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**Refugees' Livelihood Strategies in a Setting of Long-term
Encampment:
The Case of the Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi**

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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| CARD | Churches Action in Relief and Development |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| JRS | Jesuit Refugee Service |
| MoHS | Malawian Ministry for Homeland Security |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| ORAM | The Organization for Refugee, Asylum and Migration |
| PIM | Plan International Malawi |
| SLA | Sustainable Livelihood Approach |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHS | World Humanitarian Summit |

Abstract

This study focuses on refugees' livelihood strategies in a context of long-term encampment. It looks at this phenomenon through the case of the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi by investigating camp residents' strategies as well as intersecting barriers to livelihood attainment. Initially intended as a *temporary* emergency measure to host refugees fleeing conflict and genocide from East Africa's Great Lakes Region in the late 90s, it has been operating for more than twenty-eight years. Due to the government's encampment policy, all refugees in the country are obliged to reside in the Dzaleka camp. Through an interdisciplinary conceptualisation of livelihoods, this paper draws on different schools of thoughts to account for a comprehensive understanding of livelihood strategies. The eight-week in-situ research was conducted in the Dzaleka camp during August and September 2022 and twenty-two interviews were held through a collaborative life history method. By using an intersectional lens and thematic analysis, it finds that relations are at the core of camp residents' livelihood strategies. These relations can both benefit livelihoods through mutual support and impede them due to social hierarchies based on gender and ethnicity. Findings highlight that camp residents face intersecting barriers to livelihood attainment based on multiple systems of oppression, mostly disadvantaging refugees from Rwanda. There is a need for humanitarian and development actors to take these systems into account when designing policy and livelihoods programmes. Findings also underline that the concept of refugee 'self-reliance', as promoted by the humanitarian and development nexus, needs to be revised as this is not equally attainable for all refugees. Whilst other studies on the Dzaleka refugee camp have looked at specific livelihood strategies, this study is the first of its kind to address livelihoods from an intersectional perspective and to include strategies that do not operate within market structures.

Relevance to Development Studies

This topic is relevant to Development Studies as it addresses the issue of refugees' long-term encampment which poses a significant challenge to humanitarian and development policy and practitioners alike. It is also significant to the theorisation of livelihoods as it demonstrates the need to reconsider the binary between formality and informality in livelihood studies. By disputing the concept of refugee self-reliance through intersectional lens it speaks to critical development issues such as gender inequality and ethnic discrimination and how these need to be considered when designing development as well as humanitarian programmes.

Keywords

Refugee livelihoods; humanitarian and development nexus; refugee 'self-reliance', Dzaleka refugee camp, intersectionality, life history method, migrant-centred epistemology of care and concern.

Chapter 1 | Setting the Scene

“Refugee life is challenging... That is to encounter, to cross mountains and valleys. Many hardships. That is to be patient. No choice”
(Peter)

Peter’s statements, who fled Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide, highlight the dire condition of life in the Dzaleka refugee camp located in the centre of Malawi. It also points to the strong perseverance of refugees living in Dzaleka. As of August 2022, Malawi’s High Court has solidified the government’s decision to order all refugees in the country to return to the Dzaleka refugee camp in line with the country’s encampment policy, putting immense pressure onto the already congested camp (Baltay, 2021; Chilora, 2022; Kunchezera, 2021). As Bisimwa, a participant from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) asks, *“imagine you’re living twenty years in this place without moving. Is it really different from a prison?”*.

Prior to becoming a refugee camp, Dzaleka, which means “I will not do it again” in Chichewa, was in fact a prison for political detainees during the Kamuzu Banda regime (Kayange, 2020). Located between the mountains of the Dowa District, Dzaleka is characterised by poor weather conditions and strong winds that howl through the camp at night. At its establishment in 1994, the camp was initially intended to temporarily cater towards 10,000 to 12,000 refugees fleeing from conflict in East Africa’s Great Lakes Region (Kunchezera, 2021; UNHCR, 2022d). However, as of September 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2022b) estimates that 56,485 refugees reside in the camp, with severe consequences for their lives, including the difficulty to access food.

