

“Children are our pension”

Livelihood diversification, social security, and kinship constraints among East African refugees

Francesca DECLICH

Università di Urbino

ABSTRACT: Stereotypical ideas about poverty and life in refugee camps make it difficult to understand the choices that individual refugees make when moving from one place to another within Africa, including from refugee settlements to town, to refugee camps and vice versa. Certain choices which individual migrants make, and which may appear incomprehensible, respond in fact to a clear logic and represent, as it were, diversified forms of social security. Recent trends in migration theories have emphasised the importance of the positive role of the group of kin in the decision to set out on the migration path, but this article reveals a much more complex dynamic underlying such movements within Africa: a vision of livelihood diversification that goes beyond the stark reality of forced displacement or the opportunity of acquiring refugee status. The article will take into consideration the migratory trajectories of a number of young persons, across the Horn and some eastern African nations, first as forced migrants and later as refugees migrating at will, as observed over a period of years. Over and above the war that initially prompted migration, the movements of these young people result from negotiating the demands of individual agency and the constraints imposed by kinship ideologies.

KEYWORDS: TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY; KINSHIP; TRANSLOCALITY; SOCIAL SECURITY; SOMALI BANTU.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons © Francesca Declich
“Children are our pension”: *Livelihood diversification, social security, and kinship constraints among East African refugees*

2020 | ANUAC. VOL. 9, N° 1, GIUGNO 2020: 159-181.

ISSN: 2239-625X - DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-4218



Preamble

In this article, I have chosen to present some sections of the life histories of young refugees I have known in many places of Africa, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and the US during their almost life-long forced migration, starting in Somalia in approximately 1993¹. In these cases it emerges that translocal householding is a livelihood strategy that allows diversification. Notwithstanding the pattern of the livelihood strategies, individuals negotiate their own position in the network by juggling the demands of kinship constraints and individual aspirations. I believe that information gathered diachronically can best show the way household strategies are designed, how people negotiate their position within them, as well as how certain policies may have a direct impact on the lives of the people and on their chances of finding ways to integrate in a new country.

Pursuing the idea that migration paths are often decided by groups of neighbours, communities or families that from home prompt the migration of group members (Stark 1991; Massey *et al.* 1993: 457), envisaging that a successful migration can produce benefits for their relatives at home, some trends within the mobility studies emphasize the category of the transnational family (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002; Evergeti, Zontini, 2006; Goulbourne, Reynolds, Solomons, Zontini 2010; Razy 2011). However, studies on migrations from Somalia and Somaliland have shown the entanglement of crisis and opportunities that may prompt the setting up of a network which will support a subsequent migratory chain (Declich 1997;

1. Funds for fieldwork came through the years from various sources at different times: the World Bank Scholarship Program, the IFRA (French Research Institute for Africa), a post-doctoral grant of the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples, the Urbino Unit of several PRIN research projects funded by the Ministry of Education, University and Research in Italy. I thank Professor Isharia Kimambo from the Department of History of the University of Dar es Salaam who was always happy to answer my questions, Barbara Harrell-Bond - then director of the Refugee Studies Programme (RSP) now Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford - for introducing me to the authorities of the Ministry of Home Affairs in Tanzania and the officers of the Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs who understood the importance of a long term ethnographic approach and the many officers who facilitated the fieldwork. A very early version of this article was presented at the second AEGIS (Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies) Conference on African Studies, in Leiden, The Netherlands, in July 11-14, 2007 in a panel organized by Eva Evers Rosander and Gunilla Bjerén entitled "Family Dynamics and Migration: Tensions in Gender and Generational Relations". I thank the participants to the workshop for their feedback. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for valuable suggestions.

Declich 2010; Moret 2018)². Network contacts between urban and rural areas may be crucial to the refugees' chances³, as they are in contexts where no displacement is involved (Greiner 2011: 614-615). My position is that translocality is a better word than transnationality to describe livelihoods that count on mobility as an opportunity in this part of Africa (Sørensen, Olwig 2002; Declich 2018b: 8-16). From an ethnographic point of view translocality must be seen as “an embodied practice of living far away from one's original place of birth, either continuously or at regular/irregular intervals or as a state of mind involving an imaginary of spatial and social mobility” (Declich 2018b: 8-9), a concept based on material cultural practices, rather than as a framework for interpreting global history or a research perspective (Freitag, Von Oppen 2010: 1-21). Connections between translocality and kinship have been highlighted by scholars of Africa (Heintze 2010), as has the usefulness of translocality to describe livelihoods that implied long haul mobilities favoring trades and cultural exchange in this part of the world (Engsens 2006; Miran 2012; Verne 2012) as well the crucial role of translocal urban-rural networks to enhance the chances of livelihoods in South Africa and Namibia (Steinbrink 2009; Greiner 2011: 611). Scholars have also found it rewarding to adopt a translocal perspective in tackling mobilities (De Bruijn, Bikerman 2011: 42) and stratification within migration in Africa (Greiner 2011: 607). Translocality has been very common as a livelihood strategy and was practised in many different ways by Somalis (Colucci 1924; Schlee 1989; Little 1992; Weitzberg 2017) and other groups in Africa (Greiner 2011: 610). Yet, if pastoral livelihoods naturally imply translocality, that may seem less obvious for non-pastoral households, in which, nevertheless, exchange of goods and wealth between individual people who travel to seek for new opportunities and constitute a resource for the household of origin is a form of livelihood strategy that has also developed via individual travelers and is embedded in households' individuals' life cycles. The manner in which individuals and groups navigated the distances has always implied complex domestic arrangements and these were maintained in various ways, for instance, through serial marriages or polygamous marriages (Declich 2016). In the receiving countries after migratory paths were implemented, migrants could act according to different rules thus also improve their living standards, though

2. Since submitting this article, other contributions on this aspect have been published, one concerning Somalis in Uganda and others referring to the entire Horn of Africa (Iazzolino, Mohamed Hersi 2019; Schmidt, Kimathi, Owiso 2019; Scharrer, Carrier 2019).

