)

The ways in which adults generally constrain children's behaviour is through denying them food. This is a way for adults to demonstrate to their children, the link between food provision and consumption. If the children have not done their chores as they should, if they have not participated in the production of food, be it by doing chores at home to free their parents to carry out work in the fields, or by working in the fields themselves, then they are denied food. Thus the link between their work and food was formerly kept to the fore.



Fig. 79 In my life I like to pound but not every day, and that to help my parents and have lots of food. (Primary schoolgirl 14)

In the camp this relationship is disrupted, food distribution has been instrumental in introducing to children an idea of their individual rights. Food is distributed to the family; each household has their own *jeton* or ration card but the amount they receive is determined by the number of heads, regardless of age or work done. Children see that each individual receives a certain quantity, thus parents find it hard to constrain the child's behaviour as the child replies "you've no right to do that, I have my share". Some children refused to help with chores secure in the knowledge that the food will come no matter what their behaviour. The Group D boys also felt free to take from the family stores to pay for the cinema or to buy fritters, if chastised: they only took part

of their “share”. Marguerite’s son (one of their friends) stole from her to the extent that she now gives him permission to go to the cinema just so that he will ask and she can therefore keep track of food stores. In extreme cases children will go to eat elsewhere and inform their parents to save them their portion at home as well, as it is *theirs* so no-one else should eat it.

Children become adults by marrying and having children of their own. The ability to do this is dependent on (for boys) having the money to buy gifts for a girl and then being able to both pay a “dowry”,<sup>11</sup> and support a new wife and family. Thus even the passage of the life course is structured around food production and provision, in this case linked to wealth. As I have already discussed in Chapter Three, this is happening differently as a result of food distributions in the camp.

Certain areas of the literature on refugee children concentrate on one area of trauma, that caused by the fact that feel they can no longer rely on their parents to protect them (Boothby 1994:250). It is harder to re-establish life as normal and secure, when one of the fundamental tenants of childhood, the utter power and indestructible nature of parents and their ability to protect their children from all danger is destroyed. In Kala camp what I saw was not that children had lost confidence in their parent’s ability to protect from danger due to a failure in this ability. What I saw rather was that children were struggling to come to terms with the fact that their parents could no longer feed and provide for them or “protect” them from hunger or poverty. Children had not lost confidence in their parent’s ability, as we see from the previous quotes which discuss the return to Congo, but they are struggling to come to terms with a new context and its new social order: “Parents paid school fees for us” “Parents were free to take care of their own work to look after us properly” “at home parents looked after us, we were well dressed”

This is exacerbated by the effect of the war on the family group. “The war has shattered (*bouleverser*) our life and that of our family. Death has decreased the number of the members of our family” It is not only death which has had this effect. There is also the issue of relatives left behind, those who were least able to travel were

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<sup>11</sup> Although this is a bride price they use the French word *dot* which means dowry.

those who most needed other family members to look after them. Ntensya talked about her grandparents who she had always cared for and her worries of how they would be coping without her. A mother told me about her children's heartbreak as they had had to leave their disabled father behind.

Equally important is the issue of who you eat and peel peas with, and who feeds you as this established bonds of kinship and respect. The meal table is important:

as a site of sharing – of food and drink, but also of company and love. Cooking for others and then dining with them embody principles of foresight, selflessness, restraint, hospitality, the equality of needs and the justice of meeting them, and the life giving emotional pleasures of fellowship (Dare 1999:3).

### Neighbourly Relationships

'Eating is a social activity which unites household members who form a single commensal group' 'invitation is a gesture of hospitality and inclusion; its refusal emphasizes the boundaries of the household' (Carsten 1997:52). In Langkawi, where Carsten did fieldwork, boundaries were important and food is used to demarcate membership of a kin group, especially for children. But in Congo children are considered to be "the children of the community" not of individual parents. A child is required to demonstrate the same respect for any adults, run errands for anyone who asks, and any adult can chastise a child for wrong doing. Eating practices therefore emphasised inclusion and relatedness; the overriding practice was hospitality. In the camp, food preparation and consumption is more frequently confined to the nuclear family. One of the main complaints by adults which may result from this was that children are no longer respectful. This was reiterated by the children as the above quote from Kimpinde demonstrates.

What we are seeing in the camp is a new way of interacting around food which is inconsistent with the past in subtle ways. There is a change in the possibility of hospitality which has led to a change in social relationships. As I stated in Chapter Six, the emphasis is on the kinship ties, especially closer kin within the household or nuclear family, giving these priority over other ties within the community. Family obligations are foremost, this may also be a result of the living patterns. In a village

there are often kinship ties between most households, but in the camp this is generally not the case.



Fig. 80 The house, three trees, the extended family, there is the mother, the father, the grandparents as well as three nephews.

(Red pen) If I have drawn well, give me a present as the others have not drawn well (Primary schoolgirl 12)

The fact of sharing a dish reinforces the family ties. I do not intend to imply here the type of kinship gained through shared substance as discussed by Carsten (1997:107-112) rather the closeness of sharing on both the intimate familial scale by eating from a communal dish, and the identification of the shared situation with people living under the same camp conditions as refugees and the cultural sameness expressed through similar eating practices.

## Conclusion

In addition to the direct effects of food rations on children's lives and attitudes discussed previously, there are indirect effects caused by the changing structures in family and community relationships. This chapter has discussed how food, through the activities associated with it, structures routines and activities, and thus structures social relations: gender relationships, kinship relationships and community relationships. Practices surrounding food are not only the most visible to the anthropologist as a means of understanding relationships, but also the most visible to children in the camp. Children are seeing the changing relationships between their parents, the increase in divorce and new ways of behaving in relationships between both men and women and between all members of the community. Thus life in the camp, and especially the relationships determined and demonstrated through food provision, preparation and consumption, not only affects social relationships, but also children's expectations and experiences of how relationships should be.

Food is important both in determining and demonstrating the status of children and of members of the community and in allying people to a group. Through commensality people eat to make friends but also, as they ally themselves with one group, they distance themselves from another. The most importance of these was a demonstration of the distinction between refugees and both the Zambians and the NGOs. To take this further, in the following chapter I will be discussing a more symbolic aspect of food paying particular attention to the ways in which food is talked about in the camp as a part of identity processes. Just as this chapter has discussed the effects of living in the camp and dependency for food on children's *social* actions and relationships, Chapters Eight and Nine will consider the differing *symbolic* actions or meanings produced in the camp through food activities and discussions.



## Chapter Eight

### Hungry Minds: Food and Identity

The three sections of this thesis on “hunger” offer different explanations of why children in the camp spoke so frequently about food. In this chapter on “Hungry Minds” I address food’s importance for identity and sense of self<sup>1</sup>. Motivations, emotions and meaning are complex and this chapter provides as another layer to understanding these in the context of Kala camp.

Food dependency is a defining feature of life in the refugee camp and as such defines what it is to be refugee. The limited food and dependence on UNHCR has led to changes in the roles of all members of the community. These include roles fulfilled by children and those observed by them, both of which contribute to their social learning. These changes and the introduction of a “refugee identity” relate to food systems in the camp and as a result food has emerged as symbolically important in relation to identity.

In its focus on change and continuity, this thesis has previously described the activities of children addressing aspects in common with life in Congo as well as differences important to the children. In this chapter I will be addressing the way in which the factors previously discussed may contribute to the long-term consequences of living in a refugee camp, resulting in change to meaning as well as practice. The ways in which this may in turn result in changes to both culture and identity are discussed here. Changes to meaning indicate that even with return to Congo, relationships and practices will not revert to exactly the way they were.

The fact that children’s conversations focused on food has resulted in an analysis of changes to practices involving food, its production and its consumption. Such practices are indicative of broader change in the way that they both cause and reflect

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<sup>1</sup> In general I will be using identity to mean ‘the way “external;” socio-cultural elements and “internal” psychological forms are integrated to produce a socially meaningful sense of “who one is”’ and ‘Self’ to mean the more self-conscious observing “I” trying to control aspects of identity (Levy 1998:326) Selves are also recognised as mediated by factors such as embodiment, subjectivity and agency (Skinner et al 1998:8).

it. Food is both an example of an aspect of life affected by change and also (as a consequence) a symbol of that change. Looking at the *symbolic* usage of food as a result of change elaborates the ways change has impacted on identity.

This chapter is the one which most directly relates to the initial intention of my research which was to investigate the impact of material changes on “culture” and identity. Identity is formed through social learning being partially dependent on experience and memories. Likewise identity is also an important factor in processes of social learning as it forms the basis against which children evaluate new information. These two related issues are inevitably affected and altered as a consequence of temporary refuge in the camp with its associated changes to people’s living conditions and practices. Food’s importance in this process is further elaborated in this chapter.

Reflecting on the ways that discussions of change arose in the camp, what emerged was a sense that even in situations where, on the surface (categorically and materially) things were very similar, the *meaning* that children gave to these things differed. The things which children talk about as a result of changes in lifestyle and circumstances are therefore an important part of a discussion of change. Speech acts are also performative, through talking people ‘lay claim to some personal experience and, in doing so, reveal something about themselves’ (Miller et al 1990:292). The claims people make are instrumental in constituting the social group as well as claiming membership of it. The following chapter addresses the ways that claims to personal experience are important in negotiating role and status. Such acts are a way in which ‘people create, interpret, and publicly project culturally constituted images of self in face-to-face interaction’ (*ibid.*).

Due to my research setting, I am looking at a time and context in which a significant amount of change is occurring. In the refugee camp, this is also a time when the usual forces of globalisation which affect us all have a particular impact in terms of both the speed and intensity with which they are experienced. Change has an enduring impact, affecting more than everyday activities and practices<sup>2</sup>. In Chapter Seven this was

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<sup>2</sup> For a more theoretical discussion of change see Chapter Five.

discussed in terms of social changes, however, it is only when there is an accompanying change to “meaning” that I feel these will have lasting consequences.

### **Children’s Identity**

In this chapter it is both the context of change and the fact that my research is with children which bring issues of identity to the fore. Children are part of a community which is negotiating its status as refugees, as Congolese yet not in Congo, as people assisted by UNHCR and therefore subject to its dictates regarding behaviour. Because they are at a more critical stage in the construction of ideas of who they are children are both more readily affected by a changed context and, as a result of their flexibility of ideas, potentially more resilient.

For children, identity is important, not just in the camp setting where the impact of change is having an effect, but generally as childhood and adolescence are times when things affecting identity may have a greater bearing. Thus the importance of a discussion of things impacting on identity and the ways in which this is mediated is particularly relevant.

Many of the issues raised in the following discussion are therefore particularly pertinent in the lives of the children studied. I suggest that change will affect children’s identity more acutely as a child’s memory can be considered more of a “clean slate” than an adult’s. They are therefore undergoing a more critical process of the accumulation of experiences, thus factors affecting identity will have greater impact. Surroundings during childhood form the raw material of identity for children. Whilst this is also true for adults, the degree to which surroundings will affect identity is tempered by what I term the different levels of memory adults have. The idea of the blank slate is initially introduced by philosophers such as Locke and discussed in depth in the social sciences, especially social psychology (cf. Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch and Sohmer (1995)) in terms of identity formation and the nature-culture debate<sup>3</sup>. Whilst I do not follow the more extreme point of view which implies that the mind has no inherent traits, I do feel that throughout the life course people’s

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<sup>3</sup> Pinker (2003) gives an updated discussion of this in which he criticises the idea.

experiences have an impact on identity. It is for this reason that I talk of the memory rather than the mind as more of an empty slate.

By levels of memory, I refer to the way memory builds up over time and new memories overlay old ones. An adult has a series of layers of memory, all of which inform their idea of who they are. Children, on the other hand, have fewer layers of memory. Every time something new is seen or experienced, new meanings are formed, and thus new information regarding who they are is received and interpreted. Each new experience has a comparatively bigger importance for children's identity simply because it is less diluted by the memory bank informing this identity, it will therefore have a greater impact. Hart expresses this in terms of the fact that: children have had less time to construct their inner selves which are less fixed and therefore more affected by change (1997:28).

Children's identity is also particularly affected by the factors discussed in this chapter as they not only "learn" culture through experiences but also through the actions of adults who try to "teach" it to them (James 1993:28). "I was a kid without knowing what life is and I lived in immorality but my parents trained me and I managed to understand and apply what my parents wanted of me, good behaviour" (Mowa secondary schoolboy 21). Children observe when adults' activities and roles change, which informs their ideas of identity and role. This may result in long-term change even where adults revert to former practices. Food complaints are therefore important in that they are used by adults as a constant reminder to children that this is not who we are, this is not home. The adults in the camp were telling children what it is to be Congolese and what it is to be a refugee thereby emphasising the fact that this way of life is temporary.

It is important to recognise the processual nature of identity in order to better understand the impact of change on identity. Identity is a process, adaptive and accumulative throughout a person's whole life but, (as with many things), is seen to be particularly critical throughout childhood years. Children should not, however, be seen as 'people in the process of becoming rather than being' (James 1993:30), as this process is in itself an aspect of "being" and continues throughout adulthood. It is through the search for identity that one comes to be defined, and identity is never

static. It is important to acknowledge however, that whilst identity has both fixed elements and a processual nature, one never feels that one's identity is changing, rather it is in looking back that the differences become apparent (Sarup 1996:xiii-xvi).

Children are influenced by adults but also by external factors. "My parents, the church, neighbours and all who make up my background (*milieu*), made me what I am" (Mowa) From children's discussions of image and role in Chapter Four, however, we can see that identity is not just important as members of a group, away from home, but also as individuals; they are negotiating individual identity and status for themselves within the community through the roles they perform.

In addition to global ideas of what it is to be a refugee, children are subject to and influenced by global ideas of childhood, a factor made more significant as a result of being under the protection of UNHCR. Children's rights and other aspects of life affected by these are emerging quite strongly in the community as children become aware of their rights as individuals and as children. Often this may take place in opposition to adults in the community for whom "international" rights are not an integral part of what it is to be a child. Ideas of rights are emerging indirectly through programmes which do not directly educate about children's rights but which indicate their existence though emphasising equality such as the food distribution discussed by Kimpinde in Chapter Seven.

Children are therefore subject to policy directly aimed at them, policy which is formulated under the influence of global concepts of childhood and international discussions regarding what childhood is and what it should be. Such ideas, as well as "benefiting" children<sup>4</sup> can be in conflict with the way children wish to carry out their lives, or the ways their communities expect them to carry out their lives.

Child work is one example of this. As we saw in Chapters Three and Four, work is an important and positive aspect of childhood for the children in Kala camp. International Agencies are increasingly recognising the diversity of childhoods, however policy indirectly affects children's ability to work. For the international

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<sup>4</sup> As we saw with ideas of equal rights to food.

community<sup>5</sup> whose definition of childhood is often based on ideas of it being carefree and innocent, (cf. Boyden 1997) work is not a priority and therefore is obstructed both directly and indirectly. Further the prioritisation of schooling has led to increased pressure to attend school in the camp (as discussed in Chapter Three). “It is more difficult for young people to be employed by the UN because their parents also want money to improve their lives” (Musampwa secondary schoolgirl).

Children’s bodies are markers of identity (James 1995:65) first and foremost because they immediately speak to others of the childhood status of the individual, but also because they mark the identity of that individual in more specific ways. The things that the child does with and to their body are important. ‘Within the culture of childhood, that conceptual space which positions children *vis-à-vis* each other, individuality and independence vie with the pressure to conform’ (James 1995:74) but it is not just children who are negotiating these distinctions, as the discussion below will demonstrate, individuals must also demonstrate group membership.

Child development is generally considered to include separating the self as an individual from mother and group therefore defining self in opposition to them. (Levitas 1983:14). The extent to which this will happen and when, however, depends on the culture in which the child is growing up, and the extent to which individualism is stressed. In the camp, the way children share communal plates and share beds emphasises the importance of connections to the group (contrast with Dare 1999:8 and Bringéus 2001:xii).

Whilst children may be present in anthropological discussions of identity, these have often focused on specific instances or moments of identity such as socialisation (becoming) (Mayer 1970) or rites of passage (Richards 1982). I have therefore found it particularly interesting to consider more general identity issues and to consider children in the light of these. Rather than considering children as outside of wider culture, I consider them as any other people within the culture, although not the same as adults, still operating within the same broad categories and contexts. That is not to say that they experience identity in exactly the same way. As discussed above, certain

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<sup>5</sup> Here I include members of the public with International NGOs and the UN

characteristics of childhood mean that identity, especially in a time of change, has a special significance for children.

## **Food**

The work activities discussed by children in Chapter Three, developed in Chapter Six illustrate changes to activities which affect identity. These were still focused on the provision of food but the fact that the refugees were queuing at the distribution rather than digging in the fields was a meaningful difference. This differentiation did not seem contingent on factors such as the level of effort and the amount of time that such activities took (which were often equivalent). This emphasised the more important fact that these were symbolically different kinds of activity as they resulted in food not through “production” but through receiving, (a more passive activity). It is these differences that are the focus of this and the following chapter. That such activities have the *wrong* meaning leading to a disjunction between experience and identity or role.

Food practices and discussions are not related solely to the satisfaction of biological needs. Both the way food-related activities affect roles and the way changing food practices affect social relationships are important in the meanings given to such practices and the ways these meanings relate to children and their identity. Since a part of who you are is what you do, this has obvious implications for identity. Role, position in society and the idea other people have of us are all important factors affecting the way we conceive of ourselves. Children observe those around them to gather information of what people do, what constitutes appropriate roles and behaviour and who is the most successful. They use such indicators and role models to inform decisions regarding their own behaviour and thus children can fit themselves into wider social networks of roles and therefore relationships.



Fig. 81 A young girl experiments with her mother's shoes and equipment.

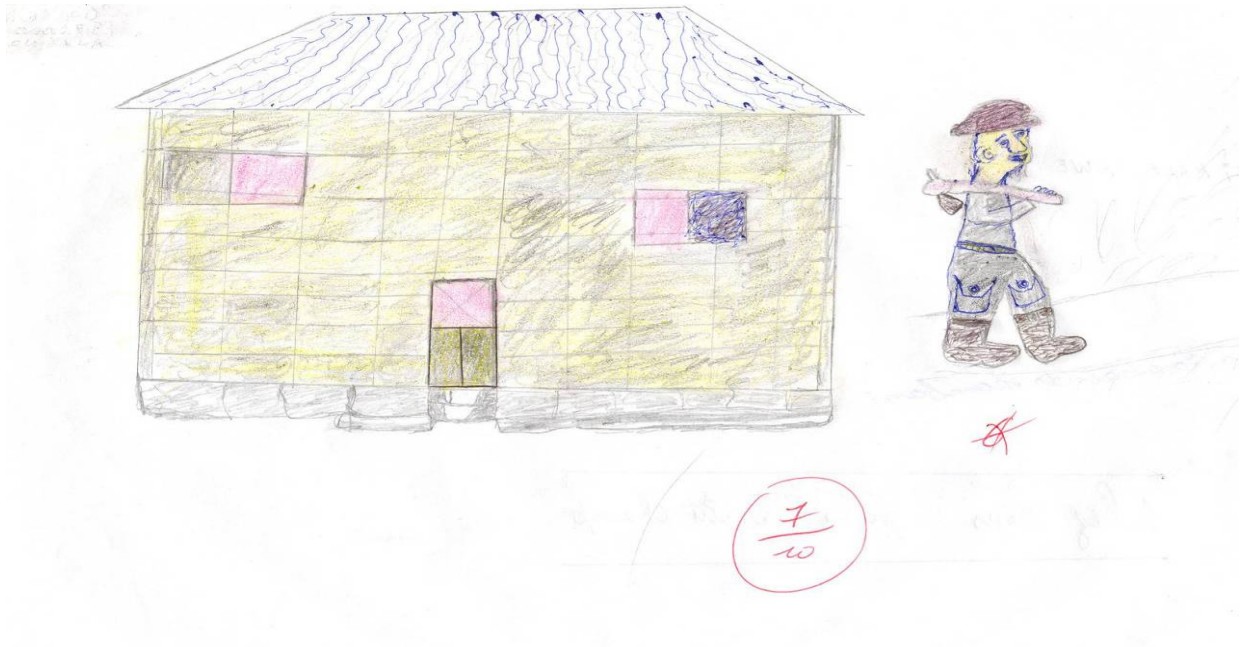


Fig. 82 At home father goes to the fields. (Primary schoolboy 11)



From the discussion of the social importance of food in Chapter Seven, there emerged a sense of the way in which food practices define relationships and in defining relationships, food also (to a certain extent) defines people. As with role, relationships with other people influence a child's idea of his/herself. Further, relationships affect other people's opinions which in turn contribute to their conception of who they are. Relationships and roles are relevant to identity in any situation but they emerge as especially important in this context because the difference of camp life causes change to relationships and roles:

it is never solely individuals whose identity is at stake but *relationships* between persons as well as relationships between persons and the things that have ultimate value for them. Thus the loss of one's language, land, livelihood, and personal belongings, or the belittlement and shaming of those with whom one most closely identifies, are readily experienced as assaults on one's own person (Jackson 1998:17-18).

Both social and physical environments therefore have an impact on identity as sources of meaning, confirmation and validation (Wulff 1995:9). Rapid changes also affect group identity and this forms a part of people's individual identities. Becoming a refugee therefore causes rupture to existing ideas of self (cf. Daniel and Knudsen 1995:5 Knudsen 1995:13, Peteet 1995:173).

For the people in Kala, identity was not just called into question by becoming a refugee, but has been an issue throughout the whole process of political instability, uncertainty and change. Names, an important aspect of identity, are an indication of this. Most of the children had African names, as Mobutu's policy of "*authenticité*"<sup>6</sup> had forbidden the use of all things Western, such as names or clothing. Older generations sometimes reverted to their "Christian" names when he left power but a generation of children may not have "Christian" names<sup>7</sup>. The name of their country and therefore nationality had also changed 5 years previously. Names are particularly important as they give people a fixed marker to tie their identity to<sup>8</sup> (and also in this context because most names given have a specific meaning such as Bupe (Gift) Bahati (Luck) Kaimba (Singer)).