Aside from forceful encampment, the Malawian government restricts refugees’ ability to sustain their livelihoods through limiting their rights to labour, education, and social security (UNHCR, 2019, p. 1). This is particularly challenging for populations that are traditionally marginalised due to certain identity markers such as gender, class, and ethnicity, as research shows that they are at high risk to face intersectional oppressions at the sight of the camp (Camminga, 2020a; Camminga, 2020b; Hossain *et al.*, 2021; Pail, 2021; Rosenberg and Bakomeza, 2017). Yet, research highlights despite spending most of their lives in a camp environment shaped by hostility, refugees find ways to make a living and create safety for themselves and their families (Awidi and Quan-Baffour, 2021; Boeyink, 2020; Carpi *et al.*, 2020; Rosenberg and Bakomeza, 2017; Omata, 2021; Nabulsi *et al.*, 2020; Hoque and Yunus, 2020). It is this ability to sustain their lives beyond the legal restrictions put in place that forms the basis for this Research Paper.

This research focuses on refugees’ livelihood strategies in a setting of long-term encampment in the Dzaleka refugee camp, Malawi and highlights intersectional barriers to livelihood attainment. By adopting an intersectional analytical framework and making use of collaborative life history methods, it centres the experiences of people from the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda who have and continue to find refuge in the camp since its onset more than 28 years ago. The people from the Great Lakes Region also form the majority of current camp residents (UNHCR, 2021b). Through a *relational* ontology and a *migrant-centred* epistemology of care and concern, this study draws on different schools of thought to reach a comprehensive understanding of refugee livelihoods. This is evident in an interdisciplinary conceptualisation of livelihoods which seeks to address the importance of relations in livelihood strategies and

how relations do not only benefit livelihoods but may impede them through social inequalities, hierarchies, and unequal access to resources.

The research's findings illustrate refugee livelihoods in Dzaleka are largely enabled through mutual support which is conditional based on camp residents' social rank, group membership and vulnerability. Moreover, intersecting systems of oppression based on gender and ethnicity limit some camp residents' capacity to develop and sustain livelihood strategies. Consequently, the idea of refugee 'self-reliance' as promoted by the UNHCR is not equally attainable for all refugees. This is exacerbated through humanitarian and development organisations' limited consideration of structural inequalities. It concludes that livelihood initiatives need to adopt a more gender-sensitive approach and incorporate an intersectional analysis in their programmes.

1.1 Problematisation: The Tension between Refugee Camps' supposed Temporality & Protracted Refugee Situations

Drivers for migration are numerous and diverse, with conflict and subsequent displacement being one of the major causes for population movement in East Africa's Great Lakes Region (Kibreab, 2014). Nowadays, there is a general trend amongst displaced people to migrate towards urban areas as these may provide resources for building networks and labour opportunities (Güngördü and Kahraman, 2021; Meral and Barbelet, 2021; Tulibaleka, Tumwesigye and Nakalema, 2022). The UNHCR (2022a) supports this trend by stating that refugee camps should only be an *exceptional* and *temporary* solution to displacement. Consequently, the Global Compact on Refugees, an international policy adopted by the General Assembly in 2018, argues that alternatives to camps should be explored (UNHCR, 2018b). For instance, an alternative can be local integration in rural and urban areas to foster the well-being of refugees and support their rights and freedoms (UNHCR, 2022a). However, the phenomenon of the refugee camp should not be overlooked as many people continue to flee to the safety of camps which act as a safe haven to many refugees. The UNHCR estimates that more than 6.6 million refugees worldwide live in a camp setting that is either formally organised or self-settled (UNHCR, 2021d). This number indicates that twenty-two percent of all global refugees remain in camps with many spending their lifetime in a state of encampment (UNHCR, 2021d).