3. A recent monography describes the borough of Eastleigh in Nairobi also in this sense (Carrier 2017).

not uniformly (Declich 2018b). To understand the real nature of the socio-spatial structure of the social networks necessary in mobility, it is crucial to highlight the translocality of many livelihood systems that implicates not only pastoralists, but also, for instance, people living between rural and urban (Lohnert, Steinbrink 2005: 99) or practising transoceanic trades (Declich 2018b). In the large humanitarian crises of the Horn, refugee camps, – although totalizing institutions (Goffman 1961) which sometimes dissuade people from moving ahead to seek other chances, keeping them at times almost as hostages in between camps by offering at least basic benefits –, are also seen as one among other opportunities, offering chances to find jobs and to improve life, albeit not always successfully (Getachew 1996; Turton, Allen 1996; Declich 2011; Jansen 2016). Notwithstanding, while it is important to highlight the characteristics of refugees as specific social actors, entangled within a set of international and domestic legal constraints and the enforcement of public international practices that bound their social space, I believe that conflating all practices concerning the mobility of those who hold the status of refugees in the same “pot” of refugee issues may hide rather than highlight human diversity and the capacity of different communities to act in original ways and to engage their unique social and cultural capitals. Especially for Somalis, who have lived without borders for centuries before nations were even imagined in Africa (see also Weitzberg 2017), the mobility skills developed over centuries and the social security mechanisms that go along with them must be highlighted. Thus livelihoods based on translocality, persisting and adapting to the conditions of a historical period in which national boundaries exist, can be seen as part of endogenous resilient skills rather than as new features prompted by the “national order of things”, in Malkki’s (1995) definition. The idea is to count on categories constructed as much as possible inductively through an emic perspective rather than shaping them deductively and verify them in the field⁴.

This article deals also with some of those forms of social security and their diversification in contexts of poverty where people are accustomed to deal with mobility. How certain living standards can be guaranteed in Africa in contexts of rural poverty and what can guarantee such standards is one question. Travelling to other places may provide chances of social mobility. Possibilities of resorting to social networks as well as obtaining even

4. Analysis on how social and cultural capitals can be invested and transformed within migrations into economic capital (Moret 2018) may lead to fascinating results but follow this latter approach.

minimal financial credit are crucial in coping with shocks that could come from any sort of misfortune or occurrences that may lead to more poverty. A recent study of the middle class in Kenya provides food for thought. The middle class in Kenya has been defined as “that social class which can, over time, mobilize resources to maintain a certain social status” (Kroeker 2018: 275); that class diversifies forms of security arrangements by not relying only on institutionalized forms of protection (i.e. salaries) but also engaging in “informal social security arrangements, such as solidarity networks” (*ibidem*: 283) to secure their status.

Lower classes, on the other hand, do not have secure access to salaried jobs. The trend Somali Bantu refugees follow, coming from rural areas where refugee settlements are placed, is to seek opportunities for salaried jobs for any of the extended family and to weave those social relations that can help to cope in situations of stress which can occur at any time, like occasional draughts, illnesses, etc.; those social relations often entail engaging in trade with urban contexts. My argument here is that networks and resources that were found mostly in urban areas when Somalia was not ravaged by wars, can be found today also in large refugee camps like Dadaab and Kakuma too, where international support also provides extra educational services and employment opportunities for people lacking other entitlements but the refugee status. Those refugee camps, thus, become further opportunities which sometimes appear very promising, yet are relatively new ones in the panorama of otherwise different existing options.

Who actually makes the choices to pursue one or other alternative path, to what extent does kinship network enforce certain decisions and what are the constraints under which young people, women or men, take the decision to migrate? Reinilde Sotiria König and Martina de Regt (2010: 1) have clarified the intersection of gender, intergenerational ties and tensions existing in the dynamics of transnational migrations from Africa to Europe. Ada Engebrigsten (2011: 311), in her study about Ali’s disappearance, has emphasized that sometimes the decision to move, if temporarily, is taken out of customary loyalty to one’s kinship network rather than to one’s individual inclination. In this article, I would like to show the interweaving of personal strategies and social constraints in some decisions of young refugees to move within East Africa and beyond by presenting the view point of both, the children and the parents. I will also show that, in contexts of poverty pervaded by a subsistence economy, certain kinship ideologies pave the way to access “wealth in people” (Guyer 1995) and constitute ways of reproducing the group.

Methodology and issues

This article is based on data gathered over several years through ethnographic fieldwork that became multi-sited as I followed refugees who were forcibly displaced to Kenya, Tanzania and the US as a result of the outbreak of war in southern Somalia in 1990. In 1993 I started a follow up anthropological research fieldwork under the umbrella of the Refugee Studies Programme in Oxford⁵, initially with a visit to Dadaab camps in Kenya, thereafter with prolonged stays at the refugee settlement of Mkuiu in Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam and later in the resettlement area of Chogo. Fieldwork entailed living together with the refugees in Mkuiu and with some of their relatives who had migrated decades earlier to Tanzania - fieldwork which I carried out for some months every year until 1998⁶. After the resettlement of Bantu Somali refugees from the camps in Kenya to the United States, fieldwork led to the US with groups of refugees who had moved into two American towns, San Diego (California) and Buffalo (New York) in 2000, 2009 and 2012. Ethnographic fieldwork has therefore entailed the intimacy typical of social anthropological methodologies which would not have been the case had I merely been interviewing people, even if more than once, in a sociological perspective in multi located places.

In the meanwhile, by getting in touch and living with refugees in different countries, it became clear that the borders of the group that I was studying were melting day by day on contact with new societies, cultures, forms of education and countries. Yet a way to keep track of the ongoing changes was to spend time in the receiving countries with people I had known before in Somalia, so that I could hear at first hand the transformations they were noticing. Some formal interviews were carried out, fieldnotes were taken and interviews were videoed. Some issues dealt with in the interviews were about how the people were coping with the new life in the receiving country, which were the changes and, of course, observations about the life cycle within the households.