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<sup>6</sup> This rejected colonialism and appealed to ideas of primordial/autochthonous Nationalism.

<sup>7</sup> Although it was forbidden, the remoteness of many places meant that it was possible to use, or at least bestow Christian names so this is not true for all.

<sup>8</sup> Although names do change as emerges later in this chapter.

## Relevance of Change

This context of change was a particularly rich source of information regarding processual aspects of identity as '[p]eople, perhaps especially in situations of rapid change...are involved in the constant process of reworking objectifications and senses of themselves vis-à-vis others, forging identities from available resources in the flow of activity within historically specific sites' (Skinner et al 1998:4). In my research, the site was Kala refugee camp in its early years and therefore any identity forged there would not necessarily persist elsewhere where activities and symbolic capital were different.

Once these children (and adults) leave the camp they will no longer belong to the category "refugee" and will therefore shed the *label* but children in particular will not necessarily shed all elements of identity associated with that category. Individual responses to this may differ but what they will share are the memories of the camp and the experience of being a refugee. Being someone who suffered the necessity of eating peas will remain in their "repertoire" of being, in the repository of both identity and memory. Thus they will be different from those people who remained in Congo, had different experiences, and did not eat peas.

There is a range of elements which make up a person but these can be emphasised or submerged depending on the context. This may be consciously done as the anthropologist "manages" her image in the field, or it may result from living in a different context with different people and relationships whereby new elements are added and existing ones made redundant (I became "*muzungu*" and "Lusiya" but was no longer "tutor" or "carer"). Which elements are stressed or hidden also depends on the range of what is considered socially acceptable.

When people arrive in the refugee camp, a context which is new and alien, there are new elements of identity which emerge. The fluid and changing aspects of identity do not erase old elements but merely overlay them and take precedence in the eyes of the community. The aspects of identity which are emphasised depend on the context lived in at any point in time. To the Congolese, for example, motherhood can bestow a new title as well as a new role. A woman giving birth to a (first) child named Kasamba

would become Banakasamba. I bought a *Kanga*<sup>9</sup> in the camp which says “*mtoto kwa mzazi hakui*” “a child always to your mother”. When you become a mother yourself this identity may take on more importance in some contexts, but to your mother you remain her child.

The “new” identity, “refugee” is therefore only one aspect of identity for people who remain Congolese, pupils, sons, daughters, mothers or fathers, tailors, teachers, intellectuals and so on and therefore retain many elements of the old identity. Identity continues to shift according to status as it always did but new forms of identity and status associated with the camp and new experiences also become part of this. This is not something which is newly occurring in the refugee camp but which happens throughout all aspects of life. Being a refugee is something which is seen as temporary and which, on return to Congo, is part of identity which may no longer be important, but which, in the camp is often of prime importance. Further, the meaning of what it is to be a refugee is also varied.

My concept of identity differs from those who would describe this plurality of sites of self as a plurality of selves (Skinner et al 1998:8). Although the individual may “belong” in two places with context dependent identities (Geschiere & Gugler 1998:310), the situation of change simply resulting in the emergence of a different identity (Rew and Campbell 1999:13), there remain constants and these identities are not discrete or separate. For example, Ntensya (13) had seen herself as a helper to her grandmother in Congo, but in the camp she was an older sister caring for her baby brother born there. Within these two “identities” she was still sister, daughter, pupil, pretty, young. The characteristic most relevant in any context will be the one to the fore, thus with a parent one is primarily a child, but with a husband primarily a wife and with a teacher primarily a pupil. I therefore feel that to talk of a “plurality” of selves is an oversimplification since these selves retain the same history.

It is important to recognise that the “refugee” identity, whilst “new”, has elements of the “pre-refugee identity”. To call it a separate identity fails to take this continuity into account. As an anthropologist in the field I may fit into a society in a wholly new

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<sup>9</sup> A *Kanga* is a sort of sarong which has slogans printed on it in Swahili.

way but my new identity is not separate from my old one. I feel the same person in spite of the many differences and more importantly I retain the same memories of my experiences and of who I am<sup>10</sup>. I therefore prefer to talk about shifting elements which make up identity rather than complete “identities” coming into use/disuse.

Another significant factor in these changing identities is the people who the refugees interact with, both within the camp population and external to it. In the eyes of UNHCR, NGOs and Zambians they are primarily refugees but to other refugees they are school children, well behaved, Tabwa, big sister. “Here I am now in 4<sup>th</sup> H.P (Teaching) but all the same I remain a refugee like all the others. I am a refugee and a pupil at the Secondary school” (Kabwe 19). Furthermore being a refugee isn’t necessarily something that is going to last and it isn’t something which is as important in other contexts. As Harrell-Bond (1986) and Malkki (1996) demonstrate, the meaning of “refugee” is contingent on what the group feel it *should* be, both in terms of UNHCR constraints on behaviour and the expectations of other refugees.

Identity is therefore rooted in a range of elements or options existing as part of a process of memory and social interaction. These options can be foregrounded or ignored at any time but all fall within and collectively constitute a person’s identity. This not finite but ever increasing, dependent on memory and experience and specific to the individual. Thus by becoming a refugee, by living in such a different context, there is a shift in the relevant aspects of identity, some are added while some lose relevance as experience and memory change. The experiences of children in the camp will build up their stock of identity elements based on those experiences.

## **The Group and the Individual**

In this examination of the interaction between group and individual identity, especially with its context of change, I treat group and individual identity as aspects of the subjectivity which cannot be separated. Having culture (and thus a socially constructed self) does not negate agency or individuality. This is an issue which is increasingly recognised with phenomenological discussions of subjective and

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<sup>10</sup> Though these memories may be reinterpreted and used differently to inform ideas of self and memory is neither fixed nor constant.

intersubjective knowledge which does ‘justice to the lived complexity of experience’ (Jackson 1996:8) involving both cultural and individual experiences and prioritising neither. Discussions such as Ortner’s on resistance (an issue discussed in more detail in the following chapter) further this in their recognition that ‘[a]gency is not an entity which exists apart from cultural construction’ and that ‘every culture... constructs its own forms of agency’ (1995:186).

As an illustration of this I refer to the incident when a girl in Group A was trying to decide the correct way to wrap a *citenge* (sarong/skirt) by discussing with other girls of her age. By entering into this discussion she was demonstrating her individuality, the fact that this is a personal decision, and by concluding that she should cross the *citenge* right side over left side (the Congolese way) she was demonstrating both the influence that the socially constructed idea of what it is to be Congolese (in the case wrapping the *citenge* the Congolese way) and the fact that to her, this was a relevant and important way of demonstrating her Congolesehood. Furthermore, she was demonstrating that she wished to be identifiably Congolese.

Likewise with eating practices: preference for cassava related foods, such as *ugali* and *katapa*, both in statement and in fact, was a personal decision made by children in terms of its importance weighed against the practical issues involved in procuring such food. It was also an embodied way of being and demonstrating Congolesehood, through taste habits, and was a cultural and socially constructed way of differentiating oneself from Zambians<sup>11</sup>. The fact that the Congolese were acknowledged by several Zambians as better at cooking these foods both in terms of technique and skill added to this idea of difference.

This is not simply a question of being affected by other people’s opinions of our behaviour but also of decisions regarding behaviour being made through interaction and in a context of knowledge of what others consider relevant (Robbins 1973:1199). Children (and adults) orientate themselves to others; their ideas of themselves are used to guide their interactions with others just as their idea of who they are comes from these interactions and what they perceive as socially acceptable. Ideas of self

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<sup>11</sup> Zambians do eat Cassava and there were some prolific producers of Cassava near to the camp, but this was not considered the ‘norm’ for Zambians in the same way that it was for the Congolese.

and the opinions and expectations of the group are intertwined, affecting and affected by the other. Thus individual identity is woven into the social such that the separation of group and individual identity begins to seem arbitrary, as each is constituted by and within the other

During times of change individual identity is therefore renegotiated in response to the changing social structure within the community and changing ideas of relevant behaviour, and also with respect to changing ideas of what constitutes the community which come from both within and outside of the group. Although the self is constructed through past experiences, it also looks towards the future. Behaviour is determined not only by the idea we wish others to have of us, but also by the ideal self we hope to become. This is based on moral ideals of dignity and what constitutes a meaningful and fulfilled life (Taylor 1989:4) but also on the behaviour and reactions of others. It is therefore not only the actions of others that inform social learning, but also their reactions to the children's own actions.

### **Children's Identities as Refugees**

Inherent in this discussion of identity are examples of the agency of the children in their response to the challenges of their situation. Children are active in writing their own life stories, they select from their surroundings in forming their identity rather than absorbing all that is presented (Wulff 1995:9). As discussed in Chapter Four, in the context of Kala camp, the children decide to prioritise Congolese identity over other aspects of identity with their choice of bright colours, hairstyles, and fitenge, as well as prioritising the aspect of refugeeness that a refugee is someone who receives. One reason for the former is that they are defining themselves in relation to other people such as the local Zambians, or the international staff. A primary way of doing this, however, was through food.

The term refugee can have different meaning to different people in different contexts. It is not just in academic discussions that there is variation between the meanings attributed to the term and who it signifies. In *Imposing Aid*, Harrell-Bond's description of refugees as people who are dependent on assistance and have therefore 'failed' is one example of this (1986:6). She states that this is because the dominant

discourse is controlled by those who actively define themselves in opposition to refugees: those self-settled refugees who reject aid (*ibid.*:5). Outsiders' constructions of "refugeeness" may also conflict with their own self-definition, leading to increased problems of insecurity and can also lead to inappropriate interventions.

For the children in Kala a refugee is someone who receives. They used the UNHCR symbol to prove this to me (Fig. 83) as it depicts two hands which are the UNHCR protecting, then underneath the image someone, a refugee, standing in the shelter of these two hands.



Fig. 83 The UNHCR Emblem

The children told me to look at this image carefully and notice that this person has no arms, and no legs, thus they are unable to work or look after themselves. For the children, becoming a refugee is therefore metaphorically a temporary loss of limbs. This is considered a temporary and context dependent identity. The refugees in Kala strategically exploit this as a symbol which *proves* their "helplessness" and need of assistance as it is the UN's own symbol. Since they can't grow food for themselves, it's UNHCR's responsibility to feed them.

The refugees both exploit and revile this meaning. They exploit it in the sense of using it to make demands and ensure they receive as much as possible and they revile

its implied helplessness. The vocal complaints regarding *receiving* are also important for the negotiation of self; by reviling their “*reception*”, the refugees have something concrete to complain about. In speech acts which demonstrate discontentment with life in the refugee camp, the fact of receiving stands for other elusive elements of a life in limbo (see Chapter Nine). Helplessness does not define them as people, only as refugees as it is only temporary and is imposed by others.

This reflects both the relationship that the refugees have with the UN and their conception that food in this context is a right. Although they define being a refugee as being someone who receives, this is generally phrased in terms of rights rather than helplessness. The children in Group A repeated frequently that “you brought us here, you must feed us”. Talking of food is used as a way of expressing identity and negotiating a particular relationship with UNHCR and therefore a particular image of themselves. It is also something which they can complain about without getting into trouble with UNHCR in order to evoke and negotiate this relationship.

### **The Relevance of Food in the Absence of Place**

From looking at why identity becomes important in the camp, I move on to look at why food emerges as so important to identity. One of the reasons for the ubiquitous talk of food in the camp is that, in refuge, “Place” is called into question. Common ways of defining groups and selves are often ostensibly or implicitly constituted in connection to a place. This is not necessarily actively spoken of on a regular basis, but may rather be taken for granted. There is a general ‘notion that there is an immutable link between cultures, peoples, or identities and specific places’ (Lavie and Swedenberg 1996:1). Given that place is an element called into question for refugees, food’s importance may be in offering an alternative conceptualisation of identity: a conceptualisation whose importance grew as direct connection to place was diminished. ‘A hungry person finds it harder to control his appetite than someone who has had his fill’ (Bringéus 2001:172), hunger for home is only relevant when it is absent.

For the people in Kala, the importance in describing who they are is in the shared “state” of refugeeness rather than a shared “place”. Kala camp is not a place the



refugees have a relationship with either in terms of the land, or in terms of what it means to live there (compounded by the fact that they are unable to grow their own food there). The relationship the refugees have with the camp is negative both in terms of value (it's an undesirable place to live), and in what it is *not* i.e. "Home" (Congo). There is no historical connection, the camp is a borrowed space, located and defined through its meaning rather than its geographical situation. The latter is less important than the category, "refugee camp". The meaning of Kala for its inhabitants would be equivalent even if it were located, for example, in Tanzania. In terms of location the most important element is that it is *not* Congo.

The relationship between people and place is important as aspects of identity located in both past and future may become fragile with the loss of the physical and social locus of identity, accepted ideas and beliefs may become questioned. These issues are particularly relevant for children "life here does something to the future we will have" (secondary schoolboy 17). While people were still living in Congo and therefore in a familiar context there were more constants, more stability and therefore less impact on identity. In the camp these cumulative factors along with a lack of stability contributed to the impact of the upheaval of flight and camp life on identity. People no longer had a home and in addition their main role was often denied them. Farmers, fishers and hunters no longer existed in the camp, only refugees.

"Place" is called into question by becoming a refugee partly because of no longer being in the place they used to be, the place which defined them, but also because people in the camp come from different places. The refugees are from Congo, but not from the same place *in* Congo. With different landscapes different tribal groups, and different languages there is nothing which unifies the refugees as a group. Congo is also called into question because of the things that happened there, things which caused the refugees to flee, but also events which have taken place in their absence. It is now an uncertain place.

To an extent this is mitigated by the fact that the importance of place in identity can be reformulated as symbolic rather than linked to a physical location. The meaningful category "home" is mobilised as with African Americans who make an effort to locate single cultural roots and play down their hybridity (Lemelle & Kelly 1994:7),

in doing so, they reinvent and imagine a home. In the camp this is done through evoking agricultural and fishing activities and food.



Fig. 84 This drawing explains that when we were in Congo we pounded and we farmed but here in Kala camp we don't farm like we did in Congo and we don't pound. In Congo some people drew water in pots but here we draw water in containers and I don't know if that is right, that's all. I end here. But some people lived in nice houses. (Secondary schoolgirl 14)

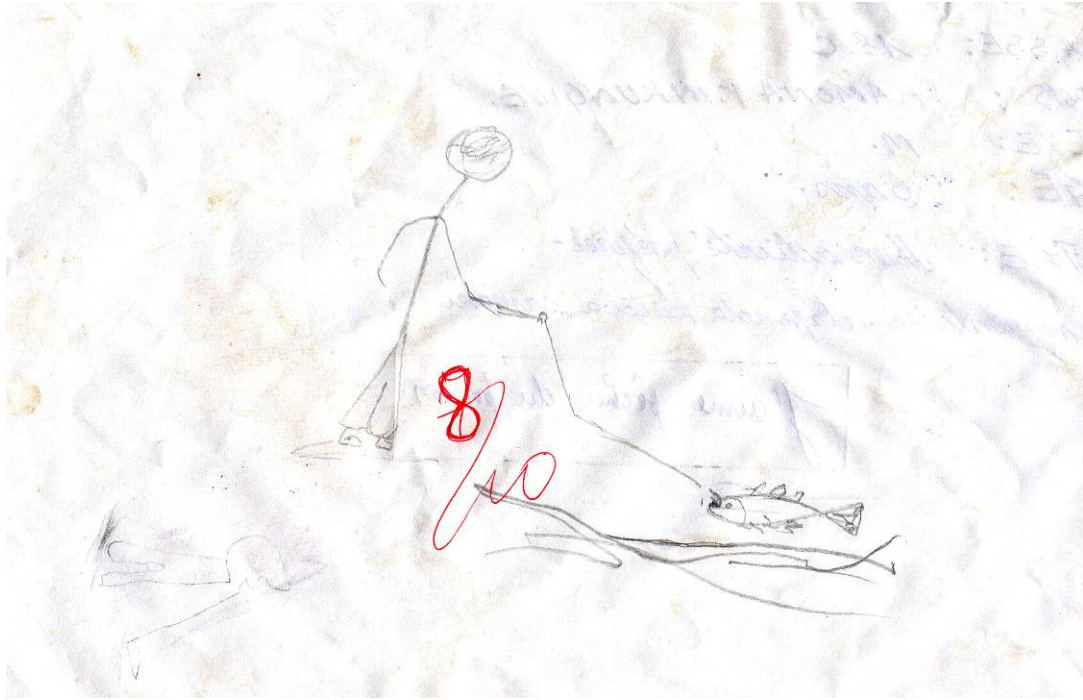


Fig. 85 I like fishing for fish (Primary schoolboy 6)

Connection to place does not depend upon inhabitancy. The importance of the place may not be in its physical presence but in its symbolic existence as a source of meaning in people's lives (Van der Veer 1995:12). The Hutu refugees described by Malkki feel that "refugeeness" is a process defined in terms of waiting to return home and this fixes them as a group even though they are not fixed geographically (Malkki 1996:382).<sup>12</sup> The *idea* of a place can therefore take on more importance than the physical place itself (Lemelle & Kelly 1994:7). This is true both for the idealised "Congo" (where food is abundant and varied) and the vilified "Camp" (where they eat peas).

The fact that the refugees are no longer in Congo and have feelings of uncertainty about Congo does not prevent them from continuing to consider themselves Congolese. On the other hand, as my fieldwork shows, that does not mean they have made an unproblematic transition from being resident in their country to being exiled

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<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Bascom showed in his study of Eritreans that although they articulated a desire for return subsequently the majority remained even after return was made possible (1998:147).

from it. Whilst I agree that the physical presence of a place is not necessary for it to be significant for identity, I feel that it is important to remember the dissonance caused when what was an unproblematic presence in people's lives becomes a very problematic absence. The waiting and sense of limbo, the suspension of certainties leads to a hiatus of meaning. Place is therefore both important and problematic for the refugees whose very status depends on displacement.

Place is no longer effective as a symbol and the need arises to find new symbols and practices to give meaning to who they are and to unify the diverse groups, and which also provide a rhetoric or language for relating to home and its absence. In Kala camp food provides a way of expressing both "who we are" and "where we come from". All of the refugees receive the same food (described in Chapter Six) and the majority have identical reactions to these foods be it mistrust for yellow maize, disgust for *njekele*, or disappointment in the quantity, especially of oil or salt. As a result a rhetoric or discourse has developed in response to these foods both in the negative speech regarding camp food and in the idealisation of foods from the past, from home.

Children's formation of identity is affected by the association between them, members of their family and places associated with family as it is through 'expanding relationships ... and [] relationships to the places populated by family and others who contribute to a sense of self in the growing child' (Sibley 1995:125). This in turn forms the basis of the 'relationship between the self and both the social and material world' (*ibid.*:125). Thus the social relations discussed in the previous chapters together with the locations in which these are enacted are important for children's changing identities and social learning.

The importance of food to identity has been acknowledged by other anthropologists such as Carsten (1997) and Feldman-Savelsberg (1995). Kinship and personhood maybe established through eating practices (Carsten 1997:286). Food acts as a boundary marker between groups and individuals, it creates cohesion between people who eat the same foods, or prepare them in the same way. People who eat together form a group, while food preference and avoidance, whether through their expression or practice, also form bonds between people.

It is not only through the types of substances eaten that the body takes on identity and food is embodied. The body is also socialised through the acquisition of taste and the act of eating in the proper way (Bringéus 2001:173). Taste here refers to both aspects of its dual meaning, both to food preferences and the sensory acquisition of knowledge which combine to produce culturally embodied reactions to food. One could not be Congolese and eat *nshima* with a knife and fork. Similarly it was considered impossible that I, a *muzungu*, would eat *nshima*. When people saw that I did, there was much surprise but also a shift in our relationships. This became even more pronounced when they realised that in the camp I ate exactly what they did, I had *njekele* rather than meat with my *nshima*. In this way I was more like the refugees than the Zambian Bemba who never ate *njekele*.

Taste and embodied responses to food are especially important in childhood as '[c]hildren experience things acutely in a physical sense' (Sibley 1995:124). Experience and sensations (including emotions) 'shape the developing child's relationship to people and places' (*ibid.*). Equally important is the issue of who one eats with, and is fed by, as this established bonds of kinship and respect (Chapter Seven). Children's social networks and the people they consider kin have become reduced in the camp by the tightening of the circle of people they can eat with. However, whilst this personal network is decreasing, the wider group membership of people they don't have a relationship but consider to be related in the sense of being "like them" may be expanding.

In the camp it is not only through direct social contact that people come to be members of the group, but by knowledge of shared practice. Anderson describes reading the paper as an act which increases an idea of solidarity.

'Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore this ceremony is necessarily repeated at daily or half daily intervals' (1991:35).

In the camp eating food rations serves a similar purpose. There is a degree of certainty to this "imagined" community and activities in common. The refugees all receive the same food and therefore will generally all be eating exactly the same thing

at similar times in their individual homes but they remain strangers, unknown to each other.

There is also a level of visibility, unlike Anderson's situation, as the densely populated streets and small houses means eating often takes place outside of the front of the house, visible to others in the street. This level of visibility means that people more easily relate their experiences to each other in a way not guaranteed elsewhere. As I mentioned previously the need to "hide" food and eating occurs only when a family is eating a meal which differs from that being eaten by the neighbours (a divisive event which happens less often in the camp where people receive the same rations). As children are more mobile within the camp than adults they encounter more of these people and witness more of this resemblance.

My focus on food in this discussion of identity, however, is concerned more with speech than with practice. People form groups by speaking about themselves and others in unifying ways. Food also helps to create and maintain the "group" in the way that people talk about it. I felt at times in the camp that food was all the children talked about.

Another part of what happens as a result of place being called into question is that adults are continually reinforcing in their children aspects of the place where they came from. When I asked the children whether their parents ever talked to them about Congo, or their villages, the children replied "only at meal times". Initially this surprised me as I expected that they would talk to them a lot more. On reflection I realised that talking of something at a time when you are eating and relating it to a specific and concrete substance, is a very powerful way of evoking a topic and embedding it in the memory.