1.1.1 Refugee Camps as Permanent Fixtures and their Link to Development Policy

Today, many refugee camps have become permanent fixtures where development policy is implemented. Indeed, camps such as Kakuma in Kenya, Al-Wehat in Jordan and Moria in Greece resemble structures of cities where refugees start businesses and obtain higher education (Crea and McFarland, 2015; Jansen, 2011; Vonen *et al.*, 2021). In fact, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and consequential Grand Bargain process¹ underlined the importance of the humanitarian and development nexus whereby humanitarian settings are seen as opportunities to foster economic endeavours (Ki-moon, 2016; Meral and Barbelet, 2021). Similarly, the migration and development nexus has been increasingly promoted by

¹ "The Grand Bargain, launched during the WHS in Istanbul in May 2016, is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action" (IASC, n.d.). Since its launch in 2016, this has resulted 65 Signatories from a wide range of Member States, UN agencies, NGOs, and governmental organisations taking part in the agreement (IASC, n.d.).

international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and mainstream academia who see migrants and refugees as “agents” of development (Kaiser, 2006; Raghuram, 2009, p. 113). Policy instrument such as the United Nation’s (UN) Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees underline such discourse as migrants are argued to be contributing to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (UNCTAD, IOM and UNHCR, 2018). Notwithstanding the assistance that these policies may provide for refugees in camps, as Gabiam (2012) emphasises, such discourses can lead to shortcomings in addressing refugees’ political needs and limits our understanding of camp livelihoods to neo-liberal spheres. The persistence of refugee camps as city-like geographies stands in stark contrast to the UNHCR’s apparent approach of temporality as many refugees end up being encamped for generations (Opi, 2021). This highlights the need to investigate the lived experiences in such settings.

1.1.2 The Persistence of Refugee Camps in Africa’s Great Lakes Region

The African continent hosts three out of five of the world’s largest refugee camps due to the persistence of conflict and encampment policies (UNHCR, 2021a). Refugees from the Great Lakes Region continue to flee to refugee camps in neighbouring regions (Kibreab, 2014; UNHCR, 2021c). The longstanding conflicts and crises in the DRC remain a major reason of displacement, with the DRC being one of the world’s most neglected protracted refugee situations (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022). After an increased interest the late 1990s and early 2000s, attention on Rwandese and Burundian refugees has been limited in the academic and policy sphere. Although immensely impactful in the region, as Graynor (2021) argues, the Burundian refugee crisis continues to be one of least funded in humanitarian assistance. UNHCR (2018a) declares, “Burundi risks becoming a forgotten refugee crisis without support”. Similarly, Rwanda’s economic boom and apparent political stability side-lines Rwandese refugees’ lived experiences of long-term encampment (Kingston, 2017). Consequently, despite Malawi having acted as “regional safe haven” for decades, there is a neglect in addressing Malawi as a major host country and the long-term encampment of refugees from the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda (Kateta, 2021).

1.1.3 Consequences of Long-Term Encampment

As previous research shows, long-term encampment has severe consequences on groups that are already marginalised prior to migration. As El-Shaarawi (2015, p. 39) argues, extended periods of encampment result into “feeling ‘stuck’ between places and in between past and possible future lives”. Through the lens of intersectionality, we can see that this state of limbo is particularly significant for female refugees and refugees with non-heteronormative gender identities and sexual orientations as they often face issues of safety and sexual violence in camp settings (George *et al.*, 2021). George *et al.* (2021) call this ‘intersecting exclusions’ of displacement. Moreover, as Pittaway and Bartolomei (2000) argue, refugees often face ‘double’ discriminations, implying that they are subject to hostility towards their foreignness or ethnicity as well as towards their gender. Indeed, a report by Rainbow Railroad and the Organization for Refugee, Asylum and Migration (ORAM) (2021) from Kakuma refugee camp stresses that the intersections of homophobia, sexism, and community exclusion led to shortcomings in making livelihood interventions, such as the UNHCR’s Development Assistance for Refugees, inclusive of all camp residents (UNHCR, 2005). Yet, there is limited consideration in humanitarian practice as well as academia of gender sensitivity. As Hilhorst, Porter and Gordon (2018) argue, humanitarian programmes and research often falsely equate gender with women. Importantly, patriarchal forms of oppression do not only affect women but other genders as well (Cammaing, 2020b). Research by van Stapele (2021) on livelihoods