In so doing, I realized that the possibility of meeting the same people in the field year after year and seeing the results of their choices over such a sweep of time is a privilege that anthropologists may enjoy through their research work. This certainly lends weight to the information gathered, which, in Geertz's words, allows "thick descriptions" as opposed to "thin" ones (Geertz 1998: 8-11). Simple interviews with people only recently known

5. At the time I was a Research Fellow at the RSP.

6. Research activity, however, did not stop as there were several different focuses to follow and I was able to keep meeting people in Tanzania until 2016.

could not easily arrive at the same depth of understanding⁷. This is a prerogative of the ethnographic approach in which data are collected over a long period of time, through repeated meetings at different levels and on different aspects of people's lives - sometimes through intuition and empathy more than preformatted intention - to produce denser, more substantial descriptions of what is studied. This sort of understanding of the situation came into its own when talking with the people about their recent movements as refugees.

Therefore, the results of this study have been partly produced by events, because the forced migration occurred after the initial fieldwork in Somalia had been completed, partly by the opportunity to go again in the field when the events were taking place⁸. Yet, having followed over a number of years how people's lives have unfolded between and across asylum countries, I was enabled to reflect on the relevance of diachronic anthropological research to understand not only processes of change (Peel 1987; Christomalis 2006: 377), but also socio-cultural mechanisms that drive people's choices under specific constraints. Hearing about the pressure of constraints from the very people engaged in making their choices differs greatly from gathering explanations of those decisions years later, when the people involved have had the intervening time to ruminate.

Agency and kinship ideologies

Although individual agency can never be underestimated, not all choices can be made neither are they available under certain constraints. Lack of economic resources as well as the parents will regarding one's marriage are still severely restricting young people's choices in rural Africa and elsewhere; these bonds can either be accepted or they can be overridden by some ploy, which may, however, not lead to success. Kinship ideologies including arranged marriages are still an important strategical move which parents resort to in order to set up their children's lives so that they will deliver grandchildren and, in so doing, ensure their own old age. For teenagers and young adults, these two constraints become crucial and they can drastically change the course of these young people's lives. I shall thus analyze the choices made by some young people concerning important

7. I would like to thank the people I have interviewed who also became friends thanks to their long-standing commitment to my research work. I cannot mention all their names here for privacy concerns.

8. This commitment to multi-sided fieldwork, and the chance, which may not materialize, to get research funds for pursuing the collection of this kind of data can be demanding.

stages of their life, their studies and their marriages, their accounts of why they made certain decisions, and also the barriers they had to overcome. I have dealt elsewhere with the trap encountered in their journeys in western countries by young Somali Bantu refugees entangled in kinship ideologies entailing arranged marriages (Declich s.d.). The issue of marriage and having children in exile can be seen from different points of view. Some migrant women attempting to reach Europe are able to use their unforeseen pregnancies outside kinship relations as tools to navigate the migration legal frames (Kastner 2010); others in Egypt take the chance to rearrange their marriages from a different perspective when they are in exile (Al-sharmani 2006: 58); on the other hand, Sudanese male ex-refugees now living in the US navigate their marriage ideology by offering very high bridewealth to seek wives in the refugee camp of Kakuma, thus beating any competition from local male refugees (Grabska 2010).

A traditional concern for parents is that children are part of their “retirement insurance,” they are their main social security. The idea of locating children in several places where they can become rich and have a good life is a very conscious strategy that more than one person expressed during my research work. A father did everything for his first child to become a doctor, which he achieved. Another, with fewer financial possibilities, paid for the training for his child to become a driver, because that is considered a respectable job for somebody who could not pursue his studies. This is done clearly not simply to set the children up in life: before the displacement from Somalia, it was customary that children, as soon as they were able to work and marry, would bring goods and money to their parents. Nowadays, it is still expected that children will do that. A fifty-five year old Somali Bantu refugee mother in Tanzania told me in despair: “Here in Tanzania everything is a mess. When children marry and go away, you would expect them to come home and greet parents with gifts, bringing something on every visit. Here, though, they cannot make it, they come and ask you for food because in town they may not have been able to earn any money... In Somalia it was different because the food could be seen, [in the fields and on trees] you did not need money to buy it.” Of course, the wishes of parents to control their children according to a traditional mindset do not always become reality.

However, considering the overwhelming parental pressure, young people need to be very determined in their decisions; within this kinship ideology young people are also scared to incur in their parents’ curse.

Context and individual stories

I was in the Somali Lower Juba region in 1988, before anybody ever thought the Zigula would have to flee from their villages⁹. The civil war in Somalia started at the end of 1990 and since 1993 I have carried out follow-up research and fieldwork with them as refugees from Somalia in Kenya and Tanzania. Some of their stories, which I shall describe, are not exceptional and may be considered representative of many of those I met during the multi-sited fieldwork which started on the Jubaland in Somalia (1985) and continued, on and off, with visits to the refugee camps of Dadaab in Kenya, the Mkuiu refugee settlement (Mkuiu), the resettlement location of Chogo and the town of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. My most recent visit was in 2016.

Their forced migration began after 1990, when life in the villages was made impossible by the militias making their way south from Mogadishu, looting the rural communities of the Middle and Lower Juba, stealing the harvests and thus pushing the civil population towards the town of Kismaayo in search of support. As very little food was available, those who could afford to attempted to leave the town of Kismaayo and went by car and on foot to the refugee camps of Dadaab, in Kenya. Many households were divided between members who stayed and other who fled. Some of them succeeded, others died along the way.

