

“Stuck in Thorns”

The Effects of Power on Liberian Refugees in Guinea



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TABLE OF CONTENT

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Preface.....	vi
List of Acronyms.....	viii
Map 1: The Locations of UNHCR and CNISR offices in Conakry.....	ix
Map 2: The Location of Kouankan Refugee Camp in Macenta Prefecture	x
 Chapter 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem and the Main Argument.....	2
1.2.1 <i>Encountering Momolu in Conakry</i>	2
1.2.2. <i>Deddeh: A refugee at Kouankan Camp</i>	4
1.3. Contextualizing the Topic.....	6
1.4. Lack of Relevant Literature.....	13
1.5. The Timeline: 1990-2007-2012.....	13
1.6. Theoretical Framework.....	15
1.7. Choice of Methods and Methodological Tools.....	17
1.8. Organizing the Study.....	22
1.9. Chapter Summary.....	22
 Chapter 2: BUREAUCRATIC POWER: UNHCR & CNISR	 24
2.1. Bureaucratic Concept of Power.....	24
2.2. Historical Update.....	25
2.3. Bureaucratic Power.....	25
2.3.1. <i>UNHCR</i>	25
2.3.2. <i>CNISR/BCNR</i>	28
2.4. Cessation of Refugee Status.....	20
2.5. Chapter Summary.....	37

Chapter 3: EVERYDAY POWER-GUINEAN MAJORITY AND REFUGEE MINORITY	39
3.1. Ethnicity and Ethnic Difference.....	39
3.2. Guinean Majority.....	42
3.3. How the Refugee Minority Deal With Their Situation.....	46
3.4. Chapter Summary.....	50
 Chapter 4: COPING STRATEGIES	 52
4.1. Social Network and Solidarity.....	52
4.2. Symbolic Social Solidarity Events and Reciprocity	53
4.3. Marriages and Bereavements.....	54
4.4. Birth of a Child and Liberian Anniversaries	55
4.5. Nationalism: The Basis for Networking.....	57
4.6. Chapter Summary.....	59
 Chapter 5: VULNERABLE GROUPS- WOMEN AND CHILDREN	 61
5.1. Refugees and Common Everyday Activities	61
5.2. Adversities of Refugee Females.....	62
5.3. Refugees Turning to Street and Working Children.....	65
5.4. Who are the Street Children?	66
5.5. Working Children in Kouankan: Illicit Mines and Plantations.....	73
5.6. Chapter Summary.....	76
 Chapter 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	 78
6.1. Personal Reflection: Insider/outsider.....	78
6.2. Way Forward: Anticipated Policy Modification.....	80
6.3. Concluding Comments.....	84
6.4. Chapter Summary.....	86

THESIS BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES	87
DATA OF INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED BETWEEN JANUARY 15 AND JULY 13, 2012	99
APPENDIXES	101
Appendix 1: Informants' Interview Guide.....	101
Appendix 2: Interview Questions	102
Appendix 3: Statistics of Refugees in Guinea.....	104

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Notwithstanding, shortcomings that might be implicit in this piece of work are my own responsibility and have nothing to do with those who supported and commented on this thesis.

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Preface

Conflicts have inflicted the African continent for the past fifty years and the plight of refugees form one of the most visible consequences. Today Somalia, Southern Sudan, the DRC, Mali, Niger, the Ivory Coast and many other countries of African have been killing fields, forcing many to flee the atrocities and the mayhem. Outside Africa, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are never ending. The carnage in Syria has shown no sign of abating soon and civilians made up of women and children bear the blunt of it all. Earlier conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia have created PRSs or “protracted refugee situations” (Milner, 2009). This thesis has been motivated by the forces and the understandings of the importance of refugee issues, especially, the social, economic and psychological well-being of the refugees in Guinea. The Liberian refugees who joined the “miserable sea of humanity” (Malkki 1990) when civil war began in their country in December 1989, started fleeing to Guinea in January 1990, and were faced with many different problems. First and foremost, their long existence as refugees put them in “protracted refugee situation” category. Second, donors have not only become fatigued but also the emergence of numerous new conflicts as well as some long on-going wars matter the most to those in whose hands economic power lies. Hence Liberian refugees have received less sympathetic attention and support than they received previously. These factors have contributed to cutting the provision of food, shelter materials, social and economic assistance to Liberian refugees in 2007. The slashing of humanitarian assistance compelled most refugees to enter the informal sector job market to do casual jobs on farms, on construction sites and in mines, engage in petty trades and work as domestic servants to fend for themselves and families. The closure of free education facilities pushed children to the streets, illicit mines and farms where they faced horrific situations just like their adult counterparts. Refusal to pay for their services, threats, rapes and other forms of exploitation are some of the excesses and atrocities refugees faced. Inequality between the locals and refugees existed in various arenas. Access to employment, right to run private business and the fundamental human rights of these refugees are infringed. Last but hardly the least, the status of refugees also ceased on June 30 2012; on that date the Liberian refugees were no longer considered as “refugees”.

This research investigated the effects of the various forms of power by UNHCR and ethnic Guinean majority on Liberian refugees. All the time the former refugees continued to face

dilemmas in the eventual implementation of local integration and voluntary repatriation programs. In the first place those who opted to repatriate were made to abandon their farms thinking that they would leave immediately. Unfortunately, when their repatriation delayed they could not go back to continue their farms because the rice cultivation season was far gone. Second, the cash disbursed to former refugees who selected local integration to embark on income generating activities was given as loans payable on installment basis. Moreover, the loan was granted to families without considering the numbers of members. The disparity in the durable solution assistance, in which cash given to those repatriating is classified as “grant” but as “loan” to those integrating, is brewing tension and apprehension among the former refugees. Besides, the locals understood the cessation of Liberian refugee status to mean that all refugees are to return to their country. This misrepresentation is causing problems for the former refugees who have opted for integration. UNHCR and CNISR are accused of exploiting the former refugees in the implementation of these durable solutions. While many asylum seekers are denied documentation, several local Guineans were registered to benefit from either the integration or repatriation package.

My special commitment to tackle the theme on minority Liberian refugees in Guinea is based on my conviction that my insider and outsider perspectives on refugee issues might make significant contributions to the subject matter. Having lived in Guinea as a refugee, I was driven by my daily lived experiences in the past to gather materials for this thesis. As a former refugee, my re-entrance into the academic forum at UiB has moved me to become a participant observer of refugee experiences. My dual experiences, first as participant observer and second as observing participant offered me the opportunity to value the probable significances that my insider perspective might offer to institutions and the academic world at large.

List of Acronyms

BNCR: Bureau Nationale pour la Coordination des Réfugiés (National Bureau for Refugee Coordination) This was later transformed to CNISR

CNISR: Commission Nationale d'Intégration et de Suivi des Réfugiés (National Commission on Integration and Protection of Refugees)

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

DynaM: Association Dynamic Mutualiste

FG: Franc Guinée (Guinean currency)

IRC: International Rescue Committee.

LCHR: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights

PRs: Protracted Refugee Situations

UiB: Universitet i Bergen (University of Bergen)

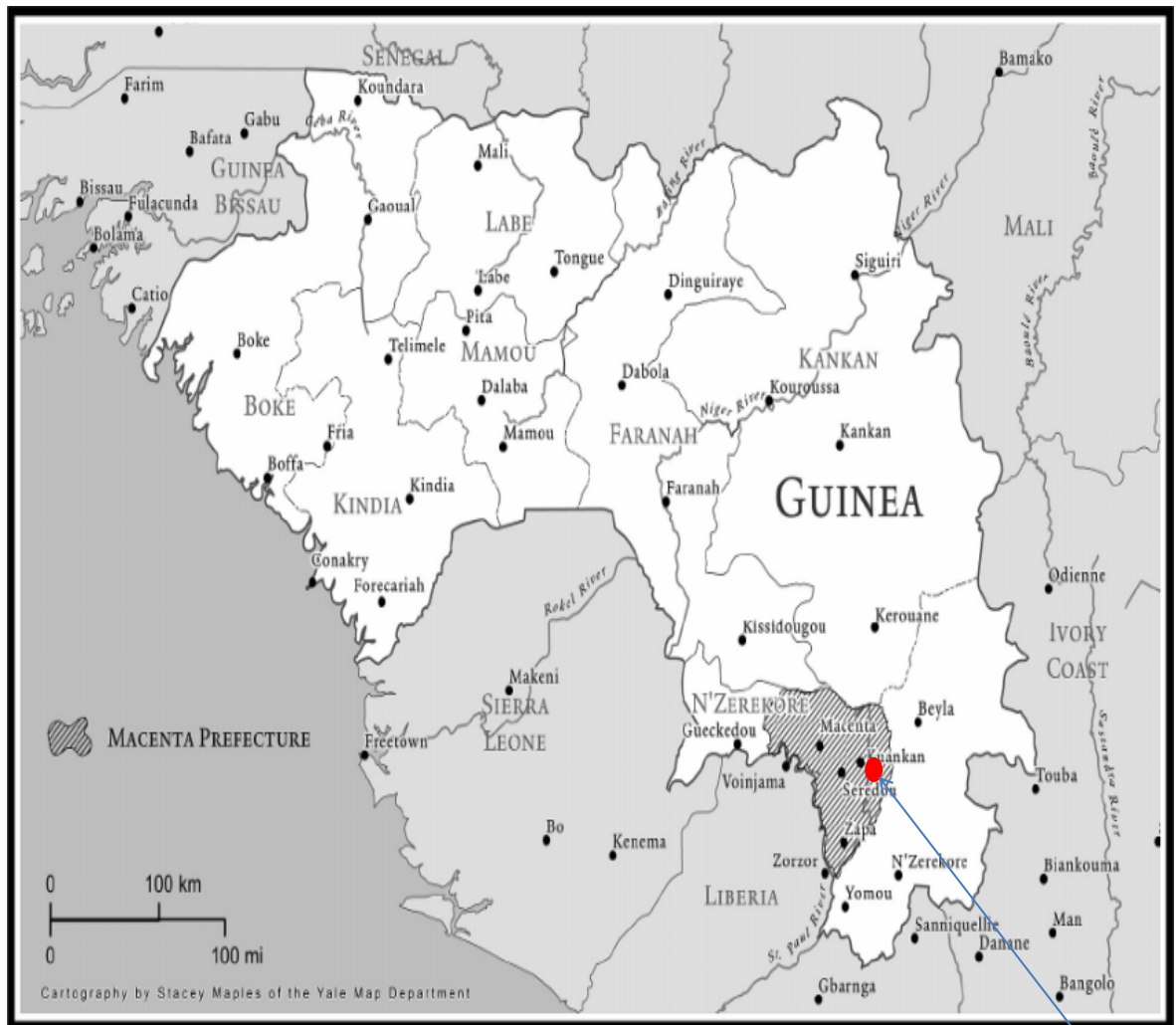
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (The UN Refugee Agency)

USCR: US Resettlement Committee

STUDY AREA MAP



FIG 1: MAP OF CONAKRY SHOWING THE POSITIONS OF UNHCR & CNISR OFFICES
(Source: Google Map – www.commonswiki.org/wiki/file:Location_map_Guinea.png)
Additional Labeling by: Henry Ahorttor Collins



MAP 2: MACENTA PREFECTURE AND LOCATION OF KOUANKAN REFUGEE CAMP
 (Source: McGovern, Mike, *Unmasking the State: Making Guinea Morden*, 2013, p.4
 Additional Labeling by Henry Ahorttor Collins)

**LOCATION OF KOUANKAN
REFUGEE KAMP**

Chapter 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Fierce rebel war began in December 1989 and forced several Liberians to flee to Guinea from January 1990, where most refugees began living on humanitarian aid made up of food, shelter, economic and medical assistance and even clothing. Moreover, refugee children benefited from educational facilities made up of learning materials, free school uniform, hot meals and scholarships. However as Liberian refugees stayed longer in exile, the volume and frequency of the assistance they received began to be reduced. By 2007 humanitarian assistance for most refugees as well as the free education program for children were slashed compelling these refugees to engage in diverse activities in order to fend for themselves. As these refugees carried out different livelihood activities, UNHCR and CNISR and Guinean majority population exercised powers that had adverse effects on these refugees. However, Liberian refugees employed social network and solidarity as coping strategies to counteract these various forms of power. The status of Liberian refugees ceased by 2012, and local integration and voluntary repatriation were the two preferred solutions which refugees opted for. Ostensibly, my fieldwork in Guinea coincided with the cessation of Liberian refugee status exercises. I was drawn to compose the following questions to enable me to discuss the power relations that existed between Liberian refugees and UNHCR and CNISR on one hand and the Guinean majority on the other:

1. What effects do the exercises of bureaucratic power have on Liberian refugees in Guinea?
2. How is inequality significant in the everyday power Guinean majority exercises over the refugee minority?
3. In which ways do the refugees deal with the different forms of power they encountered in their daily activities?

1.2. Statement of the Problem and the Main Argument

1.2.1 Encountering Momolu in Conakry

I had barely settled down in the new community that was to become my temporary home in the next six months when I bumped into Momolu in Conakry. The impromptu encounter, however, provided a vital research forum that helped to shape this thesis. Momolu and I travelled in the same taxi but we did not come to our destinations when we had to disembark unceremoniously at a point. Opposition political party activists were fighting a pitched battle with the Guinean security forces; throwing missiles and tear gas, smashing vehicles. Several innocent civilians caught up in their skirmishes were wounded, tortured or harassed by either party. As I ran in confusion for my life, the dramatic change of the city during my absence made me ambivalent whether I was heading in the right direction where I would not be caught in further disorder. Other people I asked for direction refused to assist me. The reluctance of people to direct strangers stems from the cross border attack on Guineans by Liberian rebels in the year 2000. When the rebels first entered the country, they disguised themselves as civilians. The locals, unaware of their motives, gave them directions to villages which led to the slaughter of several prominent ethnic Guineans and refugees in Macenta and Gueckedou Prefectures. That incident taught people to be more cautious in giving direction, especially, to strangers. However, Momolu's magnanimity to lead me out of the uproar, although he did not know me previously, was unimaginable. Recovering my breath after being led to a much safer place, I gave Momolu more information about myself and the purpose of my trip to Guinea. Intriguingly, he opted to share a substantial amount of key information of his refugee experience with me and what initially was a mere request for assistance to get out of a security threat, ultimately, became a research data gathering approach. Momolu then began to narrate how he was a mechanical engineer and worked several years for an iron ore mining company in Liberia, prior to the civil war. He also detailed how his family received humanitarian aid from 1991 but as the relief aid decreased from year to year he secured a job with a Brazilian road construction company in 1996. He worked for four years but his employers fired him for no apparent reason. When the next job he subsequently secured also ended the same way and humanitarian aid phased out in 2007, he moved from Kouankan camp to Conakry with his family where he was fortunate to secure a job. According to

Momolu he was fired by that company after two years. He also lost two other subsequent new jobs. According to him each of the employers uttered the following when he was fired: “You refugees cannot be taking the jobs of our own people. Our own people cannot be suffering while you strangers take their jobs. This place is for us and it is our people who are to benefit and enjoy not you refugees”

He also unfolded that it was his wife who supported the home through what she earned from doing laundry, cooking, cleaning homes and baby-sitting for Guineans while he was jobless. Aside from the meager amount earned from the manual work his wife did for people she also prepared doughnuts, which was sold by their two teenage daughters, who had stopped schooling. Momolu also recounted that his inaction in certain instances saddens him when he reflects on how some men raped his wife while she was returning home one evening after her day’s work. As much as he was devastated, he could not leave his wife because she was the bread winner of the home. “It is hard to exercise full authority and control as a father and as husband because I don’t have the means of providing for the family. I was forced to take up a job as labourer at the construction site because it is impossible to find a job of my profession”, Momolu told me. Furthermore, he hinted that his two teenage sons have dropped from school because he could not afford their fees in a private school. The boys have moved from home and work as porters for marketers or zigzag between slow-moving vehicles in the congested Conakry traffic to peddle assorted items for people. Besides, the boys occasionally bring some money home to augment the family budget. Momolu also chronicled how two military men broke into his home and sexually abused his teenaged daughters. According to him, the first man forcibly sexually abused one of the girls while the other held a gun to the head of his wife to watch the immoral scene. When the man was done sexually violating this girl he took the gun from his friend who held it over his wife’s head and his colleague also sexually abused his other daughter and her mother was forced to watch the same. Momolu further explained that he had gone out of Conakry to work but he had to abandon the work to return when his wife called and gave him the information. He reported the case to the authorities at the army barracks and with the ID card which one of the men left behind, the two men were apprehended and detained. However, when the colleagues of the two culprits threatened that if the complaint taken to the authorities at the army barracks was not withdrawn his entire family would be wiped off, he became afraid and complied with their demand. Finally, he revealed that one of the girls was still being forced to live with one of the men who

mistreated, beat, and tortured her from day to day. Momolu claimed, “UNHCR does not do anything about the complaints refugees take to them therefore the Guineans have taken us as slaves, take our property, and treat us any way they want”.

I spent almost four months in Conakry and got many stories about the issues Momolu and other interlocutors related to me regarding the desperation and self-sustenance trajectory of Liberian refugees. During my sixteen or more hours’ road-journey from Conakry to Kouankan camp for the second phase of my research process, I could not stop thinking about the outrageous experiences Liberian refugees who have fled from war in their country, are subjected to in exile in Guinea.

1.2.2. Deddeh at Kouankan Camp

I came across Deddeh, a widow and mother of six children, the second day of my arrival at the camp. She was returning from the farm. I was heading home after talking to ninety year old Yarkpawolo, who Momolu mentioned to me. Deddeh had a big bundle of firewood on her head and a young child of about one year at her back. An entirely naked boy, of around three or four years, trailed behind her, crying loudly. Deddeh’s facial expression told that the loads she carried were heavy. I negotiated with one of the boys playing tennis ball on the road to pay him 500 FG to help her with the bundle of wood. She was relieved when the load came off her head and she thanked me over and over again. We talked about a few things on our way to her residence but arranged to meet again the following day. During our engagement Deddeh recounted that her husband became very ill at the camp, from where they were relocated to the present one. The delay in transferring her husband from the health post at Kountaya camp to a better equipped health facility in Kissidougou resulted in his death three months prior to their relocation from that camp to Kouankan in 2006. When they were relocated in the present camp, food and medical assistance was given to all refugees until it was cut in 2007. However, her daughter and other disabled and vulnerable refugees continued to be helped before also this was later stopped abruptly. Deddeh also unfolded a stirring account of how her two teenaged daughters were deluded by local men who abandoned them when they each became pregnant. The two girls take contracts to work for Guinean farmers who often refuse to pay for their services. She further chronicled how young girls and even

married women were raped in the bushes when they went to collect palm kernel, fetch wood, went fishing or went to work on farms. She revealed that:

Some of the Guineans who do these evil things to many refugee women even threaten to kill their victims or bewitch them if the secret was revealed to anyone. The wife of my only son was raped by a citizen from Kouankan town and he forcibly took her from him. When my son took the complaint to the town chief of Kouankan he was rather jailed and made to pay 150,000 FG before he could be released after two weeks. The town chief told him, “You refugees should be aware that you have no rights. Don’t even bother to bring any case against any citizen to me here. You will also be hurting your heads by taking reports to UNHCR. So up to now you refugees have not realized that there is no place for you here?” Most refugee children have stopped schooling since IRC closed facilities at the camp. These children are just idling about in the camp, hunting reptiles or carrying loads for marketers of Kouankan on market days. What future do these children have and who will take our place when we die? This is worrisome. (Deddeh, 48, Kouankan camp)



Photo: Deddeh (centre), her two daughters, two grandchildren and the uncle of her children at Kouankan camp

I have decided to use these two different synopses to illustrate what my topic is all about. From these two cases it has become apparent that the major focus of the research is on minority Liberian refugees in Guinea, most of who having previously lived on humanitarian aid and now who, during the time of my fieldwork, had to fend for themselves. As refugees,

they encountered the exercise of bureaucratic power by two institutions, namely, UNHCR and CNISR and everyday power by the local Guineans in their different livelihood activities. In this regard, the title of my thesis “*Stuck in Thorns*” is therefore, considered appropriate to argue that the various forms of power have psychological, economic and security ramifications on the lives of Liberian refugees in Guinea. Meanwhile, the “*thorns*”, as we shall see in due course, denote the hard times, distasteful as well as the unpleasant effects of the various forms of power on the minority refugee minority.

1.3. Contextualizing the Topic

The flight of Liberian refugees from their country and their settlement pattern in Guinea is pivotal in contextualizing this topic. With civil war breaking up in Liberia in December 1989, several people fled from different parts of that country and joined the “miserable sea of humanity¹” in Guinea in January 1990 (Milner, 2009). The settlement pattern, fundamentally, can be classified into two categories. The first one is made up of refugees who left the country before the rebels could come to their villages and towns. They took with them most of their personal belongings to start life in their new home while the second category comprised those who waited until the rebels came to their locations. Many of them were caught in cross-fires, and underwent gruesome treatment. Those who survived had to flee in haste in large numbers, usually without taking any of their possessions. These two scenarios represent “anticipatory and acute refugee movements”² categories respectively; the first represents anticipatory and the second one designates acute.