highlights that men struggle to live up to expectations of masculinity, leading to feelings of inadequacy vis-à-vis their families and communities. Thus, it is highly relevant to look at the ways refugees obtain their livelihoods through an intersectional lens whilst paying attention to structural barriers and inequalities based on intersecting systems of oppression.

1.1.4 The Need of Investigating Refugee Livelihoods in Malawi and Beyond

Recent developments in Malawi and a lack of scholarly attention on its protracted refugee situation highlight the need and benefit of investigating refugee livelihoods in this context. Given the increasing arrivals of refugees from the DRC, the UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) are raising concerns over the number of refugees (more than 400 per month) coming to the already overpopulated Dzaleka camp (Masina, 2022). Due decreasing funds, global inflation, and soaring food prices, the UN agencies argue “that providing basic services to the new arrival and to those already in the camp is becoming a big challenge” (Masina, 2022). This underlines the importance for development and humanitarian practitioners and academics alike to understand how refugees sustain their livelihoods in a time of decreasing institutional support. As Stamnes (2016, p. 1) argues regarding long-term displacement, “[t]his situation poses therefore as much a development challenge as a humanitarian one, with long-term impact on the countries and communities concerned”, underlying that the dynamics of long-term encampment should not be overlooked. By studying refugees’ livelihood strategies and barriers to livelihoods in Dzaleka, insights can be gained on the humanitarian and development nexus beyond a sole focus on market structures. Moreover, the government’s decision to follow an encampment policy regardless of the UNHCR’s plea for refugee camps as *temporary* solutions as well as the ongoing humanitarian challenges due to COVID-19, highlights the need for bringing attention to refugees’ ability to sustain their livelihoods in settings of hostility (Vonen *et al.*, 2021; Zaidi and Garcia, 2022).

Indeed, whilst much scholarly attention has been paid to human rights violations and livelihood strategies in camp settings in other countries (see Kamau, Kibuku and Kinyuru, 2021; Rai and Paul, 2020; Omata, 2021), there is limited research on refugees’ livelihoods in Malawi specifically. Research thus far has focused on limited opportunities for refugee youth in Dzaleka as discussed by Healy (2012) and youth identity formation as researched by Chima and Horner (2022). Two studies have looked at the Tumaini festival, firstly in terms of refugee visibility as examined by Makhumula (2019) and secondly regarding transnationalism as studied by Chima (2022). Furthermore, Kokowa and Kaomba (2020) have studied social services in Dzaleka, while Damiano *et al.* (2022) has looked at psychological support and mental health issues in the camp. Moreover, Crea (2016) and Dahya *et al.* (2021) analyse the impact of educational programmes. In the realms of livelihood strategies, Brown *et al.* (2022) offer a realist approach to the role of refugee entrepreneurship and the use of communication technology. Although these studies have provided insights into life in Dzaleka camp, their focus is too narrow and they fail to provide a broader perspective of livelihood strategies, how these interact with one another and the barriers that might impede them, particularly through an intersectional lens.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

To address the problem presented above, this research project seeks to shine light on refugees’ ways of obtaining their livelihoods in an environment of hostility. Another objective is to underline that these livelihood strategies should not be analysed in isolation but looked at

through an intersectional lens which aims to reveal structural barriers to livelihood strategies. Consequently, the following research question was formulated:

How do refugees in the Dzaleka refugee camp obtain and sustain their livelihoods in a setting of long-term encampment and what barriers to livelihood attainment do they face?

To answer this question, four sub-questions are drafted to look at structural mechanisms and their implications for the lives of refugees and the significance of gender and beyond.