In March 1994, more than 10,000 Somali Bantu lived in the three refugee camps of Dadaab: Ifo, Dagahaleey and Hagardeera (Declich 2000: 27). Individuals had different life trajectories. Many spent years in the refugee camps; of those some decided to wait in the camp in case of a chance to resettle in the US, others opted to sell their refugee cards and try a new life in Tanzania or Kenya. People moved individually or in groups. Most often households did not travel all together but, if possible, tried to keep their chances alive in more than one place, leaving some behind to look after the fields or for lack of money to travel as a single party. In June 1992 a group of Somali Bantu Zigula arrived in Tanzania and, in consequence of their petition to be received by the country as a group returning home after deportation, were allocated the refugee settlement of Mkuiu, in the Handeni region (Declich 2010: 175). Some years later in 2002, the refugees of Mkuiu in Tanzania were transferred to a permanent settlement, Chogo, in Tanzania. In 1999 the Congress of the United States had approved the resettlement of more than 13.000 Somali Bantu from the Kenyan refugee camps of Kakuma and Dadaab and in 2003 the transferral from Africa started

9. The Zigula are an enclave of Bantu language Kizigula speaking farmers who live along the Juba River in the middle of a Cushitic language speaking pastoralists dominated area.

and the Somali Bantu were offered asylum in many different states of the US. The process of resettlement was scheduled to be completed in 2006 (Eno, Eno 2008: 198). Since then, through the persistent work of Omar Eno and Dan Van Lehman, who set up a project in the US to facilitate their integration, many associations of Somali Bantu have been funded. The associations have the task of representing the members of the community in any requests they might formulate collectively and of organizing some social services.

While this group of refugees from southern Somalia found year after year humanitarian protection and places to live in Tanzania and the US, the lives of the youngsters followed different trajectories, depending on their age, the place where they happened to be received as refugees and the network available. Children who arrived in the US at school age were included in the local school, while those beyond school age, even by one year, lost their chance to enter public schools, to be educated with other schoolmates and were included in programs for work and study¹⁰. Conversely, those who were of the right age to attend school had the chance to study in public schools and, thereafter, if interested, to compete for university degrees.

Mariam arrived in San Diego after having lived in the refugee camp of Dadaab in Kenya. She remembers very little of Somalia as she left when she was a very little girl. When I met her in San Diego she already had a child. However, she was in her fresher year of university, studying to become a nurse or a medical doctor, and her child was looked after by her mother who was getting some payment from the social services for nursing her. She had big aspirations for her future: after graduating in medicine she wished to go back to Africa to help improve the medical services there. When she talked about Africa, though originally from Somalia, she always referred to Kenya, where she attended most of her studies, apart from the last years of secondary school in the US. Halima, on the other hand, when she arrived was already twenty years old. Due to her age she could no longer enter secondary school. Much as she would have loved to study, she could only be engaged in a joint program of job and educational training which, however, did not lead to a secondary studies diploma. She was, furthermore, pressed by her mother to get engaged to a man she did not want to marry. As a result, she escaped to Arizona with a man she liked and had three children.

10. The provision of social service was different in different states because the agencies that deal with third level assistance to refugees in the various states may follow their own procedures (work with their own modalities). My observations relate to San Diego, in California, and Buffalo in NY state.

In Tanzania, school age children started attending primary schools in Mkuiu and those who achieved a sufficient score were later sent to different types of secondary schools according to the marks they had obtained, as happened with the other Tanzanian youngsters. Tanzania offered the same chances to refugees and Tanzanians, with some better facilities being available to begin with for the refugees in order to fill the initial learning gap; but the country could not offer secondary school for all. In that very decade, between 1993 and 2003, when people moved between Kenya, Tanzania, and the US, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided humanitarian aid for them, opportunities were very variable for individual refugees, depending on whether they happened to be in the right place at the right time. Some had much greater opportunities than others. The openings available to children in those days were very unequal because much depended on occasional opportunities: a child whose mental capacities had been impacted in infancy by severe hunger during the war in Kismaayo could find herself in the US a few years later, studying in a school and receiving special care. Others, maybe children with brilliant minds and sharp intelligence, could be stuck in a Kenyan refugee camp with no chances to continue their secondary education because they did not have a refugee card and they had to work to support themselves, or marry at a young age in a resettlement area in Tanzania because their command of English was not good enough to pass the exams.

According to the humanitarian aid machine, had all the Somali Bantu waited in the refugee camp at Dadaab for ten years, they would have all been in the US by the end of the resettlement process which started in 2003. Yet, the offer of resettlement arrived almost ten years after the refugees had reached the camps, escaping from the war. Living for ten years in a refugee camp, waiting for chances to be resettled somewhere else, can be very demanding. There is a flourishing literature on the psychosis, in Somali language denominated *bufis*, generated by the years waiting in refugee camps in the expectation of being resettled in the US or other Western countries (see for instance Horst 2006; Oka 2014; Rawlence 2018). By the time the process of resettlement to the US started, many of those who were still healthy after the war, who had some minimal network opportunities to decide otherwise, or sufficient invention to conceive of alternatives, had moved from the camp to somewhere else in East Africa to try and lead a normal life. The implementation of the first resettlements to the United States for which refugees were first brought to the Kakuma camp for preparations, became a pull factor and some people went back to live in the refugee camps again, possibly in Kakuma.

Young refugee: options and choices

Arbay and Mohamed were still kids when I first encountered them in 1988 in Somalia, and a bit older when I met them again in Tanzania as refugees. In the 1990s and after 2000, whenever I went back to the refugee settlement at Mkuiu in Tanzania for fieldwork and to meet friends and acquaintances of the southern Somali Bantu group who had been able to reach Tanzania, Mariam updated me on the well-being of her children.

One year Mariam informed me that Arbay had not been able to pass the Form 4 exams with a sufficient score to gain a scholarship to continue her studies: her command of English was not good enough. She had studied in the secondary school at KwediBoma, and, still under the umbrella of the humanitarian aid provided for the refugees, her school fees had been paid through the programme. At that point, however, as she had not met the standards required to pursue her studies, she could not continue attending secondary school unless her parents could pay the fees. As the parents could not afford it, she could not continue studying in Tanzania, which was what she really desired to do. For this reason, she had spoken with her mother and father, Osman, managing to convince them that, as she wanted to study computer science, she could go to the refugee camp at Kakuma in Kenya, a 2-day journey from Mkuiu in Tanzania, where this would be possible. This was also a way to avoid marriage before completing further studies. Her father would have pushed for her marriage had she continued to live in the village¹¹. Thus Arbay's journey was arranged and she went to live on her own in Kakuma in 2006¹². She stayed initially at an uncle's place, and started studying computer science.