The areas where Liberia refugees resided prior to their flight to exile played a role in determining their settlement pattern in Guinea. Those who lived in areas along the Liberian-Guinean border were settled in the nearby border villages and towns in Guinea when they crossed over. Remarkably Guinea, comparative to Kenya and Tanzania, two countries in similar situations, did not respond to large refugee influx by initially establishing refugee camps. Refugees were permitted to settle within the local population (Milner, 2009: 137) before camps were later established along the borders. UNHCR’s rationale for locating the

¹ Malkki, Liisa, Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization, *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11(3): 377-404, 1996, p378

² Kunz, E.F, The Refugees in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement, 1973, p131

camps along the borders was to facilitate a quick return of the refugees when the war ended. However, as the war dragged on, refugees who were farmers in their country prior to flight into exile, made arrangements with local people for residence and other rights with their local hosts in diverse communities. It is important to point out, however, that Liberian refugees who belong to the farming culture acquired residence, for most part, in both the villages and the camps along the Liberian-Guinea borderlines. Each of these residences had its own boundaries and privileges. Residence in the camps enabled registered refugees to receive humanitarian assistance made up of food and non-food items. Several refugees utilized the camps as transit points where they appeared, collected their ration and disappeared until another distribution time when they re-appear again. Residence at the local village gave easy access to resources which ranged from palm-fruit and nuts harvesting, rights to fishing and hunting grounds and tilling and working farm lands, allocation of market spaces and many more. The arrangements by the refugees with their hosts became significant in regulating the deposition of assets and loyalty (Strathern, 1992) and can be seen more or less as “patron-client” (Hall, 1977; Scott, 1972) model of association. Patron-client relationship³ existed between the local Guineans and their refugee guests. The ethnic Guineas, who are the patrons, received labour services and loyalty in return for resources they provide to their refugee clients. While refugees of farming background settled around the borderline communities to make farms, those who had other professional backgrounds moved further into the bigger towns and cities in search of jobs.

³ This is a common arrangement between Guinean hosts who have authority, social status, wealth, or some other personal resources (the patron) and Liberian refugees who benefit from their support or influence (the client). Edward Hall wrote extensively about this concept in work “Beyond culture” in 1977

A detailed map of Guinea-Bissau and its neighboring countries: Senegal to the north, Mali to the northeast, Sierra Leone to the south, and Liberia to the southeast. The map also shows parts of Guinea-Bissau's neighbors, including Fouta Djallon, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast. The Atlantic Ocean is to the west. Major cities and towns are marked, including Bissau, Bolim, Bafing, Tinkisso, Siguiri, Kankaran, Kouroussa, Faranah, Kissidougou, Kérouané, Beyla, Macenta, Nzérékoré, and Freetown. The map also shows the location of Mount Nimba (6,069 ft.) and Mount Tombo (5,043 ft.). The map includes a scale bar (0 to 150 miles and 0 to 150 kilometers) and a copyright notice: ©2001, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.



A Liberian refugee did not reside in just one camp throughout his/her whole refugee experience in Guinea. For most part, when the number of refugees in a particular camp went

down, the rest were moved to join others in other camps. Whether this was done to enhance logistical efficiency in delivery of services to refugees or not, it had some effects on the refugees. One problem was that these relocations were not communicated to the refugees on time. Most of them often got caught by events when they were either harvesting or planting crops and they had to abandon their farms and crops to avoid being left on their own to sort out any security problem they encounter when the UNHCR and its partners had withdrawn operations in the area. Several of my interlocutors told me that they had lived in camps such as Boreah, Kountaya, Simbakouya and Kola prior to their relocation to Kouankan camp.

Map of Guinea showing refugee camps in Dabola, Kissidougou and Nzerekore relocated at Kouankan
Source: Google map with supplementary labelling by Henry Ahorttor Collins



KEY



Refugees from Simbakounya camp in Dabola, Koutaya, Boreah and Telekoro camps in Kissidougou and Kola camp in Nzerekore relocated to Kouankan in 2007



Kouankan camp where refugees from Dabola, Kissidougou and N'Zerekore Prefectures were relocated in 2007

It is therefore not uncommon to find a refugee at Kounkan who has previously lived in more than four camps in Guinea. Aside from the decrease in the number of refugees in a camp a second reason for relocating refugees was security concerns. In the year 2000 most areas in Gueckedou and Forecariah saw cross-border attacks from supposedly Liberian and Sierra Leonean insurgents. Refugees were not only accused of collaborating with the perpetrators of the cross-border incursions from outside but on September 9, 2000, President Lansana Conté in his radio address to the nation said:

I am giving orders that we bring together all foreigners...and that we search and arrest all suspects.... They should go home. We know that there are rebels among the refugees. Civilians and soldiers, let's defend our country together. When you catch these people, these enemies, crush them. Wait for nothing. I order it⁴

The President's announcement inflamed passion of hatred throughout the country and many refugee men, women, children and even babies were rounded-up, arrested, detained, brutally tortured, raped and humiliated. These incidences contributed to the transfer of refugees in all camps along border areas, commonly referred to as *Languette* in Gueckdou Prefecture to new camps at Boreah, Kountaya, Telikoro in Kissidogou and Sembakounya in Dabola Prefectures, while others moved on their own to Conakry. (Milner, 2009:147-149)

Presently Liberian refugees are mostly found in urban Conakry and rural Kouankan camp and it is on these two sites that my study is focused. The situations at the two sites are not the same. Refugees in Conakry, the capital city of the Republic of Guinea, are scattered throughout the city and live in accommodations for which they pay rent besides paying for other facilities such as light, water and transportation to get to certain points. At the time of my field work in Conakry, the number of Liberian refugees was 2332. Kouankan camp is located in Macenta Prefecture in the Guinea Forest (Guinée Forestière) region; about 1200 km from Conakry. It is the home of around 300,000 inhabitants including Liberian refugees⁵ who numbered 3349-when I conducted my fieldwork in Kouankan camp. The common language

⁴ The President's speech seems to have no transcript. This extract by an unknown translator was cited by both LCHR and USCR. (LCHR, 2002, 74 and USRC, 2000e)

⁵ The statistics of current Liberia refugee population was obtained from UNHCR Guinea Conakry office on April 15, 2012

of communication with the refugees during my fieldwork in Guinea is Liberian English; a sort of English which originated from the Americo-Liberians⁶.

Ostensibly, three different scenarios can be summed up regarding Liberian refugees in Guinea from 1990 to 2012. First and foremost, the length of their refugee status put them into protracted refugee situation (PRS). Protracted refugee situations⁷ (PRSs) category occurs when 25,000 or more refugees, who originate from the same country, have sought asylum in another country/countries for at least five consecutive years (Milner & Loescher, 2011). UNHCR, ultimately, defines protracted refugees as the situation where “refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile”⁸. Second, the emerging new conflicts such as in Mali and Syria and the long on-going Afghan, Somalia, Southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) wars, conflicts that matter most to those who command economic power, has made Liberian refugees to attract less sympathy and get less attention and support than what they received previously. Last but hardly the least, as the initial step, donors who may have been fatigued in continuing to fund the Liberian protracted refugees cut the provision of food, shelter materials, social and economic assistance to them in 2007. The cessation of Liberian refugee status, ultimately, followed the previous phases in 2012. After this these refugees had two main durable solutions; local integration or voluntary repatriation.

As protracted refugees for whom humanitarian aid was axed, Liberian refugees have become casual farm laborers, day laborers at construction sites, manual workers at local illicit mines, petty traders, domestic servants, fire coal producers, palm kernel processors and firewood fetchers and sellers to fend for themselves. Hugely, these refugees have been exposed to serious hazards, economic exploitation, psychological stress and security turmoil. Economically, refugees are denied payment for the work they do for many of the local Guineans. Women who are raped or sexually abused are often threatened with bewitchment or murder were they to reveal the secret to anyone. Threat and intimidations were used by these

⁶ Americo-Liberians are the black freed slaves and those intercepted on the high seas and returned to Liberia between 1821 and 1867 under the project carried out by the American Colonization Society.

⁷ Milner, James & Loescher, Gil, responding to Protracted Refugee Situations, Lessons from a decade of discussion, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, 2011, p3

⁸ *Protracted refugee situations* (EC/54/SC/CRP.14), June 2004

perpetrators as devices to instill fear and terror, which often has long psychological impact on their victims. Adults and children/adolescent refugees alike live with fear and insecurity and are exposed to the aforementioned situations. Guinean security, not recognizing UNHCR documents and demanding refugees to pay bribes or else go to jail, put these minority refugees at risk. Liberian refugees are not only blamed but they also got accused whenever any political or security issue cropped up in the country. Notably, when Liberian refugees earlier received humanitarian assistance UNHCR and CNISR offered them reasonable level of protection but as most of them tried to fend for themselves through different activities they were sexually abused, forced to pay bribes, economically extorted, threatened, psychologically and mentally tortured and intimidated in various forms. It is against this background that this research saw the salience to employ theories of power and social action concepts to investigate the effects on the refugees. I use theories on bureaucratic power and everyday power as a framework to understand the challenges of Liberian refugees, particularly women and children in Guinea, and I use the concepts of ethnicity social network and national solidarity to show how the refugees cope with their problems.

As I have indicated earlier UNHCR and CNISR are the two institutions that have been mandated by the United Nations Charter and the Guinean government respectively to protect and provide services to Liberia refugees in Guinea. However, instead of carrying out their mandate, it was alleged that they are intransigent and are involved in improprieties such as sexual exploitation, bribe taking, extortion and infringing on the rights of the refugees. Realistically, as the staff of these institutions became implicated in the vices themselves, their own guilty conscience made it very difficult for them to address the excesses the locals commit against the refugees. Hence this has perpetrated the high rate of rape, economic exploitation, sexual enslavement, bribe-taking and extortion of Liberian refugees by the staff of UNHCR and CNISR and ethnic Guineans. Especially women and under-aged girls have become targeted and can be attacked with impunity. With free educational facilities ending, without a similar alternative strategy being put in place by UNHCR and CNISR for the refugee children for whom schooling is a prime protection, one is forced to question who is to be blamed for the Liberian working and street children paradox, which has permeated into the fabrics of the refugee community in Guinea. Evidently, the lack of protection plan for refugee school dropouts is the cause of the rise in the number of working and street children phenomenon among Liberian refugees.

1.4. Lack of Relevant Literature

Although refugees have existed throughout the West Africa sub-regional for the past five decades or so, there is a minimal anthropological publication on the phenomenon, especially on Liberian refugee and their life situation in Guinea. Aside from Liisa Malkki's extensive literatures on Rwanda and Burundian refugee all attempts to contact Mike McGovern, a political anthropologist who worked in West Africa, especially Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, to get some academic tips prior to my departure for the field proved futile. All pursuits to browse the Amazon.com and other websites for books on the sub-region context also yielded little results. Furthermore, attempts to check for materials from the UiB Social Science and other department libraries proved exhausting and challenging but literature on refugees in general was found on UNHCR websites while additional documents and data were obtained from UNHCR Guinea office during the research. Meanwhile, resourceful literature on refugees was found in UiB Law Faculty Library during my writing process. Published data, article, journals text books, local and international news as well as other related documents constituted the relevant tools used in the research. These resources formed portion of the information triangle that will shape the theoretical framework and data analysis of this publication. However, my inability to find enough materials on refugees in Guinea prior to leaving for fieldwork is not expected to extensively impact the aim of the research. This thesis, undoubtedly, can supplement the already existing literature on Liberian refugees in Guinea, which will be of further benefit to future, local and international researchers who want to further explore this region.

1.5. The Timeline: 1990-2007-2012

As indicated earlier the refugees received humanitarian assistance from 1990, made up of food and non-food items, medical and financial assistance. During this early phase refugee children had free educational facilities. Free tuition, writing materials and text books were some of the benefits refugee children enjoyed. The numbers of street and working children amongst the refugee population were minimal during this period. Exploitation in different forms, child prostitution or sale of sex among young girls as well as rape was low in the refugee community. In the meantime, the axing of humanitarian assistance, starting in 2007,

ushered in the second phase. 2007 also saw the closure of schools that provided free learning to refugees. With no free school access, street and working children increased. Parents forcing their under aged daughter to marry older men for financial and material benefits became the order of day. Prostitution and sale of sex by under aged girls rose. Abuse of power especially by CNISR and locals became obvious and rampant. Staff of CNISR demanded bribe or sexual favour from Liberian asylum seekers before their cases could be processed. Those who could not meet their demands remained without status and refugee documents until the cessation of Liberian refugee status on June 30, 2012.

Several threatening situations occurred within the period of Liberian refugee existence in Guinea. For example 30 cross-border incursions occurred in Guinea between September 2000 and March 2001 (Milner, 2009:143) and these necessitated relocation of refugees and camps in 2001. Since refugees are inherently seen as destabilizing and as a threat, when security problem crop up, most of them would flee from violence of the host population. The threat and violence is usually sporadic with no time to save personal belongings or refugee documents before fleeing. Refugees have relocated to Conakry on their own from other parts of the country, where the refugee documents were processed. However, my research discovered that the refugee registration information for most of them could not be traced in the country-wide UNHCR database system. This often led refugees into starting the registration procedure from the scratch, and then going through a series of screening processes, leaving the updating of the status of several of them unfinished and delayed their receipt of any appropriate identity documents. With the status of Liberian refugees having ended on June 30, 2012 what could be the basis for determining or choosing one of the durable solutions can be anybody's guess.

Liisa Malkki (1990) in her ethnography about the Rwanda refugees in Tanzania found the situation in which refugees in the camp depended mostly on humanitarian assistance while those in the city survived on self-sustenance activities. Such studies will be useful to juxtapose with the manner in which Liberian refugees in Guinea went about their everyday situations and the different challenges they encountered. The research was a multi-sited⁹ with Conakry and Kouankan refugee camp as the two main centers where the study was carried.

⁹ Kurotani Sawa, *Multi-sited Traditional Ethnography and Shifting Construction of Fieldwork*, 2004, p202

1.6. Theoretical Framework

In order to discuss these problems I shall put them in a theoretical context of power, both in general terms and then in what I shall term “bureaucratic power” and “everyday power”. Although there is endless scholarly debate about its definition, power is invariably defined in terms of the relation between people, which is articulated in symbolic representation. Power also generates the capacity to influence others, and also has the potential to emerge from control over valuable resources and the ability to administer rewards and punishment. (French & Ravens, 1959; Keltner et al 2003) Moreover, the question of the “effects of power”¹⁰ also often arises. Power has been variously examined in the works of the following scholars: Foucault, 2003, 1983, 1980a; Weber, 1978; Bourdieu, 1989. While the social science scholars mentioned may differ on theorizing power, resistance, domination, legitimacy, authority and social identity, they have all provided important frameworks for the analysis of the theories of power. In order to investigate power relations and the intricate affinity between social network, solidarity, ethnicity and identity, this work has not only found it relevant to delve into bureaucratic power of UNHCR and CNISR but also how power relations of ethnic Guineans shape and affect the everyday life of Liberian refugees in Guinea, using the different views of Michel Foucault, Max, Weber, and Pierre Bourdieu and other social science scholars on power.

Power is, however, often affiliated with competition, coercion and domination. Power as domination is a concept delineated in the works of Weber (1986) and Bourdieu (1994).

Weber (1946: 180) defined power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (Weber, 1978:53). He also referred to domination as the “probability of specific commands or all commands being obeyed by a group of persons” (Weber, 1968:212). Weber's celebrated definition of power can be conceptualized in terms of control and dependence and inequality. While control and dependence characterize the bureaucratic power UNHCR and CNISR exercise over Liberian refugees in Guinea, the everyday power by the Guinea over that minority group is also marked with inequality. Bourdieu focused among other things on symbolic power. He suggests that power exercised

¹⁰ Lukes S. Power, Freedom and Reason in Power A radical review, Disagreement over power, 2005, 61

as manifest physical force is converted into symbolic form to give a sort of legitimacy. In Bourdieu's opinion symbolic power is the invisible power that is exercised without people realizing it. In a more simple term, it is an invisible and unintentional power which transforms into legitimacy through its application. Symbolic power is exercised on shared belief of benefits to those who participate in its application, in their subjection (Bourdieu, 1991). In the lives of Liberian refugees in Guinea, there are diverse actions that symbolize things that are important to them and hold deeper meanings than what appears on the outside. As all cultures have rituals or customs that are symbolic to its people; bereavement, marriage, birth of a new child and food sharing. These also are the processes that are very significant for Liberian refugees in Guinea. An element of symbolic action is also prevalent among Liberian refugees in their diverse activities which involve creation of social network, solidarity and inter-group helping relations as a strategy through which they cope with the power exercised by UNHCR, and CNISR and the locals. Hence Bourdieu's postulation that "social order is inscribed in 'people's minds' through 'cultural products' including systems of education, language, judgments, values, and methods of classification and activities of everyday life" is pertinent for examining the situations of Liberian refugees in Guinea.

On his part, Foucault saw power as "a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others" but "upon their actions" (Foucault, 1983:220). He postulated that power does not exist in concentrated or diffuse form but only when put into action¹¹. He also suggested power to be something that is exerted but not possessed (Foucault, 2003: 13) and often framed his concept of power as the examination of a relationship. Ultimately, he argued that there is no society without power relations. As Foucault was concerned about what happens when power is exerted over others (Foucault, 1982:786), we shall later see the relevance of this aspect of his work through different forms in which UNHCR, CNISR and local Guineans exercise power over Liberian refugees in Guinea.

¹¹ Foucault M. The Subject and Power, In Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, ed. Dreyfus H.L., and P. Rabinow. 208-226. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983 p219.

1.7. Choice of Methods and Methodological Tools

When I first met with the members of the Liberian refugee committee to inform them on the purpose, scope and nature of my research in Guinea, Gwedy, a member of the committee said to me, “There are several people out there to give you useful information on their refugee experiences. If you don’t come to our meetings at Kipe you’ll not get them and you may go back to Norway empty handed”. I discarded this important suggestion thinking that by talking with the Liberian refugees about their experience, I would obtain the information I needed. Although I provided a mobile phone through which people could flash to enable me get the phone number of the caller to phone back, nobody made the attempt to reach me. Realizing that this method was not helpful, it then dawned on me to adhere to Gwedy’s advice. I searched for the Kipe venue, attended a couple of meetings in the last week of January 2012, and became a regular attendant during the entire duration of my research in the country.

Before going further on the discussion of my topic, it is important to examine issues regarding the methodological options of the research. Participant observation was the basis in my fieldwork but it needs to be complemented by other qualitative methods. The complex behavioral disparity and the stigma attached to certain issues in the refugee community influenced the methodology for data gathering. In a research, which was geared towards achieving specific objectives, qualitative methodology was seen as ideal for the purpose. Techniques or methods which I termed “*walking talking*”¹² and another known as “*go-along*”¹³ were especially effective. Face to face interviews or discussions were held with informants. The floor was opened for informants to express their thoughts without restraint. To appropriately maintain focus, questioning was closely guided in order to leave room for informants to raise matters the researcher might neglect. Open-ended approach of questioning was favored. For example in investigating the element of the supposed self-sustenance transformation of Liberian refugees in Guinea, a probable question asked was: “Can you explain if you and your entire family find life more challenging now than when you received humanitarian assistance some years ago? This format did not only create room to obtain

¹² By walking talking both the informant and the researcher take casual walk and discuss issues. By this technique, the discussions are usually informal and unstructured.

¹³ Kusenbach, M. “Street Phenomenology”: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool, 2003, vol.4(3): 455-485

insights beyond this question alone but other aspects that this research sought to investigate. Interviews and discussions were held at the convenient and comfortable venues which the informants themselves selected. Hence porches of homes, bed rooms, coffee shops, restaurants in Conakry, tree shades, churches, old and unused SGBV center and farm huts in Kouankan were some of the places chosen by informants for this purpose. Interviews, therefore, provided helpful insight into power relations between UNHCR, CNISR, ethnic Guineans and the Liberian refugees in their livelihood activities. This invariably, strengthened Julie Cruikshank's (1993) position about the mechanism about interviews. She emphasized the extreme importance of interviews by explicating how the experiences of the narrator have great direct prospects of benefiting the listener. Participant observation (Bernard, Russell, H; 1994; Ellen, R.F 1984) was also employed to bridge any unforeseeable gap that could be inherent in data gathering through interviewing.

Participant observation technique adopted to observe individual behavior on power relations of UNHCR, CNISR and ethnic Guineans vis-à-vis Liberian refugees in their diverse self-sustenance activities has been invaluable for my thesis and for understanding what I set out to research. Remarkably, it allowed access to intimate and confidential aspects of Liberian refugee experiences. I was exposed to details about exploitation of refugees in all forms by the locals as well as UNHCR and CNISR staff, child prostitution and sale of sex, rape of married refugee women which is kept secret for years, the atrocities against refugee children and disproportionate application of power. Information received during oral interviews was tested and followed-up. Lies and inaccurate information was discussed and corrected. Participant observation was thus employed to validate accounts of interlocutors.