This emerges as a way in which group identity can be formed separately from connection to place. Symbols have been treated in various ways in anthropology and here I wish to draw on Kertzner's work (1988) which demonstrates the ways that they are used by people to communicate and resist. Communication through ritual or symbols is more powerful than verbal communication (*ibid*:30). Given that, as I have described in the previous two chapters, the changing situation with regards to food has

had a significant impact of people's lives, and given its association with natural functions and its presence as an inalienable right, it became clear that one aspect of its use in conversation was symbolic.

### **Food as symbol**

'[F]ood presents a rich symbolic alphabet through its diversity of colour, texture, smell and taste; its ability to be elaborated and combined in infinite ways; and its emersion in norms of manners and cuisine.' (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:2). In the camp food is used symbolically as a way of unifying the group. In the previous chapter I discussed practices of eating together as a way of creating or re-enforcing kinship ties and group membership. Here however I am not referring to the action of eating, but rather to speech acts; the ways in which people *talk* about food has led to its use as a 'shared symbol'. Symbols and rituals are used to create shared understanding and to simplify the world. These symbols create order and give meaning to people's lives, they are used both to express and challenge<sup>13</sup> social relations (Kertzer 1988:1).

The fact that so much meaning can be condensed into food as a symbol allows it to function in diverse ways and thus contribute to identity. By using the symbols of the group "Kala refugee", a person feels, and is recognised, as a part of that group (Kertzer 1988:17). "Life in the camp is not different in different sections because the food and things distributed in this section is the same as that which is distributed in all the sections" (Bahati). 'We are what we eat' as quoted by Dare is not just a question of the body, but also of social identity (1999:4). Food preference and avoidance, whether expressed or practiced, forms bonds between people and people who eat the same foods, or prepare them in the same way are able to relate to one another through these experiences.

Peas arose in many discussions. They are the most hated thing about being in a refugee camp. The children do not like preparing them and they hate eating them. They have to eat them at every meal unless they can exchange them for something

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 9

better. Peas have therefore come to symbolise how horrible life is in the refugee camp. They also symbolise group membership, which is asserted by affirming that peas are horrible. Their nutritional value and the fact that peas were “free”<sup>14</sup> were not of importance, what was important to the refugees was that they had received these horrible peas but did not want to be eating them. By using “conventions” of greeting and complaints the refugees could acknowledge, ascertain and reinforce group membership and shared experience.

One of my “intellectual” friends recounted to me a conversation about peas with people who referred to them as *finjekele*. He explained to me that many refugees referred to the peas in this way. The prefix “fi” denotes a negative judgement, it expresses negative feeling towards the object it describes, (when applied to people it is hurtful and insulting). My friend then explained that he had explained to the people he had heard use this form that it is not correct to do so, that nutritionally peas are good and that they should be thankful for the food they received. He had corrected them and said “you shouldn’t be calling them *finjekele* they are *njekele*.”

In doing so he was differentiating himself, either inadvertently or purposefully, by introducing rationality into the topic. He was both asserting his intellectuality and demonstrating a difference between himself and others. He was therefore setting himself slightly apart from other refugees, a group who hate peas and are prepared to talk about this fact all the time. Whereas he, although he also hated them, could still see value in them. In this way, I suggest that he jeopardised his standing as a refugee and his relationship with the wider community. This could cause the kinds of mistrustful relationships described in the following chapter, especially as he had a job and could therefore more easily eat alternative foods.

For children whose membership of the wider social group secured mainly through kin relationships, it is important that they become skilled in recognising and manipulating such symbolic markers of group identity. By engaging in discussions about food and about the problems of being a refugee in Kala camp, children are creating links of similarity with other refugees in the camp.

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<sup>14</sup> Free but only for those who do refugee ‘work’ ie there is the need to be a refugee and to conform to refugee behaviour to get them.



Food is also used by the refugees to differentiate themselves from Zambians and other groups who eat different foods. 'Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves to both solidify group membership and to set groups apart' (Mintz and Du Bois 2002:109). In the negotiation of group membership food therefore plays a large part in defining insiders and outsiders. It determines the grounds for judging similarity and difference, demarcates boundaries and the ways these are drawn and maintained in a similar way to the situation described by Malkki where nationhood is formed through opposition and the need to "other" (1994:57) (see also Barth 1969:7).

The fact that the Congolese were unfamiliar with certain foods from the area contributed to their identity as a group both in relation to the Zambians, and as a way of unifying different groups within the camp who came from different areas in Congo for example Group D were from cattle farming areas and used to eating beef, or drinking lots of milk, Group C were from the lakeside and used to fresh fish, but none of the refugees were used to eating peas. Some children also found vegetables such as slimy Okra very strange and most preferred palm oil to the oil distributed in the camp.

The different maize from the USA was also something which kept them distinguished as Africans, a title of which they were proud (see Baaz 2001 for a discussion of African "Authenticity"). None were familiar with or enjoyed yellow maize therefore they were unified in their dislike of it whether they preferred cassava or maize *ugali*. This situation of a group of people being unified by *dislike* is an unusual example of what can unify people. It is also an indication that dislike and avoidance are just as important as discussions of taste and preferences for self definition in opposition to others.

As the refugees live in Zambia, it is also important for them to distinguish themselves from the Zambians: other people who also live in Zambia but who are outside of the newly formed group. People's reputations regarding food are an important aspect of their identity which defined them as different from Zambians. The children considered the Zambians to be inhospitable as there are many social obligations or practices which they ignore. These include the need to offer a guest some food no

matter what time they arrive, the need to invite anyone who is present at a mealtime to eat. These are necessary actions in order to be considered socially acceptable. As individuals the Zambians are not seen to be good hosts but also as a nation hosting the refugees in their land there are resentments in terms of the lack of land for cultivating and the restrictions placed on the movements and behaviour of the refugees. Given that what they provide is insufficient, they also fail to fulfil the necessary role of a “good” host.

The ideal of food generosity gives the refugees a group identity which combines both elements of their past and reflections on their present. So too does the idea that the Congolese eat different foods to the Zambians, just as nationhood is imagined ‘associated cuisines may be imagined, too. Once imagined, such cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity’ (Mintz and Du Bois 2002:109).

Children are also taught about food at school, but this has become problematic in the camp as the foods which grow in Zambia are not the same as the foods in Congo. The school teachers complained to me about the fact that they couldn’t even get the props to teach children about foods because “in Congo there were 10 varieties of banana but here in Zambia there’s only one type” so they can’t teach their pupils about bananas anymore. The teaching of food was important in the schools, even in Congo, and this continued in the camp to the extent possible. Fig 86 shows a recital about preparing food given at the preschool, by 5-6 year olds, it shows the pestle and mortar and the sieve.



Fig. 86

These are used to prepare the meal (*farine*) in order to make the staple *ugali*. Fig 87 is a picture of another recital about the foods grown in the fields.



Fig. 87 This recital goes:

“Yesterday I went to the fields with mama and she taught me about all of different the foods, this is a maize, this is a sweet potato, this is a tomato, this is an onion. Come to the fields tomorrow and you can learn about all of these foods.”

Thus although children aren't going to the fields or taking part in cultivation, through the preschool and through the recitals that they learn there, the kinds of foods that people were growing, producing, and eating in Congo and the importance of cultivating is being reinforced in the children. Such invocation of activities now absent from daily life is important to continue the symbolic connection to home (or to create one for young children) as well as providing knowledge which will be useful on return to Congo.

One of the reasons that food is evoked so constantly may be that it is a new symbol, or a symbol being used differently and more widely, especially as the refugees are a new "group". Symbols 'act only on condition they encounter agents conditioned to perceive them' (Bourdieu 1977:76). In order to understand the meaning of a symbol people must 'associate the same meaning with the same sign' (*ibid*:26). Refugeeness and shared eating practices are still both in a process of becoming accepted as forms of identifying, expressing and being. Thus the constant evocation is a means of establishing both group and symbol as unquestionably part of the "rhetoric" of being. In this way, talk of food will become established as a part of what it is to be a refugee, what it is that they share as a group and what it is that makes life in the camp different from life at home and in doing so it will also contribute to the idea of Congo as home.

Symbolic behaviour is socially standardised and repetitive (Kertzer 1988:10). Food is a powerful symbol, both because of its sensory nature<sup>15</sup> and because it is something which is a constantly recurring part of daily life. Standardised discourses on food such as the greetings described in Chapter Five and the complaints about peas and about queuing contribute to this. Furthermore food is eaten on a regular basis, thus when parents *only* talk to their children about Congo at meal times, this can be two or more times a day. This is why talking to children about food is a powerful means of communication. '[M]anifesting pride through food has a high social value' (Dare 1999:4). Whether it is through 'what we eat, what we eat with what, how we prepare it, how we eat it' (*ibid.*) or who we eat it with.

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<sup>15</sup> 'Food as a trigger of affective memory is well known as is its role as definer of cultural identity' (Scott 2001)

One aspect of the way food is used symbolically as a tool for forming group identity is that the emerging symbol “food” also reinforces connections between people and places, it thus reinstates place as a different kind of symbol, one which is continually reinscribed rather than taken for granted. When food is used symbolically it does not supplant “place” as a symbol, it works with it.

The changes that refugees have experienced and the new ways of living in the camp cause constant comparisons. These are drawn between places rather than times, especially when in relation to things such as “[t]he climate here is cold compared to Congo” (Musampwa secondary schoolgirl) “agriculturalists lament the poverty of the soil” (Ilunga secondary schoolgirl), “In Congo there were many mountains which stopped the wind but in Zambia there are no mountains...In Zambia there are lots of whirlwinds” (Mapenda secondary schoolboy) and the lack of rivers and lakes discussed in Chapter Four.

These are associated with different geographies and national borders but also with food and cultivation. “In Zambia the soil is not fertile, you can cultivate three hectares and you will harvest only two sacks of Maize, it’s not good, in Congo you could cultivate a tiny field and you will harvest lots” (Mapenda). The result of this is that place continues to have an importance for identity but not in its previous form. There is an interplay between food and place through food’s associations with places: with home and with the camp.

Food is something which directly connects people to land and therefore to places, especially where they are farming the land and eating their crops. The land provides people with food, it is part of the food. Therefore when people eat this food they are ingesting the land and it becomes a part of them and they a part of it. Moreover, by farming, people are creating and shaping the landscape just as the land, through nourishment, shapes them. Thus people create and maintain a relationship with the land. Food is “closely linked to the soil... the family and the person” (Mauss 1990:10). In linking people to places, food also unites them as a group, Carsten discusses processes of incorporation and embodiment through feeding with relation to kinship and personhood, however I also feel that ‘the nature of the food consumed,

and who it is consumed with' can 'create and transform' (1997:286) other relationships such as those mentioned above, between people and places.

To have this process take place involving foreign and mistrusted places may be unacceptable. "Congo is a native land whereas the camp is a world of exile" (Ilunga). By eating food distributions, the relationship between people and places is brought further into question as this received food is of unknown origin. "UNHCR provide us with Maize from far away foreign countries" (Mapenda). Eating grain from America and oil from Europe is therefore problematic. As symbols, food and place are interlinked; they rely on each other.

That food connects people to places is one of the reasons that food is constantly vocalised in the camp. The food that the refugees are eating was not grown by them, it hasn't come from a place that they are familiar with. Thus when they are complaining about food, part of what they are complaining about is the fact that they don't have any land to grow their own food. But they also express their mistrust of this food. This was especially clear in the case of yellow maize whose unfamiliarity was interpreted as something suspect leading to rumours such as that it would make them infertile<sup>16</sup>. There is a double strand here to the reasons that food is talked about. It is a reason for complaint but it is also used as symbol.

#### The Symbolic Effectiveness of Food

Food is particularly effective as a symbol because of its sensory nature<sup>17</sup> and therefore its evocative link to memory. Food is a sensory substance, taste can be evocative and when you smell and taste things, this brings back associated memories. As I described above, adults were "using" this association with taste and smell to talk about Congo and home.

Children said that their parents only talked to them of home at mealtimes, to say that: "in Congo we would eat this". The children's comments gave me the impression that this was either to cheer up children who were fed up of the monotonous food, or

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<sup>16</sup> I discuss these further in the following chapter

<sup>17</sup> The sensory nature of eating is described in Chapter 6

because the adults feelings of homesickness needed to find a vocal vent. Food is a particularly rich way of creating associations, as the discussion below will demonstrate. My intention is not to suggest that parents deliberately attempt to create in children's minds a sensory relationship between food and home, as I have no evidence on which to base this, only that they speak when eating evokes their own memories.

In his work on food on a Greek island, Sutton discusses the ways that food links people who are away to their homes. Through tasting foods from home, people are sensually brought home. They eat both to combat and almost to evoke homesickness, to keep the memories of home near and alive (Sutton 2001:74). In the camp what I found was an inversion of this. Food at mealtimes, because of the absence of quality and variety of food associated with home, makes people miss and wish for familiar foods and for home.

Food in the camp is not the right food, there's not enough variety of food and this negative relationship with food in the camp evokes the memories of a contrasting relationship in Congo. This repetition and the evocation which comes from taste also plays a part in reinforcing in the children the ideas that "if we were at home we would be eating different foods". The lack of variety is an important aspect of food in the refugee camp, unless the refugees exchange part of their food rations, they literally eat exactly the same thing every meal, every day.

In terms of the ethnography, what Sutton was describing was the exact opposite of what I experienced, yet the symbolic effect was the same. Eating evokes memories of home, specifically of food and eating. In Sutton's ethnography this is done through the presence of foods from home, in the refugee camp through their continual absence and the unfamiliarity of what is present. The comparison between here and there is constantly recurring due to the repetitive nature of food and eating practices and therefore regularly evokes memories of home.

What emerges from the difference between my ethnography and Sutton's study is an indication of the importance of talking about food, in addition to, or in place of, the actual tasting and experiencing of food. Sutton's book indicates that the Greeks

discuss nostalgia foods for the same reasons that they eat them, yet he does not dwell on the importance of these discussions. In the situation of the refugee camp, where the *absence* of food is the key, the associated rhetoric is as important as the sensory experience. The repetition of conversations and especially greetings is both a reflection of the repetitive nature of food practices and therefore of such thoughts, but also to the importance of food as a means of reinforcing identity.

The similarity of the structure of meals, paired with the difference in the type and amount of food makes the contrast much starker. People in the camp fortunate enough to earn money found it easier to get some variety in their meals by buying dried fish, a variety of vegetables and beans or sweet potatoes. Others had to trade some of their limited rations for a small amount of *chisense* (small-fry) and this was particularly difficult for the most vulnerable and people living alone.<sup>18</sup> Thus food also creates hierarchy in the refugee camp. The divisions within the camp population however, were more easily negotiated and done in a variety of ways, the challenge was in finding common ground and ways of unifying themselves as a group. The collective rhetoric of food is a symbol which defines the refugees as a group and also differentiates them from each other.

Food is a tangible thing which evokes not just the *memories* of eating, but also the memories on which identities are formed (Sutton 2001:74). Just as the memories of food from Congo are an important aspect of their lives in Kala, the memory of the foods eaten in the camp will distinguish the refugees from their neighbours who did not flee Congo. It will give them a shared past to reflect back on and pull them together as a group when they return. Even if this is not actively evoked it remains as an element in their “repertoire” of identity discussed above.

Because both feelings of hunger and taste are sensory, they cannot be disputed by others, and this makes them powerful as symbols. Taste is mediated by culture and experience, as is hunger, but as they are experienced individually and internally they cannot be called into question by others. Like pain, hunger and taste are

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<sup>18</sup> As all refugees have access to maize and to peas they have to give more than they will get in return. This has less of an impact on a big family than one person living alone.



incommunicable, they cannot be experienced outside of the body<sup>19</sup> and there is no evidence for them (Daniel's 1994:232-33). Suffering, although 'lost' to both gaze and speech' can often be implicitly *recognized* (Hastrup 1993:733) but the refugees cannot rely on this recognition by others, they need to express it instrumentally, the way to do this given its incommunicable nature is through the use of metaphor which mediates the experience through language and culture (Daniel 1994:235).

### The Importance of Memory

The importance of the memories that food evokes lies in the role of memory in culture, experience and practice. When an informant is asked about his or her culture, 'that informant is being asked to recreate the recent and more distant past...to give the anthropologist some memories' (Teski and Climo 1995:67). Thus memory may in fact be the 'main place where culture exists' (*ibid*:2). It is therefore important that people in the refugee camp maintain these memories to maintain important elements of their culture and ideas of who they are and to recreate these ideas in the children who can only experience them vicariously. Memory may also be the main place where identity exists; self consciousness comes from 'the acquisition of experience' (Cohen 1994:56). "[W]hen we experience different situations we also experience different inconsistencies which leave in us unforgettable memories in life" (Mwila secondary schoolboy 19).

Memory has a role in connecting people to places and it is important in the building of identities. It is the disruption and uncertainty of life in the refugee camp which leads to a more conscious focus on such issues. As Bahloul's informant states 'When you go you leave behind places where you built your life' (1996:46). The importance of remembering these places is therefore the importance of maintaining the self that was built in them. The fact of being Congolese remains an important aspect of identity for the refugees, this is therefore one element of the self that they wish to maintain, but it is a problematic one given their exile. Communicating memories of Congo is increasingly important as children may not have a "self" that was built there, but through the adults they vicariously come to know the place and associate it as home.

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<sup>19</sup> This is not a negation of Bourdieu's discussion on the cultural/learned basis of taste (1979) but rather a reflection that as something 'unseen' and individually experienced it is not possible for one person to deny another's feelings of hunger or homesickness.

The parents are with the children at mealtimes and are therefore able to use this as an opportunity to discuss with them the fact that “if we were in Congo we would be eating fish”, “we’d be eating meat”, “we’d be eating different vegetables”, “we would not have these peas”. Thus mealtimes are especially important in maintaining and evoking memories, not only because they are repetitive but also because it is a time when people are together.

Memories evoked in the camp generally focused on ideas of “home” and of individual places experienced as “homes”. The relationship between food and home is also a sensory and embodied relationship. There is a bodily attachment to a place as well as an emotional experiential one. Foods from “home” are now less familiar to many of the children in the camp than peas. They are unfamiliar to grow, to cook and to eat: the look, the taste and the feel of them. Just as with the place of “home”, however, the children do not consider them unfamiliar. Their knowledge may be vicarious but the “taste” and the place are kept alive through sensory means, through talking of food at mealtimes. “Effectively a man must remember his environment through the emotions he receives” (Bahati secondary schoolboy).

### **Thoughts of Congo: Past and Future**

Return was another important topic of conversation in the camp as a part of the importance of home. This is again a reflection of the attitude regarding life in the camp versus life in Congo; the idea that everything was better before. “When we think of Congo we want to go back there because we had a good life there” (Musampwa). “Home” is strongly associated with good food. Food’s connection to land means that complaints of food are complaints about the loss of home: a home where they could grow their own, familiar foods, a land which provided these foods. Such ideas of home are tied in with the idealisation of how life was before, how much better the food was before, all the positive things about life in Congo: “the opinion of the people in the camp called refugees, they see Congo as a paradise” (Bahati).

The idea of home is however affected by the knowledge that things are not the same, will never be the same. In this sense home is not there anymore and as a place is

almost as uncertain as the refugee camp. Even looking to the future there is no certainty that the place returned to will be the one which had been left. But wherever they return to in Congo, and whatever the state of the village, cultivation of food is seen as a certainty, that when they go home they will be growing their own familiar food and therefore eating a wider variety of food. “In the camp there is no change in the food, but in Congo it was very varied” (Bahati).

In Kala the way that food is talked about is a reflection of the past, but also projects onto the future and the food that they will have when they return home. Food therefore directs thoughts in a Janus focus looking back, but also looking forwards to the return to Congo. One of the children talked about the return to Congo: “we will cultivate and we will have profit from the harvest, it’s not like here” and because they will cultivate and have a profit, she goes on to say “we will build nice houses like before”. Because of the strong links between food and economics (discussed in Chapter Six), this becomes an indication that the refugees consider that every aspect of their life will be better, that when they get home, through cultivation they will not only have nice and varied food, but from this will also have money to enable them to improve other aspects of their lives.

Ideas of return emerged even with children who have little or no memory of life in Congo. One father told me about his son who had recently starting talking. He had been born six weeks before they left Congo and therefore had no memory life there. He came up to his father with something in his hand and he said “Daddy will we take this with us when we go back to Congo?” This can be seen as a reflection of both the fact that ideas of return recur in conversation between adults and children, but also that children have developed vicarious memories of life in the Congo. One aspect of such memories is that in some ways they are vicarious for everyone in the camp, they are a collective construction of life in the Congo as much as they are true experiences.

As with the Hutu refugees described by Malkki (1996), in Kala the rhetoric regarding return has a similar unifying effect to talk of food. This is both in the possibility of returning when conditions in the camp get too difficult, and returning as there is peace in Congo.