At the time, Arbay's decision seemed to me a little weird. She had arrived in a peaceful country, Tanzania, in a place where she had been able to study, so why go back to a refugee camp now? Kakuma, in addition, is a very hot, arid area, with scarcity of water, where no productive economic activities such as agriculture are possible: choices and options, from my point of view, prospects, as I saw it, were really limited. Later I realized that she had a different view of the case. Somebody had told her that Kakuma refugee camp offered the chance of continuing education until a later age than usual. She

11. This is quite a common problem in rural Africa as the alternative to studying is considered proceeding with one's life by marrying.

12. Although her declared age was approximately 17, in fact she was 21. There was no General Register Office in Somalia where she lived and her age was registered for the first time from memory in the refugee settlement. Thus, ironically, unlike her fellow Zigula resettled in the US she had been able to study in Tanzania although she was older than her school mates.

also envisaged getting a refugee identity card and, while studying, waiting for a possible chance of resettlement in western countries. Moreover, this choice would help her to avoid marriage, which she was not prepared to undertake at such an early age. In Tanzania, in secondary schools, children are taught that studying helps them in getting better jobs in the future and that marriage can be delayed. The options I had imagined were different from the ones a refugee girl in Tanzania had in mind. Indeed, other people I interviewed had done something similar. In fact, Zeynab, Mariam's sister who lived in Dar es Salaam, had found a way to send two of her children to the Kakuma refugee camp. In her case, the elder boy, an eighteen-year-old, sadly died of cholera; the second, after having lived there for several months, decided he wanted to come back to Dar es Salaam. He could not stand the weather, the sand, the scarcity of water, and the hardship.

This time Mariam had a different story to tell. Arbay's younger brother, Mohamed, had not passed the exams for the second year of secondary school, and this year the humanitarian aid had been withdrawn, therefore Osman and herself would have had to pay the fees for the secondary education of their own children. She and her husband could not afford it and so Mohamed could not continue studying. He kept reproaching them with helping Arbay to study and to go to Kakuma while they were not helping him to carry on with secondary school. He saw with envy his own school mates continuing their secondary education, destined to become teachers. One day Mohamed and a male friend disappeared from Mkuiu. In the morning the parents could not find him and were desperate as they did not know where he had gone. Two months later Mohamed's travelling companion returned from Mombasa to inform them that Mohamed had fallen ill in Kenya and needed some help. The two boys, neither of whom could continue studying because the humanitarian aid was no longer available and their families could not afford to fund their studies, had escaped from the resettlement village of Mkuiu in order to seek opportunities in Kenya. As it happened, Mohamed had received information from a former school mate that there were jobs available in Mombasa and, in fact, in Kenya he had found something considered pretty good: he was working in a large shop selling radios, telephones and other electronic goods. He did not see any interesting future in that refugee settlement where young people, in his view, could only marry and start farming small pieces of land. If he could not study he needed another project to pursue. Mohamed's father, Osman, went to Kenya and recovered his child so that he could be treated for the tuberculosis he had caught. When he arrived they thought this might be AIDS for he was very weak. Mohamed's act of rebellion ended there and he was obliged to try and

find a job for unskilled and uneducated workers in Tanzania. His resentment was comprehensible but, irrespective of their poverty, the parents saw that he was not really good at school, like Arbay. Mohamed's decision was not to escape to the closer town of Dar es Salaam, where several of his relatives live, but to reach a more distant place like Mombasa following his friend's suggestion.

The stories of the two children reflect many of the constraints that young refugees in asylum encounter and which they have to negotiate their way through: in particular, kinship ideologies and lack of opportunities, most often due to poverty, may clash with personal aspirations.

Arbay did not travel away alone, abandoning her ties; her journey to Kenya was not an escape. She won over her parents, with the help of her mother, by presenting her trip to Kakuma as a chance for the entire household. If she managed to pursue her studies in Kakuma, the entire family would benefit. If she were to be resettled in the United States, she would be able to support them forever. She presented herself as an opportunity for the parents and succeeded in being selected for the trip instead of her brother. In fact, she had always been very good at school, which was not the case with Mohamed, and her parents decided to let her go to Kakuma despite the fact that she was to travel on her own. The parents, within their limited economic means, were trying to arrange the lives of their children in such a way that the investment they had put into raising them could produce wellbeing in the future. Mariam, who had been left motherless, and got married at a very young age in the early 1970s, once told me: "Well, when I got married I said to myself: 'let me have as many children as possible as they will make my future'. Because, of the ten or so children you may have, one or two can make it good and will be able to help you when you are old". Other parents force their children into marriage because they do not believe in education, which was the case of a very bright girl at school whose father not only would not let her study but got her married to a husband of his choice.

Years later...

Let us pick up the story of Mariam's two children a few years later. In 2010 Arbay was studying for a diploma in Early Child Education (ECD) in the Kakuma refugee camp and was to be sent to Canada to study for a degree. In the refugee camps there may be offers of education for older persons and during that time food items and non-food items are delivered to the refugees. Thus studying is possible if survival is ensured. In the U.S. people

who have passed the age for studying are offered unskilled work opportunities and those who have too little education may find difficulty in getting back to study afterwards. As they will not earn enough to support their future studies, they will need to find a benefactor. In Tanzania, Arbay was not offered a choice. She was brave in her decision to leave Tanzania alone for a refugee camp. Her parents ended up proud of her when she completed her diploma and hopeful about her prospects.