Seen by most people as "insider" put me in a situation where people I knew previously during my refugee years in Guinea could tell lies about their life situations to obtain my empathy. Telling lie was used to receive humanitarian assistance or refugee benefit from UNHCR and even for obtaining refugee status. This trend is not only prevalent amongst Liberian refugee population in Guinea but it has become inherent in all UNHCR programs. Lies have become customary with refugees so much that most of the stories they tell have become ridiculous. I bumped into two informants who gave absurd accounts of their civil and employment situations respectively. Kumba, a 38 year woman, earlier, told me that she lost her husband during the Liberian civil war in 1993. She also told me about the overwhelming difficulty she

had in fending for the four children she had by her late husband as she shed tears. Agreeing to go with her to the vegetable garden near the camp the next day was not really meant to substantiate the incredibility of her story through observant participant technique. Rather it was only a spontaneous interaction which daunted on me out of the sympathy I felt for her and the plight of caring for many young children she has. We met a man pruning the vegetables when we arrived in the garden. Since refugees usually engage other men to work for them, I took that man to be working under such arrangements. Astonishingly, however, she introduced the man to me as her husband and the father of her four children. Noticing that I was startled, Kumba took me aside and said, “You know my brother, my records at UNHCR show that I am widow and a single parent. It is single parents who get good assistance in this refugee life here in Guinea”. The other incident involved a forty-six year old man, Gartee, who told me he had no job for the past ten years and relied on friends and neighbours for survival when I had a talk with him. I stumbled into him after a week when I waited for a taxi to be able to meet a prospective informant. Coincidentally, he was the driver who was willing to drive me to the part of the city, where several of his colleagues were reluctant to go. I listened to him keenly while he recounted economic difficulties in the country and how he had had owned that vehicle for the past ten years. Finally, he said “This God damn car has been giving me a hell of problem these days. I want to sell it to get some money to top up what I already have to buy a new one but it is not easy to get somebody to be interested to pick it up.” He had forgotten that he had previously told me of his joblessness. These two incidences are comparable with similar situations John Chr. Knudsen (2005) encountered in his work with Vietnamese in refugee camps in the Philippines, Hong Kong and Japan. He detailed that Vietnamese refugees “hunt for the smallest signs of what might prove beneficial”¹⁴ to boost their prospect of obtaining asylum approvals to prevent them being forced to go back

As “observing participant” my former refugee status in Guinea and my re-entrance into the academic forum at UiB has moved me to become a “participant observer” of refugee experiences. My dual experience, first as a participant observer and second as observing participant offered me the opportunity to appreciate apparent significance that my insider perspective might offer to institutions and the academic world at large.

¹⁴Knudsen, Chr. John; *Capricious Worlds: Vietnamese Life Journeys* LIT Verlag: Münster. 2005 p52

During the initial stage of the research, I realized that most interlocutors did not only become very sensitive, nervous and tight lipped during discussions and interviews, when notes were taken down, but it also interrupted the flow of the conversation and keen observation. Hence note-taking during interviews or discussion was subsequently discontinued at the later stage of the research. Observation notes that had bearing on the research questions were jotted down as soon as the discussion was over and the details were still fresh. Emerson and Fretz (1995) underscored the issue of observation as the cardinal approach of qualitative research. It was revealed that ethnographers collect relevant materials by focusing on naturally occurring situational interactions through which local meanings are created and sustained. Peltó and Peltó (1978) also stressed how records of operations increase the accuracy of observations, and provide the framework of data that enables the researcher to gather information. This underpins the assumption that observation is an essential tool in qualitative research and that it exposes awareness into symbolic actions, which might be difficult to uncover through oral discussions.

Smaller and large group discussions were envisaged to be useful for the study prior to my departure to Guinea. However, considerable changes had to be made when I got to the field. It became evident that several informants were unwilling to participate in large group discussions. Their fear and skepticism about airing views on various issues was easy to understand as they could receive critiques from their colleagues. This kind of situation was anticipated so smaller groups, mostly family members, were used as alternative. Here, the informants felt much more comfortable to discuss issues in the circle where they had close relationship than when they were in larger groups of diverse families. This approach, ultimately, unveiled resourceful accounts of the effects of the exercise of diverse forms power over Liberian families in their subsistence practices. The diverse experiences of families were contrasted against one another to unravel inconstancies. Visitations I made to Momolu both at his home and at his working place at the construction site visitations aided in further verifying any information I obtained from other refugee informants on a particular issue.

External events also affected my research. The scores of opposition political party violent demonstrations in the months of April and May 2012, in Guinea was seen by some people as a spill over of the postelection conflict that claimed the lives of several people in neighbouring Ivory Coast. I was caught up by such fracas as we saw when Momolu guided

me through to safety during one of such instances. I was also put into a dilemma when demonstration broke up abruptly and I could not reach the informants I made appointment to meet that day. Ultimately, many appointments were cancelled and or re-scheduled as a result of these frequent interruptions. Carrying out research in this sort of atmosphere consumed my mental and physical energy speedily than I could imagine. Originally, I planned to spend equal time at the two research sites. However, these occurrences affected the original plan and I had to finally make adjustment in my research schedule to spend more time in Conakry than Kouankan. Nonetheless, these episodes provided comparative background used as the main focus of the study, pointing at the diverse forms of power and its effects.

The pre-field plan was to apply face to face interviews and discussions. Making use of this technique was very helpful in gathering part of the research information. Telephone is a modern technological tool that has great potentials of making a substantial contribution to my research and unlike my refugee days in Guinea most refugees now use mobile phones to communicate with one another. However, the high telephone charges coupled with the unreliable network services in most part of the country was a major obstacle for it to be utilized extensively. As much as it was not directly used to interview informants due to the aforementioned reasons, it aided in contact-making and in confirming arrangements for further face to face meetings and interactions. Since sensitivity is inherent in the cultural practices of the refugees and the local community in the field situation in Guinea, participant observation turned to be the appropriate and profoundly used qualitative research tool. I sat down in cafés, bars, restaurants and cook shops ¹⁵ to talk with refugees and also went with them to their various places of daily activities. I hung out with refugee petty traders, fish smokers, marketers and petty traders, peddlers of assorted wares while they went about their usual activities, followed by discussions about their businesses. I also went to farms with refugees, participated in coal making tasks, picked coffee beans with women and assisted in picking palm kernels as women cracked them. The pre-field plan to use participant observation method, for the most part, materialized and enabled me to have informal discussions on how Liberian refugees in Guinea address their situation and how they react and

¹⁵This is a Liberian slang for a sub-standard restaurant where food is prepared and sold mostly in unhygienic condition. This kind of spot is operated along the streets by Liberian refugees as well as local Guineans.

handle the different situations they face in their interactions with the UNHCR and CNISR as well as the local Guineans.

1.8. Organizing the Study

In order to meet the aims of the research, this thesis is systematized into six chapters. This, being the first, it represents the introductory chapter and attempts to familiarize readers with the background of the research area and outlines the objectives, the methods and the key concepts. The second chapter employs several empirical examples to examine the effects of bureaucratic powers by UNHCR and CNISR on Liberian refugees in Guinea. Cessation of Liberian refugee status and issues regarding two durable solutions are also considered in this chapter. The third chapter investigates everyday power relations between Guinean majority and Liberian refugees. Based on the huge effects both bureaucratic power and everyday power have on Liberian refugees in their daily activities, the fourth chapter reviews strategies which these refugees adopt to meet this situation. Chapter five delves into the dilemmas of women and children, characterizing them as the “vulnerable groups”. Chapter six which concludes the thesis draws recommendation from the researcher’s personal reflections regarding “insider” and “outsider” research positionalities.

1.9. Chapter Summary

This study attempts to analytically investigate the effects of bureaucratic power and everyday power on Liberian refugees in Guinea, who prior to 2007 lived on humanitarian aid. Two informants; Momolu and Deddeh were drawn in to relate stirring accounts of the dilemma and atrocities of their families and other refugee colleagues. The topic was contextualized drawing on the settlement pattern of the Liberian refugees when conflict flared up in their country in 1989 and refugees began arriving in Guinea in January 1990. When refugees first came to Guinea they were not initially settled in camps but resided among the locals hence patron-client relationships existed between the locals and their guests. From 1990 Liberian refugees lived on humanitarian aid until it was stopped in 2007 and they had to fend for themselves through diverse activities. Moreover in 2012 the refugee status of Liberians ceased. The work

of Weber, Bourdieu and Foucault are found relevant to examine the theoretical context of power both in general terms and what is termed bureaucratic power and everyday power. Qualitative methodological approaches associated with participant observation methods and other interviewing techniques were applied. The analysis of the subsequent collected data forms the realization and the basis of this thesis.

Chapter 2

BUREAUCRATIC POWERS-UNHCR & CNISR

In Chapter One I laid the premise to investigate the effects of the various forms of power on Liberian refugees in Guinea. This chapter, therefore, tries to delve into bureaucratic powers of UNHCR and CNISR respectively. I will argue that the exercise of bureaucratic power by these two institutions has caused mental anguish, insecurity for the vulnerable group, economic hardship and social abandonment for Liberian refugees in Guinea.

2.1. Bureaucratic Concept of Power

Weber and Foucault are scholars who conceptualized on bureaucratic power. These two men employed a historical overture to show how changes in the 17th and 18th centuries led to the management of people and resources. Weber emphasizes the relevance of bureaucracy to explain the concept of power and argued that authority strengthens itself in bureaucratic practices which the state utilizes to legitimize dominance. Bureaucracy exists in both the power of the state and in all aspects of societies, including the one in which Liberian refugees live in Guinea. Weber regards bureaucracy as a particular type of administrative structure developed through “rational-legal authority” (Weber, 1947:328). He defines bureaucracy as the exercise of control on structured basis of knowledge (ibid: 339). On the other hand Foucault’s concept of bureaucratic power may be seen from his work “Subject and Power” in which he specifies that there is inherent resistance within power itself. In his analysis of bureaucratic power he suggested that power functions through agents. He designates that “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed to govern, this sense, is to structure the possible field of others” (Foucault, 1982:221). Foucault also examined the association of power with social relations as well as the way the state power functions.

The ways in which Weber and Foucault looked at bureaucratic legitimacy motivated me to employ their concepts as a pertinent tool to examine the bureaucratic power of UNHCR and CNISR.

2.2. Historical Context

As this chapter attempts to delve into the bureaucratic powers, it is important to track the relevant historical context regarding UNHCR and CNISR from 1990 to 2012. Fundamentally, the United Nations and the Guinean government have each delegated bureaucratic powers to UNHCR and CNISR respectively. Hence it was found consistent to refer to UNHCR and CNISR as institutions that exercise bureaucratic powers

When Liberian refugees entered Guinea in 1990 the camps in which they resided were administered by UNHCR while screening and security protection of the refugees was the principal prerogative of BNCR. However, in 2007 BNCR was replaced by CNISR (*le Commission Nationale pour l'Intégration et le Suivi des Réfugiés*) to monitor the process of integration (Milner, 2009:153). Essentially, when some rebels launched cross border attack into Guinea in 2000 BNCR did not only find it difficult to provide security for the refugees but they also teamed up with various local militia groups and other locals to intimidate, harass and terrorize refugee communities. Donor support for the refugee program in Guinea diminished and humanitarian assistance was stopped in 2007. At the time UHNCR and CNISR started to pay less attention to the Liberian refugees who resided in Guinea and most mechanisms that UNHCR had in place previously such as frequent meetings with the refugees to update them on various issues, were relinquished. With the refugee status of Liberians ending in June 2012, UNHCR and CNISR however, continue to exercise their bureaucratic power in the fields of local integration and voluntary repatriation processes.

2.3. Bureaucratic Powers

2.3.1. UNHCR

As the UNHCR carries out the mandates by the United Nations, it identifies and awards contracts to partners that have suitable expertise in delivery of service to refugees. (Cuny, 1981:16) In Conakry, for example, medical services to refugees, is being delivered by DyNam. As a rule, a refugee who is sick obtains document from UNHCR, takes it to the clinic operated by DyNam to receive treatment. Without authorization document from

UNHCR, a sick refugee will not receive treatment, even when the person is at the point of death. All problems refugees encounter in the process of health care delivery are forwarded to UNHCR for supposedly appropriate action or redress. All registered terminally ill and other vulnerable refugees are supposed to receive aid from UNHCR under the social service scheme. Furthermore, UNHCR's function includes intervening in security, legal or civil problems refugees encounter in their everyday activities. The roles outlined above, therefore, manifest the bureaucratic power as well as power in everyday life of UNHCR over Liberian refugees. However, several refugee informants alleged that UNHCR has been dispassionate in carrying out the United Nations mandates. The UNHCR personnel are alleged by several interlocutors to be inept and arrogant in addressing issues, especially, regarding security, medical and social well-being of refugees. To be able to illustrate more on this point I want to return to the illuminating encounter with Momolu at the beginning of this work. We are reminded by Momolu's narrative that he took the complaint of the merciless beating and brutal treatment of his eldest daughter by the military man, with whom she continues to live, to UNHCR without redress. "I'm fed up with the whole case because UNHCR has paid deaf ear to the complaint I took to them", Momolu told me. It can also be recalled that Momolu was not the only refugee whose complaint UNHCR failed to address satisfactorily. The plight of Yarkpawolo, similar to other situations I saw or heard about in Conakry, is worth examining regarding inaction of UNHCR. Having heard about Yarkpawolo through Momolu, he was among the first refugees I interacted with when I first arrived at Kouankan camp to carry out the second half of my research. Yarkpawolo lives alone at the outskirts of the refugee camp where most of the houses are in a state of dilapidation. He occupies one of the houses UNHCR constructed for refugees who integrated locally. Though this structure has zinc roof, it lacked the basic furniture such as a bed, much less a bench to meet the need and the comfort of a man of Yarkpawolo's age. He sleeps on pieces of tarpaulin and some rugs. He narrated his ordeals during the Liberian civil war and the loss of his entire family, when rebels locked them up in a house and put it on fire. "I have nothing left there. My other relatives have also died of hunger because of this rebel war. When I remember the things that the rebels have done to me I don't want to return to Liberia," Yarkpawolo related to me. Besides, he told me that he is disillusioned about the type of treatment meted out to him by UNHCR. This is what he narrated to me in a low and melancholy voice:

UN just put me here without bed, bench, even a mat or a drinking bucket and cup. I'm old and cannot work. Had my neighbours not been very kind and generous to me I would have been in my grave by now. UN does not want to know how I eat and in fact those in charge of the integration program are always dodging me when they come around here. I asked one man to write a letter which I sent to the UNHCR big man in N'Zerekore but I have not heard anything and it has taken over two years since I sent the letter. I believe the driver I gave letter to, did not give it to the big man. If he did, why was nothing done about my situation? All the people at UNHCR are heartless. (Yarkpawolo, 90, Kopuankan camp)

I also came across other vulnerable refugees in a desperate situation like Yarkpawolo, who included the blind, crippled, amputees, the terminally ill, young mothers and malnourished children. From the different episodes I have outlined above it is up to each individual reader to determine as to whether or not UNHCR actually implements the terms of the mandates by the United Nations to positively impact on the desperate and needy Liberian refugees in Guinea.



PHOTO: Yarkpawolo and other vulnerable Liberian refugees, for whom UNHCR and CNISR have stopped providing humanitarian aid and social protection in Kouankan camp

As much as the diverse accounts in Conakry gave me insight into the exercise of bureaucratic power by UNHCR over Liberian refugees, it also gave me a starting point at Kouankan camp where several refugees live in shabby camp houses with worn out tarpaulins spread over thatched roofs. I did not first conceive why several of the camp dwellers dried wet clothes on

morning of my arrival at the camp. However, I got the understanding myself the following morning when I transferred to the camp. It rained for most part of my first night in the camp. I had to sit up in one corner of the tiny room for many hours while rain poured on my grass mattress bed. Just like those I saw the previous day, I had to dry my clothes and most of my research materials from my soaked carrier bag.

2.3.2. CNISR/BCNR

As much as my research study focused more on documented Liberian refugees, I want to give some space to the undocumented or “underground” Liberian asylum seekers, who also form the group I defined earlier as Liberian refugees. I have termed those who have applied for asylum, when they voluntarily relocated in Conakry, and still remained without documentation of refugee status as “underground refugees”¹⁶. CNISR is obligated to evaluate and recommend asylum seekers to UNHCR for documentation¹⁷. An asylum-seeker is a person who asserts that he/she is a refugee. However, that claim has to be seriously evaluated. Several of these people have made their asylum claims or applications to CNISR when they found their way to Conakry on their own. Although CNISR makes decisions on the asylum claims for protection, the cases of a great number of Liberian asylum-seekers remained unhandled. The staff of CNISR responsible for the process are said to have demanded bribes or sexual favours before the claims of asylum seekers can be evaluated. As I previously indicated, several of the Liberian refugees, few of whom I knew, lost their refugee documents. It can be recalled that many refugees fled from camps throughout the country when rebels launched cross border attacks in the year 2000. They did not flee only due to the intimidation by local militia but also due to the direct threat of the rebels. Those who could not meet those demands made by staff of CNISR remained in a state of limbo and their fate can be anybody’s guess. No wonder that some interlocutors claimed that their applications dated as far back as

¹⁶ I term these refugees as “underground refugees” because the problem of obtaining documents that legitimate their status compelled them to carry out all their activities secretly rather than openly. They cannot easily rent houses nor carry out any informal sector activities without going through a documented counterpart refugee. The propensity of these refugees to hide or go underground to carry out all their activities has earned them the term “underground refugees”

¹⁷ The information on the role of CNISR was received during a meeting with a staff of this institution when I informed them of the purpose of my fieldwork in Guinea.

2001. However, their cases were not handled until the Liberian refugee cessation clause came into effect on June 30, 2012.

Garmai lived in Zarabaga refugee camp in Macenta Prefecture up to 2000 when rebels attacked the town and its surrounding villages at dawn. She lost everything when the rebels torched several houses ablaze in the camp. She moved to Conakry to join her mother. She was a registered refugee when she lived in Macenta but since she did not bring the old documents the UNHCR office in Conakry paid deaf ears to her explanation. This is what she told me:

I applied to CNISR since 2002 and was called for interviews many times. Whenever I went to the office I was told to go and come back. When I there the last time, the Bigman¹⁸ wanted to force me and make love to me. I hit him on the head with a chair and ran out of the office. Being that he was humiliated, he became annoyed and wrote a false comment on my application that I'm not a Liberian but a Guinean. I took this case to UNHCR but nothing has been done about it. (Garmai, 35, Conakry)

Similarly, Varney also lived in Gueckedou until the town was raided by rebels in the year 2000. Intimidation by the Guinean security and the local militia groups, that branded Liberian refugees as rebel collaborators compelled him to move to Conakry in 2001. He discarded his refugee documents because if he identified himself as refugee he would be exposed to more risk at the many security checkpoints on the road from Gueckedou to Conakry than if travelling without identity document. He only paid a bribe at the checkpoint in lieu of identity document and evaded the risk. He applied for asylum protection when he arrived in the city. This is what Varney told me:

I have not got my refugee card since 2003 because I didn't give the 150,000.00 FG the CNISR boss has asked me to pay as bribe before he could process my case. Now that the cessation clause is coming to take effect I don't know what to do. This man doesn't want to lay his eyes on me. Whenever I went there the first thing he would ask me was: "Avez-vous apporté l'argent? Si non, vous ne serez jamais vos papiers, je le jure" Translated in English as Have you brought the money? If not you will never get your documents, I swear (Varney, 42, Conakry)

From the foregoing cases it is evident that undocumented or "underground" Liberian refugees face much tougher challenges with local Guineans as much as with Guinean security than those who are documented and have refugee documents. Given that these undocumented refugees get no protection from UNHCR or CNISR, many Guineans exploit them with threats

¹⁸ Bigman is a Liberian slang for a person in a leadership position

and constant intimidations. The situation this vulnerable group of Liberian refugees is placed into has compelled them to accept meager payments for their services. As that UNHCR and CNISR have refused to document underground refugees to enable them obtain legitimate status and necessary documents, this forces them to accept to do anything to make a living. Hence they are exposed to threats and menace, as well as being the victims of severe exploitation.

As I have indicated, the inception of several new conflicts over these recent years, in other areas and regions has, made donors disinterested to continue to fund programs for old or protracted refugees. This has provided the basis of the general framework of Liberian refugee existence in Guinea undergoing different transitions from 1989. It is important to reiterate that Liberian refugees have been present in Guinea and other countries in the West African sub-region since the rebel war began in their country in 1989. It is without question that these refugees have been in exile for a substantial length of time now and have claimed protracted refugee category. The cessation of the status as refugees is specified by a provision of the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees. My research coincided with this cessation of Liberian refugee status, effective from June 30, 2012. Cessation status is what I term the last phase of the existence of Liberian refugees in Guinea. The two earlier phases included, first the refugee centered livelihoods on direct humanitarian assistance and then, from 2007, refugee self-sustenance based activities. Reviewing the cessation of Liberian refugee status is the main objective of this section. This is also another arena in which UNHCR and CNISR exemplified the use of bureaucratic power.