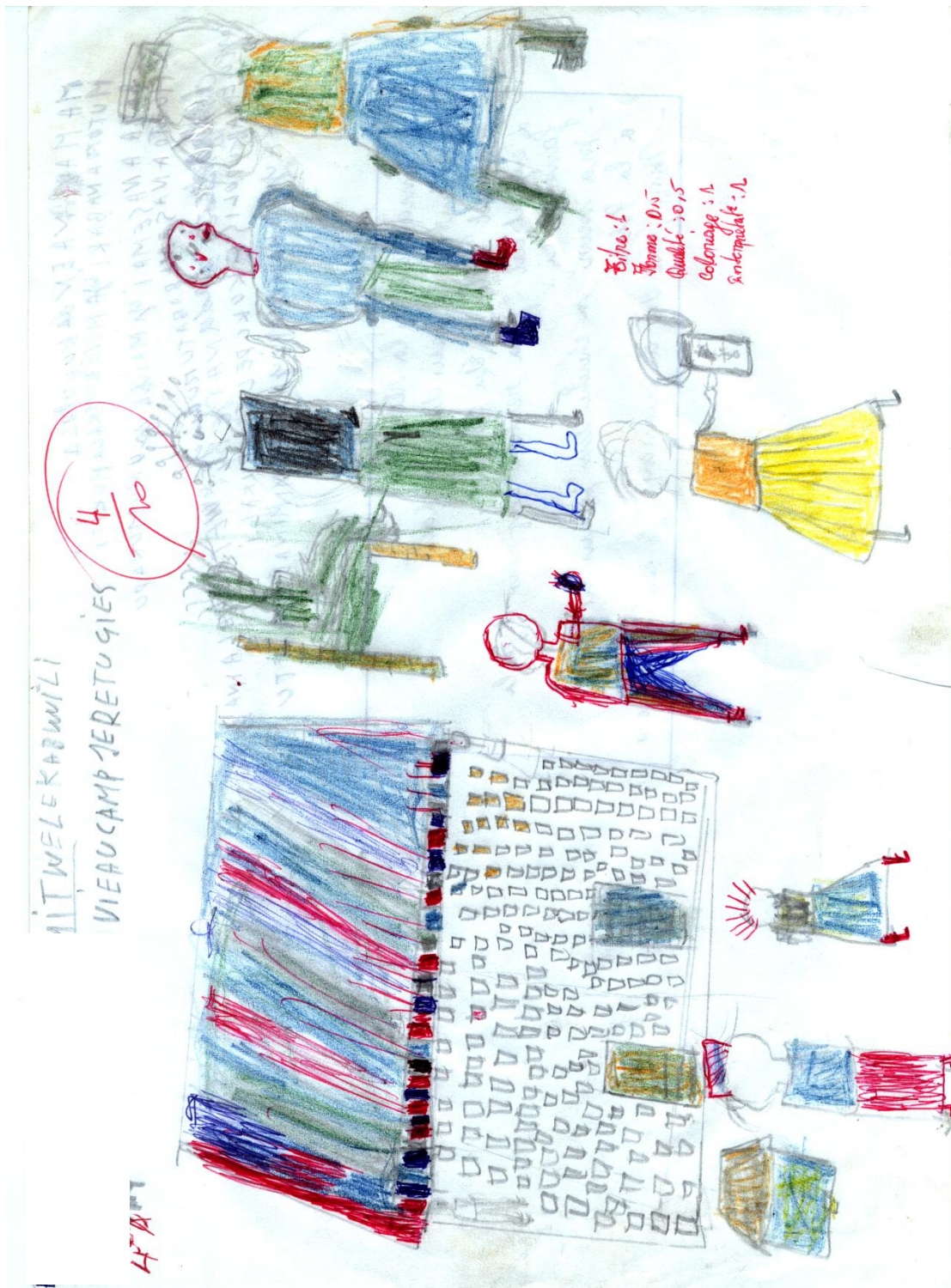


Fig. 88 Mother is going to the distribution, the child is sitting in a chair. Father says “this life in the camp...” the child says “Papa lets go home, there is famine here” My sister is going to look for permission to go out at the police station. My brother says to mother “I am going back home” (Primary schoolchild 15)

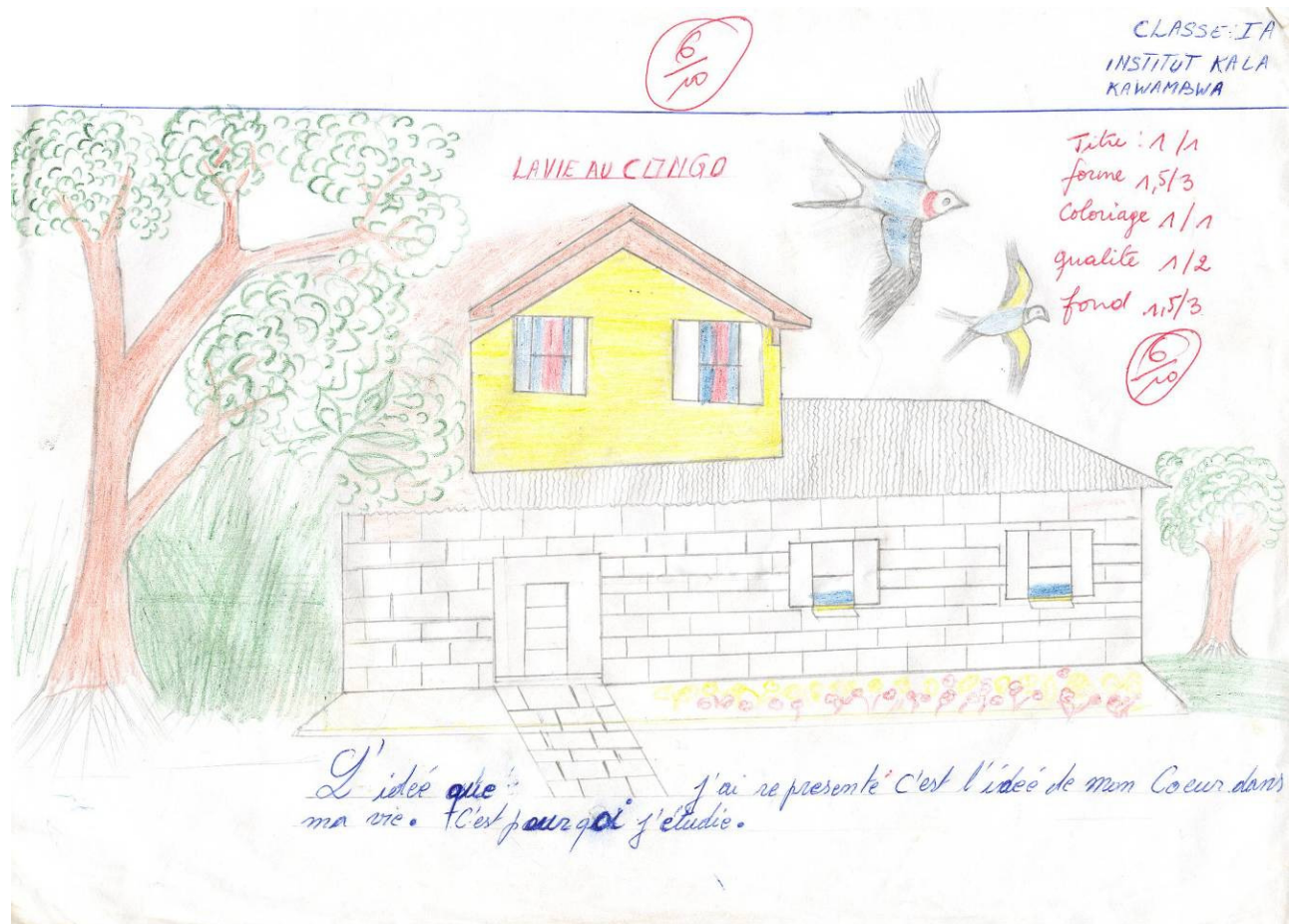


Fig. 89 Life in Congo: The idea I have I show you here. This is the idea I have in my heart for the future. That is why I study. (Secondary schoolboy 14)

Thinking to the future, ideas of a return to Congo also act to unify the refugees, but this is often expressed in terms of food and is therefore also a part of the food rhetoric: There are the imagined feasts to celebrate the return but also the ideas of everyday meals. “When we go back to Congo we will have variety in our diet, not just peas everyday” (Mumba 14). Thus ideas of return also complement discussions of food in unifying the group.

Food is directly linked into people’s ideas of their identity, thus as change happens they constantly evoke this as a way of reaffirming who they are and what constitutes the group and where they come from. It is also used as a metaphor for other changes because it is a substance, a concrete matter easily verbalised and visibly different in the camp. Exile is a problematic transition and food is also important in enabling

discussions of this. People cannot easily complain about loss of country (because of the political implications<sup>20</sup>), so they complain about the different foods. Food is therefore a way of acknowledging other changes which are not necessarily as easy to talk about and it is a way of expressing the fact that these changes are something which they have not really had control over without acknowledging their lack of control. Although food may involve the most basic needs it provides a manageable way of engaging with the issues. The idea of using food as a metaphor and as a means of expressing more problematic issues forms the basis of discussion in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The ways in which identity has been discussed in anthropology in the past are tied up in several dichotomies and anthropologists disagree on what actually constitutes identity. Is it self ascribed or ascribed by others? Is individual identity separate from group identity? Is identity deep seated and unchanging (within oneself,) or is it transitional, multiple and situational? This discussion has demonstrated the ways in which all of these factors of identity are true and relevant to children growing up in Kala refugee camp

Children are especially negotiating ideas of similarity and difference as they establish their idea of who they are as individuals and as members of the community. 'It is []the emerging dialectic between sameness and difference which helps constitute children's consciousness of themselves as both individuals and as children' (James 1995:67). These processes are therefore particularly important for them.

I have discussed the different ways that memory is involved in identity and ideas of home. The importance of memory in this indicates the changes in lifestyle as they affect and bring about changes in culture and practice. These in turn add layers to memory which is used to inform identity. Just as the memories of food from Congo are an important aspect of refugees' lives in Kala, the memory of the foods eaten in the camp may also be important in distinguishing the refugees from their neighbours

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<sup>20</sup> This is both because of residual feeling from Congo and also because any political activity in the camp was banned by UNHCR.

who did not flee Congo and giving them a shared past when they return. For children this will have a greater impact as a larger proportion of their memories will be of life in Kala camp rather than life in Congo. Food dependence is therefore not only important in its effects but also in the way that it is talked about.

Talking of food in the community is one of the ways that adults share their memories of Congo with the children and demonstrate to them what it is to be *Congolese* and not just *Congolese refugees*. The use of food in collective rhetoric can therefore be seen as the result of a new context within which people 'search for new collective symbols and define them through the innovative blending of the old and the new' (Jules-Rosette 1978:7). Children do not simply internalise this information but rather work it into their own constructions of identity and Congolesehood.

People's relationships with food therefore take on new importance. What people eat, how they get food, how they cook, distribute and share food become ways of being and of knowing who they are, who is like them, and who is different. This is an embodied way that children come to know and be Congolese. Food is both an expressive and a creative mode; it is used to express change and discontent. Dependence has led to significant changes to the food eaten, the way it is provided and prepared and therefore talking about food takes on new importance in the camp. It is used therefore important in expressions of identity. In this context where connection to Congo may be brittle food is used to create, to reinforce and to replace the use of memories of place in forming identity. Further it is used creatively and purposefully in the construction of group identity.

In expanding the explanation of children's preoccupations in the camp, this discussion has not only enabled a better understanding of children's lives and why they talk so much about food, but also a better understanding of children's identity. Especially in a context of rapid change one in which their lives are affected by global or international policies and actions. Social learning and teaching are affected by global influences, by IP policies and by members of their community. Group and individual identities are affected by these processes in the present but also by the way that vicarious memories of Congo are brought into use as a part of the rhetoric relating to life in Congo.





## **Chapter Nine**

### **Hungry Minds: Power and Agency**

This chapter emphasises and deconstructs a notion which has been central throughout the thesis, that dependence on UNHCR for food rations is both at the core of children's experience of being a refugee, implicit in this is the notion that this creates a particular power relationship between the IPs and the refugees. Whilst this issue of power results from all IP-refugee interactions, food touches everyone in the camp and is the most vital for survival. What emerges in this chapter, however, is that whilst this dependency may disempower, the children and their families use food to challenge and renegotiate this relationship. The way that people in the camp talk about food demonstrates both to the UN and other outsiders, but also to children whose main experience is of dependence, that this is not an ideal way of living and that a better quality of life can be achieved through independence.

Children's lives are affected, not just by their familial relationships but also by wider community processes. One of the most prominent of these was relationships with NGOs and the power differentials constituting these. Although children may not always be directly implicated in these interactions, they are nonetheless affected by them as members of the community and of the category "refugee". As some of the quotes from them in this chapter indicate, they are certainly aware of these power differentials and form their own understandings of these. This is an indication of the impact of power relationships on the context in which they are living and as a consequence on their social learning.

#### **Intervention**

It is now generally acknowledged that relief and development projects will have unintended effects with the impact on people's lives going beyond their planned changes. All aspects of life are connected and as such, elements of lives superficially unconnected to the intended outcomes are significantly affected by unintended outcomes (Ferguson

1990:20). It is therefore unsurprising that this should be the case in Kala. In the camp however, the situation is perhaps more complex. The extent of and the ways in which programmes affect people's lives and cultures depend on the context: the programme's aims, the staff, and the individuals involved in the project.

Development projects generally target specific aspects of people's lives but the UNHCR programme, comprising several different projects, necessarily pervades *all* aspects of life, not simply as a side effect, but as a defining feature of the programme as a consequence of the context in which it is operating. This all takes place in addition to the material differences to lifestyle with people estranged from their familiar context: their houses, land, their communities and their means of production. In addition people in the camp are continuously being told what to do, told to change their practices, customs and traditions and to conform to UN policy or Zambian Law. As a result of their dependency the refugees have little choice but to conform. This is an added element to the refugee work discussed in Chapter Seven.

Not only do material conditions have an effect on social relationships, but projects are also directed at changing behaviour within relationships on an interpersonal (individual, family, tribal or gender) level. Elements of this were discussed in Chapter Seven. Direct interventions involving laws on witchcraft and domestic violence, the educational activities and committees involved in them also have an impact. The many things they are taught or learn through new experiences are another layer to this. The children and their community are bombarded with new information and expected to assimilate it, to use it to inform practices and change behaviour. From technology such as taps and Motorola radios to new foods and different ways of cooking familiar food (See Fig. 10 in Chapter One), life in the camp is full of new influences.

Development has evolved and learnt from its mistakes but 'good intentions [] have emerged within a policy environment which is not well equipped to respond to social complexities. This environment has a strong tendency to simplify matters, for example through the use of catch-all terms and phrases, and technical solutions' (Pottier 1999:38).

Important influences came from all of the programmes. Whether or not they involved “rules” or “training”, they were each sources of information of new practices and ways of doing things for children to observe and use to model conduct either in copying or rejecting behaviour.

Environmental officers were employed who could punish people for cutting down trees especially on the banks of the stream and there were educational activities and posters on such issues. People could have fuel-efficient stoves built for free and could be arrested for producing charcoal to sell (See Figs 90&91).

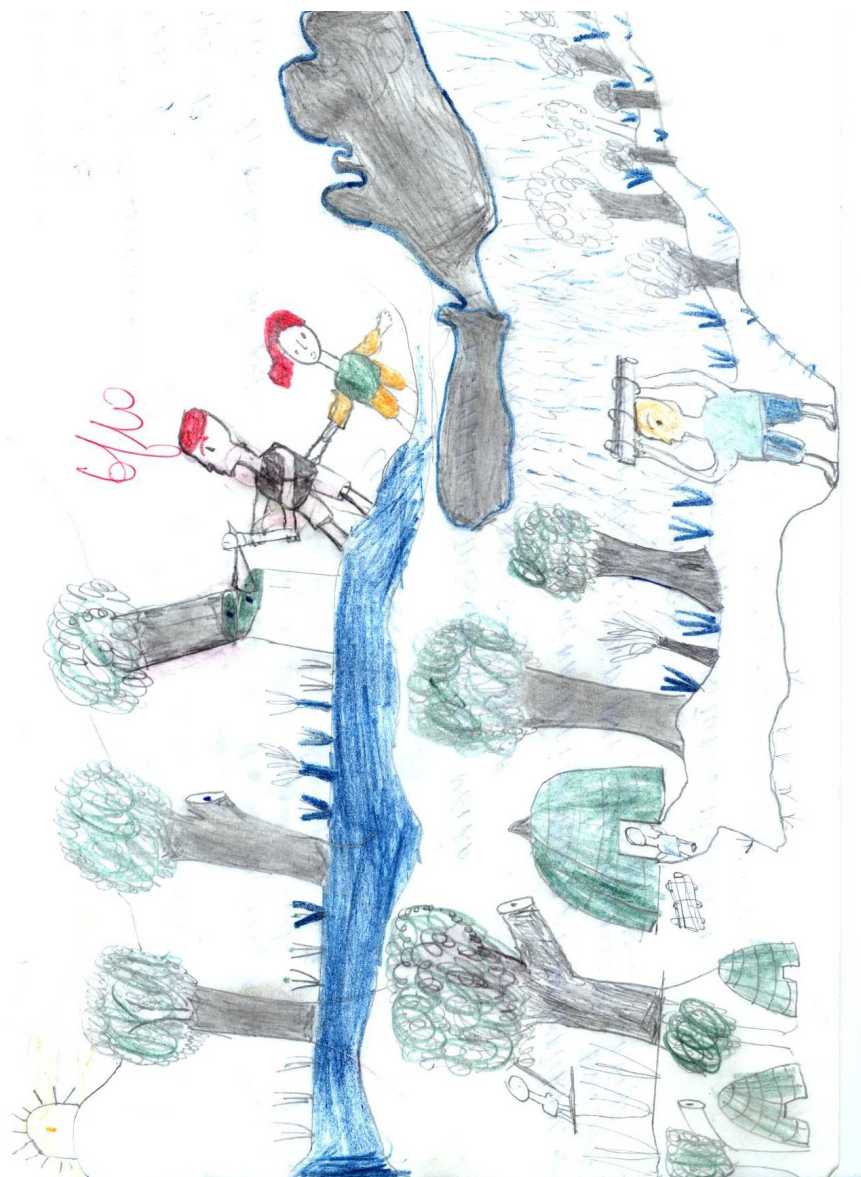


Fig. 90. I am cutting down a tree, I am arrested by the environment officer who confiscates my axe.  
Papa comes back from the fields, he is wet from the rain, he goes inside.  
There are lots of trees in the camp, if you cut them down they confiscate your axe.  
In the camp there are lots of huts, in Congo there were beautiful houses.  
(Chabu Kalunga Primary schoolboy 13) See also earlier pictures on this issue



Fig. 91 Picture taken by the children in Group A of a sign advising people in the camp to use fuel efficient stoves.

The health programmes in the camp also intruded into people's practices, they were involved in educational activities regarding hygiene, alcohol and drug abuse and especially HIV/AIDS education. Children spoke with resentment about the hygiene education which exhorted people to do the impossible: they should wash themselves, their clothes and their dishes on a regular basis with soap. Yet soap was often missing from distribution and even when it was received, was insufficient to last the month.

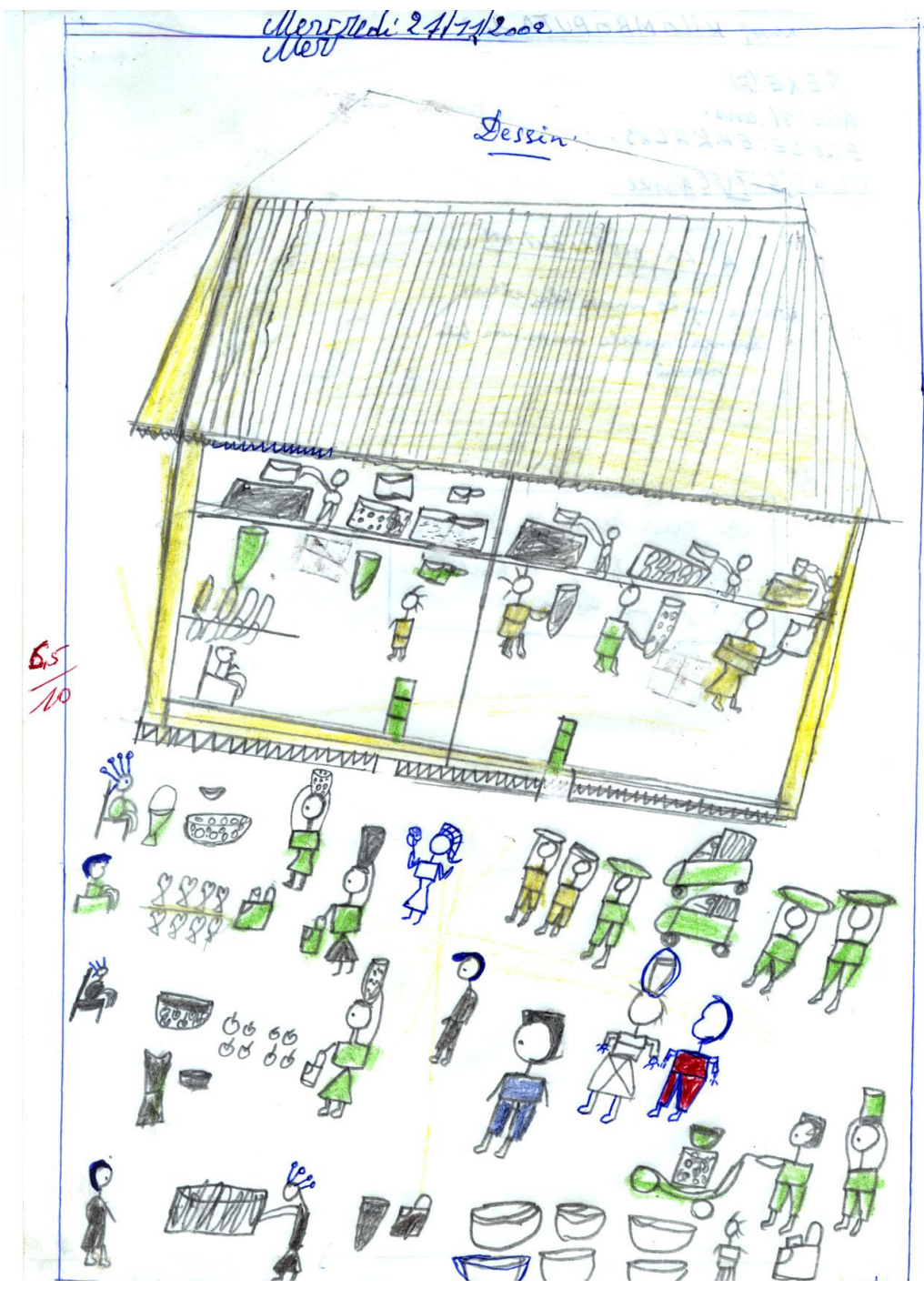


Fig. 92 Kilombo (Primary schoolgirl 11)  
People receive food, mealie meal, peas, oil. There is no soap

More subtle are influences which occur as a result of changes in values implicated in seeing new patterns of who prospers and can take advantage of opportunities in the camp: people with a certain level of education getting paid work, female headed households, the elderly and unaccompanied minors receiving distributions of clothing and there were programmes for income generating specifically for them. “[T]hey just give sarongs to women, shoes to old people but young people/children haven’t received any clothes, it is for this reason that we have suffered a lot, we have no means of standing up for ourselves” (Musampwa secondary schoolgirl).