- a. What livelihood strategies do refugees in the Dzaleka refugee camp create, develop and make use of to sustain their lives?
- b. How do refugees engage in these livelihood strategies in the Dzaleka camp?
- c. What role do relationships and social hierarchies play in the development and maintenance of refugees' livelihood strategies in the Dzaleka camp?
- d. Which and how do barriers affect refugees' capacities to develop or sustain livelihood strategies in a setting of long-term encampment in Dzaleka?

1.4 Why this Research? Personal Accounts and Academic & Policy Relevance²

1.4.1 The Research Journey

As Wilson indicates, the research journey and the idea of cultivating a “respectful relationship with the ideas that I am studying”, is of high importance as it helps the reader to understand the research's relational context (2008, p. 22). This section discusses the research journey that has shaped the choice of researching refugees' livelihood strategies in a setting of long-term encampment in the Dzaleka camp. I will detail what encounters, dialogues, and literature have influenced that choice. By building on the research journey, I will situate and justify the research in relation to larger academic and policy debates.

The following accounts highlight that it would not have been possible for me to come up with the research topic without the guidance of others nor privilege of listening to many people's migration histories. I was already in my early 20s when I found out that my grandmother had been a refugee that was forcibly displaced from her home in Eastern Europe and brought to Germany during the Second World War. She was thirteen years old and Russian soldiers violently took her and her family to Germany in a coal truck. Subsequently, the family spent time in a refugee camp but were fortunate to have been resettled and reunited with other family members. Learning about this experience influenced my consciousness about refugee-hood and my interest in pursuing migration studies. Contrary to my grandmother's family, most refugees living in camps do not have the chance to be relocated and have to find ways to create a livelihood for themselves in often hostile environments (UNHCR, 2022e).

The specific idea of looking at refugees' livelihood strategies in Dzaleka was significantly impacted by the stories I heard from a mentor of mine. My mentor, with whom I used work at a migrant-focused NGO in Cape Town, has a history of displacement herself and she now works for an organisation that provides online education in refugee camps. She works closely

² This section is based on my RP methodology assignment, course “3211 Decolonial Research in the Development Context”, submitted on March 28, 2022.

with refugees in Dzaleka and shared with me how they have managed to find ways to sustain their lives in a setting of hostility. Some are even obtaining Masters degrees. Yet, despite their ability to create livelihoods, they often remain in the camp for years. This made me reflect about the paradox between the common understanding of international organisations, such as the UNHCR and the IOM, that camps are *temporary* solutions and the realities of long-term encampments such as in the Dzaleka camp, Malawi (Opi, 2021).

1.4.2 Policy Relevance

The next step of the research journey was to investigate this paradox by looking at policies that are relevant to refugees' livelihoods in a camp setting. In fact, through studying livelihood strategies and barriers to livelihood attainment, I came to know that this research is of policy relevance as it can contribute to our understanding of how policies may impede refugee livelihoods. To be more precise, there is a general policy trend by the UNHCR, who closely works with the WFP in protracted refugee situations, to promote refugee self-reliance and entrepreneurship (Skran and Easton-Calabria, 2020). However, there is limited policy attention on how livelihood policies that promote refugee self-reliance may not be a panacea to long-term encampment and may not be accessible for all groups of refugees (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018). As Skran and Easton-Calabria (2020, p. 4) argue, current refugee livelihood policy, “[p]resents refugee self-reliance as an end state to be attained, and one largely possible through individual economic engagement in local markets”. Thus, policy is dominated by individualism and a focus on economic endeavours. This means that there is a blind spot when it comes to understanding livelihood strategies and barriers that do not centre the individual nor solely focus on the economy. It underlines the importance of gaining knowledge on how refugees sustain their lives in a context like Malawi where economic integration in local markets is legally prohibited as I will discuss later in more detail. In that way, this research can inform policy by addressing livelihoods beyond market structures and barriers to livelihood strategies from an intersectional perspective.