2.4. Cessation of Refugee Status

UNHCR exercised institutional power over Liberian refugees as far as the durable solutions are concerned. This can be seen in one way as effective, or as problematic in another way. Workshops were organized to give information to refugees on the possibilities and options that commensurate with the cessation of refugee status. Ultimately, workshops and different activities organized and implemented to sensitize the refugees can be seen as important and productive. It is important to point out that prior to my research in Guinea I had no idea about

the term “durable solution¹⁹” but I got more insight into its meaning by attending several of those workshops. The workshops made me both more of a participant observer and also an observing participant. Additionally, they also provided me with a forum to meet and personally explain the purpose of the research to many Liberian refugees, whom I had only talked to previously on the phone.

In the month of April 2012, registered refugees in UNHCR database also presented themselves during the registration exercise and selected one of the two durable solutions, namely, local integration or voluntary repatriation. Interacting with refugees as they went through the documentation of their preferred solution in the month of April, 2012, I could observe the exercise of power by both the UNHCR and CNISR. I was struck to hear from several refugees that they had been left in the dark for the past months with little or no update from UNHCR regarding the solution they each had selected. The lack of information about the plans for implementing the durable solutions by UNHCR had placed the refugees in a series of dilemmas and produced restlessness. They had become jittery over the months and had taken to rumour mongering as consolation device in the absence of updates from UNHCR. Several of the refugees who had chosen to repatriate had become more apprehensive and agitated because they had been made to abandon their farms. The information they were given earlier was that repatriation would start as soon as the registration process had ended. On the contrary, the lack of information on when exactly the repatriation convoy was going to begin to return people to Liberia meant that UNHCR had manipulated them. Refugees complained that they had been made to abandon their farms and other activities on which they had spent money and other resources, and they could not go back to farming because the season for rice cultivation, on which several of them depended was far gone. The following is what Donzo told me about what he and several of his colleagues were going through:

UNHCR has really made a fool of us. They made us to stop work on the farms most of us have cleared to plant rice. We thought we'll be leaving soon but here we are without knowing our fate. They did the same thing when we were being relocated to Kouakan from Kountaya camp. I had to leave my rice farm without harvesting and several of my colleagues too. We were told that

¹⁹ Stein, Barry N, Durable Solutions for Developing Country Refugees. *International Migration Review*, Vol. 20, No.2 1986, p.264

UNHCR would not be responsible should we have any problem if we remained behind to harvest our farms. We are just treated like children and we cannot make our own decisions. We reminded them about the experience we had during our relocation here in the information meetings and we were promised of speedy implementation of the solutions this time, but now we can't even see them in the camp. Since we registered for repatriation in April we can't hear anything from them. We just hear rumours that they are coming such and such day. All our activities have been put on hold and we hardly have food for our families. People are no more willing to share whatever they have with each other after we made the decision to return to Liberia. It is very frustrating and I don't know for how long my family will continue with this dilemma. (Donzo, 55, Kouankan)

The lack of effective communication by UNHCR and CNISR on plans and schedules regarding implementation of the durable solutions associated with the cessation of the refugee status has potentially caused more problems for the refugees with their Guinean hosts. UNHCR and CNISR did not only fail to explain the durable solutions to the ethnic Guineans sufficiently but they also failed to adequately educate the ethnic majority Guineans on the cessation of Liberian refugee status. Given that the majority population understood cessation of refugee status to mean all refugees were to return to their home country, this then posed huge problems for the minority refugees that opted to integrate locally. I ran into a lady, on a sunny afternoon, who earlier had told me that she had opted to integrate locally. With frustration, this was what she said to me:

My brother, no head no tail with the kind of life I am facing in Guinea these days about my local integration program. The landlord of my restaurant has given me notice to move because according him I have been paid plenty of money by UNHCR to return to Liberia. I have informed UHNCR about the situation but they had no time for me each time I went to the office. I don't even know the content of the local integration package and we have begun facing problems. What will happen to my family when we are on our own? I'm not sure whether UNHCR and the Guinean authorities have adequately given information to the citizens about the two different solutions and that not all refugees would be returning to Liberia. I'm nervous about this local integration thing and I wish it was possible for me to change this option to repatriation. The most frustrating thing about this is that we are not all together again since we registered our decisions. Everybody is on his/her own now. (Korto, 45, Conakry)

Although resettlement to a third country is not a prioritized solution, some refugees have not come to terms with the fact that UNHCR cannot determine resettlement by itself. It is the refugee recipient countries that make their own assessment, based on the level of threat on

refugees in both the countries of origin and of asylum. The level of threat in both Liberia and Guinea does not call for such action at the moment. Hence most countries have put resettlement programs on hold for the time being. Nevertheless, some refugees are still holding on to their dream world of resettlement to a third country so much so that no argument can convince them otherwise. The following represents the position of someone to whom I talked during my research:

I don't want to return to Liberia and I don't want to stay here. I have been in exile since the beginning of the Liberian war but UNHCR has refused to resettle me. I don't have anything or any place in Liberia any more. My husband was killed and our house has been leveled to the ground. When I go with my children where are we going to live? The Guineans do not regard us as human beings so will they change their behavior towards us when we integrate? I hope UNHCR can send for the immigration authorities from countries such as USA, Canada, Australia and Norway to interview us for resettlement. I have nothing to do with those who have "sold their birthrights"²⁰ for peanuts for selecting other options. I know that this time "each one is for himself/herself and God for us all". (Cecelia, 45, Kouankan)

Though several refugee families have opted for voluntary repatriation, many are worried about how their children, who were born in exile and have less knowledge of Liberia, will cope when they go to that country. Children born in Guinea going to a new society where they have never been will need some time in order to learn the norms and adjust. This seemed to be a very worrisome issue for many parents. A parent showed the following concerns about her children:

My children were born here and know nothing about Liberia. They have no knowledge at all about that country and they have been sad since I made the decision for us to return to Liberia. They have many friends here and it will take time for them to make new ones there. If there is a way that I can change my option from voluntary repatriation to local integration I will do so just for the sake of these children. There is nothing I can do now. We refugees are not together like before. Each monkey carries its own tail²¹ (Hawah, 38, Kouankan)

Commensurate with the Liberian refugee status cessation mandate, local integration and voluntary repatriation are the two main solutions from which these refugees can select. Local

²⁰ Selling one's birthright is a common saying among Liberian culture. This has biblical relationship in Genesis 25:29-34 when Esau who was older than Jacob traded his birthright for a meal with his younger brother and this turned to affect him in the long run.

²¹ This is a local proverb in Liberia which means that all individuals take their own responsibility

integration is regarded as establishing roots in the host or asylum country if returning to one's home country is not feasible. Voluntary repatriation, on the other hand implies a return to Liberia. As Liberian refugees select one of the above durable solutions, this does not imply that the two options are without challenges, and these challenges will later be delved into. A third solution is resettlement in a third country. Resettlement to a third country, however, is regarded as a solution only for refugees who feel threatened in the host country or in country of origin. In this case, as refugees are exposed to less threat in both Guinea and Liberia at this moment, resettlement to a third country is not a prioritized option. However, refugees who have enough reason to substantiate why they would not voluntarily repatriate to Liberia or integrate locally have the option to apply for "exemption from cessation of refugee status"²² (Milner, D. 2004). Applications are to be evaluated on case by case basis and those whose applications are rejected will forfeit benefits for voluntary repatriation and local integration.

There are different help packages refugees can receive for either local integration or voluntary repatriation program in order to be self-sustaining. In the first place, voluntarily repatriation refugees receive three hundred dollars per adult and an additional seventy five as local transportation fare from a transit point in Liberia. Moreover, minor refugees (those below 18 years) are entitled to two hundred dollars per head plus local transportation fare just like their adult counterparts. Secondly, registered refugee families in UNHCR database who presented themselves during the registration exercise in April, 2012 and who also selected the local integration option, are eligible to apply for a loan of three million to four and half million FNG (3,000,000.00 – 4,500,000.00 FNG) to undertake any income generating activity. This loan is not granted to each individual within a family but to the family as a unit. This means that if there are five adults in a particular family they cannot apply for income generating loan individually but all of them apply as a family. The granted loan is payable within 24 months and attracts an interest rate of 2% per month. UNHCR together with Yeti Mali and CNISR collaborate in operating the micro finance project for these refugees. It is important to point out that Yeti Mali is a local micro finance institution that has operated in Guinea since 1998. Like many other local integration refugees, Foray vented out his dissatisfaction on the arrangements regarding this micro finance project:

²² Milner, David *International Journal of Refugee Law*. Vol. 16 No.1, 2004, p.91

How on earth can UNHCR and its corrupt Guineans continue to be treating us in this manner? What kind of business can 300,000.00 or 4,500,000.00 FNG start in Guinea in competition with the rich Fulah and Mandingo businessmen? I know what I went through during the rebel war. Since I decided to make my life I thought whatever will be given to me would be a starting capital the same way those who are repatriating have received a package to start life in Liberia. UHNCR knows that integration package has money and that many Guineans have registered so that that they can get that integration money, and this makes them careful. UNHCR and CNISR are nothing but corrupt organizations that do not care for refugees. Why is integration refugees treated differently from those repatriating? I can't understand why we are treated like this. UNHCR want us to continue with the suffering in this country that's why they have connived with the Guineans so that we can pay back what they give to us to start life? Why is the money given to those repatriating not a loan but ours is? They are doing this to steal from integrating refugees. We are no more united and this is causing us the major problem. (Foray, 52, Conakry)

Understandably, many refugees were granted micro finance funds previously and few benefited from the funds. Thus disbursing the micro finance funds to integration refugees as a loan instead of aid can be seen as a strategy to compel them to be serious with their various activities. However, when I met some UHNCR staff on the issue they were tight-lipped.

With the difficult situations refugees face in Guinea especially after the slashing of humanitarian aid, some refugees felt that voluntary repatriation was a good opportunity to transform the life of one's family. The following represents what a refugee told me:

Since the death of my husband at Boreah in 2003 I have been struggling with my two sons and a daughter up to this time. They are the only persons I have in this world. There is no more school for them here and I can't continue for them to just be going around without doing anything. I didn't go to school and I don't want my children to be like me. Since UNHCR is talking about repatriation I will use the package we will receive to start my cooked bowl business as I'm doing here. I think I can help my children go to school. My brother sent message that he can give us a place to stay in Buchannan and I will not pay house rent. I don't want to miss this chance. (Dechontee, 38, Kouankan camp)

As much as different perspectives prevail among Liberian refugees on the cessation of refugee status, the Guinean majority have their own views regarding this mandate. The view among the Guineans was that if many Liberian refugees returned to Liberia the demand for most consumer goods and accommodations will drop drastically. Several businessmen and real estate owners, who made good financial gain from refugee presence in the country, have become very disturbed and disillusioned over the cessation of refugee status and repatriation of refugees. A wholesale rice vendor at Kouankan Town was worried because most of the

refugees will sooner or later be returning to Liberia. According to him refugees are to continue to live in Guinea and this would enable him to continue to be in good business. This was the reason of his weariness and melancholy disposition. This was what he said to me:

Je vais certainement faire faillite quand les réfugiés sont revenir. Je ne sais pas ce que je ferai. De nombreux réfugiés sont aussi louer mes maisons. Quel sera venu de ces appartements où les réfugiés revenir. Vous savez Guinéens ne paie pas son loyer quand ils sont dans votre maison. Ils préférer dépenser de l'argent sur leurs copines dehors de payer leur loyer. Il s'agit d'un revers important pour moi. Pourquoi le HCR fait cela pour nous? Translated in English as : I will definitely be out of business when the refugees go back. I don't know what to do. Many refugees are also renting my houses in Conakry. What will become of these apartments when refugees go back? You know Guineans do not pay rent when they are in your house. They prefer spending money on their girlfriends outside than paying their house rent. This is a big setback for me. Why is UN doing this to us? (Mamadée, 57, Kouankan town)

While businessmen among who was Mamadée were concerned over the gloom prospects of their businesses others are jubilant over the return of refugees to their country. Such notions were shared by a local thus:

Nous sommes heureux que les réfugiés aillent bientôt retourner dans leur pays. Depuis qu'ils sont venus ici nos propres enfants ne peuvent pas trouver un emploi et nos filles ne peuvent pas trouver un mari. Cela sera terminé quand ils vont revenir This translates to English as: We are happy the refugees will soon go back to their country. Since they came here our own children can't get jobs and our daughters can't find husbands. This will finish when they go back" (Madame Bangura 56, Conakry)

The reaction of staff at UNHCR and CNISR regarding the cessation clause are similar. As much as decisions on this clause were made in Geneva and passed on to the institutions in Guinea to oversee its implementation, this means scaling down of staff.

Certainly, the cessation of Liberian refugee status will, ultimately, put many local staff out of jobs sooner than later. This was affirmed by Massanyan, a UNHCR driver, who said that; "This cessation clause will make us to be without jobs. In fact we have already been told that by 2013 the staff will be reduced. Why does Geneva want the refugees to go back to Liberia when they are happy here?" Meanwhile, the views of Liberian refugees on the cessation of their status are diverse. One group of those I talked to suggested that the decision or the cessation clause is an opportunity for them to return home to end the hard realities of exiled life. This group imagined that their situation could improve in their home country more than

they would expect as refugees elsewhere. However, most people appeared confused. Like several of his colleagues, Karmo posed the following question to me: “So they are telling us about the cessation clause on June 30. What exactly are our benefits after all these years in exile?” To prevent finding myself in an uncomfortable situation, I diplomatically and politely advised him to refer his question to the institution responsible for refugee issues.

UNHCR utilized sensitization as a tool for disseminating information and about the durable solution benefits for exercising bureaucratic power. However, this was causing tension, hatred and apprehension among the Liberian refugee population. This is serious as the social network, social solidarity and commitment these refugees earlier had towards each other is beginning to wane.

2.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter took up the effects of bureaucratic power/authority which is exercised by two institutions; UNHCR and CNISR over minority Liberian refugees in Guinea. The effects of bureaucratic power over Liberian refugees in their everyday activities in Guinea formed the fundamental scope of examination. Ultimately, the argument was that the exercises of bureaucratic power had various effects on Liberian refugee women, young girls, children and the vulnerable group in general. Selected literatures were exploited to discuss the theoretical framework premised on power relation theories, knitting them together with the literature review.

Liberian refugees encountered the exercise of power from UNHCR, CNISR and ethnic Guineans in their diverse practices as they tried to fend for their families. The refugees encountered various forms of abuses from the exercise of bureaucratic power by UNHCR and CNISR. However, they feared that open resistance to the above institutions could pose problems for them individually or collectively. Hence they developed social network and group solidarity as collective power to cope with the diverse situations they face. Basically, the different coping strategies will be discussed in due course. Earlier reviewed empirical materials show that UNHCR and CNIR are responsible for the demise of Liberian refugees. The personnel of UNHCR and CNISR were not only accused of demanding bribes and sexual favours but their laissez-faire attitude also put untold hardships and psychological stress on

the refugees most especially the terminally ill, women, children, the elderly and disabled and the vulnerable group in general. The views of the refugees on the two preferred durable solutions following the cessation of Liberian refugee status were also varied. The credibility of UNHCR and CNISR has been further dragged into disrepute as they have collaborated with Yeti Mali, a local organization, to operate micro finance project for local integration refugees. These refugees, undoubtedly, interpreted this partnership as a ploy and the ultimate strategy to defraud them to amass wealth for themselves. Notably, as Liberian refugees selected one of the two durable solutions, after the cessation of their refugee status, the social network, solidarity and coping strategies, which Liberian refugees had earlier created among them in Guinea, began to dwindle.

Chapter 3

EVERYDAY POWER- GUINEAN MAJORITY & LIBERIAN REFUGEE MINORITY

I discussed the bureaucratic powers of UNHCR and CNISR in chapter two. I have shown how these two institutions in exercising their power have brought mental anguish, insecurity, untold economic hardships as well as social abandonment on the Liberian refugees in Guinea. In this chapter, I will examine the importance of the exercise of power in everyday life by the ethnic Guineans vis-à-vis Liberian refugees. I will argue that the everyday power that local Guineans exercise over Liberian refugees depicts inequality.

3.1. Ethnicity and Ethnic Difference

Fredrik Barth (1969) considers ethnicity as a set of boundaries between neighboring groups and individuals who are primarily desirous of maintaining boundaries in order to explain their identity in a relative and comparative manner²³. Ronald Cohen (1978) also argues that ethnicity is not so concrete but rather a fluid situation through which members exhibit “in-groups” from “out-groups,” and which can be in a state of constant change due to various situational applications. He also discusses inter-ethnic relations, a medium through which ethnicity reveals itself.²⁴ Cohen suggests that ethnicity assumes different variables at a given situation. Both Barth and Cohen imply that ethnic boundaries are multiple and include overlapping sets of ascriptive loyalties that make for multiple identities²⁵. While Barth created a basis for modern ethnic theory and Cohen expounded and elaborated further on it, their theories are complimentary. Both also show how people employ us/them dichotomy to distinguish themselves from others. They interpose the idea of community as an

²³ Barth, Fredrik, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press 1969, p159

²⁴ Cohen, Anthony, *Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology*. Annual Review of Anthropology 7, 1985, p105

²⁵ De la Gorgendiere, Louise et al *Ethnicity in Africa: Roots, meanings and implications*. Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1996 cf. Ronald Cohen, 1978, p38

organizational principle which allows people to more closely examine the distinctive characteristics of self-other identification. The emphasis on boundary is sensitive to the circumstances in which people become aware of the implications of belonging to a community, and describes how they symbolize and utilize these boundaries to give substance to their values and identities.²⁶ Finally, Gerhard Maré (1993) gives two general elements of ethnicity which are “social identity formation”, resting on culturally specific practices, made up of symbols and beliefs. By belief it implies the notion of a common origin and history and a “sense of belonging to a group”. This confirms peoples’ “social identities” in daily encounters and interactions with those inside or outside the group²⁷. Ethnicity is considered to be a particular feature of social organization; a nested hierarchy of inclusion and exclusion that recognizes a multiplicity of identities. It is a collective sense of self-consciousness which is mobilized when people feel they are faced with more than a minimum risk from the outside from the “other”. This is also a social identity rooted in a common past which defines the nature of the individual-individual or group-group interaction.

Several communities in Africa practiced the natural process of ethnicization during the pre-colonial era. At that time, people intermingled and easily interchanged identities as they moved to other communities where they encounter new cultures. However, the artificial drawing of the borders of African countries also known as “the scramble for Africa” at the Berlin Conference in 1885 by European²⁸ colonial powers for their economic ambition changed that dynamics of ethnicization. Although some Liberian refugees and Guineans have “a historical tie”²⁹ and a common heritage, as long as they are located on geographical spaces created by the colonial powers they regard themselves as people who belong to different ethnic groups. This explains why Guinea majority feel that the minority refugees are not equal to them and hence determining the basis of their exercise of power over them.