As it happened, she didn't succeed in going to study in Canada, possibly due to the high competition, yet managed to become a teacher in a nursery school set up by an NGO in Kakuma. At the end of 2018 Arbay returned to Tanzania to see her parents - her mother had had a car accident - and brought her 3 children to visit Chogo. They stayed there for a month and a half until they had to go back for the children to start school. She is now married to a man who is currently doing his second year studies in Nairobi and he's also competing for the chance to be offered a study option in Canada. Should he succeed, they would both be resettled together with their children in Canada. Alternatively, they will continue for the time being in the refugee camp where they have spent the past twenty years improving their education, raising their children and cultivating aspirations. Both are also waiting for possible resettlement in the US, Australia or Canada. As things stand at the moment, Arbay is not particularly wealthy; she is not helping her parents from abroad. However, she still represents the possibility of a change in her parents' standard of living and the prospect of an easier old age.

Mohamed works as a small trader in a marginal borough of Dar es Salaam. He's been married since 2010 but refuses to spend much time in Chogo as he gets angry at living in what he feels is rural isolation there. He is still unsatisfied as he believes he has missed his chance in life; he cannot live too close to his mother and father as he always grumbles, so he works in Dar es Salaam.

By way of concluding

These are only a few of the many stories of this kind that could be gathered in the resettlement villages of Mkuiu and Chogo. Arbay is not the only girl who went back to spend her life in a refugee camp, or, rather, decided to go back to a refugee camp in order to complete her education or improve her chances, after having lived part of her life in Tanzania's resettlement villages. For instance, I have heard of more than one woman who got married to men who were in the refugee camp in Kenya (Dadaab)

and then left Tanzania to join them. Conjugal ties are constantly maintained between camps and across distances; marriages are arranged as before and celebrated now in one or other resettlement area in Tanzania or Kenya. Although borders can prove troublesome, they do not put a stop to livelihood strategies that come from afar and connect villages with areas that are perceived as offering economic as well as networking opportunities and the possibility of better living standards. Neither have they stopped parents from thinking of their children as opportunities that must be placed in the best possible position to pay back the investment made while raising them. Parents try whenever possible to place their children in positions that can enhance their chances of a better life, disregarding the distance and the borders. When, in the 1990s, some of the Somali Bantu Zigula arrived in Tanzania, they crossed the borders on foot with other people going from Kenya to Tanzania for the markets; simply speaking the local language made this possible. Arbay claims that one of her arguments to convince her parents to let her go was that “she could not stay in the same places as her parents if there were no longer chances of education, because if you are educated you will survive in any country you go to.”

In contexts of first asylum or resettlement, rural livelihood diversification, as defined by Ellis (1998), becomes livelihood diversification according to the opportunities (Sørensen, Olwig 2002: 9-10). Yet, diversification of livelihood opportunities is a copying strategy in the context of refugee camps, as rightly observed by Horst (2006), but is not necessarily a new strategy originating from the condition of being refugees. On the contrary, for the group focus of this study, it stems as a continuum from previous livelihood patterns and it is in line with choices made decades earlier by some members of the Zigula group, who migrated to Tanzania because they felt discriminated against in Somalia (Declich 1997, 2010). Livelihoods have been diversified in terms of education, labour and location of residence. While there is no space to discuss all these aspects at length, I have presented here some social dynamics reflecting the ideal of finding good positions for members of the household who grow up and marry and, may be, live in different locations. Such a strategy, that some adults pursue consciously for their children and some young people for themselves, cannot be pursued without tensions between the actors, and young people may need to negotiate their own choices.

Since some refugee camps are places where certain opportunities like adult education/training or resettlement in western countries are available, refugee camps are targeted in line with these choices. The process of

creating networks through conjugal ties and arranged marriages, even over large distances, is not a new one and the opportunities that exist in refugee camps or countries of resettlement may increase its desirability even across countries.

Refugee camps are considered important resource places. Almost twenty years ago, Marc Antoine Perouse de Montclos and Peter Mwangi Kagwanja (2000) wrote an article that highlighted the economic importance of refugee camps like Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya. Based on data from the UNHCR census, in 1998 Kakuma and Dadaab had refugee populations of 58,000 and 106,000 respectively (de Montclos, Kagwanja 2000). The supposedly transient nature of the refugee camp had evidently already changed and the camps had become cities and important trading centers which could not be closed simply by a political decision. In 2015 the Dadaab refugee complex first established in 1991 was the third largest urban concentration in Kenya. While that year Dadaab's population was an estimated half a million people (Rawlence 2016) of whom more than three fifths were refugees in February 2019, according to the UNHCR, Dadaab numbered 202,483 registered refugees, a figure which decreased for various political reasons including measures taken by the Kenyan government to reduce the size of the camps¹³.

When I asked the father of one of the women who had lived in Tanzania and was now married in Dadaab why it was that she had gone there, he answered: “That was her chance”. But while saying that his daughter had seized her opportunity, in reality the father meant that, were she to be lucky and obtain a resettlement in the US, that would improve his own chances of a better standard of living.

The strategy of mobility in this situation of forced migration is an old one and isn't abandoned in the face of obstacles like frontiers or faraway places, provided that opportunities are available or seem available to the actors.

While cultural scripts concerning kinship and marriage may change in migration contexts (Engebriksen 2007) aspects of kinship that involve forms of social security for the elderly seem to be resilient in these African contexts in which other forms of social security are not available in the way that they are in certain western countries. This difference cannot be underestimated. A good Somali Bantu friend in Tanzania, Salim, told me during an interview in 2010: “Children are our pension. Here in Africa, the pension is available only for people who work in the government. For all the

13 See the website <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn/location/179>, accessed on 20/05/2020. Somalis who have connections with the Somali clans also go to Eastleigh the borough of Nairobi which is nick named Little Mogadishu (Carrier 2017). For a most recent diachronic story of the Dadaab's refugee camps see D'Orsi 2019.

others the children are the only sort of retirement scheme available. Once you are old, they are the ones who will be helping until you die” (Declich 2011). For this reason, he said, you must invest in them. Mariam, during one of our many conversations through the years, said: “You can have many children but only a couple of them or even just one may be successful. You must count on those who will be. I will indebt myself up to the impossible in order to have one of my children studying at University level”. Children are therefore part of the chances that parents have and in which they have invested, hoping that they will get from the children in return something of what they have given to them. On the other hand, as has emerged from previous studies of other parts of the Horn of Africa (see also Barrera 2011; Grabska, de Regt, del Franco 2018), internal migrations are often due to discomfort with the constraints that kinship obligations impose on young people. Youngsters negotiate their way forward through more or less rebellious action.