The study of livelihoods in refugee camps is also needed given today's global increase in displacements (see Figure 1). The rise of long-term encampments such as the ongoing displacement crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region, the persistence of refugee camps in bordering Sudan and South Sudan as well as the world's largest refugee camp for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh underline the need to study livelihoods in this context (UNHCR, 2022c; Concern Worldwide, 2021).

1.4.3 Academic Relevance

Besides its policy relevance, the topic of refugees' livelihood strategies in the context of long-term encampment in Malawi is of significant academic relevance. Mainstream literature often focuses on the assumed European 'refugee crisis' which dominates migration studies (Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab, 2020; Opi, 2021; Picozza, 2021). As discussed in the problematisation section, albeit refugee camps posing significant challenges to African countries and refugees alike, inadequate scholarly attention has been paid to the phenomenon of South-South migration and internal displacement. As argued in Nasser-Eddin and Abu Assab's

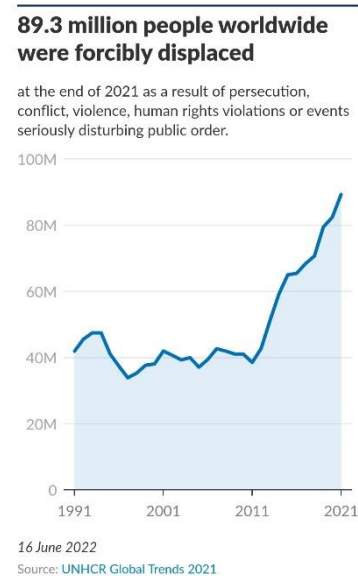


Figure 1

Statistics on global forced displacements as of 2021, source: UNHCR (2022f) (Accessed November 2022).

(2020) decolonial take on migration research, literature on migration tends to reproduce governments' agenda on the securitisation of European borders. Hence, shifting the focus to an understudied area such as the refugee situation in Malawi provides an opportunity to expand migration research and knowledge on the refugee experience in Malawi and livelihood strategies in general.

This study can be placed in relation to discussions about intersectionality and its benefits for understandings systems of oppression and how these affect livelihoods. As discussed in section 1.2.3, refugees may experience intersecting forms of oppression due to discrimination against their ethnicity, sexuality, or genders. Crenshaw's (1991) introduction of intersectionality highlighted the importance of uncovering how these identity markers intersect and how one form of discrimination fortifies others. Since then, literature of all disciplines has greatly covered differentiated lived experiences through the lens of intersectionality. For instance, Rice et al. (2020) look at queer women's negotiation of identity and other studies by Paz and Kook (2021) and Almakhamreh, Asfour and Hutchinson (2022) focus on refugee women's livelihoods through an intersectional perspective. In the context of refugee camps, Rahman, Shindaini and Abdullah (2022) investigate intersectional barriers to Rohingya children's education. However, there is a gap in the literature on intersectionality and refugees' lived experiences beyond women and children and in the African context specifically (Thomas, 2020; Yacob-Haliso, 2016). Applying an intersectional analytical lens to refugee livelihoods in the Dzaleka camp in Malawi, this research seeks to address this gap and expand the knowledge on intersectional barriers to livelihoods.

Chapter 2 | Studying Refugee Livelihoods

The study of livelihoods can be approached from many different theoretical perspectives. This section firstly conceptualises livelihoods through an interdisciplinary lens, privileging feminist and decolonial understandings of livelihoods. It then looks at what the literature tells us about refugee livelihood strategies in a camp setting, the role of relationships and social hierarchies, and what existing research says regarding structural barriers to livelihoods.