In the context of inequality, the position of the refugee which is based on the refugee status is often seen as a social stigma. Reidar Grøhaug’s (1979) work: *Migrasjon, utvikling og*

²⁶ Cohen, Anthony, 1985 *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London & New York: Routledge, 1985 p105

²⁷ Maré, Gerhard (1993) *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*, London & New Jersey: Zed Book Limited p23

²⁷ Cohen, Ronald, *Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology. Annual Review of Anthropology 7: 379-403, 1978, p398*

²⁸ Koponen, Juhani, *The Partition of Africa: A Scramble for a Mirage?, Nordic Journal of African Studies 2, (1) , 1993, p117-118*

²⁹ Cohen, Ronald, *Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology. Annual Review of Anthropology 7: 379-403, 1978, p398*

minoriteter: Vandringer fra Asia og Middelhavsområdet til Nord-Europa og Norge i 1950-70 årene. (Migration, development and minorities immigration from Asia and the Mediterranean to northern Europe and Norway in 1950-1970s) is found relevant to elaborate on the subject of ethnicity and inequality between the local Guineans and the Liberian refugees. Grønhaug captures the relations between Norwegians and immigrant workers in the country. He advanced that class and gender are used as the basis for social inequality in Norway. He also advanced that ethnic difference is another form of social inequality. Ethnic difference springs up when people perceive each other as members of different cultural categories and classification³⁰. Grønhaug's propositions validate the situation of Liberian refugees in Guinea. Although the 1951 UN Convention stipulates that contracting states shall accord the most favourable treatment to refugees lawfully staying in their territory and afford them the right to engage in wage earning employment³¹, refugees in that country face social inequality just like immigrant workers in Norway. Despite the provisions of this Convention, ethnic difference is employed by the majority population to deprive the minority refugees from wage-earning employment and to also antagonize those who operate their own businesses. Grønhaug has posited that immigrant workers cannot attain equality status with Norwegians due to the majority-minority situation that exists in the country. He suggests that social equality can only occur in a society in which ethnic difference does not obstruct equality and ethnic identity does not control the distribution of opportunities³². If it does, we may talk of ethnicity being a social stigma. This Grønhaug points out that class and ethnic difference within the Norwegian society between 1950s and 1970 had caused immigrant workers especially from India, irrespective of their profession and educational qualifications, to take jobs meant for unskilled workers. It was therefore uncommon to find a master degree holder to take up skilled positions in which this education was relevant. (Grønhaug, 1979:150)

Studies during my research first and foremost, shows that refugees in both the urban or rural or camp settings relate and interact with the ethnic Guineans in their different daily activities

³⁰ Grønhaug, Reidar, Migrasjon, utvikling og minoriteter vandringer fra Asia og Middelhavsområdet til Nord-Europa og Norge i 1950-70 årene, 1979, Chapter 11 Nordmenn og innvandrere, p 125

³¹ UN 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol, Chapter, Article 17.
www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION

³² Grønhaug, R. Migrasjon, utvikling og minoriteter: *Vandringer fra Asia og Middelhavsområdet til Nord-Europa og Norge i 1950-70 årene.* Bergen, Oslo og Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1979 p144)

which range from social, commercial to cultural. Refugees, irrespective of where they reside buy and sell in a common market ground with the locals while children of refugees and locals play together and sometimes attend the same schools. Religion is one of the things that bind both the refugees and the locals. Churches and mosques are the common arenas where refugees and locals interact. Inter-marriages also exist amongst refugees and the ethnic Guineans but not as many as casual relationships. In spite of all this, Liberian refugees compete with the host population for scarce resources such as water wells, toilet facilities, farm lands, fishing and hunting grounds they are seen as inherently destabilizing and as a threat. Hence refugees are constantly deprived access to the utilization of certain vital resources and facilities in the houses they live, particularly in Conakry.

3.2. Guinean Majority

The exercise of power is not only very characteristic of bureaucratic institutions but inherent in the entire Guinean society and with owners of homes in which refugees live. Interlocutors gave account of how they are sanctioned on the use of toilets as well as restricted from drawing water from wells in most homes, and they have to buy water from outside the premises in the neighbourhoods for use. Refugees, whose religious beliefs differ from property owners, were denied renting and occupying empty apartments while some were refused jobs on account of their different religious belief or evicted for practicing their religion. The following represents such situations. Firstly, I encountered Susan during one of the weekly meetings. She and her two children have been temporarily sheltered by another family until she could find a place of her own. She said “I have been put out of the apartment I rented because I’m a Christian. I tried finding a new place but two different landlords refused to give their places because I’m not a Muslim and “kalfilee”³³ to occupy their premises. Susan’s experience was supported in the following narrative of Alfred: “We tried to carry out different activities in line with our religious practice in the place we rented but our windows and doors were stoned and we were prematurely thrown out without the refund of the rent advance we paid”

³³This is supposed Arabic word that denote to unclean and people whose religion differ are seen to be unclean Muslim community in Guinea

The above cases are just some of the many ways in which locals exercise power in their everyday interaction over refugees in Conakry and Kouankan respectively. The readers may remember the beginning of this work where we saw how the local Guineans treated Deddeh's family and other refugees at Kouankan camp in their everyday life. The conversation I had with Deddeh gave me a broad idea of issues of refugees in the camp. Before I attended the first refugee meeting at the camp in order to identify my prospective informants, I had an idea of the scopes the questions would be covering to be able to substantiate the information Deddeh earlier gave me. A typical question I put to my informants was as follows: *After the axing of humanitarian assistance by UNHCR in 2007 what challenges do you or your family face in your daily livelihood activities?* This question generated a variety of responses and many interlocutors opened up to share information on things they had kept away from their bosom friends and even husbands and wives for years. In response to this question Jattu explained how she took contracts to scratch, weed grass, harvest rice, pick coffee or palm nuts for locals or haul palm kernel, processed it to oil which she sold to buy food for hers three young children. She narrated how her husband was arrested, falsely accused of collaborating with rebels that attacked Gueckedou in 2000. He was tortured for many months and he looked more dead than alive when he was released and died a few months later at Boreah camp in 2001. Jattu also said:

I went to work for a citizen one day but he threatened me that if he does not make love to me he would kill me and dump my body in the thick forest where nobody would be able to find me. I was afraid and defenseless and had to yield to his threat. After he had sex with me to his satisfaction he further warned me that if he ever heard of what had transpired he would search for me and slash my throat or send a snake to bite me in the bush. I was ashamed to tell others about what had happened to me in the bush. I was afraid the very person I trusted with my secrets would not only scandalize my name but I didn't want the society to look on me differently. In order to prevent people from taking my name around I have been keeping all what happened to me to myself. I 'm telling you this secret because I know you will not tell anybody else based on the promise and encouragement you gave me before we began this meeting. (Jattu, 36, Kouankan)

Jattu's ordeals confirmed Deddeh's earlier information on how the locals endemically raped and threatened their women victims. One can understand Jattu's situation, which stems from the social stigma attached to rape in most African societies. The gruesome way in which societies look at rape makes it shameful for victims to reveal their ordeal to others; not even close friends or husbands. Deddeh earlier also told me that forced marriage of young girls to

older men is another way the Guinean locals exercised their power over refugees. In the camp, where poverty is more prevalent, locals often lure poor refugee parents to trade their under aged daughters into marriage for financial favours. According to Deddeh the uncle of her children cajoled her last daughter who was only eleven years old to marry to a 62 year old local whom he owed some money. She chronicled how her daughter, Mamuna, became the slave of her elder mates. She did not only become the slave for the other three elder women who preceded her in the marriage but whenever she was tired to work she was insulted, starved, beaten, or even tortured. Furthermore, upon the death of the husband, Mamuna was forced to marry his younger brother. She was kicked out of the house with the two children when she refused to enter into that relationship. The two children Deddeh had with her when I first met her were the ones Mamuna had with her deceased husband. Deddehh also informed me that Mamuna and her elder sister worked for people on their farms. “The men of Guinea are insensitive because several of them will not give my daughters contract unless they have sexual intercourse with them or they refused to pay for the work these girls do for them”, Deddeh lamented. Forced marriage was not the only issue which affects women and adolescent girls in Guinea but also financial exploitation or what I term “sexual enslavement” is another way in which Guinean locals exercise power over female refugees in Guinea. Kou explained how she had a thirteen-year relation with a local, with whom she had three children. She contributed both financially and materially towards the constructing of the house in which they lived. The man’s family took a new bride for him and she was driven out of the house with her children on the grounds that she was of a different religion. This is her account:

I was selling fish in the market and saved more than 1,500,000.00 FG but he seized it and claimed it was his. If I don’t go out to look for contract we can’t eat. My children have stopped going to school and go out to carry loads for people to earn money to help me with their food and house rent. (Kou, 38, Conakry)

Borborbele also narrated how his two former colleagues quarreled with the locals that refused to pay them to confirm the bewitchment or casting of evil spell on refugees that demanded payment for the work they did for local Guineans. Borborbele said, his friends were told by the men for whom they had worked that: “You will never come to ask for money again. Three days after the threatening of my friends, one of them committed suicide and the other got drowned in a small creak a week after his friend hanged himself”. Furthermore, he said:

I made arrangement with a local to fell trees to burn coal. After the trees were cut, the logs arranged and finishing torches of work being done, a different person appeared to claim ownership of the place and demanded that we entered into a fresh condition else the work must stop. I went to the man I made the first arrangement with but he chased me out of his house and warned me never to foot into his premises if I wanted my life. Realizing the amount and resources that had gone into the work, I took the risk again to enter into a new contract with the second man. I didn't get anything from the hard work. I was left with nothing after all my expenses. All of us who are in the coal business face this type of situation but we have no other choice. (Borborbele 36, Kouankan camp)

Nimene underwent a similar predicament to Borbobebe. The only difference was that Nimene entered into arrangements with only one individual. However, after he had burned the coal and the landlord saw that he produced many bags of coal, he demanded that they re-negotiate the terms of their arrangement, or else he would not be allowed to move the bags of coal from the bush to town. When he objected to that demand, the man informed the forest guards who confiscated half the number of bags of coal he produced from him and turned round to impose a fine on him. "This kind of situation does not only occur to refugees who are in the coal making business but also with those who arrange for land to cultivate crops. The local people have no regard for refugees at all". The rights of refugees are not respected by locals," Nimene told me.

I want to draw on my encounter with Momolu, the interlocutor I introduced in Chapter One of this work to further argue that ethnic inequality or difference has an effect on the daily life of Liberian refugees in Guinea. Similarly to the predicament of Momolu, Fatumata was evicted several times from the premises where she had her restaurants. This is what she said the women she was in competition with in the restaurant business had told her:

Le temps que vous n'étiez pas venu réfugiés en Guinée, nous étions heureux et nos entreprises s'est bien passé, mais vous avez détruit nos entreprises et de prendre nos clients. Jamais! Il ne va pas continuer ! Translated to English as: The time you refugees had not come to Guinea, we were happy and our businesses went well, but you have destroyed our enterprises and take our customers. Never! This cannot continue !

The perception of ethnic Guineans that Liberian refugees are ethnically different from them makes it difficult for these refugees to be gainfully employed even when they are qualified or engage in competitive businesses with the locals. Many Guineans were unhappy that Liberian refugees competed with them for limited resources, jobs and even in marriages. Hence

refugees were blamed for the menace regarding the country's social problems, which are alleged to be under threat from the outside. This was something they can hardly avoid as long as the refugees lived in Guinea. Refugees had become used to this for many years and are no longer weary of the stereotype. The men are stereotyped as rebels, thieves, destroyers, bandits, killers and the women as prostitutes, unclean and murderers. Had ethnic inequality not been employed by Guineans, I would have met Momolu working in his area of profession as a mechanical engineer rather than at construction site where he worked as a casual labourer. Furthermore, Fatumata could have been operating her restaurant instead of going around to laundry or wash the dirty clothes for people in order to earn money to buy food to feed her family. Taking the presentations of Grønhaug 1979, Barth, 1969 and 1971 as points of departure, the cases of Momolu and Fatumata provide empirical examples of situations from which it can be concluded that Guineans employ ethnic difference that produce social inequality between them and Liberian refugees. Refugees continued to be mistrusted for being part of the violence in Guinea between September 2000 and April 2001. As much as striving for power is a universal and elementary human motive³⁴ coercive authority³⁵ is utilized by ethnic Guineans to strengthen social inequality. Furthermore, President Conte's pronouncement explains why the Guinean majority perpetrate atrocities against Liberian refugees in their exercise of everyday power with impunity

3.3. How the Refugee Minority Deal With Their Situations

As we saw in Chapter 2, UNHCR held frequent meetings with the refugees to identify their concerns, problems and updated them on new developments and plans. However, as time went by the frequency of these meetings dissipated and the presence of UNHCR staff in the camps also declined. As Liberian refugees became part and parcel of the "protracted refugee category" and also went from humanitarian aid receiving to self-sustaining phases, these meetings eventually died down completely. From 2007 to 2012 UNHCR staff only met with refugees when they wanted to carry out an exercise such as verification, registration or renewal of refugee documents. Once that exercise was done they had nothing more to do with

³⁴ Wrong, Deniis, H 1995, p291

³⁵ Wrong, Deniis, H 1995, p41

the refugees, nor did they meet with them to ascertain information on their concerns as they did previously. From this point in time, the refugees were more exposed to the atrocities of Guinean majority. When the refugees came to this self-sustenance stage they also tried to find ways to address their own challenges. One way was to transform the former UHNCR mechanism into a forum for discussing issues that affected their daily lives. Those who had information on accommodation and jobs shared this with their colleagues. Most refugees who knew of vacant accommodations or jobs would pass it to others. In the situation where families were evicted from their apartments by their landlords for one reason or the other, kind hearted refugees often sacrificed and lodged their desperate and needy colleagues until they could secure a place of their own. It is also not uncommon for people to share their meals or food with those who cannot afford.

The prevailing view amongst the Liberian refugees is that the slashing of humanitarian assistance by UNHCR and its partners imply abandonment. The frequent meeting of Liberian refugees in the absence of UNHCR's earlier meeting mechanism does not only amount to a problem-sharing forum and support soliciting, but to a medium through which social network and group solidarity is fostered and enhanced for social power to express an identity of shared suffering. They first retreat into their social network³⁶ and use it as a basic social power, which, ultimately, is converted into a coping strategy. Eminently, attending the Liberian refugee meetings while I was in Guinea benefited my research in a number of ways. Aside from it lessening the burden of identifying and selecting potential research informants, it also offered the accessibility to obtain useful authentic data on the effects of the exercise of power by both by UNHCR and CNISR as well as and locals over Liberian refugees.

³⁶ This is a network of social interactions and personal relations between actors in a society.



PHOTO: Sections of Liberian Refugee Meeting at Kipe, Conakry

At Kouankan the Liberian refugees met regularly to share their problems and get tips on solutions from their colleagues and also assist or contribute to each other just like refugees in the city. At Kouankan, the refugees are involved in seasonal contracts which involve weeding, cultivating crops and harvesting. During the lean season, which is made up of with less work, different activities are performed. In the lean season men thatch roofs, repair walls and floors of camp houses and women crack and process palm kernel. The various activities in which both men and women of the camp are involved are carried out in collective work groups, commonly known as “coop”³⁷. The men and women have organized themselves into different working groups and take turn to help each member. Even farm work in most rural parts of the country is carried out through this kind of system. I met two men in a bitter quarrel one evening. When I had meeting with one of these men called Tokpa the following day, he explained the salience and meaningfulness of reciprocity in the social relations among the camp members.

³⁷ Coop is a club which is organized by men and women in rural area to take turn to help each other with their farm work, building and other task that an individual can perform single handedly.

Trust is very important in the relations and obligations we as refugees have for each other. I know last night you heard me having a bitter argument with my friend. I helped him to repair his house and since I was the last person in the cycle he refused to come to help me when it came to my turn. My other colleagues and I had to strain ourselves to finish the work on my house since the rains have started. I think it is morally wrong to refuse to pay back what you owe someone. This can make you lose the respect people have for you. Now the respect I had for him is gone and I will never trust him again. (Tokpa, 37, Kouankan camp)

Failure to meet obligations to one another has moral consequences. Hence refugees try to make provisions to fulfill their commitment. The obligation to meet the commitments Liberian refugees have towards each other at Kouankan camp is regarded as a social interaction that must be reciprocated. The obligations and reciprocity Hawanatu and Tokpa respectively talked about are similar to Marcel Mauss' (2009) gift concept. Mauss portrays the inherent and intangible elements within gift giving. According to him a sort of spirit or "*hau*" (Mauss 2009: 212) exists within the actual gift itself and that spirit makes it compelling for the gift to be returned to the original giver. Like the *hau* of the gift, Liberia refugees are driven by a force to reciprocate for favours they receive from colleagues and the same force drives receivers to also reciprocate. Due to the sense of shame one is exposed to, were received favours not appropriately reciprocated, Liberian refugees are duty bound to reciprocate to what they receive in order to avoid losing their honour.

Power is inherent in social relations and is also intertwined and solidified within the identity management of Liberian refugees in the Guinean society. It should also be noted here that authority is "the untested acceptance of another's judgment" (David Easton 1958, p179 cited in Wrong, 1995, p35) and subjects or subordinates often obey their superiors out of fear that their resistance can produce some consequences. This is the potential reason why Liberian refugees find it difficult to openly resist the exercise of power by the Guinean majority despite the predicaments they face in their daily activities but rather employ social network and collaboration to express idioms of solidarity. Fundamentally, the examples I have shown above demonstrate that although most Guineans and Liberians share common language, culture, religion or belief, they have been made socially unequal and ethnically different on the basis of the artificial geographical spaces which the European colonial powers created during the scramble for Africa in the 1800s. As the ethnic Guineans demonstrate social inequality and ethnic difference in their everyday life interactions with their guests, the

refugees use collective power which they acquire through meeting in forums, commitments to collaborate, and to solve problems that affect individuals and the group.

3.4. Chapter Summary

Everyday power by the ethnic Guineans on one hand and by Liberian refugees on the other was investigated in this chapter. Diverse social science scholars have made arguments on ethnicity and also have portrayed complex ways in which human beings behave. Moreover, as much as ethnicity can affect the distribution of resources it also has the potential of enhancing inequality among a group of people that share a cultural heritage but have been made different through border demarcation during “scramble of Africa” in the 1880s by European colonial powers. Different relevant literatures by scholars such as Grønhaug, Barth, Anthony Cohen, Ronald Cohen, De La Gorgendière, and Gerhard Maré were employed to delve into the concept of ethnicity. Minority refugees who formed my informants recounted their experiences that depict the effects of the power the Guinean majority exercised over them. Women who have spent a considerable number of years with Guinean men as husbands and wives were endemically thrown out and financially exploited. Furthermore, in rural Kouankan camp, where poverty among the refugees was more severe under-aged girls were lured to marry older Guinean men for financial benefits. Moreover, the recalcitrance of UNHCR and CNISR to address the abuses which the refugees suffer from the ethnic Guineans was due to the improprieties in which the personnel of these institutions themselves are involved. Grønhaug suggested that the majority-minority situation that prevailed in Norway in the 1970s formed the basis of inequality between the Norwegians and immigrants. The situation in Guinea where the majority locals deprive minority refugees from obtaining formal sector jobs, operating their own businesses, refusing to pay refugees for their work or exploit them in all forms is comparable to Grønhaug’s inequality analogy. This notion also contributed to the profound and prevailing sexual abuse or rape of women and young girls with impunity. Information sharing and support for one another was not only part and parcel of life in Conakry but Liberian refugees also shared their apartments and food with other needy colleagues. On the other hand, in the rural Kouankan camp, refugees collaborate with each other through a local mechanism they termed “coop” to carry out their activities. In implementing this mechanism, it was necessary that members reciprocate the services they

receive from each other. The “Gift” concept of Marcel Mauss is found significant to examine the social network, solidarity and collaboration of Liberian refugees, who relate reciprocity to “susu”; a local arrangement which obligates those who receive to give back to those from whom they receive.

Chapter 4

COPING STRATEGIES

I delved into everyday power of the Guinean locals and the refugees in the previous chapter. I discussed how the Guinean majority use inequality dispositions to exercise power which oppresses and exploits the minority Liberian refugees. In this chapter, I want to look in greater detail at the ways the Liberian refugees meet this exercise of power against them. A major strategy is found in networking and collaboration.

4.1. Social Network and Solidarity

Social network theory, also referred to as social network analysis, is of importance in several social science disciplines. The anthropologists who developed the concepts of network defined it as “a set of ties linking social system members across social categories and bounded groups” (Wellman, B; 1983:158).

John Barnes (1954) and Elizabeth Botts (1957) developed the concepts of network analysis in the mid-1950s. Their works was widely used, and have now emerged as an essential analytical tool (Boissevain, 1979:392). Although not a theory, network analysis has theoretical significance (ibid). “Sociocentric” and “egocentric” networks are the two types of social network analysis. Sociocentric networks occur in relations between all members of a group. On the other hand, egocentric network normally exists between individual people who know each other. Notably both sociocentric and egocentric relations existed in the relations between Liberian refugees in Guinea.

The social network which occur among them play a vital role and serve as part of the coping strategies against the atrocities they suffer as a result of the exercise of bureaucratic and everyday power by UNHCR and CNISR on the one hand and the locals on the other.

Barnes’s (1954) concept of social network, which was used to describe ordered social relations and behaviour of a fishing community in Norway known as Bremnes, illustrates how the dwellers of this community share their culture with other fellow countrymen who also

belong to a common economic, social, and administrative system³⁸. The creation of coping strategies through social network; information sharing, support and social solidarity and collaboration among the Liberian refugees in Guinea compares to Barnes's analogy of Bremenes. It implies that the members of the Liberian refugee community employ resources to fulfill a corporate obligation or objective. (Hechter, M. 1987: 18) In the following, I shall present some ethnographic examples of this.