REFERENCES

- Al-Sharmani, Mulki, 2006, Living transnationally: Somali diasporic women in Cairo, *International Migration*, 44, 1: 55-77.
- Bryceson, Deborah Fahy, Ulla Vuorela, 2002, Introduction: Transnational families in the twenty-first century, in *The transnational family: new European frontiers and global networks*, Deborah Bryceson, Ulla Vuorela, eds, Oxford, Berg: 1-30.
- Barrera, Giulia, 2011, L'aria di città rende liberi? Appunti sulla storia delle donne sole nell'Eritrea coloniale, in *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi diasporici*, Uol-delul Chelati Dirar, Silvana Palma, Alessandro Triulzi, Alessandro Volterra, eds, Roma, Carocci.
- Carrier, Neil, 2017, *Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi's global Somali hub*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Colucci, Massimo, 1924, *Principi di diritto consuetudinario nella Somalia Italiana meridionale. I gruppi sociali: la proprietà*, Firenze, La voce.
- D e Bruijn, Mirjam, Inge Brinkman, 2011, “Communicating Africa”. Researching mobile kin communities communication technologies, and social transformation in Angola and Cameroon, *Autrepart*, 57-58, 1: 41-57.
- Declich, Francesca, 1997, *Migrations, war and adaptive strategies: The case of the Zigula in Tanzania*, seminar held on March at the Program of African Studies, Evanston, Northwestern University.
- Declich, Francesca, 2000, Fostering ethnic reinvention: Gender impact of forced migration on Bantu Somali refugees in Kenya, *Cahier d'études Africaines*, 40: 25-53.
- Declich, Francesca, 2010, Can boundaries not border on one another? The Zigula (Somali Bantu) between Somalia and Tanzania, in *Borders and borderlands as resources in the Horn of Africa*, Dereje Feyissa, Markus Virgil Hoehne, eds, Oxford, James and Currey: 169-186.
- Declich, Francesca, 2011, Coming of age in exile, Research Documentary, MEIMM, Urbino, <https://vimeo.com/397063670>, accessed on 3/04/2020.
- Declich, Francesca, 2016, Migrations, women and kinship networks in the Western Indian Ocean: a comparative perspective, in *Mobility and Family in Transnational Space*, Marzia Grassi, Tatiana Ferreira, eds, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 161-175.
- Declich, Francesca, 2018a, Translocal links and women slaves in nineteenth-century Somalia, in *Translocal connections across the Indian Ocean. Swahili speaking networks on the move*, Francesca Declich, ed, Leiden, Brill: 92-120.
- Declich, Francesca, 2018b, Translocal relations across the Indian Ocean. An introduction, *Translocal connections across the Indian Ocean. Swahili speaking networks on the move*, Francesca Declich, ed, Leiden, Brill.
- Declich, Francesca, s.d., *Agency and marriage: Somali Bantu refugee women in exile in the US*, forthcoming.

- de Montclos, Marc Antoine Perouse and Kagwanja, Peter Mwangi, 2000, Refugee camps or cities? The socio-economic dynamics of the Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Northern Kenya, *Journal of refugee studies*, 13, 2: 205-222.
- D'Orsi, Cristiano, 2019, "We cannot manage this plight alone anymore": Analysing the Kenyan threats to forcibly repatriate all Somali refugees from Dadaab camp, in *Refugees and forced migration in the Horn of Eastern Africa. Trends, challenges and opportunities*, Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt, Leah Kimathi, Michael Omondi Owiso, eds, Berlin, Springer.
- Ellis, Frank, 1998, Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification, *Journal of development studies*, 35: 1-38.
- Engebretsen, Ada Ingrid, 2011, Ali's disappearance: the tension of moving and dwelling in the Norwegian welfare society, *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 37, 2: 297-313.
- Engebretsen, Ada Ingrid, 2007, Kinship, gender and adaptation processes in exile: the case of Tamil and Somali families in Norway, *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 33, 5: 727-746.
- Eno, Omar, Mohamed Eno, 2008, The making of a modern diaspora: the resettlement process of the Somali Bantu refugees in the United States, in *African minorities in the New World*, Toyin Falola, Niyi Afolabi, eds, London, Routledge: 197-219.
- Evergeti, Venetia, Elisabetta Zontini, 2006, Introduction: some critical reflections on social capital, migration and transnational families, *Ethnic and racial studies*, 29, 6: 1025-1039.
- Freitag, Ulrike, Achim Von Oppen, 2010, Introduction. "Translocality": an approach to connection and transfers in regional studies, in *Translocality. The study of globalising phenomena of a Southern perspective*, Ulrike Freitag, Achim Von Oppen, eds, Leiden, Brill: 1-21.
- Geertz, Clifford, 1998, La description dense. Vers une théorie interprétative de la culture, *Enquête*, 6: 73-105.
- Getachew, K N, 1996, The displacement and return of pastoralists in Southern Ethiopia, in *In search of cool ground. War, flight and homecoming in Northeast Africa*, Tim Allen, David Turton, eds, London, Africa World Press: 111-123.
- Goffman, Erving, 1961, *Asylum. Le istituzioni totali: i meccanismi dell'esclusione e della Violenza*, Torino, Einaudi.
- Goulbourne, Harry, Tracey Reynolds, John Solomons, Elisabetta Zontini, eds, 2010, *Transnational families: ethnicities, Identities and social capital. Relationships and resources*, London, New York, Routledge.
- Grabska, Katarzyna, 2010, Lost boys, invisible girls: stories of Sudanese marriages across borders, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17, 4: 479-497.
- Grabska, Katarzyna, Marina de Regt, Nicoletta del Franco, 2018, *Adolescent girls' migration in the global South transitions into adulthood*, Palgrave, Mac Millan.
- Greiner, Clemens, 2011, Migration, translocal networks and socio-economic stratification in Namibia, *Africa*, 81, 4: 606-627.