The earlier chapters have demonstrated that the programme that most affects people’s lives is that of food distribution (*reception*). Pottier, in a different context, raises the question ‘to what extent do high level policy formulations of food security reflect the complex real-life experiences and perceptions of the food-insecure’ (1999:11). The question has equal relevance here, especially when the refugee camp is less “emergency relief” and more closely resembles a development project.

Children may be particularly affected by power dynamics in the camp as their position within the community also situates them as less powerful. The main aspect I will be discussing here does not relate specifically to this but rather to an issue which seemed to concern them more. Conversations focused on the mistrust evident in many relationships in the camp especially in the attitudes towards the UN, Implementing Partners (IPs) and their programmes, as a result of their intervention into the lives of the refugees. The discussion of mistrust also relates to attitudes to those employed in the camp such as teachers and clinicians, or involved in the programmes such as Section Leaders and the SGBV Committee. These are all refugees who are part of IP programmes.

Topics of conversation which frequently arose, given their negative and unsubstantiated nature, can be collectively classed as rumours. If all of these were to be taken at face value it could be understood that, to name some of the most common: teachers and clinicians were all stealing, Section Leaders were receiving more than the stipulated

rations and IP staff were all corrupt and diverting donations intended for the refugees. Whilst I cannot state with certainty that these are all false, the levels of corruption they describe were certainly not present and to the best of my knowledge most of these rumours had little or no foundation in reality.

These rumours should not be simply dismissed, as irrespective of their “truth value” which I cannot only guess at, they are a reflection of the way the refugees *feel* about life in the camp: ‘however partial or even mistaken the experienced reality of human agents, it is that experience of reality that provides the basis for their understanding and their action’ (Scott 1985:46). Additionally such remarks and conversations indicate something more, in Kala antagonism and rumour are central to the face-to-face relationships within which mistrust is enacted. As I demonstrate below, they are markers of particular power dynamics in the camp and they are also a powerful tool in negotiating such dynamics.

## **Mistrust**

Mistrust is a feature which permeates all elements of camp life. The issue of trust and mistrust is not specific to the refugees in Kala camp, but one which appears in many guises in a diversity of refugee contexts and may even be a defining feature of being a refugee. ‘From its inception the experience of a refugee puts trust on trial. The refugee mistrusts and is mistrusted.’ One becomes a refugee through a ‘process of the breakdown of trust’ even prior to flight, and continues to be a refugee until ‘trust is reconstituted’ (Daniel and Knudsen 1995:1).

Trust is often taken to operate on two separate levels. On the one hand there is trust at the level of the individual in face-to-face social interactions operating in terms of either rational calculated choices (Aguilar 1984:3) or affective ties. On the other hand there is the trust which operates on a collective level either as a part of a social order (Gellner 1988:142) or as a part of the psychological disposition (Aguilar *op cit*). Trust is also associated with security and stability which are lacking in the camp, and is linked to social cooperation (Watanabe & Smuts 1999:98) and cohesion (Gellner 1988:156).



Seligman states that trust will be lacking where it is 'less possible to assume shared strong evaluations with others' (1997:172). As a result of these factors it is therefore unsurprising that there is an atmosphere of mistrust in the refugee camp.

A mistrust of outside forces also had an impact on the refugees' lives. These include: the Congolese government and the rebels who cause them to (still) be refugees; the UN, who are an alien authority; the USA which is blamed for the war, and whose hand is seen in food distributions and other programmes. Further there is a mistrust of the Zambian government, which controls their mobility outside of the camp and whose policies towards food aid and refugees have an impact on their lives.

I left Kala camp to go to Kawambwa. In Kawambwa I was caught. They asked me for my *kibali* [pass] I told them that I did not have my *kibali*. The police man said "you dare to speak to me, don't you know that I'm going to arrest you?" Then I got off my bike. The policeman told me to go to the office, he hit me on the head with the rifle magazine and made it bleed. I held my eyes and my head and the bike stayed standing in the road (Musasa 15 secondary schoolboy)

The amount of food received is also dependent on international forces and UN Policy<sup>1</sup>. More often these things were translated into relationships between the refugees and the NGOs on the ground, but were always informed by the world service, local radio broadcasts and other external sources. There is also mistrust of the NGOs, most of whom are staffed by Zambians and who are assumed to be corrupt and diverting aid which is intended for the refugees. At times IP workers allowed personal feelings (for each other) to affect their work in the camp. This is a further acknowledgement of the refugees' lack of control over their own lives as they have not the power to redress such negative treatment. IP workers are not accountable to them but to the international community and donors. This again shows the refugees position in an "in between space", although they are the reason for the IP workers' employment and status, this status was seen to be more important than refugees' physical comfort and dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> Rations were affected by the war in Afghanistan. Also WFP decides rations on a scientific/ nutritional basis in terms of the number of calories provided per day.  
[http://www.wfp.org/operations/current\\_operations/countries/countryproject.asp?section=5&sub\\_section=7&country=894](http://www.wfp.org/operations/current_operations/countries/countryproject.asp?section=5&sub_section=7&country=894).

Refugees and Zambians interact both in terms of the programme staff and in relationships with people in the surrounding area. I have already mentioned the fact that initially Zambians took advantage of the refugees by paying them insufficiently for piecework. “when they cultivate, three hectares for example, they will be paid very little, the price of trousers and a shirt... but in Congo if you cultivate 3 hectares you would have a surprising amount” (Musampwa secondary schoolboy).

The relationship between refugees and Zambians can be categorised as follows: the Zambians felt superior and therefore treated the refugees badly (calling them *fimbutusi*) but the refugees interpreted this as a lack of hospitality and therefore considered the Zambians inferior to them. The children spoke to me of how they would behave in the “proper manner” should there be visitors/refugees in Congo. Very few personal relationships were made between refugees and Zambians. Interactions were usually business ones, at the hammer mills, at the shops in Kawambwa, and when employed for piecework by Zambians.

The relationships between refugees and IPs play out in terms of accusations and rumours about corruption, about goods going astray, about the warehouses being full of shoes when none of these were getting distributed in the camp, about the progress of programmes being too slow, and about things which are done differently compared to Mwange camp who “receive a full bottle of oil at every distribution” (Group A).

IPs and their programmes are treated as part of each other in confrontations about being given short rations at food *reception* or in rumours and complaints about the quality of distributed food (as either inferior or suspicious). The equating of family planning with an attempt to reduce the Congolese population by the refugees was related by Groups A and B who also described their interpretation of genetically modified (GM) maize and the dye used to mark their skin at the recensus.

During the recensus the refugees were painted with an invisible paint which was luminous in the dark. This prevented them from being counted twice and demonstrated the lack of trust the IPs have for the refugees who were expected to try to be counted more than once<sup>2</sup>. In response to this the refugees developed their own theories about this paint which the children recounted to me: that it was to make them infertile (they also felt that something had been added to GM maize for this purpose). In doing so UN mistrust for refugees (whether consciously or not) was transformed into a demonstration of their own mistrust of the UN.

But relationships to programmes are also relationships to other refugees: those who are employed by them. The lack of trust for NGO programmes and the refugee staff involved in them emerges in the children's discussions of the clinic and the schools in Chapter Four. This may be because people who are employed in such programs: "When they were in Congo they were poor, but here in Zambia they have become rich" (Mapenda secondary schoolboy).

### Mistrust in Relationships

One aspect of this kind of mistrust between refugees is related to what is referred to as tribalism: each tribal group giving preference to their own members and being suspicious of the others, with accusations of people getting served in the hammer mill<sup>3</sup> sooner because they are of the same tribal group (Tabwa) as those working there, or people being given preference in the job market for the same reason. Kisimba (from group A) complained of being teased and bullied in school for being Bemba something which he felt doubly strongly as he is not in fact Bemba, but Tabwa and was simply able to speak the Bemba language.

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<sup>2</sup> Which I'm sure they would have, this is one of the many strategies of "coping" and "resisting" that the refugees employ. There is a certain tension created between mistrust that is founded and other incidences of mistrust. This is not a tension I intend to explore here as my focus is on the relationship dynamics which cause or result from mistrust in the camp.

<sup>3</sup> This is where grain is milled into meal or flour.

Mistrust also plays out along socio-economic lines, with people in paid work being accused of corruption, theft and taking advantage of their position. Trust is often limited to kin and a contracted social network. “When the Zambian bosses want to employ someone they ask their captains who will look first for the people who are the same tribe as them, only then, if there are still jobs, have we got the chance to be signed up” (Kiwele secondary schoolboy).

This is similar to the situation of Bwisha families in Congo who make ‘an important distinction’ ‘between ‘cooperating’ and ‘non-cooperating’ households: couples who could still ‘hear and listen to each other’ in a relationship of mutual trust and respect, and those who could no longer do so...Such cooperation is more difficult to maintain when a household is, or becomes poor’ (Pottier 1999:36-37).

When I asked the children why people did not ask Section Leaders to complain of the lack of food on their behalf, they said that: “the Section Leaders always come from the distribution with LOTS of food so they don’t care about the others” (group A). They felt that section leaders would not complain on their behalf, as they had no need to complain for themselves. This perception of unfair distributions may have been a reason for mistrust, an excuse for it or an expression of it. Whilst I cannot say with certainty that the section leaders did not receive more food than the other refugees, I doubt that this is the case as I cannot think *how* it would be done. Further the Section Leaders *did* frequently complain about food on behalf of all people in the camp.

### Reasons for Mistrust

What this may represent is a simple situation of corruption and the abuse of positions such that teachers really *are* selling the products of their pupils’ labour, or people *are* stealing the right drugs from the clinic, or of ineptitude where the wrong medicine is prescribed by the clinician or dispensed by the pharmacist. Kala camp (although the only one that I had extensive experience of) had the reputation of being the least corrupt of all the Zambian camps.

People in the camp who earn money are able to buy food and other provisions for themselves, this causes a power/wealth imbalance and upsets relationships and grounds of equality with other refugees. This is also an indication that the situation is one where “theft” or corruption is seen as a necessary survival strategy<sup>4</sup>. “[L]ife in the camp is not uniform, it is not the same for all the refugees because some are happy with the possibilities of life here, because they have employment and salaries at the end of the month. But lots are disappointed and unhappy because they have to exert themselves in many ways to earn money” (Kasongo secondary schoolboy).

On one level the above examples can be seen as a simple way of responding to the inequalities of life in the camp. It is no coincidence that the people who were victim to most of these rumours were people in employed work. Mistrust is an understandable reaction to such stark and obvious inequalities. Wealth is associated with power even within the inequalities of camp life. The problem of inequality is not restricted to the camp as the necessity to hide wealth and good food indicated.

Rumours are a logical continuation of this mistrust, they both express it and reduce those who are the victims of the rumours as a result. Rumours also act as a leveller in terms of regulating the behaviour and therefore the exercise of power of both wealthy refugees and the UN and IPs. However, the importance of reputation depends on ‘how dependent the poor are on the good opinion of the rich and vice versa’ (Scott 1985:24). In determining reputation, rumours teach children community opinion on desirable behaviour and role models.

One basis for mistrust between refugees may be the result of jealousy with significant inequalities in wealth and power usually as a result of association with IPs. “To have solidarity on the camp we must destroy injustice, hatred and especially jealousy”

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<sup>4</sup> In the distribution of fitenge to women a friend of mine who was also a Section Leader tried to take advantage of this by getting one as section leader, and another when her name was called. She explained that it was worth a try; that people need to take advantage of situations as they offer themselves.

(Kasongo secondary schoolboy). Jealousy is also evident in the discussions of witchcraft.<sup>5</sup>

Group solidarity is created by “othering” through rumour. In this case, as with the children described by Miller et al, narratives are constructed jointly and ‘become a repository of the groups experiences’ (what we might call rhetoric), leading to the possibility of ‘a socially expansive notion of personal experience’ (Miller et al 1990:302). Rumours therefore become shared narratives which demonstrate to children and others a certain view of the way things should be.

Trust is an issue of power. If a relationship structurally gives others power over us, then there should also be a structural factor which prevents, or tempers, the abuse of that power. Rumours ‘embody, as ideology, a critique of things as they are as well as a vision of things as they should be. They are attempts to create and maintain a certain view of what acceptable human behaviour ought to be’ (Scott 1985:23). In doing so they transmit a moral message to children and the whole community. Rumours, like mistrust, probably also characterised the war situation in Congo because of disparity between official explanations and local experiences.

With refugees this is also about having control over ones own life. ‘Unlike life under “ordinary” circumstances, or more correctly under circumstances over which one exercises a certain measure of control, in the life of a refugee, trust is overwhelmed by mistrust, besieged by suspicion, and relentlessly undermined by caprice’ (Daniel and Knudsen 1995:1-2).

It is also important to note that a prominent reason for mistrust and the children and their community’s perceptions of teachers, clinicians, and section leaders may be mistrust of change. It may be rooted in the fact that life is so different in the camp, rather than being caused by specific differences. One indication of this comes from the fact that disparity

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<sup>5</sup> Clarkson and Crawford state that food shortages heighten beliefs in Magic and increases in production lead to a decline in such beliefs. (2001:1)

of wealth also exists between traders (businessmen) and “ordinary” refugees. Traders with money do not seem to be mistrusted in the same way, which may stem from the fact that commerce has always had value for the Congolese, but teachers were poor in Congo where they are rich in the camp. Rumours regarding section leaders are also a reaction to alien social structures.

This is only one level or example of the amount of control which others have over their lives, control which may only be counteracted with a display of mistrust. Rumours are also a means of ‘quiet’, routine resistance to power and authority (Scott 1985). Power and resistance are issues discussed more fully in the final part of this chapter.

As a means of countering mistrust Watanabe and Smuts suggest that ritual behaviour can ‘make social communication between individuals more reliable’ and therefore intensify ‘ritual relationships of mutual trust’ (1999:98). What ritual does is to communicate complex information about future social action (*ibid*:99) and therefore create shared understandings. Formulaic rhetorical statements in relation to the UN may create this sense of ritual, especially when associated with repetitive standardised practices such as queuing for food rations or eating a monotonous diet and may therefore contribute to shared understandings among the refugees.

Mistrust may be seen as an appropriate way of operating in a situation of extreme and unwelcome change as ‘the capacity to trust must be underwritten by the capacity to tame chance, especially the chance of being hurt’ (Daniel and Knudsen 1995:2). A further reason related to this powerlessness is the need to have someone to blame for problems to the extent that the UN are blamed for the corruption of Section Leaders. “UN continues to corrupt section and street leaders” (Musampwa secondary schoolboy). This is a means that the refugees use to come to terms with their reduced quality of life. They cannot be thankful for what they have when it is so much less than what they had before. To accept the situation as it is, is to submit their spirits and deny the possibility of betterment, or improvement of the situation. “[E]very person envisages living better in their future” (Kabwe secondary schoolboy 20). It is not acceptable to the refugees that life *should* be

like this and one interpretation, as a consequence, is that their reduced quality of life is a result of someone else's wrong-doing. Thus peas were brought by a Zambian lady who had come to conduct a workshop and maize shortages were due to the corruption of a UNHCR officer.

Rumours are a means by which the refugees could demonstrate their mistrust of the UN and IPs without direct confrontation over the more fundamental issues of control and power: of the need for UN administration, the need to live in a camp, of the need for such a level of intrusion into their lives. For example "to travel you have to go through several stages to get a *kibali* but in Congo it wasn't like this" (Musampwa). "In the camp there is a law against fighting because if you fight you get hurt and you will be imprisoned" (Kalembwe secondary schoolboy)

Rumours and mistrust are firstly a way for the refugees to respond to the new information and programmes they are being faced with. There is so much new information coming at them from a variety of sources and all in addition to the completely new context in which they are living; they cannot assimilate it all at once. That which fits most easily with previous practices is more quickly accepted, such as establishing churches, schools and businesses. Otherwise people respond by either ignoring or completely rejecting new practices or interpreting them through traditional means. Rumour and other expressions of mistrust are one of the means of doing this.



## Counting the Refugees<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 93 Above: people come back from the *reception*  
Below: people flee the camp because of hunger (Katempa Primary schoolgirl 13)

<sup>6</sup> Harrell-Bond 1986

During the time of half rations many refugees left the camp and sold their ration cards to those remaining in the camp. In order to get a clearer picture of the actual camp population there was a “recensus” in early June 2002 whereby refugees had to re-register and were given new ration cards. The preliminary figures<sup>7</sup> were that the population in the camp was closer to 17,000 than the 25,000 the original numbers indicated. The necessity of counting is linked to the accountability of the UN and IPs to the international community and their donors rather than the refugees. This is partially to justify funding but also because the effectiveness of programmes is seen to be measurable by numbers.

In drama sketches about becoming a refugee children recounted their journey to the camp which also involved counting. To prevent refugees in transit from being counted twice, they were given security wristbands to wear which were cut off once they had received their registration, ration cards and non-food items. This was a further demonstration of bureaucracy’s intrusion as well as the UN’s mistrust.<sup>8</sup>

When the refugees first arrived in Kala, group D Boys described the waiting areas for food distributions as *Kraals* (cattle stalls). The girls from that group took a picture of these as an “important place in the camp” (below).

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<sup>7</sup> All that were available even by the time I left the camp a year later.

<sup>8</sup> See Malkki 1995 for a discussion of refugee camps and Foucauldian forms of power.



Fig. 94 The Distribution Kraal

The choice of and amount of food distributed is another kind of counting involving calories. This follows a pattern of ‘a growing tendency to medicalise the condition of the poor as a way of managing them’ (Dare 1999:12). One of the children phrased it thus “Refugees are like their merchandise, their machines” (Bahati). If refugees are considered machines needing fuel then there is no need for involvement in the other issues and problems related to food and therefore the possibility of distancing oneself on the part of WFP.

‘Locating problems and solutions firmly inside the ‘Third World’ – which is a representation, not a place... the international community need not question its own role in the creation and maintenance of conflict, terrorism and poverty’ (Pottier 1999:17-18).

The NGOs and the UN do not directly use their position as purveyors of food to control the behaviour of the refugees, and this is hardly ever implied in practice<sup>9</sup> yet that is how the relationship between them is defined. The UN has taken over the role of the father, the provider and therefore the authority.

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<sup>9</sup> In Mwange after the Field Officer was held hostage, food rations were withheld for a period of time. In Kala they (WVI I think) wanted to do the same after a riot but they were overridden by UNHCR.

The attitude that: “We have to put up with a lot of things” (Musampwa), highlights the disparities in power in the camp, this is not limited to the counting and depersonalisation but also to specific acts. The example given most often by the children involved delays in the registrations of births (and therefore the addition of another family member to the ration card) when for a death, which must be reported immediately, the person is removed immediately.

### **“Poisoned” Rations**

Refugees’ reaction to the yellow maize they received from America was not only dislike but also mistrust. Discussions of food tampering came to a peak in September 2002 when WFP food distributions to refugees were caught up in the wider debate about GM food in Zambia. Following a recent drought and as a result of a perceived food shortage the whole country was receiving maize donations from international sources (again mostly from the United States). This provoked discussion of GM crops from within Zambia with President Mwanawasa referring to GM maize as “poison”<sup>10</sup>. By mistrusting and refusing GM food he was stating that no matter what the situation, the international community cannot act as they want towards Zambia<sup>11</sup>.

The refugees still received the GM maize even after the rest of Zambia had refused it. This, given that they listened to the news, indicated two issues to them: firstly the untrustworthiness of WFP both because they had been distributing “problem” maize for so long and because they were continuing to do so. Secondly it indicated that the Zambian government did not truly care about the refugees. Furthermore it was an indication of the refugees’ lack of voice, their lack of ability to refuse this food on their own behalf which they had been trying to do since they started to receive yellow maize.

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<sup>10</sup> “Simply because my people are hungry, that is no justification to give them poison” President Levi Mwanawasa from BBC news 3 September 2002 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2233839.stm>

<sup>11</sup> In order to have its own produce certified as non GM in the global market, Zambia needed to establish measures to ensure that there was no possibility of their crops becoming cross contaminated.

## **Power and Dependence: Talking about Food to Resist**

There were different elements or levels of power playing out in the camp. Here I shall consider primarily those involved in relationships between refugees and non-refugees looking at mistrust, control, and rights. Food, as a fundamental physical need, can potentially be used to control, talking about food in the way the refugees do, is therefore one of the ways of resisting control. This is true not just in the refugee situation where refugees are constrained to conform to UN dictates regarding their behaviour in return for receiving food, but also in normal family behaviour where children are threatened with not being fed if they are not doing chores or are misbehaving. As with the celebration days described in Chapter Seven, eating has an element of display to it. It is an occasion for demonstrating power and status through who eats, who gets the best food, who has the power to bestow or deny food. Just as mealtimes are a direct way of demonstrating hierarchy and social positioning in the family to children, communal feasts serve this role for the community.

Food is not just a way of talking about power but also of exercising power, taking power or resisting the power of others. By talking of their mistrust the children are not simply describing power relations, but are actively engaging with them; by mistrusting and circulating rumours, they are reducing power differentials in terms of reputation and status. Talking about food was a way of talking about mistrust, such as by referring to their suspicions that the UN or the Americans were doctoring the food to reduce fertility. This is indicative of a wider discourse within which the Americans were blamed for the war in Congo.

The example of GM food illustrates quite vividly that food is also a global issue, this is clear from the forces having an impact on food in the refugee camp. UNHCR policy regarding how food should be distributed, (never retrospectively<sup>12</sup>), USAID policy stating that refugees should consume and not exchange food, WFP policy also determines what is appropriate in terms of type and amount of food, countries donating to the UN “in

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<sup>12</sup> If a certain food was unavailable on distribution day then it would be distributed as soon as it was available but there would be no extra distributed to make up for the days without.

kind” determine what type of oil or maize. The war in Afghanistan was a further factor which caused the refugees to receive half rations, the Zambian government then disrupted food distributions by banning GM food.