4.2. Symbolic Social Solidarity Events and Reciprocity

Food sharing (Daniel & Knudsen 1995:208) is a significant and symbolic practice among minority Liberian refugees in Guinea. Essentially, food shared with others is a "lifelong partnership" with them³⁹. For Liberian refugees food sharing is not only a way of symbolically expressing group or social solidarity but also for forging social network and expressing idiom of identity or managing it. On special occasions such as on Liberia's Independence anniversary on July 26, refugees collect food or cash to prepare meals which they share among themselves and other invitees. Jean Briggs (1970) who studied the Utku Eskimo in the Arctic region of Canada contextualized the group's strong belief in food sharing, characteristic of reciprocity and indicative of symbolize identity. Families that have extra food share freely with those whose supplies are running low (Briggs, 1970:47)

Liberian refugee families employ symbolic expression to forge their identity in Guinea. Three social solidarity expression events are very symbolic for Liberian refugees in Guinea. These are birth of a new child into a refugee family, bereavement of a relative of a refugee and marriage of a refugee. During such occasions people contribute generously to those who are celebrating or mourning. The form of gift giving without the expectation of immediate return, referred to as generalized reciprocity, (Sahlins, 1965:147) is common among Liberian refugees in Guinea. Sahlins identified three types of reciprocity which occur in societies globally. Apart from "generalized reciprocity" the other two are "balanced" and "negative" reciprocities. Balanced reciprocity is an explicit expectation of immediate return and this

³⁸Barnes, J.A. (1954) discusses Bremnes a fishing community in his concept in Class and Committees in Norwegian Island Parish, p40

³⁹ Bennett, John and Susan Rowley, eds. Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004

exists amongst friends. Negative reciprocity, however, occurs when an individual is influenced to exchange something that he/she may not want to give up or when there is an attempt to get a more valued item in return than what is given away. (Sahlins, 1965, 1972: 185-275) The bond of the social network brings moral value to the fulfillment of the obligations and reciprocity Liberian refugees have towards each other, and people do not take such things lightly. The following is an explanation I received from an interlocutor:

The response to our needy colleagues is “susu⁴⁰”, which accumulates. When it becomes your turn, those you contribute to will pay you back. The way one responds to the needs and the distress of colleagues determines the reciprocity one gets when he/she also is in distress or need. I know this very well so I don’t miss anything that concerns any Liberian refugee here. Even when I’m sick I make effort to attend to the needs and distress of my friends. (Hawanatu, 45, Conakry)

4.3. Marriages and Bereavements

Bereavement and marriages are integral parts of the events that matter very much for Liberian refugees in their refugee sojourn in Guinea. The improvement in communication has made it easier for the refugee community especially in Conakry to share information, happy or sad, with colleagues in no time. Information about the marriage of two refugees-Patience and David- spread quickly and Liberian refugees contributed in diverse ways on the wedding in March 2012. Liberia refugees went in their numbers to grace the occasion. The local Protestant church in a suburb in Conakry was full to its maximum capacity. Although more than twice the number could not find space inside and had to remain outside under the scorching sun until the official ceremony was over, they were not bothered. Everybody who went for that wedding was fed and some mothers even took the left-over with them to their homes. It was a fascinating scene. A refugee committee member, Bannah, told me “We are frustrated by UNHCR and the Guineans but we are strong as a group and when we wrap our arms around each other as people of the same nation, we become much stronger. This power has kept us going for these years”.

⁴⁰ Susu is a traditional arrangement where members a group contributes and the total amount given to one person. This continues until the cycle is complete. However if say C refuses to contribute say A when it comes to the turn of C to collect the contributions A will also not contribute to C. This arrangement often helps the members to raise funds to meet dowry payments, marriages and cultivate farms. The contributions may be in cash or kind.

Marriage is not the only thing that glued Liberian refugees together but also bereavement of fellow refugees is another symbolic event through which refugees enhance their solidarity and generosity. Even when a relative of a refugee passed away outside Guinea and the news was shared with the refugee community, people sympathized and donated to their colleague upon whom the misfortune had befallen. While I was on research in Guinea tragedy struck the Conakry refugee community in the month of April. A male refugee of about 21 years died mysteriously. His girl-friend also passed away the following day while two others, a male and female, were admitted to the hospital under critical conditions. They were all alleged to have consumed poison-contaminated alcoholic beverage or something of the sort. Within a short time, the news had circulated within the refugee community like wild fire in the harmattan⁴¹ season. The entire refugee community was involved in mourning their deaths and in contributing in diverse ways especially towards the burial of the young “underground refugee” lady who was undocumented and not eligible for assistance from UNHCR. Everyday refugees streamed in their numbers to visit the other two refugees who were in the critical conditions at the hospital and most people prayed and fasted for their speedy recovery. Salleymatu, with whom I had earlier planned to meet, canceled her appointment due to the mishap. She told me that the refugees in Guinea do not only share a common problem but they are also one family. Moreover she said to me “What affects one refugee affects us all and the cry of one refugee is the cry of all and every refugee here in Conakry”. These two instances manifest how Liberian refugees deploy different mechanisms to acquire their own collective power which enabled them to cope with the exercise of bureaucratic power by UNHCR, CNISR and the power of everyday life by ethnic Guineans. Thus the assertion: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and, yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1978:95-6) is validated through the way Liberian refugees address their own challenges.

⁴¹By physical geography definition, harmattan is a dry wind that blows from the Sahara Desert towards the West African coast particularly within the months of November to March.

4.4. The Birth of a Child and Liberian Anniversaries

The birth of a child into a family is another event that symbolizes social solidarity and identity of Liberian refugees in Guinea. Just like bereavement and marriage people make generous contributions to the family concerned to facilitate the celebration of the event. Finally, national festivities such as Independence and Thanksgiving Day are joyous occasions just like marriages and birth of children into families. Refugees began to make preparations towards the celebration of Liberia's 165th Independence anniversary on July 26, even before I arrived in Guinea on January 14 and they were not done until my departure on June 13, 2012. Refugees strained themselves to save in order to purchase the clothes the country's politicians in Liberia approved to be worn on that day. Obviously, idealization of homeland, associated with the "imagined communities", (Anderson, Benedict, 1983) is at work here. Anderson coined the concept "imagined communities" to explain how a nation and community are socially constructed and imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of and members of a group in a community. Anderson reckons that people of the same nationality usually claim their unity as one people and one state and are connected to an abstract community. The people regard a nation as a symbol that is synonymous with community that forges their commitment and loyalty to one another. However, an imagined community needs to be distinguished from an actual community. While everyday face-to-face interactions occur between members of an actual community, members of an imagined community hold mental images of their affinity to their nation. He argues that a "nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". (Anderson, B. 1983:6-7)



PHOTO: *Marriage and Child Out-Doorings Ceremonies by Refugees in Guinea.*

4.5. Nationalism: The Basis for Networking

Anthony Smith is also an illustrious scholar on the concepts of ethnicity and nationality. Smith regards an ethnic community as a group of people that has a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, culture, and an attachment to a historical territory or homeland and value of solidarity. Ethnicity may prevail among the members of a nation even if they are “long divorced from their homeland through an intense nostalgia and spiritual attachment” (Smith, 1991: 23). He also defines a nation as a group of people who share historic common myths, historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members. (Smith, 1991:52). Smith argues that the core of ethnic community and nation is the knowledge of myths, folk stories, rituals and discourse about the nation. Furthermore, he argues that preserved ethnic and national sentiments are forged to bind and orient people in their lives and present them with a meaningful history that is transferred from generation for posterity with an imprint of the actual. Smith draws his argument of the nation on the pre-existing history of a group which is created from common identity and shared history. He suggests that as far as nationalism is concerned, the members of a nation need not be alike but they should feel a bond of solidarity to the nation and other members of their nation (Smith 1986:32, 2002). “Refugee” and “Liberian” are self-explanatory terms which are frequently used to express this sense of unity. Hence these labels have fundamentally shaped the identity politics of Liberian refugees in Guinea. The concepts by Anderson and Smith have been found to be particularly useful for analyzing social network, ethnic, social and

national identity of Liberian refugees in Guinea. Ultimately, Liberian refugees create their ethnic community on the idea that they are people of the same nation (Liberia) who were driven by war from that country to Guinea. With this background these refugees have built a well knitted social network which makes them to be responsible to each other. The social network they have built is not only strong but it also gives them power as people of an imagined community. The collective power which the social network has helped them to acquire is appropriated to manage their social and national identity and to manage and address the effects of the power of UNHCR, CNISR and local Guineans exercise over them. Though most Liberian refugees did not know each other prior to their flight to Guinea, neither do they belong to the same tribal or ethnic group, but sharing the same refugee category has knitted them to brothers and sisters and people of the same nation. Hence the relevance for selecting nationality as a parameter for distinguishing Liberian refugees in Guinea is justified. My study unveiled that when power subjects feel vulnerable and unsafe as a result of misapplication of power, refugees employ appropriate strategies to address their own needs as well as to strengthen their identity.

The identity project of Liberian refugees in both the city and camp situations in Guinea is different from the situation of Burundian refugees in Tanzania (Malkki, 1992). Liberian refugees in Conakry and Kouankan only constructed a categorically distinct collective identity devoid of any internal differential ethnic elements. Collectively they are Liberian refugees, who regard themselves, essentially, as people of one nation in Guinea. The issue of tribal or kinship relations is less prevalent amongst the refugee community in Guinea. Liberian refugees only see themselves as people of the same nationality and have built their social network around this this notion. This is different from Malkki's case. In Tanzania, one group of the Burundian refugees was settled in a rigorously organized, isolated camp while the others are found in a fluid society of Kigoma Township on Lake Tanganyika. (Malkki 1992:35) The refugees in each of these settings categorized themselves differently. While the town refugees "saw themselves as a nation in exile" with a "moral trajectory that would empower them to reclaim a homeland in Burundi" (ibid) the town refugees sought ways of

assimilating and taking multiple identities not as Hutu, refugees, Tanzanians, nor Burundians but just as “broad persons”⁴²

The social networks which Liberian refugees have developed do not only revolve around attending meetings, reciprocating to gifts and favours they receive but also in making telephone calls to check on each other. Calls are also made to relatives in Liberia to solicit for information and get the latest gossips and even update on newly released music by Liberian artists. I heard music in most homes I visited in Guinea, which I was told was the latest and most popular albums by indigenous Liberian artists. Several of the refugees at Kouankan camp monitored Liberian radio stations that gave news and developments from the country. I was also struck by the Liberian flag displayed in one corner of most refugee homes I visited during my research in Guinea. Notably, by listening to indigenous Liberian music, by monitoring radio stations in that country to keep abreast with events and displaying the national flag, these refugees are helped to forge and manage their identity as Liberian refugees.

4.6. Chapter Summary

Given that Liberian refugees encountered diverse forms of power by UNHCR, CNISR and ethnic Guinean majority, they built social network and solidarity as a coping strategy to express idioms of identity. Literature on social solidarity and networks by Barnes, Botts, and other social science scholars was employed to discuss the on-going process of adaptation.

As suffering and disruption become part of the life of Liberian refugees in Guinea, social network, solidarity and idioms of identity were used as coping strategies and weapon of resilience to improprieties and injustices they suffer directly or indirectly, from UNHCR, CNISR and ethnic Guinean majority. Aside from food sharing, marriage, bereavement, birth of a child and anniversaries of Liberian are symbolic solidarity events among refugees in Guinea. Marriages, bereavements and the birth of a child are symbolic occasions during which Liberian refugees do not only show their physical emotions but also display their social solidarity and identity by contributing in various ways to their colleagues to whom the affair

⁴²Hebdige, Dick, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*. London: Methuen, 1987, cf. Malkki, L, 1992, p36. In my understanding, “broad persons” translate as human beings.

is of direct concern. Contributions or gifts as a moral rule are to be reciprocated sooner or later.

Liberian refugees celebrate Independence Day on July 26, Flag Day and other important anniversaries and contribute in cash and kind to each other. They also monitor radio stations in Liberia and are also listening to indigenous music as well as displaying the flag of their country in their homes in exile. Liberian refugees use these symbols to strengthen their national identity and to appear as an imagined community in Guinea. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" concept, I would like to point out that as a result of the exercise of power by UNHCR, CNISR and ethnic Guineans, the social network and social solidarity which Liberian refugees activate to acquire social power is based on idioms of a collective identity.

Chapter 5

VULNERABLE GROUPS-WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In the foregoing chapter, I examined the strategies that Liberian refugees utilize to manage the economic exploitation, mental stress and security dilemmas they face as a result of how they are treated by UNHCR, CNISR and the Guinean locals. I argued that Liberian refugees employ network and social solidarity through the organization and implementation of a number of activities to manage and express idioms of collective identity. This chapter is designed to probe into the effects of power, particularly, on two groups, women and children or minors, in Guinea. I will argue that the unfair treatment of the refugees, coupled with the involvement of UNHCR and CNISR staff themselves in the improprieties have hugely contributed to the demise which women and children face in Guinea.

Basically, in formal terms, the “vulnerable groups” constitute a definite administrative category of refugees, who have medical, physical, mental or emotional situation that entitle them to be treated preferentially in terms of humanitarian assistances in the form of food, non-food items and other services. These vulnerable refugees include, for example, the disabled, the elderly, teenage mothers, malnourished children, the terminally ill and even single mothers, and all those who are liable to marginalization. However, I have chosen to restrict this category to refugee women and adolescent boys and girls who undertake diverse livelihood activities to take care of their own needs or those of their families, and in so doing encounter brutal effects or atrocities of the different forms of power.

5.1 Refugees and Common Everyday Activities

While few Liberian refugees did different types of odd jobs for the locals when they first entered the country in 1989, when they were left on their own to fend for themselves following the axing of humanitarian aid to them in 2007, almost the entire refugee population were forced into such relationships. Adults tried to find ways of providing the basic necessities, namely food, clothing and shelter which UHNCR stopped supplying for their families. As a consequence of the inability of most parents to provide the basic needs of their

children coupled with the closure of free school facilities, several refugee children or youth were driven to the street job market. I will shed more light on this phenomenon in the section entitled “*Refugee Street and Working Children*”

In Conakry the refugee men crashed stones or rock for construction purposes, carted materials at construction sites, worked on their own as shoe repairers, as watch-men or gatekeepers for wealthy Guineans or worked as taxi drivers. Furthermore, the men at the refugee camp engaged in burning fire coal, worked in illicit mines and cleared farms for the locals. The women also hauled, crack and processed palm kernel to oil, scratched, cultivated and harvest crops on farms, picked coffee beans on plantations, washed gravels for minerals in illicit mines and hewed wood for sale. At times some refugees in Kouankan camp were involved in share cropping of rice as a family, whereby men, women and even children have their own specialized task. The men would clear the bush, fell the trees, burn and clear the burned materials to get the spot ready for planting of seeds. The women were responsible to scratch and plant the rice seeds and weed grass to prevent them competing with the rice for nutrients. The children’s role was to drive away the birds so that they did not destroy rice when it begins to bear seeds and when seeds start to get ripe.

As Liberian refugees were drawn into the various activities in order to cater for their families, they encountered the exercise of power by UNHCR, CNISR and power in everyday life from ethnic Guineans. The exercise of the various forms of power and its effects on the life of refugees particularly women, under aged girls and children are what I will focus on in the two subsequent sections. I will argue that the axing of the humanitarian aid contributed immensely to the plight of women, under aged girls, and other children and that the UNHCR and CNISR have ignored the atrocities which the Guinean majority committed against the refugee minority, probably due to the improprieties in which they themselves were involved.

5.2. Adversities of Women and Under-aged Girls

Refugee women are more frequently at risk of sexual abuse, and rape and other sexually based types of violence and exploitation than any other population of women population in

the world⁴³. Women, under-aged girls, and disabled females generally are most vulnerable to these risks. As this section tries to examine the adversities of refugee women and young girls, more focus will be placed on the effects of ethnic majority power on their daily lived experiences after humanitarian aid to Liberian refugees came to an end. I will argue that the sexual abuse, rape and other abuses, which women and teenage girls suffer in the hands of the locals emanate from the ineptitude of the UNHCR and CNISR and the atrocities they themselves perpetrate against the refugees they are mandated to protect.

Earlier in Chapter 1, Momolu informed us that his family took to sustenance behaviour because donors injected more funding to new and emerging wars while reducing help to refugees of earlier wars in countries such as Liberia. One wonders what the possibilities and predicament are for refugee women in the Guinea with such a development. Ostensibly, the possibilities for formal sector jobs for refugee women are limited in Guinea. Besides, refugees are also generally exposed to discrimination and stigma. These factors explain why many women joined the informal labour market; surviving largely by petty trading, hawking doughnuts and ginger beer, laundering clothes, domestic services, casual jobs on farms, hauling materials at construction sites and mining communities, engaging in prostitution or developing series of liaisons with lovers. It is important to note here that while some non-formal market activities are done on the open market level, prostitution and liaisons with lovers among adult refugee women are not open. Women who indulged in these activities are afraid of being castigated by their colleagues so they are carried out underground.

Refugee women, carrying out different non-formal sector activities, face many predicaments and situations. Economic exploitation is the first and foremost predicament most of them go through. Jebbeh, one of my interlocutors sustained bruises due to the caustic soda concentrated soap she used to do laundry for her clients. Despondently, she said,

I was often given large heaps of dirty clothes to wash for small money but was not paid the little amount we agreed on. I walked several times to get my money to no avail and many times I waived everything. Can you imagine a little boy just the age of my last son kicking my butt when I went to ask his mother for the money I worked for? These Guineans treat refugees any way they want with impunity. If UNHCR had been taking our cases seriously when we go to them all these would stop. (Jebbeh, 45, Conakry)

⁴³UNHCR Deputy High Deputy High Commissioner L. Craig Johnstone, reported in *UNHCR backs 16 days of opposition to violence against women* press release, UNHCR 25 November 2008 available at www.unhcr.org

Aside from economic exploitation, rape by the local Guinean men is another dilemma Liberian refugee women and young girls are subjected to. Married women and young girls are rape victims as they go about their diverse daily self-sustenance activities. The stigma attached to rape in most African communities makes it shameful for victims to discuss their plight with others; not even close friends or husbands. When quizzed on some of the hardships individuals and families face in their self-sustenance activities a young refugee woman gave me the following information:

Two men raped me in the bush four years ago. These men warned me that they would come after me if I leak what happen to anyone. I have been having stomach problem especially during my menses since then but I'm afraid to tell my husband, otherwise he will leave me. I'm only disclosing this to you because you are someone I respect and trust. (Sadiatu, 27, Kouankan)

Although forcing teenage or under-aged girls to marry older men is common in most African traditions, it is definitely also the quandary of female refugees in Guinea. In Kouankan camp, where poverty is very rampant among the refugee population, parents habitually forced their adolescent daughters into marriage with older local Guineans, from whom parents expect to receive financial and material support. Far more refugee women and girls are subjected to frequent and constant rape, assault, exploitation or forced marriages in Conakry and Kounkan camp. Since rape victims are castigated by colleagues and the society when they reveal their ordeals, they feel reluctant to report these incidences, even to the appropriate authorities. Several Liberian refugee women face disproportionate dimension of abuse and exploitation in all forms. This tendency does not only support the assumption of universal male dominance (Sanday, 1981) but also demonstrate the inherent patriarchal tenets in Guinea and most African societies.

I have illustrated the different circumstances Liberian refugee women and under-aged girl's face in Guinea after they stopped receiving humanitarian aid from UNHCR and agencies. Among the horrendous excesses that they face are rape, sexual slavery and economic exploitation as I have illustrated with empirical examples of Sadiatu, Kou, Jebbeh and Mamuna, Deddeh's under-aged daughter respectively. We saw that ethnic Guineans use coercive power as a tool to augment social inequality towards Liberian refugees in their country.

5.3. Refugees Turning to Street and Working Children

Momolu was the first person to give me a hint about the atrocities women and teenage girls face, as well as the deplorable situations street children encounter in an uncompleted building which some of them have made new their “home”. Although Momolu informed me of street children among the Liberian refugee community in Conakry he was, however, apprehensive and embarrassed to take me to the “home” of these children each time I brought up the subject. Enthusiastic to examine the street children phenomenon, and with many new developments taking place during my eight or more year’s absence from Guinea, I needed someone who knew the city and also was knowledgeable about issues concerning refugees. Meanwhile, the first hand advise I received when I suggested my intention to someone was that the street children would avoid me or not open up to me because I was a stranger whom they do not know. Besides, the research ethics restricts me from talking to minors (children under 18 years) without the consent of their parents. Aware of these backgrounds, I consulted the refugee community during one of their weekly meetings on how I could get access to talk to refugee children including those in the streets of Conakry. Most parents have busy schedules while some find it inconvenient to go to where their children live in the street while others have severed relations with their children. Collectively, it was agreed that Clifford represented the refugee community and should introduce me to the children to whom I wanted to talk. Clifford commands the respect of many parents as well as children. As a member of the committee, he did not only have a fair idea of issues but helped to resolve several conflicts between refugee parents and their children. This made the children see him more as a father than just a committee member. Clifford took me out to the street in Madina market for the first time where he pointed out several Liberian refugee children between the ages of ten to sixteen years amongst their Guinean peers. They were involved in the peddling of items ranging from cold water, razor blades, phone-re-charge cards, nail cutters and what have you in the morning rush hour traffic of the city. I was saddened by the eminent danger of young children zigzagging between moving vehicles to sell items. To my mind, the appropriate place for these children is the classroom. Fascinated by what I saw, I arranged to talk to those who were willing talk to me. I will give an account of my interaction with three of these children at the later stage of this work.