- Guyer, Jane, 1995, Wealth in people, wealth in things. Introduction, *Journal African History*, 36, 1: 83-90.
- Heintze, Beatrix, 2010, Translocal “kinship” relations in Central African politics of the 19th century, in *Translocality: The study of globalising phenomena of a Southern perspective*, Ulrike Freitag, Achim Von Oppen, eds, Leiden, Brill.
- Horst, Cindy, 2006, *Transnational nomads: how Somalis cope with refugee life in the Dadaab camps of Kenya*, Oxford, Berghahn Books.
- Iazzolino, Gianluca, Mohamed Hersi, 2019, Shelter from the storm: Somali migrant networks in Uganda between international business and regional geopolitics, *Journal of Eastern African Studies Studies*, 13, 3: 371-88.
- Jansen, Bram J., 2016, “Digging Aid”: The camp as an option in East and the Horn of Africa, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29, 2: 151-65.
- Kastner, Kristin, 2010, Moving relationships: Family ties of Nigerian migrants on their way to Europe, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 3, 1: 17-34.
- König, Reinhilde Sotiria, Marina de Regt, 2010, Family dynamics in transnational African migration to Europe: An introduction, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 3,1: 1-15.
- Kroeker, Lena, 2018, Middle-Class approaches to social security in Kenya, in *Middle classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*, Lena Kroeker, David O’Kane, Tabea Scharrer, eds, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan: 273-292.
- Little, Peter, 1992, Traders, brokers and market “crisis” in Southern Somalia, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 62, 1: 94-112.
- Lohnert, Beate, Malte Steinbrink, 2005, Rural and urban livelihoods: A trans-local perspective in a South African context, *South African Geographical Journal*, 87: 95-103.
- Lowe, Lucy, Mark Yarnell, 2019, Perpetually in transit: Somalian refugees in a context of increasing hostility, in *Mobile urbanity. Somali presence in urban East Africa*, Oxford, Berghahn.
- Malkki, Lisa, 1995, Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1: 493-523.
- Massey, Douglas S, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, J Edward Taylor, 1993, Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal, *Population and Development Review*, 19, 3: 431-66.
- Moret, Joëlle, 2018, *European Somalis’ post-migration movements. Mobility capital and the transnationalisation of resources*, Rotterdam, Springer Open/IMISCOE.
- Oka, Rahul Chandrashekhar, 2014, Consuming “Normal” and “Dignity” for 10 Shillings: The Social and Structural Benefits of Commerce at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya, *American Anthropologist*, 116, 1: 23-37.
- Pessar, Patricia R, Sarah J. Mahler, 2013, Transnational migration: Bringing gender in, *International Migration Review*, 37, 3: 812-846.
- Rawlence, Ben, 2016, Story of cities #44: will Dadaab, the world’s largest refugee camp, really close?, *The Guardian*, 17 May 2016, www.theguardian.com/cities/-/2016/may/17/story-of-cities-44-dadaab-kenya-worlds-largest-refugee-camp-closed, accessed on 18/07/2019.

- Rawlence, Ben, 2018, *La città delle spine*, Milano, Brioschi.
- Razy, Élodie, Virginie Baby-Collin, eds, 2011, La famille transnationale das tous ses états, *Autrepart*, 57-58, 1: 7-22.
- Scharrer, Tabea, Neil Carrier, 2019, Introduction. Mobile urbanity: Somali presence in urban East Africa, in *Mobile urbanity: Somali presence in urban East Africa*, Tabea Scharrer, Neil Carrier, eds, Oxford, Berghahn Books: 3-25.
- Schlee, Gunter, 1989, *Identities on the move: clanship and pastoralism in Northern Kenya*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Schmidt, Johannes Dragsbaek, Leah Kimathi, Michael Omondi Owiso, eds, 2019, *Refugees and forced migration in the Horn of Eastern Africa. Trends, challenges and opportunities*, Berlin, Springer.
- Sørensen, Ninna Nyeberg, Karen Fog Olwig, 2002, Mobile livelihoods. Making a living in the World, in *Work and migration. Life and livelihoods in a globalizing world*, London, New York, Routledge: 1-20.
- Stark, Oded, 1991, *The migration of labour*, London, Blackwell Publishers.
- Steinbrink, Malte, 2009, Urbanisation, poverty and translocality: Insights from South Africa, *African Population Studies*, 23, Supplement: 219-252.
- Tabet, Paola, 2004, *La grande beffa. Sessualità delle donne e scambio sesso-economico*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino.
- Turton, David and Tim Allen, 1996, Introduction, in *In search of cool ground. War, flight and homecoming in Northeast Africa*, London, Africa World Press/James Currey: 1-22.
- Verne, Julia, 2012, *Living translocality: Space, culture and economy in contemporary Swahili trade*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Weitzberg, Karen, 2017, *We do not have borders: Greater Somalia and the predicaments of belonging in Kenya*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press.

Francesca DECLICH is Associate Professor at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo. She has been Research Fellow of the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford as well as Fulbright research scholar at Northwestern University and Stanford University. She has carried out long term ethnographic fieldwork and archival research in Somalia, Tanzania and Mozambique and worked with Somali Refugees in East Africa and the US. Her latest edited book published for Brill is *Translocal Connections across the Indian Ocean: Swahili-speaking networks on the move*. She recently co-edited with historian Marie Rodet a thematic issue on memories and migration for the journal *Africa* (2018) and a special issue on research films on slavery for the *Journal of Global Slavery* (2020).

francesca.declich@uniurb.it

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons © Francesca Declich
“Children are our pension”: Livelihood diversification, social security, and kinship constraints among
East African refugees

2020 | ANUAC. VOL. 9, N° 1, GIUGNO 2020: 159-181.

ISSN: 2239-625X - DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-4218