All these contributing global forces have the power to affect the refugees’ lives in key ways, without having any relationship with the refugees themselves. The recognition of global forces having an impact on peoples lives is not new but it is interesting to note, especially as the outside forces are considerable, how the refugees engage with this, through the ways that they talk about and interact with the IPs, programmes and the food that they receive.

The refugees lack of power is also demonstrated by their inability to have any influence on what they eat as discussed in Chapter Six. ‘Our food and drink habits seem to express our freedom, the absence of external constraint... decisions we take by consulting what we think are peculiarly our own, our tastes and preferences and by responding to what we cannot externalise or share, our hunger and thirst’ (Dare 1999:10).

### **Are Food Rations a Gift?**

UNHCR and the NGOs refer to the days when refugees receive rations as “distribution days” and the building where this happens as the distribution centre. The refugees, on the other hand, (in French) use the word “*reception*” not “*distribution*”. To them it is not the building where things are given, but the building where things are received. It is the process of receiving, not of giving which defines food distributions. That this is an important part of life in the camp is demonstrated by the number of representations of this building and the distribution process, and the detail in these drawings in both the drawing competition and the group activities.

That two groups of people who are at opposite ends of a process should experience it in different ways, and therefore refer to it differently is not surprising. In this context of giving and receiving, however, the different experiences can translate into different social

positions with far ranging consequences. Mauss's work, *The Gift* (1990) was the first to consider this analytically but this idea has been developed beyond his work by people such as Sahlins (1974), and Gregory (1997).

Given that food relationships represent power relationships, especially due to the distribution/receipt of food, it is relevant to discuss ideas of power and 'The Gift'. Mauss discussed the idea that, in gift giving, the giver benefited more than the receiver in terms of their gains in status and power and the receiver's need to reciprocate (1990). The fact that the refugees are not in a position to reciprocate the "gift" of food distributions indicates that such a power imbalance would exist in the camp.

Both Mauss's view and Sahlins' (that giving brings benefits without reciprocation) are reflected by the attitude of the refugees towards the UN in the way that they talk of food distributions. The latter emerges in their refusal to feel gratitude or obligation however this is also a demonstration of an alternative attitude where refugees focus on their rights and UNHCR's obligations.

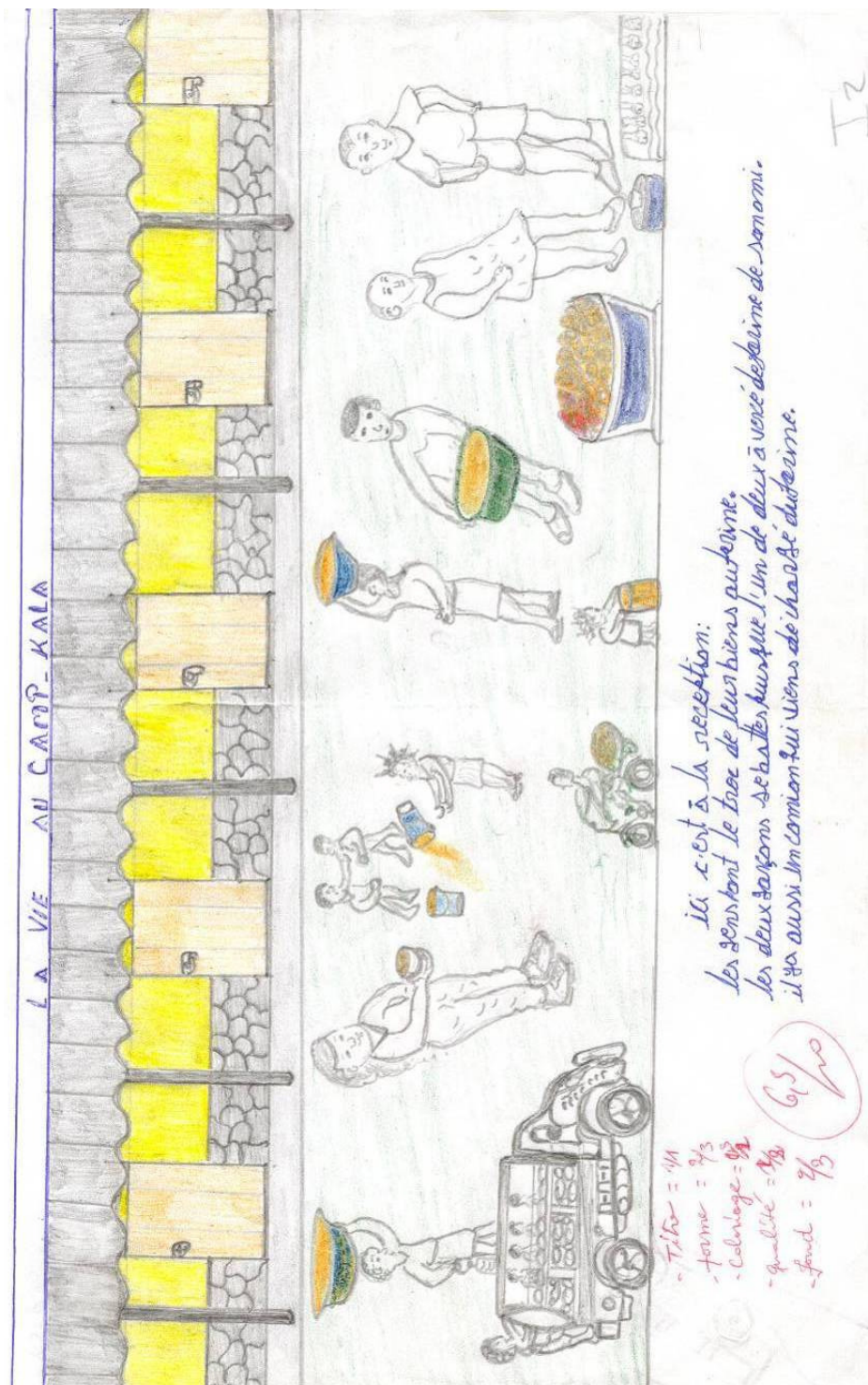


Fig. 95 Here is the *reception*. People are bartering with their containers of mealie meal/ The two boys are fighting because one of them spilt his friend's mealie meal. There is also a Lorry which has come to unload the mealie meal. (Secondary schoolboy 11)



Given the way that food rations fit into the categories described above, it would be easy to classify them as gifts and to explain the power dynamics of relationships in the camp correspondingly. However the situation is more complex than this, there are certain elements of the distributions that do not easily fit this category, furthermore there are ways in which the refugees exercise their agency and deny this classification and therefore deny the power relationships which accompany it.

The refugees were demonstrably less powerful in their relationship with the UN and the IPs as they were regularly and publicly on the receiving end of “gifts” of food. This situation was often viewed in reverse by the refugees, however. On one level food distributions were alternatively classified as, for example, normal hospitality.

As the refugees are completely reliant on the UN for their subsistence they are unable to *refuse* this “hospitality” (as Mwanawasa did), to refuse the food would be to court starvation, but by consistently complaining they can deny that this *is* good hospitality. This echoes practices described by Sutton who describes the ‘refusal of hospitality’, not eating when invited, as a way of escaping indebtedness, or if it is considered false hospitality (Sutton 2001:52).

That a gift is something which is visible, also leads it open to judgement by others “more readily subject to public scrutiny and judgement of fairness” (Douglas 1990:xiv) and although the UN’s reputation is not dependent on the refugees’ good opinion, the refugees self perception is dependent on their interpretation of their relationship with the UN. By complaining, the refugees are denying the UN both status as a giver and the right to reciprocity.

By constantly complaining, by denying that food is sufficient, the refugees deny UN the power of the gift or the status as good hosts. ‘Because of the mandatory nature of food-sharing, food refusal and fasting can have powerful social and symbolic weight...appetite can be a powerful voice’ (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:3). If the refugees are hungry then the UN is failing in their care for them.

Food distributions are also not socialized; they have not been made part of the *Congolese* social system, only part of the *camp* social system. As such the wealth of the UN cannot be converted into social capital and because the UN and their food distributions are only *situationally* socialized into the lives of the refugees and not socially or culturally accepted. They are unable to make *social use* of their wealth and giving practices in anything other than limited ways (Scott 1985:308).

Furthermore in direct relation to the UN and WVI the power of the gift is also not applied as those on the ground were not seen as the givers but merely those passing on the gifts of others. The UN receives food as a “gift” from the donors. The refugees refuse to be disempowered by refusing to be “grateful” as is expected of them.

One example of both the power relationships at play, and the nature of food distributions emerges in the conflict over policy regarding the exchange, barter and sale of food rations by the refugees (who are only allowed to exchange a small proportion of their food rations<sup>13</sup>). If this food was a gift, that would suggest that there would not be any grounds for UNHCR to maintain control of it after they have given it away.

A further way in which food distributions may evade the gift classification is through foods perishable nature. Although food is often classed as the ultimate gift there are also situations where its lack of durable qualities means that it cannot fulfil the necessary criteria (Sutton 2001:45). Endurance in reputation and memory are necessary for the food given to take on the characteristics of the gift (*ibid.*), but given the repetitive nature of receiving in the camp there are no specific memories of events of giving. In the loss of individuality, the event loses memorability and therefore value.

More powerful was the fact that this food was considered an obligation rather than a gift. This emerged frequently in discussions with Group A with the constant accusation “you

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<sup>13</sup> This is enough for the refugees to pay to get their maize milled in the camp so is not very much. This does not take into account the fact that those receiving maize in return for services or products will need to exchange or sell larger quantities.

brought us here!” These children and their parents would rather have stayed self-settled along the border where they would be self sufficient instead of going to the camp where they were dependent. Implicit within this, however, is that they lack the power to refuse to live in the camp and the acknowledgement of dependence in these circumstances. Such statements, however, represent a refusal to be classified as dependent as they reinforce the capability of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency was much talked about by the children and was an important indication that they continue to value Congolese means of making a living.

## **Refugee’s Rights**

As I discussed in Chapter Four with specific reference to children, knowledge of rights is something which empowers the refugees and this contributes to the refugees’ agency with regards the UNHCR. On the other hand emergency interventions create a context where it is difficult for an agency to implement a rights rather than needs based approach to “development”. As a result UNHCR do not have a specific approach to Human Rights or a Rights Based Approach to development. However certain principles uphold rights, these include the founding principle with regards freedom and protection but also policy based on equality. This indicates that rights also emerge as a result of “Western” emphasis on the individual. The following are some excerpts from UNHCR’s web site and mission statement (emphasis added):

Equality and individualism were placed at the core of the 1951 Convention... The result is a definition which does not seek to enshrine the right to safe and stable communities; it seeks to ensure that an individual will be free from discrimination within a given community (Bond Rankin 2005:6).

### **What rights does a refugee have?**

Refugees should receive at least the *same rights and basic help* as any other foreigner who is a legal resident, including freedom of thought, of movement and freedom from torture and degrading treatment. *Economic and social rights are equally applicable*. Refugees should have access to medical care, schooling and the right to work.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> (Basic Facts about UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics/opendoc.htm?tbl=BASICS&id=3b0280294#rights>)

In all of its activities, UNHCR pays particular attention to the needs of children and seeks to *promote the equal rights* of women and girls.... By virtue of its activities on behalf of refugees and displaced people, UNHCR also promotes the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter: maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations; and *encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*.<sup>15</sup>

All refugees are treated as equal and the way that this is best demonstrated or enforced, is by the fact that they all receive equal amounts of food and other distributions. The social effect of this, as mentioned earlier, is an erosion of traditional leadership as it re-enforces the fact that there are no extra rights for leaders, traditional or otherwise. Food distribution has also been instrumental in introducing to children an idea of individual rights. Food is distributed to the household according to the number of family members with children receiving equal amounts to adults. In this way children see that they have their own food and their own right to the family store. This leads to some erosion of “values” and discipline but in spite of these new ideas of rights as individuals, children still “know their place” their role and position in society: “the bible tells us to obey our parents, to respect the adults of the village and you will have a long and happy life” (Mowa secondary schoolboy 21).

Food is the main instrument which has demonstrated to the people in the camp their rights as refugees. Food is not considered a gift but a right and the food discourse is used as a way of demanding rights. This is implicit in the statement by children, much cited by me, but also much repeated by them: “you brought us here, you must feed us”. The equating of UN with “father” leads to expectations not only of the UN’s status and authority, but also of its responsibilities. This is also a result of Congolese attitudes to whites which I discovered through refugees’ attitudes towards and expectations of me - an attitude that poorer people can expect or ask for things of rich people.

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<sup>15</sup> (From UNHCR mission statement <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics/opendoc.htm?tbl=BASICS&id=3b0249c71>)

Food discourses were never ostensibly about resistance and yet there were power systems impacting on food practices. Relationships involving food, as a basic need, bring greater power to bear as there are serious effects if it is withheld. There are checks and controls to prevent the NGOs and the UN as purveyors of food, from using the power they gain in this way. The knowledge of this potential power is however something which one is constantly aware of. In small ways the refugees are resisting this in many of the practices and rhetorics surrounding food, first of all by labelling food as a “right” and further by criticisms of the way this right is provided: “In one month we only get enough salt to last one week” (Olweni secondary schoolgirl 14). Thus by using food to “resist” or by resisting food relationships, they are resisting the foundations of the power relationship.

The previous chapters have demonstrated that the fact that so much of children’s conversations revolved around food is indicative, not only of the importance of food in the many aspects of the refugees lives, but also of the fact that talking about food is a concrete way of discussing pervasive and wider issues in their lives which can be represented or expressed using discussions of food. The most insidious of these was the discourse of power. Food discourses are used to oppose and resist practices and powers outside of the refugees control, to recreate an order and meaning in their lives. Sometimes this was through direct references to power and powerlessness such as in invoking their dependence on the UN. The lack of control over food and eating practices echoes a general lack of control over other material aspects of their lives (see also Turner n.d.).

I wish to reiterate here a point made at the start of the thesis regarding the overemphasis on agency: ‘talk of ‘passive victims’ must be avoided, but not at the expense of encouraging blindness to the structural parameters that constrain life chances and options’ (Pottier 1999:196). Although the above ways of talking about food helps with the refugees’ view of themselves, they cannot change the UN’s view of itself. Agency however is only partially related to the power others hold over our lives as it relates to the ‘the ability of persons to accomplish things in the world’ (Ortner 1997:147). When I asked children in Group A to speculate about their futures they replied “only god can know”. Thus, in addition to UN regulations, values and attitudes such as the refugees’

fatalism and attitude to God also have an impact on agency in the camp. “My future life is dark because no-one knows their destiny. If I say that I will be farmer, agriculturist, doctor, fisher, thief, or if I say I will do this or this job I’m fooling myself” (Kalinde secondary schoolgirl).

Food as a topic of conversation can be seen as an expressive mode within which all of these things are communicated within the group, but also between refugees and outsiders, communicating directly to UNHCR policy and IP programmes. Food is something concrete that the people in the camp can use to voice other elements of their lives that they are not happy with. For this reason all conversations about food in the camp relate to the negative comparison of food in Kala to food at home. In this way adults are able to demonstrate attitudes to children and children are able to express their homesickness, how unhappy they are with their community’s dependency and lack of control: how *life* in Kala is negatively compared to *life* at home.

Continual absence evokes memory of life in Congo but these absences, in addition to evoking memories of home are also a constant reminder of the current situation. When a child in Kala talks about the fact that “[w]e are used to cassava meal and here it is all mealie meal” (Mwamba secondary schoolboy 15) these complaints are not simply a sign of the inability to adapt to new foods (a questionable conclusion), they are a demonstration of homesickness, an ephemeral concept which can thus be expressed in a concrete manner.

Complaints about types of food also have the added feature of representing another aspect of people’s lives which equally they have no control over and which they cannot come to accept: “receiving”. Receiving has led to fundamental changes in, for example, lifestyle, relationships, self, status and a changed relationship with food. In this case the lack of opportunity to choose their own food reflects, among other things, the lack of opportunity to cultivate, to support themselves, to choose where and how to live. “I did not want to follow this option (H.P.<sup>16</sup>), unfortunately the war has caused this” “Being a

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<sup>16</sup> This is the teaching specialisation.

refugee I lack the possibility to follow my ambition” (to study medicine) (Mukeya secondary schoolgirl 17).

Talking about the unfamiliarity of the food may be an opportunity to give vent to problems with, among other things, the different climate in the camp, the different languages (Bemba and English), the different social arrangements (discussed in Chapter Seven) and Zambian laws, and the insecurity of changes to identity and culture (discussed in Chapter Eight). These things which are less concrete are less easily communicated or resolved, yet have an impact on the everyday lives of people in the camp. “The woman is fleeing the war, we suffer because of the peas and lots of other reasons” (Picture caption primary schoolgirl 16).

Food communicates group membership (to children and by children), as well as defining the boundaries of what it is to be a refugee. By using food as a topic of discussion with “outsiders” the refugees are also communicating key aspects of camp life, those things which they miss about life in Congo and those elements which cause the most discontentment in the camp. If the outsiders happen to be UN or IP staff, this communication takes on another aspect, of protest.

As with the peasants in Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), it is important for the refugees to find the appropriate forms of talking about their situation, they are engaged in ‘a struggle to control the concepts and symbols by which current experience is evaluated’ (*ibid*:27). They are negotiating a space for resistance. Scott’s peasants appealed using the ‘self-interested descriptions’ the land owners would give to their own acts (*ibid*:309). Food is a good choice of mode of expression for communicating to the UN and their policies as it is an inalienable right and whilst most aspects of UN policy regarding the distribution of food are non-negotiable, so too is the right to food and therefore not only is this a concrete topic of discussion, something which is measurable, but also one which the UN *must* listen to.



Fig. 96 Section leaders are meeting with the heads of organisations to discuss food and the situation in the camp” (Primary schoolgirl 14)



The issue is not simply to bring about or effect change either in practical terms or in terms of the relationship but rather to draw the UNHCR into the refugees specific concerns (Ortner 1997:150). The UN will engage with a discussion of food in a way that they will not with a discussion of homesickness and therefore through this indirect means are drawn into discussions about these more existential and less concrete problems. The refugees thus manipulate the UN by using the most effective ‘symbols of euphemization’ (Scott 1985:308): food. Food is therefore used as a discourse of discontent.

### Why Resistance?

The issue of power imbalances has arisen at several points in this chapter, and it is normal in current discussions of power to equally address issues of resistance. The use or overuse of resistance has been criticised in anthropology (Brown 1996) so why do I choose to call it this? In general I am not talking about resistance as a way of relating to, negating or acting against a system of power, but more of rejecting that system of power and the way of life in the camp. In the camp, what I term resistance is a way of maintaining values and maintaining an idea that this is not an appropriate way to live (and therefore of teaching children appropriate ways of living). The refugees are resisting change more than they are resisting power. This is itself a resisting of power: the power of the external forces which bring about and speed up change in the camp; those forces which impose new ways of life and new values; and the gradual encroachment and apathy which leads these things to be assimilated without their being chosen.

It is not so much that the practices discussed here resist the power of the UN but rather that by using such practices and rhetoric the refugees are seeking their own empowerment and establishing agency where the result of the refugee process may have originally led them to feel they had none. These are necessarily connected as the UNHCR power over them is one of the key factors having an impact on their own power to control their life/destiny but so too are the war, weather, disease and God. Whilst engaging with “power over” them the refugees also negotiate their “power to” act. It is not a question of changing UN’s power but rather giving that power a lesser importance in their own lives.

Agency with respect to the UN also encompasses the impact of international forces on their lives and therefore holding onto/recreating their identity and Congolesehood.

The refugees may be 'neither bowing before power nor "resisting" it, but figuring out how to both acknowledge its force and shape it to one's own purposes' (Ortner 1997:147), accepting the things they cannot change, changing where possible and assessing which aspects of life fall into each category. Thus the idea of resistance also relates to the refugees "choosing" how to change, what to accept or reject from their new lives and experiences. It is a demonstration of agency in this situation as their culture reshapes external structures (Pottier 1999:6). The issue of the current circumstances is largely determined by the UN whose power may lie precisely in its ability to impose constraints and determine and define what are practical, realistic goals. But although they control behaviour in the camp they do not control attitude, the way behaviour is experienced or future behaviour (Scott 1985:326).

The refugees are "resisting" in the negotiation of multiple systems, not just of power, but of social interaction. The resistance in the camp is not about influencing the systems of power but precisely, through using food rather than a more direct discourse of the relationships, about avoiding 'enmeshing themselves in an extraordinarily complex set of new power relations' which would 'bind them irrevocably' to a new economy and system (Abu Lughod 1990:52). Children, by also conforming to food discourses are experimenting with and choosing to conform to the values such comments embody and to reject other potential ways of thinking about the camp and Congo.

When I talk about resistance this is not in order to politicise everyday aspects of people's lives (Brown 1996:729) but rather to emphasise their agency. One reason for calling this resistance is simply to acknowledge that this is being done in a situation where the relevant power or powerlessness of the people involved is inherent in many decisions and actions and is almost certainly present in people's thoughts. This is about regaining or claiming agency, overcoming their own feelings of powerlessness which began long before they came under the jurisdiction of the UN but which are prolonged and

emphasised through their inability to provide for themselves through either agriculture or earnings.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember in this discussion of power and of the refugees in relation to the UN is that in spite of the fact that camp programmes have an impact on every aspect of life in the camp, the refugees ‘retain considerable autonomy to construct a life and a culture not entirely controlled’ by the UN (Scott 1985:328). That is to say that although no aspect of life remains *unaffected*, no aspect is *wholly* under the control of the UN. ‘There is life beyond even the most totalising discourse and there are ways of rearranging the world beneath and beyond the discursive frameworks’ of those in power (Ortner 1997:145).