5.4. Who Are the Street Children?

The “Street Children” phenomenon in many urban areas has become a growing problem globally in recent years. In this section I will present some theoretical reflections which depict the situation of street children. I will then examine the life of Liberian refugee street children of Conakry to show some of the factors that mitigate their actions and use the accounts of three potential youths to delve into some of the hardships they face in the hands of the security officers who are supposed to protect them. Furthermore, I will examine the working life of refugee children in mines and plantations around camps in rural areas. It is important to stress here that violent and materially difficult living situations can generate collective identity. Ultimately, the term “street children” is fundamentally acknowledged as malevolence but should rather receive a more positive connotation.

Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years” (www.ohchr.or/english/law/crc.htm). Childhood from socio-historical dimension should not only be considered as biological age surrounding the period of life from birth to puberty but a social and era-related concept⁴⁴. As a social phenomenon, children are tied to other perspectives of the society such as ethnicity, rank and gender, rooted in the interactions of societies and their history.⁴⁵ As much as several recent studies of street children focus on their everyday life, during my fieldwork I attempted to gain insights into the lives of my informants by means of problem-centered interview methods, particularly, participant observation and the obtained data was subsequently examined through context analysis (Mayring, 2003). Ostensibly, Geertz’s (1973) approach of “thick description⁴⁶” was found to be very salient for investigating the life of street children in Conakry.

There are several criteria for defining a street child. Extensively, a street child spends the day on the street as well as the night in certain cases. All available public and social spaces that are usable by the street children may be termed as the “street”. In most cases family ties between the street children are usually broken and in cases where contact exists between a

⁴⁴ Alber, Erdmute. Kindheit [Childhood]. In *Das kleine Afrika-Lexikon [The small Africa lexicon]* (ed.) Jacob Emmanuel Mabe, 91-92. Stuttgart: Metzler.2003, p91-92

⁴⁵ James, Allison and Alan Prout. A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems. In *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (eds.) Allison James and Alan Prout, 7-34. London, New York, 1997 Philadelphia: The Falmer Press

⁴⁶ Geertz, C. (1999). *Dichte Beschreibung: Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme. [Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture]*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1999 p24

child and his/her family, legal guardianship ceases to play any meaningful role. The street is what shapes the child's most important field of existence where most important activities of everyday life, which range from working, playing, eating, sleeping to maintaining social relations occur without special protection or care⁴⁷. However, not all the children who spend time on the street are really "street children". Academic literature distinguishes between children who live on the street, often referred as "children of the street", and those who earn a living on the street ("children on the street") for themselves and or their families (Donald & Swart-Kruger, 1994). While defining "street children" has become very problematic and contested, a recent definition of this phenomenon is: "A street child or street youth is any minor for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become his or her habitual abode, and who is without adequate protection"⁴⁸ It is also defined as children who "have abandoned or have been abandoned by their families, schools and immediate communities, before they are sixteen years of age and [have] drifted into a nomadic street life"⁴⁹. Meanwhile, Glauser (1997) sees Richter's definition as very ambiguous while other scholars argue that the street child itself is an enigmatic term which portrays negative aspects of children such as their delinquency and the violence they encounter, negative sense of identity for the child without family home or school to provide basic education (Liebel 1993 cf. Glauser 1997)

The two distinct categories; "of the street" and "on the street"⁵⁰ have become eminent in defining the phenomenon of street children, which also represent the street continuum: "the child in utter destitution and abandonment; and the self-employed youngsters in occasional touch with family, working more or less regularly"⁵¹ There are two basic issues about street children, namely, where they occupy (the street) and the lack of proper contacts or links with adult members of the family and in the society. Unlike Susanna Agnelli's report about street

⁴⁷ Dachtler, Armin. *Die Strassenkinder in Tanzania: Darstellung ihrer Lebenswelt am Beispiel der Stadt Bukoba. [Street children in Tanzania: Depictions of their life world using the example of the city of Bukoba]*. Frankfurt a. M.: IKO.1999, p21-22

⁴⁸ Agnelli, Susana Street Children: A Growing Urban Tragedy, Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd, 1996, p32

⁴⁹ Richter, Linda M. Street children: The nature and scope of the problem in Southern Africa. *The Child Care Worker* 6, 1988, p1

⁵⁰ Ibid p34

⁵¹ Ibid p32

children of Mexico City who sleep under bridges and look for food in dustbins⁵², my research has uncovered that Liberian refugee “children of the street” are not homeless per se but have created their own society or community on the street, where they live and sleep. Unoccupied buildings and uncompleted structures are shared by Liberian refugee “children of the street” who are made up of boys and girls from different backgrounds. These children organize their own feeding, taking turns to cook the food they gather in kind and cash. While most of the children often lost contact with their families that do not want to see them, some of them still retain link with their families and some even “send money home”⁵³ to their families to meet their food, rent and other expenses. The street children phenomenon is characterized by stigma and causes negativity but they make some positive impacts on the communities in which they live. The street children of Conakry serve as guards for the uncompleted structures they occupy, warding off any potential thieves who might want to steal materials such as roofing sheets from the site. Additionally, the analogy “being on the street” associated with parasitic hanging around, working on the street shows that street children make an important contribution to the society and fulfill a social function. Remarkably, the street is also a learning place for children. Streets are places where young people take responsibility and generate income through both formal and informal activities. This underlines the meaning of learning as the acquisition of social capital, serving youths who are not legally protected with better chances of survival and educational chances. (Seebode, 2002: 19-20). However the association of children from different backgrounds compels children to learn or copy some good as well as bad behaviours and habits from their peers in the street. Peer pressure⁵⁴ also introduces some children to alcohol and drug use as well as initiating them into various gang culture, burglary, prostitution, sex trade, just to mention a few.

Factors that contribute to street children in metropolitan areas globally include financial problem and poverty, violence and family breakup, poor relationships, unemployment among refugees, physical and poor/sexual abuse of children collapse of family structures. In the Liberian refugee context in Guinea, lack of free education facilities for refugee children in

⁵² Agnelli, Susana *Street Children: A Growing Urban Tragedy*, Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd, 1996, p30

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Peer pressure is the social pressure that members of a peer group exert on others in order take to certain actions, adapt to certain values or conform to certain habits to be accepted in the group. Some of this habits include drinking, smoking, drug use, prostitution and other vices

Guinea over the past recent years is an added factor. In the first place the difficulty of Liberian refugees in securing gainful employment in the formal sector has compounded to their financial difficulties compelling them to indulge in different sorts of manual inhumane jobs to sustain their families especially at the time when they are no longer entitled to humanitarian aid. The slashing off of humanitarian assistance has given rise to violence and family breakups, poor relationships, physical abuse of children, collapse of family structures and divorces; all have become rampant. In instances where a divorced or separated parent enters a relation, a child /children from the previous relationship is/are maltreated by the new step father or step-mother. Children caught in such webs of intrigue become distressed so much so that they are forced to move from home to join their peers in the street, where they can get the solace they were denied at home. I will bring the interview I had with Boryee in due course to illustrate such a circumstance. It is important to point out that when children permanently move to their “street homes” they go through initiation rituals to orientate them into the new street society. During the first week, money that new boys and girls earn goes to the old boys and girls or the leaders. New boys are bullied and tortured to toughen them to be able to endure the hardships of the street. On the other hand, new girls are gang-raped by a number of old street boys, in the presence of old girls, to expose them to the world of prostitution and sex trade. Last but hardly the least, elder men are chosen for many young girls by families. Girls who refuse such forced marriages are frequently kicked out from home for bringing dishonour to the family so they eventually end up in the street often selling sex and drugs. Gorpo’s empirical example will be discussed later in this work to illustrate this situation.

The informal sector self-sustenance activities in which refugee parents are engaged do not earn them enough income to cater to the needs of their families. With several refugee children dropping out of school due to lack of free educational facilities, they are driven into the street to earn money to procure the things their parents cannot afford to provide for them. The refugee children who take to the street work as porters, wheel barrow-pushers, shoe-shiners, car washers and peddlers of items ranging from trinkets, chewing gums razor blades, plastic bags, torch light batteries to drugs. Some children do long hours and physically demanding work for adults for which they receive meager payment in return.

The homes of children on the street were some of the places I visited with Clifford. I asked Musa why he was endangering his life selling goods between moving vehicles and carrying heavy loads for marketers instead of going to school. He told me that he was in the fourth grade in 2007 when IRC⁵⁵ closed his school and that his father did not have the means to send him to a private school when they moved to Conakry. He narrated how he was bored staying in the house without doing anything, while sometimes there was no food for him and his other siblings to eat. He started going out with some of his peers who had been carrying loads for people in the market to earn money and soon got involved in the same activity. He said, “This is helping me because I can buy all the things I need and sometimes give money to my pa and mom for food or to pay rent”. (Musa, 12, Conakry)

Having differentiated between the two categories of street children in Guinea, for that matter Conakry, I want to bring in some issues arising from my talk to some street children. Children assumed adult roles as they become part of the street. During my research in Conakry I met Paye, a parent who informed that his two sons have moved from home when the one bedroom the family of four shared became inconvenient for them. They moved and were living permanently in the street and he visited whenever he needed some assistance from them. Clifford also took me to the uncompleted house, which children who have permanently moved from their family homes live. The structure which I named “*Dorm*” is shared by about twenty boys and a number of girls. Their leader, Boryee, present a packet of cigarettes and a bottle of locally brewed liquor to welcome me to the *Dorm*. As for Clifford, he was no stranger to them. In African society, as guest, one does not refuse an offer but can accept it and present it back to the presenter. This was exactly what I did. As we talked over issues he introduced other young boys and girls, who are the occupants of the *Dorm*. Boryee told me that the boys have the responsibility for protecting the girls from attacks by other boys or older men who exploit them or refuse to pay them when they work for them. The understanding I got from him during our conversation was that the young girls were sex workers or drug peddlers. I asked Boryee why he chose to move to the *Dorm* instead of living at home with his parents. He said,

⁵⁵ IRC (International Rescue Committee) an American international NGO was the UNHCR partner provided education services and ran schools for refugee children in Guinea from 1993.

I'm not happy living in this kind of place but when my parents divorced my mother married a Guinean. This man does not want to see me and my sister. He often threatened our mother that if she gave us food from the money he provided for food she would be driven from his house. He often told us to go to our father. Since our step father also starved us and my mother was afraid to do something, I left the house and took my younger sister to my mother's elder sister. I make sure to send money to my aunt for food every week because blood is thicker than water. Here we live in fear and insecurity of the police, army and other security people that are supposed to protect us. Rather, they regularly rob us of our money and other valuables in the night at gun point. To prevent this happening to us, we have to make arrangements with the boss of the joint security and he has assigned guards around this place to keep intruders away. When we don't make our weekly payment on time the same man will order his boys to raid our place and beat us. We know this so we always make sure to comply on time. UNHCR security has termed us as "Grana boys⁵⁶" and chased us away when we tried several times to let UNHCR know what we are going through. One refugee who attends the University of Conakry helped us prepare a letter, which we sent to the head of mission but we have not heard anything and it is over two years now. NHHCR does not care about our future. (Boryee, 15, Conakry)

Boryee then introduced Gordo to me. I enquired why she was not at home or going to school rather than living among boys on the street. She was a bit embarrassed by my question but I guess the initiation she had received when she first entered the street had given her a strong self-confidence and boldness to give me the following honest answer:

I left from home because my father wanted me to marry to his friend's brother who is a diamond dealer so that he can help the family. This man is of my father's age- about forty-eight and has four other wives with several children who all live in the same house, in the diamond mining settlement called Banankoro. My father told me that we were going for a visit without telling me his intention. When we got there he had a secret discussion with the man and left with the man in his car and never came back. In the night the man took me to his room and tried to rape me. When I hit him with a small stool he got wounded on the forehead and became furious. He grabbed a gun and tried to take the bullets from his cupboard. I don't know how I got the strength to stop him from reaching the cupboard while shouting loudly for help. The neighbours broke the door open and rescued me and called in the police. It was when the man mentioned that he would do every to make my father to pay his money back, that I got to know that my father took money from him to force

⁵⁶ Gronna boy is Liberian slang denotes to children who are on their own, and who often are involved in theft and other petty crimes.

me to marry him. A woman helped me with money to travel back to Conakry but my father threatened to break my neck because I have brought disgrace and dishonor to him. I didn't know what to do. I knew Boryee when he was living near our house and when I met him and explained my story to him I moved here. Although I and the other refugee girls face problems in the night from the local Guinean girls it is better than what my father wanted me to do. At first life was very difficult because the police and security beat us when we refused to make love to them. Sometimes they will connive with the Guinean girls to make false accusations about us. When we fought they would arrest us and put us in jail while they set the Guineans free. UNHCR does not want to hear about refugee boys and girls. Most often when we had cases and UNHCR or CNISR were informed they refused to come to the jail house. At times when they come they will promise returning without setting foot there again. We have to find ways to pay on our own to be released. But now all that has stopped because the security boss is my "Godpa"⁵⁷ and nobody mess around with me and my girls again. (Gorpo, 14, Conakry)



PHOTO: Working refugee children peddling assorted wares in Conakry

During my visit to the *Dorm* I uncovered that the security jeopardized the lives of the street children by using them to spy and provide them with information on suspected criminals, or forced them to rob the homes of rich people. In executing these assignments, some of the street children were caught, either by the criminals or by the people they were sent to rob. A couple of these boys, I understood, were set ablaze or shot. Frankly, these children have no

⁵⁷ Godpa literally translated as God Father, this is a Liberian slang, denoting to a situation where an elderly man serve as a protector to a much younger girl with whom he is in love relationship.

other alternative but to accede to what the security personnel demanded of them, otherwise they risk further mistreatment and harassment. The street children were not only routinely abused and harassed at the *Dorm* alone but were also constantly rounded up and arrested when something happened in the areas where they frequented. They are tortured during interrogations in a bid to have them make false confessions about the knowledge of a crime. Not only do the law enforcement personnel exploit the street children but local people in the society deploy their services as porters to carry heavy loads, cleaners, labourers and pay them small fees for the hard labour. Some adults employ street children in Conakry to undertake dangerous and illegal activities such as prostitution, selling of drugs and robbery of homes and stores. Additionally, young boys who worked on the street become members of criminal gangs and girls selling sex. Similarly, forcing young girls to marry older men for monetary gains is also common among the Liberian refugee community in Guinea. Refugee children working for illicit gold miners/diggers and coffee farms is a common trend among rural refugees of Kouankan camp.

5.4. Working Children in Kouakan: Illicit Mines and Plantations

While most scholars focused only on the plight of children in the street in urban areas, this research unveiled a less visible quandary of children in rural gold and diamond mines and coffee plantations near Kouankan refugee camp. I interacted with bear-footed and half-naked children when I move to Kouankan to complete the last part of my research in Guinea. Like their peers in Conakry the girls peddle cold water and other items while the boys carry heavy loads of items on their heads or push wheel-barrows for marketers on Saturday market days. The marketers, who these children work for, pay them little or nothing. On other days, however, boys and girls play ball games on the motor road or open fields. Boys also hunt small birds and lizards with rubber catapults and girls carry out domestic chores or are taught how to make fishing nets by their mothers or other refugee women. Boys and girls also work for local illicit miners in the nearby villages or picking coffee in the plantation during harvesting season. I became a friend, mentor, team player and coach for these children and I bought them two new footballs- one for boys and the other for the girls. Whenever I ran into any of them, he/she would run to greet me, walk along with me and curiously ask probing

questions about schools and different ball games children play in Norwegian schools. They were also anxious to know how long I would stay in the camp before returning. The openness of these children in posing questions to me offered a forum for enquiring into why they were not in school. These children, who are desirous to learn, have dropped from school because their parents cannot afford to pay the required fees for them to attend the private schools at Kouankan town after the closure of free IRC operated schools in the camp. One day I came from talking to a disabled refugee when Joumah ran to greet me. He was returning from the farm or some other place with his mother, and without asking him any question he began by telling me:

Uncle⁵⁸, it is my dream to “learn book⁵⁹,” so that I will not be doing the kind of hard work I can do in the gold mine for people when I grow up. Since UN has closed our school and has also stopped our supply I have to go with my friend to the gold mine at Dananor to wash gravel for people. The people don’t give us food when we are working for them. The rice the boss⁶⁰ can bring from Macenta is only for the headman⁶¹ and his people. They can eat it and they are always threatening us that if we tell boss when he comes to the Dananor that we are not given food they will kill us or do something bad to us when the boss goes back. Those people, when they say something they mean it. One of the men called Seikou beat my friend until blood was coming from his nose because he refused to bring fire for him to light his cigarette. Some time when the boss brings money to pay us, the headman will just cut our money for the hard work we can do, but we cannot talk. Me, I told my mother that we should join the convoy to go to Liberia but she said she is afraid of the rebels who killed my father during the war. I want go to Liberia and go to school. If my mom says she is not going I will go on my own with a different family. Please try to talk to my mom because I am tired of being here.” (Joumah, 15, Kouankan)

I was gratified by Joumah’s ambition to go back to school but before I met the mother to discuss the son’s desires with her, I decided to go to the gold mine at Dananor to follow up Joumah’s story. I paid deaf ears to the warning many refugees gave me about the dangers

⁵⁸ Refugee children in Guinea usually call elder men “uncle” and elder women “auntie” instead calling them by their names as a mark of respect

⁵⁹ To learn book is the Liberian way of saying to acquire education or to be educated.

⁶⁰ The boss is the man who owns a gold/diamond mining pit and employs people to work for him. He is often an absentee miner who is represented by the headman. He provides funds and required mining tools and shows up at the site to deliver materials and collect the minerals that are found.

⁶¹ The headman is leader of all the workers at a local mining site at Dananor. He employs all the workers, controls them and the materials and make report to the boss.

there. My stubbornness did not only nearly cost me my life but I was also mishandled and chased out of the place and made to delete all the photos I took of the workers, including refugee children in the gold peats at Dananor and even other ones I took at the camp. Had it not been for the timely arrival and intervention of a nurse I knew from before my camera would have been destroyed or confiscated by those savage gold diggers. I was relieved, however, that Joumah's mother consented to repatriate to Liberia to enable her son to fulfill his dream.

The dropout of teenagers from school was not only common with boys but girls as well. Teenage pregnancy, which is not an isolated incident, has become more profound amongst the refugee population now than during my refugee years in Guinea. Coming across two teenagers I knew when they were babies during my IRC work days in Foriecariah and Kissidougou, I became astonished to find that at ages 15 and 16 years respectively they had become mothers, not to one but to two children each. When I asked Jemima, one of the teenage mothers why she has decided to be a parent instead of dropping out from school to become a nurse as she told me she wanted to become when she was a small girl, this is what she told me:

My father died of sickness in the bush when our Forecariah camp was attacked in 2000. Life became very difficult when we moved to Conakry. My mother couldn't pay rent for the house in which we were living. The landlord told my mother that he wanted to marry me so that he can waive the rent for us. My mother refused so the man put her in jail until she can pay the house rent. While I was sleeping in the house alone when the man broke the door and forcibly raped me. All the people refused to come to my rescue when I was shouting. I became pregnant from the rape. Due to the hardship in the city we relocated in Sinbakouya camp but later moved to Kountaya camp and finally to Kouankan in 2007. UNHCR stopped giving us food and medicine so we have to scratch farm, plant or harvest rice for the Guineans before we can get food to eat. These days, I and other girls pick coffee for some farmers. The work is very hard. We work the whole day without eating. Whenever we are given food, this is deducted from our money and at times the food can't be good but we are forced to eat it because we are hungry. Life is not easy here so we have registered to repatriate to Liberia. I will go back to school or learn a trade when I get there. I already have two children without fathers and I have to find a way so that they don't become victims like me. (Jemima, 16, Kouankan camp)

Despite the problems I faced when I went to the mining sites at Dananor, I was still determined to follow Jemima and her friends to observe and participate in their coffee picking activity. This time I kept my plans secret from the refugees in the camp. When I met the owner of the coffee farm I introduced myself and told him that I came from Norway where people drink a lot of coffee and I wanted to see how the beans are picked and processed. Contrary to the reception I received at Dananor the coffee farmer called Alussini was welcoming, but I was shrewd in order not to have my presence misconstrued for something else. Hence I avoided taking photos on the farm. I participated in the coffee picking with the refugees and Alussini was happy when we ended the day's work. As much as there was truth in what Jemima had earlier told me I tried not to leave any trace that could cause problem for Jemima and her friends when they go back another time to work for their living.

Street and working children among refugees in Guinea became more prevalent after humanitarian aid for refugees was stopped and when free education, which was vital for the development of all children, became non-existent for Liberian refugee children in Guinea. The non-availability of humanitarian aid contributed to violence and family breakups, separations and divorces, collapse of family structure and physical abuse of children forcing many children into the street. The closure of free educational facilities did not only drive many refugee youths to the streets, mines and coffee farms where they experience hardship and different circumstances as well as lifestyles but they are members of a generation of less brighter prospects whose future seem very bleak. Empirically, we have illustrated how the street children have made some attempts to communicate their plight to UNHCR and CNISR but to no avail.