The situation is unlike other situations of domination and resistance in an important way, in its temporary nature. The resistance is not just against the instances of power but against the possibility of structures and practices becoming permanent. If there were signs that the war would not end and the camp would need to be more permanent then the relationship would change as the UN is just as reluctant for their relationship to be permanent as the refugees themselves. The relationship is unsustainable in both practical and symbolic terms<sup>17</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

Previous chapters have demonstrated that dependency on others for food has far reaching effects. However this chapter has focused on deconstructing the notion that there is a straightforward correlation between dependency and powerlessness. It reveals that refugees actively reconstruct this relationship to take account of their agency. The discussion in this chapter was motivated by the need to explain children’s comments regarding food and their mistrust of other people within the camp. Their quotes indicate that the issues of power and resistance discussed here involve them even though their motivations were not always addressed directly. The power that the NGOs have over

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<sup>17</sup> The camps for Angolans who were in Zambia for more than 30 years were sustainable self contained units, independent of the UN for food and therefore in a different relationship of power with them.

their lives is something which concerns children both directly as recipients of aid, and indirectly through the adults associated with them. They are also active in their mistrust of others in the camp, especially the teachers, and a part of the process of spreading rumours as a result. Such power relationships increasingly involve children as they grow older and their social network increases and as a result there are more quotes from older children in this chapter.

Resistance and agency are important not just in gaining a better understanding of power relations and systems, but also in gaining a better understanding of culture. By looking at the refugees' responses to the effects of dependency this chapter enhances understandings of the way Kala refugees experience life in the camp and the impact of this on cultural practices. As discussed by Ortner, my aim in looking at resistance here was to equally address the "effect" and the "meaning" of the power relationships and practices<sup>18</sup>. Agency is implicit in both the *power* (effect) aspect of "empowerment" as 'that dimension of power that is located in the actor's subjective sense of authorization, control, effectiveness in the world' (Ortner 1997:146) and in terms of *meaning* as the 'active projection of the self towards some desired end'.

The effects of power on the life of Kala refugees is highly visible, the effects of their resistance more subtle. Food discourses are one of the few ways refugees can affect UN practice and their powerful status. The meaning of their resistance therefore plays a more significant role in this discussion. By resisting refugees are able to recapture a sense of agency and power and rewrites the way that relationships with NGOs are experienced. Thus agency produces the interplay between beliefs and values, 'desires, and understandings and intentions' and 'cultural constructions' (Ortner 1997:146) and as such both contributes to and is created through the children's construction of self and of cultural values discussed in the previous chapters.

Agency is 'both a source and an effect of power' and 'both a source and an effect of "culture"' (Ortner 1997:146). Thus giving attention to relationships of power and the way

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<sup>18</sup> See Ortner (1997) for a discussion of the opposition between Geertzian meaning and Foucauldian effects of power

the refugees resist both these relationships and other forces in their lives, has contributed to a better understanding of their values and systems outside the life they are leading in the refugee camp. Food is used to reflect on both the current situation and the (previous) ideal situation. By taking note of what the refugees resist I have gained an understanding not just of the changes necessitated by camp life, but also of which are considered important to the refugees. By addressing the issue of “Hungry Minds”, I have gained a better understanding of the impact of being a refugee, of dependence for food on meanings and values.

This chapter has discussed the ways in which talking about food expresses, creates and resists. Food fulfils the needs of “Hungry Minds” in that it replaces symbols that are no longer relevant in this new context. As a symbol it can be easily manipulated and has the further advantages that it is accessible, undeniable and evocative in relation to the UN and international bodies. Further given that food is one of the key features which disempowers through creating the refugees as “recipients” it is the most appropriate tool to use discursively in resisting this power.



## Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which one feature of life in a refugee camp, food distributions, can have an impact on the way that every aspect of that life is experienced and as a result completely alters the context in which children grow up. The changes to the material, social and symbolic lives of the refugees in Kala camp as a result of their dependency on UNHCR for food affect the social learning of children and as a result will have a long term impact on cultural practices and values.

Analyses which focus on the everyday are markedly lacking in refugee studies, especially with relation to children. This study fills that lacuna, it focuses on children's experiences in a way which refuses to define them in relation to their refugeeness. Although displacement and change are topics of importance to them these are not defined by negative experiences in the past. This discussion therefore demonstrates that topics which are often treated as central may be incidental, side issues in the tapestry of everyday life. In order to fully understand their importance it is necessary to have a fuller picture of that everyday life.

Children in Kala camp are experiencing life in an extraordinary context which is unique to them. However, this thesis has elaborated aspects of refugee children's lives that are often forgotten: the fact that they live, learn, work and play like any other children. These daily activities and preoccupations give continuity with their lives in Congo. Concentrating on the everyday and addressing this continuity has enabled negative experiences caused by the war to be put into perspective and reveals the differences that are important to them.

Children's everyday lives are affected by changes resulting from receiving food distributions. In focusing on the conversational topics that preoccupy these children, this thesis has further revealed how the experiences of change, uncertainty and reduced power in the face of national and international events are expressed and experienced through food, which also acts as a symbol and metaphor. In doing so the

discussion illuminates concurrently the way children experience camp life and the importance of food in their lives.

This thesis therefore fulfils the need for analysis of ‘the interplay between the forces of change, choice and context in refugee life experiences’ called for by Bascom (1998:1). I have argued that children’s everyday lives are as important as their extraordinary experiences, that children should be studied as part of a community, and that change should not be addressed without an equal focus on continuity. The wealth of information gained from this study demonstrated in this thesis and the light this can shed on both theoretical and practical issues supports this approach.

The focus on the everyday and on children’s experiences revealed the issues of importance to children. Although initially they seemed predominantly to concern continuity, differences resulting from displacement and the refugee camp become evident within descriptions of games, of school and of chores and paid work. Whilst acknowledging the tension between transformations due to the context and those due to age and individuality, the consequences of displacement that the children consider important emerge clearly. The key difference in the principal means of receiving food permeates every aspect of life and affects the way everyday activities are experienced. Social learning is influenced by the alien context and children’s ability to take on certain social roles is impeded by the transformation or removal of these roles.

This study demonstrates the potential for studies of everyday activities to reveal significant information on a wealth of topics, thus supporting the recent calls for studies of the mundane to be used for more than providing context. ‘Everyday life is significant as a critical concept, not as a descriptive notion for the mundane and unspectacular practices by which we construct ourselves and reproduce society, but because inherent in these is the potential for rupture, breakdown, and transformation’ (Katz 1991:506). This potential is revealed in the study of the everyday lives of Kala refugees. The key issues which become a focus in the latter part of the thesis, food and change, are issues which emerged from the refugee children’s discussions of their everyday lives.



The importance of food distributions and the way that they impact upon children's economic, social and symbolic lives and their experiences of growing up emerged unmistakably in discussions with the children. It was through a further examination of these issues that the focus broadened from one which is specific to children, to one which, through children's discussions, reflects the priorities of the refugees in general. In doing so this study demonstrates not only that focusing on children in research is necessary to understand children's lives, but also that research with children can be important in understanding the community as a whole and should potentially be included in many more anthropological studies even where children are not the main focus.

Food, and in particular food distributions, are used to elaborate complementary understandings of the processes at play in the refugee camp, the negotiation of survival and well being, the negotiation of social relationships, the negotiation of identity, and the negotiations of power relationships and agency. This study demonstrates the importance of maintaining a balance in food studies between material, social, and symbolic food practices and the meanings and experiences associated with these. These do not operate in isolation from one another and the power and richness of any understanding is related to its meaning in all aspects.

Food, touching on every aspect of life as it does, is not something that can be understood simply as a nutritional issue. This thesis has demonstrated that the ripple effects caused by dependence on food distributions continue outward far beyond the material consequences. Changes in the types of food eaten and in the processes by which food is obtained have a significant impact on people's activities especially with relation to work. Lack of food is not only caused by poverty, but is a cause of poverty as in many ways food is literally money.

Social relations within the family and community are consequentially affected by changing roles, in particular gender relationships and those within the hierarchy of the family. Furthermore, the importance of *talking* about food emerges through the recognition that food is invoked as both a symbol which can be used in identity practices and an intermediary between people and places. The sensory aspect of food is also important in evoking memories of experience which contribute to identity.

The focus on food in this context of change is also particularly helpful for increasing understandings of the power dynamics inherent in all levels of relationship in the camp. Whilst there are obvious consequences of the refugees' dependence on the NGOs, food is used by the refugees as a way of relating to and acting upon such relationships. There is a denial of a gift relationship and an invocation of a relationship of rights and obligations. Whilst the refugees are resisting the external forces acting upon their lives, they are also creating a discourse of agency. Through such practices they reinstate their experience of control over their own lives, a factor of which becomes increasingly significant with the recognition that so many other areas of life affected by receiving food distributions.

The analysis of the importance of talking about food contributes to understandings of power and agency in its recognition that agency and resistance work together in the presence of power. In addition this analysis provides a greater understanding of agency and resistance by revealing the intention and importance is not always to oppose or reduce power, but rather to integrate its effects into social conceptions of identity and culture in a meaningful way.

In this way food, by affecting a wide variety of practices, values and relationships, is affecting the multiplicity of influences which shape children's social learning. By creating new economic activities, by altering social relationships and the potential social roles and by affecting the symbolic capital of the refugees, food distributions not only have the potential to affect long-term dependence, they also bring about broader social changes. What children experience as normal social behaviour, roles and values in the camp are different from those considered appropriate in Congo and as a result their ideas of appropriate values and behaviours are affected.

In general therefore this is a thesis about the way that the refugees experience the differences between life in Congo and life in the camp as change. This is highlighted by the way they experience continuities and by their relationship to those processes which have a particular impact in causing change. However, it is important not to overstate the consequence of change given the Janus focus of people in the camp who refer continually to Congo whether in the past or the future, some of "Congo" is

retained in their lives in the camp. The acknowledgement of the temporary character of the current situation may reduce some of the long-term consequences of the different lifestyle. Furthermore, as is now acknowledged in anthropology, culture *is* change. People are daily negotiating between new experiences and experience in general, between the unexpected and the known.

It is perhaps the focus on children, their experience of growing up and the influences of living in the camp on their social learning which shed the most light on the processes of change taking place in the camp. Children are experiencing two types of change concurrently both growing up and becoming refugees. Changes to identity and behaviour are therefore more expected. Children's experiences are fewer and as a result a higher proportion of their experience are "new". Consequently what children consider normal, acceptable or desirable will be influenced by their experiences in the camp. Such understandings will have an inevitable impact on their identity and potentially on cultural practices and norms. As a result children may be better able to negotiate the changes of displacement but may transfer some of the differences of camp life with them on their return to Congo, they may also find the transition on return to Congo more difficult as a result.

The overriding feature which emerges from this thesis is that children's lives are as complex and multifaceted as adults and that they negotiate the different aspects of their lives with as much agility as adults. In the camp, as everywhere, the children are forging, manipulating and experimenting with social relationships; they are utilizing the symbolic capital that they witness and transforming it into something of their own. The children in the camp appreciate their own worth and both justify and take advantage of this when they deem it appropriate. That these things are taking place in a context of change, just adds one more element to the complexity of their lives and this is an element that the children in Kala camp seem to be taking in their stride.

This research makes an important contribution to childhood studies in both its methods and its topic. The topic of this research makes an important contribution as it focuses on changes to lifestyle as children negotiate the changes of growing up. The approach is equally as important as it demonstrates that children should not be studied separately from their community. Children's lives cannot be understood in isolation

from the adults they live with. They are a part of a social group and as any other category of individuals within that group their lives intersect and their priorities, as well as diverging, may coincide.

The methods in this field are continually evolving, but as many studies relate to children in “The West” they are not always relevant to children in the majority world. Furthermore little has been written on the problems of transforming a research question into research activities and then transforming the often visual results of those activities into an account which is academically acceptable.

The techniques used in this study are not only vital in carrying out research with children, but are also useful tools in other research, especially where conventional participant observation is not an option. There are many ways in which such techniques can contribute to fieldwork in the building of relationships, the different kinds of interactions which produce different kinds of information and of course the “Rest and Recuperation” that is a necessary part of fieldwork. The challenge is that such information, although involving words, is not necessarily expressed or recorded in a medium which is easily integrated into written analysis.

Whilst such visual expressions do not map onto established means of dealing with images in either visual or material anthropology, the existence of these sub-disciplines is a clear indication that the anthropologist’s reification of the verbal may be neither necessary nor desirable. The predominantly visual results and the necessity of presenting them in textual form limited their use in the thesis, demonstrating that the issue of visual expressions is also relevant in discussions on the more important issue of representation. This thesis has also demonstrated the necessity of broadening anthropological discussions concerning experience and the way that we write about it, to include a discussion of methods within this.

The refugees are using food to redefine the camp space, negotiate power relationships and redefine what it is to be Congolese, a refugee, Bemba, a child. These actions are inherent in negotiations of memory, identity, power, trust and change. Thus the example of the refugees discussed here, due to their ‘in between’ status, is particularly

illuminating in enhancing understandings of the economic, social, identity and power issues resulting from refugee status and more specifically life in a camp.

By addressing the issue in the context of the camp, this thesis not only demonstrates how the refugees' dependency on the UN for food affects every aspect of their experience as refugees, it also highlights the way that changes to food production and consumption affects many other aspects of their lives.

A refugee camp is a particularly rich site to research both this food insecurity and the impact of change which likewise may enable a better understanding of such processes in other contexts where more subtle changes are taking place. The thesis recognises that even in the presence of such drastic new influences, the refugees maintain a degree of continuity. This continuity and change refers to both practice and to meaning.

Long-term change may result from the impact of new experiences on identity and the ability for adults to raise children, and for children to learn their culture and social roles, in a context where previous roles and practices may not be possible and where new roles, practices and values influence experiences and expectations. My conceptualisation of identity resulting from the accumulation of experience which provides a repertoire of identity contributes to understandings of identity as processual but also incorporates agency, context and duality. At any moment elements of experience may take on, increase or decrease in relevance, and that this is constantly changing. This discussion's focus on children brings a greater understanding, not only because children's experiences may have a bigger and longer lasting impact than adults, but also because they are continually moving between roles and identities as they operate in different contexts and with different people.

The most general theoretical value of studies of refugees' lives such as this one may lie in the fact that they focus on the 'border zones', rich areas of study where much valuable information lies. Such 'in between spaces' can be used to negotiate meanings of culture and authority, as people cross, erase or translate these boundaries in the process of cultural production (Bhabba 1990:4). As a result these are areas where processes too subtle to be easily studied in other contexts are more pronounced and

produce richer research data. Perhaps the most value to be gained from this discussion is in the combination of its topics. This is an illuminating study of change because it focuses on children, it is an illuminating study of food because of the refugee context, it is an illuminating power because of the food dependence and it is an illuminating study of children's lives because of the all of the above factors.

This thesis was written based on information gathered from a relatively small group of people in one specific refugee camp. "The refugees" discussed here are therefore only one group within that category with their own specificities and experiences. This thesis also concentrates on one particular demographic within that group, the children. Although it cannot be said to be fully representative of the lives of the wider group, this analysis has produced important understanding of many of the issues at play which will be useful in understanding both the wider social group, and other groups in different contexts. As a result it goes some way towards answering the question: 'how can ethnographic studies of single societies enable us to say something about the *human* condition, and how is the *lived* experience of individuals connected' to wider cultural understandings (Jackson 1998:3). My thesis contributes to the anthropological project of creating such broader understandings.

In addition to the contributions to anthropological and academic discussions on such issues, this study is also important in informing policy discussions regarding the implementation of refugee programs. Having spent so much of my time in the company of people working on or managing projects in the camp I am fully aware of the financial and other constraints which affect the ways that the programs are implemented and I am therefore limiting recommendations to those which I feel are feasible within such constraints. On the other hand I am also aware that many of the barriers to change come from a certain mindset which accepts the constraints rather than challenging them.

The first step in this, and many other issues in the camp would be to listen more carefully to the issues raised by refugees. It may be necessary to look beyond what is evident on the surface, to communicate in different ways in order to enable closer and more meaningful consultation. Whilst Section Leaders' meetings are an important

first step, there seemed to be some issues which were constantly raised but were seen by the IPs as fixed and unchangeable.

It is this attitude which is often the main barrier to change and which is therefore in itself something which needs to change. It may not be possible to change the food that is distributed but NGOs need to ask, for example, ‘given that what is distributed cannot be altered, what can we change?’ Whilst it may not be possible to give more food, it may still be possible to improve the food situation by providing a variety of relish or sourcing familiar food. Perhaps more importantly the manner in which food is distributed could be changed.

It should also be recognised that measures necessary at the start of the intervention, are not necessarily essential now as refugees have changed, and are more accustomed to distribution procedures, and more worthy of the IPs’ trust. It should be possible therefore to work together with the refugees to find solutions.

Food security would be increased if food could be distributed retrospectively. If food is 3 days late one month, then those three days rations are currently written off as lost. If they were included in the late distribution it would be possible for people to maintain contingency/emergency stores of food that they would have used up in these three days.

The current procedures for distributing food contribute to feelings of dependency by promoting a feeling of queuing for handouts. Alternative procedures may be found which help to restore dignity and pride. One way to do this would be to make the experience more closely resemble shopping or going to the market with the ability for people to determine when and how often to collect food. This could also involve a more traditional economic practices (and potentially within these a division of labour) where tokens might be given monthly by the administration which could be used to collect food throughout the month. This would mean that one person could carry what they were able and return later for more, rather than requiring several people to carry the whole family’s food for one month. It would also mean that people who work would no longer need to take time off in order to receive. At the very least there

should be flexibility in the collection of food rather than the necessity of waiting for the section to be called and only being able to collect food in a given timeslot.

Even if the above recommendations were to be rejected, and neither the food given nor the distribution procedure were to change, it is important for NGOs to recognize the effects and reduce the negative consequences of refugees' dependence on WFP for food and to take this into account in their other programmes. One way to do this would be to recognise that children's educational needs, in terms of their agricultural training, are not being met. It would be relatively easy to ensure that some of the limited farmland available be made available to the schools so that children can experience and learn agricultural activities.

It was clear in my time in Zambia that consulting children and listening to their views was not considered important by the refugee community leaders, the IPs or the UN in either general policy issues or projects which related specifically to them. It is evident from this thesis, however, that children have important knowledge and opinions about their lives and community. Recognising this, and listening to these views should therefore be a priority in consultation, monitoring and evaluation. Educating IPs regarding the importance and value of listening to children must therefore be a priority.

There is an obvious gap between academic knowledge, the policy of NGOs and the implementation of NGOs projects, with regards attitude towards the importance of listening to children: the recognition of the importance of consulting children taking some time to filter through to projects on the ground. This is something that can be addressed by both the camp management in the form of UNHCR, and by individual NGOs who need to address the policy and priority gap caused by the isolation and marginalisation from head offices in Lusaka. The physical distance may be necessary, but measures can be taken to include field offices in policy decisions and practice.

Whilst the importance of seeking children's perspectives on projects aimed directly at them is gradually becoming more generally recognized and can be combated by the above measures, there is still a reluctance to include them as a part of consultation on projects aimed at the community as a whole. Children should be consulted in such



things, and this could be done in a similar way to adults through children's councils or informal meetings.

Currently it is assumed that children's specific needs will be met by the family unless there is a particular problem or breakdown in the family structure such as with unaccompanied minors whose needs are then addressed by social workers. What is neglected by this, is that children may experience problems and issues that result from changing family priorities/practices as a result of living in the refugee camp. They may be unable to voice these or address them in the family setting. They may have new needs issues that are not addressed by the family and they therefore need alternative avenues available to them. As Musampwa stated (in Chapter Nine) "it is for this reason that we have suffered a lot, we have no means of standing up for ourselves". Equally importantly, children are significant members of the community it is important to understand the way that programs or problems affecting the community affect children as a social group within this community.



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## **Appendix 1: Kala Camp**

The sections of houses in the camp are labelled alphabetically and the letter therefore indicates the age of the street thus people living in section A have been in the camp longer than those in section Z. After Z the letters are AA, BB etc to NN. Kala camp has a maximum capacity of 25,000 refugees. The refugees coming to Kala arrive in Zambia at Kaputa and Chienge. They stay in transit centres here until there are sufficient numbers to transport them to the camp (a busload of around 50).

When people first arrive in the camp they are given a 'tent' which is just a sheet of tarpaulin. Their first house which they usually occupy for less than a week is a simple dome with a wooden frame and the tent over the top. Later the tents are used as roofs, usually over the top of a thatched roof. The houses I went into mostly consisted of 2 or 3 very small rooms, a main room in the centre and then a smaller room to one or both sides for sleeping in. A sign of both wealth and the length of time people have been in the camp is the patch of land in front of the house. This may have flowers, trees or other plants in it; occasionally for food purposes but mostly to provide shade and or decoration.

Kala camp has and a very good source of spring water. Which is treated then pumped into tanks around the camp which feed taps located between sections. The camp also has two streams running near it along the boundaries. The refugees are lucky in their access to clean water but this again is not as straight forwards as it seems. For doing things such as washing clothes, they either have to carry large amounts of water, or carry their clothes long distances to the streams to wash them.

The camp is surrounded by woodland/ bush on 3 sides the only physical boundary is along the fourth side where there is access from the road. Here there is a security barrier which is manned by the Zambian Police who have a police post here. The reception area also has offices for the IPs and UNHCR, these are very small rooms where small matters of administration are carried out such as payment of salaries to staff in the camp. The only office used more than this is one of the UNHCR offices where the Field Clerk works. Births and deaths are registered, passes to go outside of the camp are approved (they are given by the police) and other administrative matters are taken care of here. In this reception area is also a meeting room where the camp

leaders have meetings every fortnight, a room for a mobile court, and a building where WVI staff store their tools and other equipment. Opposite are the rubbish halls (warehouse tents) where food is stored for distribution. Opposite the police station is the reception area where refugees first stay on arrival in the camp. As you proceed into the camp there is the food distribution centre and the football pitches before the camp itself is reached. The houses although small seem very permanent and one of my first impressions on entering the camp was a positive comparison with my expectations of tents and shacks as we tend to be shown in media pictures.