5.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has revealed how, after the termination of humanitarian assistance for most Liberian refugees in Guinea, self-sustenance activities became a possible option for them. The information that Momolu and Deddeh each shared in Chapter 1 was brought into retrospect to investigate the vulnerability of women and young girls. The rape of women and young girls is endemic with impunity. Refusal to make payment for work and financial exploitation were rampant. Furthermore, under-aged girls being forced to marry to older men for financial

benefits, was also common among refugees in Guinea. Ultimately, Liberian street children peddle assorted wares in the busy traffic, work for the locals or elder people who exploit them of their labour and pay them meager fees. Distinction is made between children who work in the street and return to their family homes at the end of the day's work, and those who have moved from home and permanently live in "street homes". The initiation rituals the new street entrants undergo and the predicaments the street children dwellers face in the hands of the Guinean security personnel do not only portray how street children exercise power among themselves but also how those who are supposed to provide protection for the powerless abuse their power. Based on the foregoing empirical examples I have documented that women, under aged girls and other children faced prolific abuse when they tried to find their own means of subsistence after humanitarian assistance for them was halted in 2007. Moreover, the recalcitrance of UNHCR and CNISR to address the abuses which the refugees suffered from the ethnic Guineans was due to the improprieties in which these institutions themselves are involved.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Personal Reflection: Insider/Outsider

Being a researcher in a community where I have affiliation pose opportunities as well as challenges. The situation was much more sensitive as my position in the community in Guinea was that of “insider” and “outsider” researcher. Besides staying in Guinea for about ten years I was also a refugee just like one of those that I had gone to study. This made me an insider. Moreover, as a refugee who had had similar experiences to those I was studying did not only increase my legitimacy amongst my informants but also made people to respect and trust me. I was elated of being accepted by my informants as one of them. However, after living in Norway for ten years, going back to study people with whom I shared the same status also contributed to the apprehension I encountered in certain sections of the Liberian refugees. I was definitely aware that the vast array of changes that had taken place during the years of my absence from the refugee community potentially could impact on my research. I was told the Kouankan camp houses had dilapidated and transformed what once stood as the centre of a bee-hive of activities into a silent graveyard. Several refugees who lived in that camp and other places in Guinea had returned to Liberia, others resettled elsewhere or were dead. However, a few of them still hanged around. The familiar faces carried loads of despair, frustration and appeared older than their ages; probably due to the hard jobs into which the axing of humanitarian aid has forced them. Young boys and girls I knew from the refugee schools in camps in Kissidougou had become fathers and mothers. A couple of newcomers had also come to that camp as a result of the civil crisis in the Ivory Coast. To those I was familiar, I was an “insider” while those who had not met me before and even some old acquaintances saw me as an “outsider”. Those who regarded me as outsider referred my research process as part of the strategy by UNHCR and its partners to lure refugees to integrate locally or repatriate to Liberia. My outsider gap was, however, bridged when people who knew me and even several newcomers were accommodating and enthusiastic to participate in the research after they understood its real nature and purpose.

Although I was eventually seen more as an “insider” than as an “outsider” and given access to the research area where I got recognition and collaboration, my outsider perspective played a particularly useful role. The third week of my fieldwork in Guinea took me to the house of an incurably ill refugee male called Seiddu and his daughter Jelleh in Conakry. Jelleh, fled to Conakry when rebels attacked Gueckedou in 2000. She fled the place empty handed when the locals started to implement the orders of President Lansana Conté; rounding up, harassing and beating refugees. She spent several days in her bush hideout and when things subsided and she returned to the town, she found her house ransacked and her refugee document was nowhere to be found. She made the report to UNHCR and BCNR for verification and action when she made her way to Conakry but she remained undocumented for the past eleven or more years. The father, Seidu, was falsely accused for the murder of a fisherman and was put in jail without trial from 1994 to 2003. He became half-paralyzed and speech-impaired when a vehicle knocked him down the very day he was released from jail. UNHCR put him on the vulnerable refugees list, which qualifies him to receive medical, social and financial and other humanitarian assistance when he was discharged from the hospital after months.

I ran into Jelleh two weeks after my interaction with them in their Kipe residence. Worried and disillusioned, she ran to me and without recovering her breadth, Jelleh said “Your old man has been thrown out of the apartment due to rent arrears. They stopped me from entering the UNHCR compound to talk to the Social Services woman”. I am aware of the different positions of anthropological scholars on advocacy and their role as researchers. As much as anthropologists have knowledge and background that can be useful for advocacy, Hastrup and Elsaas (1990: 307) do not favour them taking up that role. However, I took a contrary view to their stand and hailed the view which supports anthropologists to employ “positive passionate and proactive stand in engaging in objective and moral advocacies”⁶². Hence it became imperative that I intervened. Many UNHCR staff regarding me as an “outsider” gave a boost and made my intervention successful. Jelleh, ultimately, received the required attention and services which Seiddu urgently and badly needed. However, my outsider perspective also made me vulnerable to certain challenges. For instance several Liberian refugees who opted for local integration, among whom was Kpehe, came to me and put the following questions to me:

⁶² Scheper-Hughes, N, The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 36(3) 1995, p410

My brother you are coming from the white man's country. What is the local integration package made of? Do you think this UNHCR and their Guinea collaborators have made their own decision? (Kpehe, April, Conakry)

In order not to compromise my position as researcher and also avoid being caught in similar web as Veronica Strand (2003)⁶³ I was shrewd and advised him to address those questions to UNHCR



PHOTO: Seidu, a terminally ill refugee and his daughter Jelleh in Conakry

6.2. Way Forward: Anticipated Policy Adjustments

Having previous experience as a refugee, I feel that the different situations of refugees, which each transition ushers in, can and need to be improved. With the exercise of different forms of power by UNHCR and CNISR and ethnic Guinean majority having enormous effects on the refugee minority in diverse forms, causing the mental, economic, physical and social dilemmas, it is undeniable that a huge part of the problems these refugees face stem from the international regime of the refugee law that owes its fundamental allegiance to the state and not to refugees. (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995:10) Deals or agreements are often made only between the national government and the refugee agency, and the refugees are bundled and

⁶³ Veronica Strand (2003) was an outsider who tried to defend indigenous issues at a conference in Perth and this raised representational contentions. As an outsider she made representations regarding Aborigines and this got her into the ethical question

dumped on the local communities. The inclusion of the locals and the ethnic communities in the participatory mechanism of the refugees programs will go a long way in minimizing, if not eliminating the conflicts and bridge the inherent gap of mistrust which local hosts have for their refugee guests. Sensitizing the local leaders as well the local communities at large about who refugees actually are, their material, social and psychological needs, the mistrust, misconceptions and misunderstandings of refugees would be minimized. Moreover, frequent meetings and hosting joint social programs in the host societies where refugees reside, can be seen as vital in aiding to bring understanding and harmony between the ethnic majority and minority refugees.

Many conflicts occur rapidly and stakeholders often act spontaneously to provide emergency services for the refugees. However, after the emergency stage, stakeholders and the country which is receiving the refugees should start making plans for them, taking into consideration their protracted situation, integration and repatriation. More often the refugee agency, stakeholders the receiving country and donors put more resources into the emergency needs of food, medication and building camps to provide shelter for the refugees. Sustainable livelihood, integration and repatriation programs are usually overlooked when refugees are first taken into a country. Refugees are made to get used to humanitarian aid and when funds stop and no services are provided for refugees, they find it problematic to move from receiving support to engage in livelihood activities. In this regard, it is worthwhile that the refugee agency, stakeholders and donors plan for these programs on time rather than waiting until the refugees become protracted. In designing activities that will serve as livelihood intervention mechanism with a proven record of viability, it is important that relevant agencies, local and national authorities, development experts, international and local NGOs, community based organizations as well as the refugee beneficiaries are involved in planning and developing activities that support the program. The organizations that implement the intervention programs are required also to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the beneficiaries to enable them to be engaged in the activity that is appropriate for them based on their personal skills. It is when these features are comprehended that the livelihood approach that the beneficiaries each select can yield success. If microfinance is identified as the suitable intervention to promote refugee livelihood, the staff need to have knowledge of programming within this framework and be able to advice the beneficiaries on the activities that will be useful for each of them according his/her experience or skills instead of allowing the

beneficiary to select something that will not be viable. For example, many microfinance programs in which some refugees were involved during the mid-1990s while I was a refugee in the country were short lived because this sort of mechanism was not put into place.

Similarly, the stakeholders also need to provide necessary and timely information on the durable solutions to the refugees. This will enable the refugees to plan towards the solutions and they would not only wait until the last minute to select a solution. Implementing local integration programs in order to negate untold hardship on the integrant, allotted funds and materials should be disbursed as grant rather as a loan. Similarly, to ensure equity, benefit packages for local integration should be worked out per person instead of per family. If the above issues are not considered the local integration will not yield the result it is meant to and people will encounter problems. Providing adequate training before the disbursement of the content of integration packages will go a long way to guiding people towards feasible activities. Just handing cash and materials to people without helping them to identify what will be beneficial to them in the long run is just like “scratching the surface of the wound, without treating it”.

About the institutions, the UNHCR, other partners and the agent of the national government (CNISR in the case of Guinea) should work honestly to improve their image, reputation or performance of their roles to enhance the dignity of refugees. These institutions should be aware that refugees are also humans and deserve better and need to be treated with respect. It is when these institutions respect the dignity of the refugees that the ethnic majority and the communities in which they reside will not trample on their human rights. Law enforcement and security authorities should be given routine workshops to provide information to them on the category and validity of documents issued to documented refugees. Additionally, the government agency should handle emerging asylum cases expeditiously so as to prevent applicants from becoming “persona non grata” as a result of their non-registration.

In my view, proper planning and information sharing are very essential in the implementation of all refugee programs. These are especially vital as far as schools and programs that provide protection for children are concerned. For example the future of children is compromised if schools are closed without any other alternative for protecting them as is the case of children in Guinea. Stakeholders, in my view, need to make plans that will provide informal school facilities to replace formal schooling to provide protection for the refugee children, while

refugee parents need to be informed in good time about closure of schools to enable them make alternative plans for the future of their children.

The enormous problems that refugees face after food, medical, social and educational aids are axed can, to a great extent, be attributed to the lack of backup plans and adequately orientating the refugees about them. We have seen that Liberian refugees were not given orientation that could give them advance knowledge when they lived on humanitarian assistance. The lack of such orientations can increase the ordeals when adults and children are compelled to engage in self-sustenance ventures. This cannot expose them to insecurity, risk and threat and make them to grapple with various forms of exploitation. Women and young girls, especially, are often raped or sexually violated so as to demoralize and terrorize them. Children, who are no longer schooling or find life in their family home unbearable, are driven to the street. The street phenomenon is breeding children, who are involved in crimes such as drug peddling or prostitution. Besides, refugees are not only to be sensitized at a short time's notice about cessation of refugee status. Providing the refugees with training and building their capacities, would go a long way to preparing them for a long term local integration and voluntary repatriation challenges. Given that the repatriation of refugees would eventually occur in the future if it is safe and threat-free in their country of origin, those responsible for programs should organize exit plans from the time the refugees arrive in the host country, bearing in mind that an end of war is unpredictable as much as donors are likely to be fatigued in the long run. With the protraction of the situation in Liberia, international attention and its accompanying funding was directed to new and emerging wars, regardless of the needs of Liberian refugees in Guinea. It is therefore pivotal that when programs are winding down, assessment be made to alleviate the uncertainties and deplorable situation of the refugees when programs eventually end. Had there been backup plans that could enable refugees to fend for themselves the demise which women and children face, would have been minimal.

The insecurity, risk and inhumane conditions which the refugees endured in order to make ends meet, as well as the ordeals that many refugee women, young girls and boys go through need to be understood as to provide appropriate protection. The various stakeholders of refugee programs, namely, donor countries, UNHCR and other implementing partners need to be aware of the shortcomings, constraints, problems and potential areas of focus and improvement. The broad understanding of the problems Liberian refugees encounter in their

informal activities in order to fend for themselves following the slashing of humanitarian aid, must be developed far better than what is the case today. On account of the challenging conditions the refugees were exposed to, they attempted to retain their social and national identity through strong networking. It is therefore vital that the UNHCR, the Guinean authorities and even ethnic community are aware of the vulnerability and constraints of the refugees as they interact with them.

6.3. Concluding Comments

Having gone where many have never been and seeing the demise which several eyes have not seen, will these refugees say that I failed them or that I did not reciprocate for their experiences they shared with me? Will they also say that I “stood aside, neutral and indifferent, from the struggle in which the future of the refugees was at stake”? (Bourdieu cited in Hilier and Rocksby, 2005:7) As I ponder over these questions I was not only reminded that all research projects are guarded by ethics but I was also aware of the different positions of anthropologists on advocacy. While advocacy has the potential to make a difference in the lives of people (Layton, 1996), and also helps to obtain access to achieve a better and a vital collaboration for the collection of quality data, this was critiqued. The fundamental argument is about the ethics and the morality of the intervention by an outsider to promote a particular course on behalf of others or “the other”. Hastrup and Elsass, for example, have suggested that the anthropologists, instead of employing advocacy directly, they should rather “raise the awareness of the people and equip them to plead their own cause” (Hastrup & Elsass 1990:307). Schepper-Hughes on the other hand pointed out that “those of us who make our living observing and recording the misery of the world have a particular obligation to reflect critically” and to produce politically complicated and demanding images and events (Schepper-Hughes, 1995:416-417). She calls for accountability, commitment, responsibility, solidarity, empathy, compassion and interestingly suggests that such an approach would be “more womanly”. Moreover, Karl Marx asserted that we do not merely try to understand the world but we also try to change it.

In my personal position as a former refugee, but not as anthropologist, I take the arguments of Schepper-Hughes, Bourdieu and Karl Marx as a point of departure. Personally, I see

advocating for Liberian refugees in Guinea very pertinent. We have seen unequal power relationships, inequalities and injustices between the UNHCR, CNISR and the locals and between Liberian refugees in Guinea. I support the improvement in the circumstances of the refugees. Acting as an intermediary and a voice on behalf of these refugees, when requested to do so, I am prepared to be an active agent of change, and I will go a long way in helping improve the situation as well as restoring the self-esteem of the former refugees.

I encountered many vulnerable refugees, including the elderly, disabled, under-aged mothers and malnourished children during my research in Guinea. I also heard the desperation expressed by demise of the refugees as UNHCR, CNISR and local Guineans exercised different forms of power over them. Looking back and seeing the face of Yarkpawolo, the ninety- year old man at Kouankan camp, besmeared in the abyss of misery and desolation, and hearing the voices of other former refugees bemoaned with desperation, heavy-heartedness, sorrow and disappointment, all send cold bumps through my spine. Moreover, the eyes of the mal-nourished child I saw lie dying on the laps of her teenage mother still haunt me. The deplorable situations and the awesome stories of these refugees were not seen or heard by the outside world. I have gone, seen, and lived with these unhappy predicaments of people, but I hugely regret I did not fully use advocacy as a research methodology as that could have helped me play a more proactive role for the Liberian refugees I had gone to study. I wish I had done more to put smile in the faces and happiness in those whose hearts were filled with melancholy, as I did in the case of Seidu.

Former Liberian refugees had undergone various phases of transition in Guinea from January 1990 to June 2012. The bureaucratic power by UNHCR and CNISR as well as the everyday power that the Guinean majority exercised over them, affected them in different ways. UHNCR and CNISR, significantly, had under-performed to protect these refugees as the majority population carried out all kinds of atrocities against them. As these former refugees had entered their final phase either to return to their home country, or to engage in income generating activities in Guinea, if they will continue to be stuck in thorns just like before, time will tell.

6.4. Chapter Summary

One is categorized both as insider/outsider when researching in a community in which he/she has once lived and such a situation has opportunities as well as limitations. Insider perspective may earn the researcher the local community's respect and collaboration but it can also generate envy and dissent. However, the outsider position has the potential of misrepresentation being made of the researcher's real focus or objective. A researcher could be accused by the research subjects of compromising the improprieties of power holders as happened in my case. Data interpretation from fieldwork can potentially be a huge task, whereby researcher-informant biases can potentially become a problem. Participant observation was deployed to alleviate the probability of stage management. Informal conversations were held with informants to ascertain consistencies. Moreover, the views of my informants on different topics were compared with others to derive alternative meanings of data. The obstacles of Liberian refugees in Guinea were attributed to the failure of the bureaucratic institutions to apply appropriate mechanisms to involve the Guinean majority in planning during the time of taking refugees into the country. There is a huge debate about anthropologists playing an advocacy role using the wide knowledge they have. In a situation where a terminally ill refugee was denied a vital means of survival, the researcher's timely advocacy yielded a fruitful result. In my personal position, had it not been for my inexperience in anthropological research, I would have adopted a stronger element of advocacy as a research methodology in the study of Liberian refugee in Guinea.

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DATA OF INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED BETWEEN JANUARY 15 AND JULY 13, 2012

Interview with informant, Abbu, Conakry, April 2012

Interview with informant, Alfred, Conakry, January, 2012

Interview with informant, Madame Bangura, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant, Bannah, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant, Borborbele, Kouankan, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Boryee, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant Cecelia, Kouankan camp, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Deckontee, Kouankan, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Deddeh, Kouankan camp, April, 2012

Interview with informant Donzo, Kouankan camp, June, 2012

Interview with informant, Fatumata, Conakry, February, 2012

Interview with informant, Foray, Conakry, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Gartee, Conakry, February, 2012

Interview with informant Garmai, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant, Gorpo, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant, Hawah, Conakry, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Hawanatu, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant, Jattu, Kouankan, April, 2012

Interview with informant, Jebbeh, Conakry, February, 2012

Interview with informant, Jemima, Conakry, June, 2012

Interview with informant, Jumah, Kouankan May, 2012

Interview with informant, Karmo, Conakry, April, 2012

Interview with informant, Korto, Conakry, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Kou, Kouankan, June, 2012

Interview with informant, Kpehe, April, Conakry

Interview with informant, Kumbah, Kouankan camp, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Mamadee, Kouankan Town, June, 2012

Interview with informant, Massanyan, Conakry, April, 2012,

Interview with informant, Momolu, Conakry, January, 2012

Interview with informant, Musa, Conakry March 2012

Interview with informant, Nimene, Kouankan, June, 2012

Interview with informant, Nyahn, Conakry, February, 2012

Interview with informant, Paye, Conakry, March, 2012

Interview with informant, Varney, Conakry, April, 2012

Interview with informant, Sadiatu, Kouankan, May, 2012

Interview with informant, Salleymatu, Conakry, February, 2012

Interview with informant, Susan, Conakry, January, 2012

Interview with informant, Tokpa, Kouankan camp, May, 2012

Interview with informant Yarkpawolo, Kouankan camp, June, 2012

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Informants' Interview Guide

Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening.

My name is Henry Ahorttor Collins. I was a refugee just like any of you here some years ago before being resettled in Norway in 2003. I am a student at the University of Bergen in Norway and returned here to do a research on the life of Liberian refugee families in Guinea.

I will be asking personal questions about your family experiences. Our discussion be conducted in confidence and your name will not be mentioned in any document in this research. However, I want to ask your permission to write our discussion.

Participation in this research is not by force. If you are not willing to take part in this exercise I will not compel you to so do. Moreover, you are at liberty to stop responding the questions at any point if you so wish.

I want to ask you a simple question and your answer should be: YES or NO, and we proceed from there. Are you willing to participate in this research?

Thank you.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Fieldwork Guinea

Age: _____ Gender: _____

1. Please tell me how long you have been in Guinea or when did you come to Guinea?
2. Can you please tell me your civil status? E.g. single, married, the divorced, widow/widower. Can you also tell a little about your family, e.g. number of children you have and how many of them are here, and other family members who live with you in Guinea? Are your children and other relatives going to school? If not what are they doing?
3. What do you do to earn money to take care your family and do you encounter any problems in going about your daily activities as a refugee? Do you receive medical or financial assistance from UNHCR, partners and other organizations?
4. Can you explain if you and your entire family find life more challenging now than when you received humanitarian assistance some years ago?
5. Do you face any form of discrimination based on your religious, racial, tribal, and ethnic or refugee background? Do you and your family face any problem(s) in sharing facilities such as toilets and bathrooms or fetching water, or share of responsibilities to clean up in the house or community in which you live?
6. Do you have documents that make you a bona fide refugee and are these documents updated? If so, is it easy to use these documents within the local community or to travel within the country?

7. Have you ever had any problem at any point in your stay in Guinea as refugee that needed the intervention of UNHCR or CNISR?
8. How does the issue of identity matter to you as someone who has fled to Guinea?
9. Are you involved in any activities that reinforce your identity and link you to your home country?
10. Does music, cultural activities, food, dress or news about your home country have any influence on how you imagine or manage your identity?
11. Do events such as July 26, Flag Day on August 24, Decoration Day etc. remind you of anything or give any sense to imagining your identity differently amongst the Guinean locals and the society in which you find yourself?
12. Are you aware of June 30, 2012 deadline for cessation of Liberian refugee status and the repatriations and the local integration options that refugees have to choose from?
13. Do you have any questions for me?

Source: UHNCR Conakry Office. Received on April 15, 2012

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