In the last few months before my departure there was a spate of building in the camp, this building was using bricks rather than branches and mud. The bricks are usually homemade or bought from others in the camp. This new building makes economic differences between some of the refugees more obvious.

Other than the layout of the camp, another significant difference, which has an impact on people's lives, is the small size of the plots of land. This means that there is no way of cultivating more than a few plants and also that there will be no space to build a second pit latrine when the original needs to be filled in. In an attempt for equality every household is given a plot of land the same size so a family with 14 children is given a plot the same size as a single person.

## Appendix 2: Research Assistants

My preference for an interpreter was for a female who could speak English, the reason being that the children with whom I would carry out research would already have to deal with an adult female who was white and this would be a significant constraint on how comfortable they would feel talking to me. Further, if possible I would have liked to keep the levels of interpretation to a minimum and felt that if I were to conduct interviews through the interpreter in French, this would necessitate both their interpretation into French, and my interpretation into English.

The Education Administrator first found Katabe, a male Bemba refugee who had spent time in Zambia whilst a child at school and was therefore very proficient in English. The first few days that we spent doing research were very trying for Katabe as he had to try to internalise attitudes similar to mine in terms of comportment towards children and the weight which would be given to their information. It is not usual in this context for an adult to sit on the floor with children but Katabe entered into this in good spirit and when I brought *fitenge* to lay on the floor to prevent us from getting dirty, he even wore one which is very unusual for men<sup>1</sup> but was one of the many things which endeared him to the children I was working with at the time. That they liked him was clear especially when I no longer employed him and they kept asking when he would come back. These attributes were not only advantageous in terms of being an interpreter but they also affected the way we related to each other, we interacted mostly as friends but he behaved in a slightly paternal way towards me, a fact that was compounded by the ways in which I continued to have contact with Katabe as he taught me Bemba. (This was also a way for me to continue to employ him and lessened my worries at not retaining him as an interpreter.)

Katabe did not work very long for me as although he spoke good English, he did not speak any French, he spoke little Swahili and almost no Tabwa. Although I was reducing the levels of translation in this initial phase when I worked with Bemba children, there were times when I was increasing them as, for example, when I could

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<sup>1</sup> Fitenge are worn on a daily basis by women and girls but the only other time I saw men wear them was on occasions where they wanted to communicate a particular message about nationality, or to act the role of a woman in drama or dance.

have been communicating directly with someone in French. Also I would soon be doing research with non-Bemba speaking children. For this reason I went back to The Education Administrator and asked if he could think of anyone else with more versatile language skills. The second person he found me was Jacques.

Jacques had a good grasp of several languages and although our initial interview was held in English and we began using this in the research with children, I quickly saw that this was not as successful as I had hoped. Many of the things I said had to be repeated or Jacques had to be prompted to translate at all so I eventually switched to French. In fact the use of French had a positive impact on the research as some of the children had some knowledge of French and so could understand some of what I was saying, furthermore French was a language which they could listen to with a degree of familiarity thus using it had the effect of making me seem less foreign to the children.

With Jacques the process of trying to instil the same attitudes and actions towards children so as to make them feel less constrained by the adult-child division was started anew but proceeded much more slowly. Jacques was someone with a very strong embodiment of the hierarchical division which comes with age and accomplishment in Congolese society and therefore had great difficulty adapting to sitting on the floor etc. He also brought into the discussions some of the attitudes and judgements that children might be expected to face in school<sup>2</sup> but which I was trying to efface in the context of our activities and discussions. For example, in spite of the fact that I had repeatedly explained that what was important to me was the content of the drawing and the discussion it would generate and not the execution, at times Jacques would pass comment to me regarding the standard of drawings in such a way that I worried his body language or even his words would be clear to the children in the group.

Jacques' attitude to the children and my work affected my relationship with him, just as with Katabe although less positively. In spite of the problems we had Jacques was of great help to me in many other ways until it became clear that his other activities were competing with the times I wanted him to spend working with me. As these were

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<sup>2</sup> As an "*Intellectuel*" and married to a teacher his expectations of standards from his own children were high and he transposed these to the children we were working with.

more profitable to him, (especially in the long term) we decided that I should find another interpreter and I again turned to The Education Administrator who suggested this time a female, Fleur.

Fleur was a preschool teacher but because preschools had been separated from primary schools as “informal education”, they were no longer included in any specific budget and as a result the wages were not guaranteed in either regularity or amount. Fleur was therefore happy to have the opportunity to earn some money elsewhere and she and I negotiated a schedule which took into account the work she did in the preschools. (Katabe and I had also worked around his English teaching schedule). This was important as my research was only a short-term solution and it was important for Fleur to consider what would happen once I left Zambia. Upon my departure I tried to negotiate for her to get work in the clinic where she had experience but no qualifications.

The issue of employment was not simply a question of salary as Fleur was whispered about in terms of witchcraft while I was still there and she felt that she would be mocked when I was no longer there as she had lost her source of income (and in some sense prestige). I also ate lunch with Fleur in her house every day and this was another cause for comment on her street as the neighbours did not believe that as a white person I would be eating the same food as them; they therefore assumed that we must have been eating something special.

Fleur disregarded the comments about witchcraft but obviously felt the mockery quite keenly. Both serve as a reminder of how I was perceived and the indirect effects of my presence in people’s lives. I did not simply pass through their lives; I had an effect on them. This will also have an impact on my research. Fleur’s knowledge and attitude towards children was invaluable and she introduced me to many other aspects of her, and camp life such as the churches, she also shared with me her own experiences with her children which provided a good insight to some of the intergenerational conflicts which I elaborate upon in the thesis. The fact that Fleur was a woman and therefore a mother played an important role in her relationships with the children in my groups and also in the information she could give me from outside of these.

With Fleur I had possibly the closest relationship of all my interpreters and not only because we worked together the longest. The fact that we ate lunch together was important in this as we would talk over lunch, I spent time in her home which was the only house I visited more than once or twice<sup>3</sup>, I got to know her family and we would talk to each other about personal matters such as people stealing from me and the problems in her personal life, of all I felt that this was the relationship where I most felt like an equal.

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<sup>3</sup> When I visited Jacques it was at the tailor's workshop which adjoined his house and Katabe and I met at Foyer.



### **Appendix 3: Research with Children**

Group A was 10-15 year olds from section Q, Group B was children of similar ages from Section NN and AA; these were people who had arrived in the camp more recently. These two groups worked together for the later parts of the research. Group C was made up of children of a similar age group who lived in Section A, the oldest section. These three groups were intended to include both school going and non school going children but the majority were school going. I decided to divide the older children according to whether they went to school or not, Group D therefore was made up of non-school going children and they decided that they would rather work in two groups which separated boys and girls. The final group, Group E was made up of younger children aged 7-10 from section T.

The distinction between school going and non-school going children was made to distinguish and fit in with their daily activities, not their educational level, therefore children who had had some schooling, and those who had not were treated as equivalent for the purpose of determining groups. The older school going children carried out slightly different activities with me and this may be seen to reflect a bias I had in terms of the types of activities I felt they were capable of doing, but in fact it was simply practically easier to recruit children this way and it made it easier for me to directly access their work if it was written in French. The intention of these projects was also intended to help the children academically so that they could gain some benefit. For this reason they carried out research projects with me in teams which they named themselves. For the same reasons it was also a group of older children and secondary school who directed the 'documentary' about the life of refugee children.

These later groups were self-selected from within the category of secondary school children according to their time and inclination. The earlier groups were 'chosen' by adults in authority, either section leaders or street leaders. In terms of the children feeling constrained to carry out the activities, I don't feel that this had an impact as children felt that group membership was a good thing, an honour and fun to do. Many children approached and asked whether they could also join and some people who dropped out for practical reasons would bring a friend eager to join as a replacement. The biggest effect of having children chosen by certain people was more in terms of

the bias. (As I said the children were predominantly school going and maybe people felt that this was better for me.) Given that this research was not intended to be representative of a general group, I don't feel that this was as serious as it might have been. The reason that I chose to work with a variety of children was to get an idea of some of the diversity of experience rather than to ensure a rigorous sampling.

Initially I carried out my activities with children in the buildings at 'Foyer'; a women's income generating project. This was a relatively central location and near to the sections where the children in the first two groups lived (groups A & B). For most of the activities we sat on the floor on the mats that I had had made. I also had boards made for the children to rest on when drawing. There were individual A4 sized boards, and two larger A3 sized ones for group pictures. When this room was needed for the literacy classes on some afternoons I asked for permission to use the Catholic Church.

With later groups who lived elsewhere in the camp I moved the location of our activities to be convenient for them. There was a building built by the Red Cross for their first-aid training. The main room was hired out as the cinema but there were some smaller rooms which were a good size for me to use. I met with the group of younger children (Group E) in an *nsaka*<sup>4</sup> at the street leader's house which was big enough for our purpose and which he was kind enough to lend me.

The aim of my research, in the setting of Africa and the refugee camp, was to further the development of methodologies in this context by building on the experiences of researchers such as O'Kane (2000), Hart (1997), and others. One of the most fun methods for the children, and perhaps the most frightening one for me (as I had little control over the process), was sending the children out with Dictaphones to carry out interviews in the community. This was fruitful for my research in many ways and frustrating in others. Those interviewed were selected by the children, and although I intended them to concentrate on their peers, the resulting recordings show a preference for talking to adults from the wider community, possibly as they felt these would have more significant contributions to make<sup>5</sup> or because they figure significantly in their

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<sup>4</sup> Open building with half walls and a roof generally used for meetings etc.

<sup>5</sup> Although it may have been to impress adults with their status as members of one of my groups, holding a Dictaphone no less!

lives. The work of the child researchers, however, taught me about the views of children even when they interviewed adults, as the range of questions they chose to ask, as much as any of the answers they would have given, revealed their priorities. The biggest disadvantage of this method is in fact the sheer amount of information that is produced and I had to hire extra research assistants to carry out the transcriptions.

There are three key ethical issues concerning the research process which are central to these considerations: informed consent, protection, and confidentiality (Thomas & O’Kane 1998: 337). There is a degree of complexity involved in all of these concerns which is amplified by the overseas context. In cultural contexts such as in Kala, confidentiality can be in conflict with cultural norms of sharing information, which makes it difficult to ask participants to respect others’ confidentiality. At times I felt that this was not taken seriously or fully understood by the children but this was something which I monitored and which did not seem to be an issue. Given my awareness of these complications, I tried to gain guidance from staff and local people and combine this with knowledge of the ways these are addressed in the UK.

Asking for consent is also less culturally appropriate in my research context. I have already discussed the number of people from whom I needed permission for my various activities in the camp and this added to the usual complexity in the case of consent for research with children (Alderson 1995). I always ensured that I explained the aims of my research and the uses of the information in an accessible way in the initial few sessions, and made it clear that it was fine if children did not wish to return to participate with the group. That children dropped out of the group and at times attended only sporadically indicated that this was taken on board. Further I maintained an awareness, of whether the children felt comfortable in the groups and with the activities which children generally seemed to find enjoyable. I also made most of the activities open to interpretation and as general as possible to allow for a degree of avoidance within the task.<sup>6</sup>

Many problems such as the sensitivity of the topic were lessened by the use of

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<sup>6</sup> In retrospect my second request for the children to draw pictures of people might have been considered a violation of this as it is possible that the children chose not to draw them as they found this an inappropriate task.

participatory techniques as in such techniques the participants can direct the research process to avoid distressing topics (cf. Mosse 1994). In the case of my research I took deliberate steps to ensure that sensitive topics were only raised at the instigation of the children or other participants. The topics I raised myself were kept as general as possible to allow the children to talk about their negative experiences if they wished, but not to directly lead to such discussions<sup>7</sup>.

As a result of the open nature of the research, different priorities and preoccupations emerged in the different groups. Group A was the most vocal and insistent (to the point of confrontational) regarding food issues and their mistrust of people working for the NGOs. This was less in terms of what they said and more in the way that they said it. Group B introduced the lakes or rivers they had left behind and the effect that this had on their lives more often than Group A had. Group C, having arrived at the camp when it first opened, talk a lot more about it being “the bush” rather than an inhabited place, they also talked more about the problems of clothing and non-food items being worn out, this was logical as they had been in the camp the longest.

Group D boys talked a lot about the farming activities that were lacking. This was especially related to livestock as they had come from a large cattle farming area. They also talked more about the spare time they had as they seemed to be able to spend considerable time playing football or at the cinema. The girls in Group D spoke much more about the work they had to do at home, possibly due to increasing gender differentiation, but also in large part because of the differences in their personalities. Group E talked more about playing and family relationships. The Secondary school pupils talked much more about the value of education and the need to improve one’s own life both through studies and earning money. These differences as described here, however seem much more exaggerated than they were in reality. There were many topics which preoccupied them all and whilst there were differences in the way they expressed them, these threads ran throughout all of the discussions and these are the ones discussed in the thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> I am aware that negative emotions can still be evoked even if they were only thinking of things in terms of not wanting to talk about them but such problems can be overstated and I monitored such things very carefully.

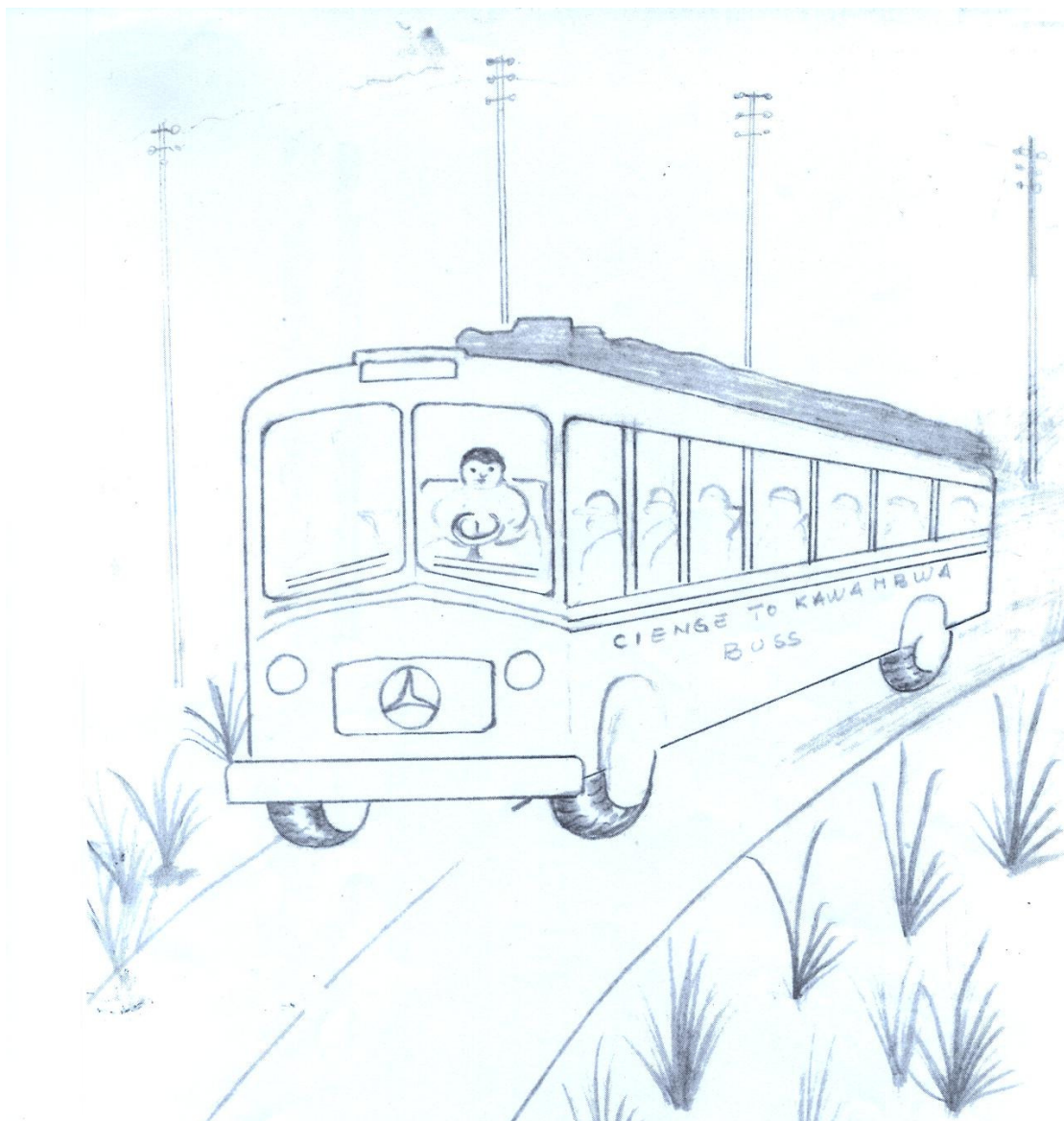
#### Appendix 4: Lia

A story about a refugee girl written by the girls from Groups A & B

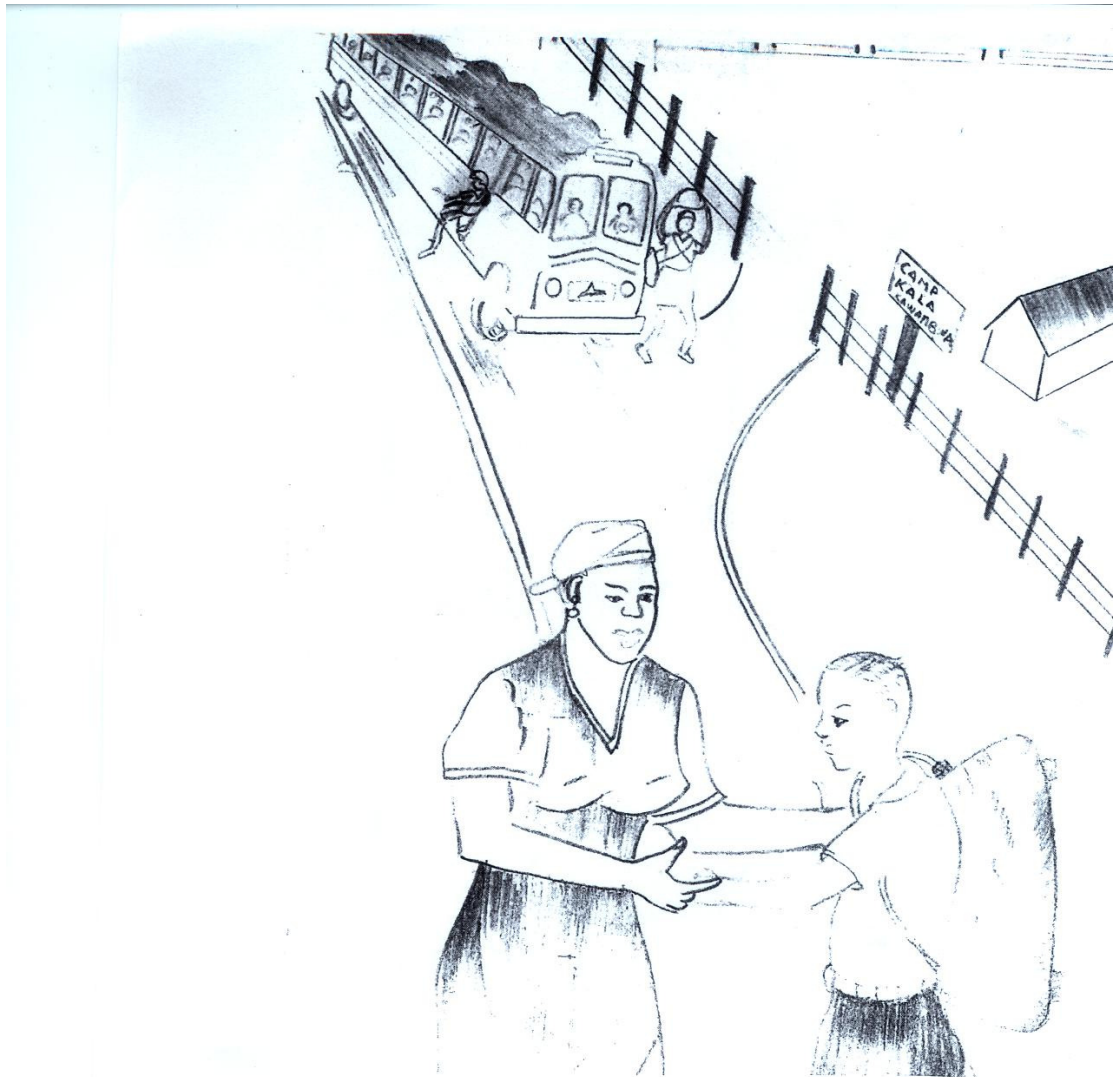
I commissioned an artist to do the illustrations under the children's instructions.



Lia left her village to go and live in town with her big brother Katabe in Lubumbashi [Congo]. Katabe worked in a shop in Lubumbashi. Lia went to live with him in order to go to school. Two years later Lia found out that her mum was living in a refugee camp. During this time her mum wrote her a letter to let her know that she was in a refugee camp in Kawambwa in Zambia. One day her Sister-in-Law untruthfully accused her of stealing some money. Lia got angry and decided to go and meet up with her mum in the refugee camp.



Lia set off on the way to Chienge [Zambian Border town/refugee transit centre] to get more information. When she got to Chienge she registered as an unaccompanied minor. She stayed three days in Chienge and she made friends with a girl called Bupe. Bupe was with her dad, her mum, her sister and her big brothers. In spite of her new friendship, Lia couldn't think of anything except her mum. Finally the bus to take them to the refugee camp came to pick them up. Bupe's family looked after Lia on the journey, as they had in Chienge because she was an unaccompanied minor. Finally the bus arrived in the refugee camp.



The Social Workers asked Lia what her mum's name was and they gave this name to the Section Leaders. The process of finding Lia's mum took two days but finally they found her. When she heard the news Lia's mum jumped for joy. She cooked a meal and went with it to see her daughter at the reception. When Lia could leave the reception to go into the camp, her family organised a party and they invited Bupe's family.





# Appendix 5: Maps





The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Geographic data: UNHCR, Global Insight digital mapping - © 1998 Europa Technologies Ltd.