2.1. Interdisciplinary Conceptualisation of Livelihoods

Researching livelihoods has gained significant attention in academic and policy debates over the last three decades. In the 1990s, the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) became a buzzword amongst development researchers and practitioners (De Haan, 2012; Scoones, 2009). The SLA framework as presented by Scoones (1998, pp. 7, 8) distinguishes four different ‘capitals’: natural, economic, or financial, human, social. Yet, a major critique is that SLA does not adequately go beyond household inequalities and engages in methodological individualism (Dijk, 2011). Individuals are portrayed as rational actors who are dis-embedded from their social settings which can significantly influence their livelihood decisions (Dijk, 2011; Tincani, 2015). Whilst Scoones’s (2015) political economy approach arguably surpasses SLA’s prior methodological individualism, it still makes use of the same mechanic framework (and analytical rubric). This insufficiently addresses how relations may be at the very core of livelihood attainment. This calls for a more flexible conceptualisation, away from binary categorisations of capitals.

For instance, the notion of human capital can be problematic in the context of researching refugees’ livelihoods in Malawi as Dzaleka camp residents have severe legal limitations when it comes to livelihood strategies (Mvula, 2010). As Jacobsen (2014, p. 100) highlights in their take on livelihoods and forced migration, “refugees are often unable to utilize their human capital, such as skills and experience acquired in their countries, because they are denied permission to work”. This is not to say Dzaleka camp residents are not able to use any knowledge acquired prior to migrating but to underline that given the work permit restrictions, many cannot work in their previous profession (Mvula, 2010). Thus, SLA’s conceptualisation of livelihoods through capitals does not adequately fit the context of Dzaleka.

An inter-disciplinary conceptualisation of livelihoods seems the most fitting for studying livelihoods in the Dzaleka camp. More specifically, my conceptualisation is built upon Hanrahan’s (2015) feminist ethic of care and decolonial critiques of livelihood studies. Hanrahan (2015), in their compelling article on ‘Living Care-Fully: The Potential for an Ethics of Care in Livelihoods Approaches’, argues for centring questions on how relations impact livelihood attainment. The author suggests in previous studies on livelihoods, “social life found itself expressed in two ways; first as social capital [...] and second as the social context in which livelihood strategies are negotiated. The social dimension of life, instead of embedded within livelihood strategies, were reduced to an instrumental role in accessing assets” (Hanrahan, 2015, p. 382). This emphasises the need to investigate the role of interdependent relationships and social networks in livelihood strategies.

Hanrahan (2015) points to three important suggestions for the conceptualisation of livelihoods through a feminist ethics of care. Firstly, a relational ontology should precede our understanding of livelihoods, which will be addressed in section 3.1 of this paper. Secondly,

dependencies and vulnerabilities between people should be acknowledged to underline “human connectedness and interdependencies” (Hanrahan, 2015, p. 385). Thirdly, research on livelihoods should reject the notion of universality by emphasising livelihood strategies are context dependent. Hanrahan’s (2015) approach acknowledges the co-existence of care and competition which can broaden our comprehension of livelihood strategies as these are not solely perceived in terms of fulfilling material needs. The co-existence of this false dichotomy may lead to an understanding of what Hanrahan (2015, p. 386) describes as follows, “conflicting factors are often negotiated, that caring for certain needs may require not caring for others”. Thus, for our conceptualisation of livelihoods this means aspects that go beyond material satisfaction must be considered.

The livelihood conceptualisation can be expanded by thinking a step further than “human connectedness” (Hanrahan, 2015, p. 385). Decolonial scholars have long argued for moving past a human-centredness of research which can be applied to livelihood research specifically (Shizha, 2022). Shizha (2022, p. 467) stresses we must respect and centre “African ways of knowing [which] have previously been misunderstood, misinterpreted, ridiculed and ignored in colonial knowledge discourses”. Respecting these forms of knowing implies to acknowledge that life and livelihoods are inherently embedded in relations with the natural environment and cannot be understood through the lens of individualism (Shizha, 2022). Consequently, the way this research conceptualises livelihoods seeks to depart from a reductionist analysis and incorporates the importance of relationships with the environment as well as the significance of gender, racial and economic hierarchies for those relationships (Grosfoguel, 2011).

2.2 Livelihood Strategies in Refugee Camps

By studying livelihoods, this research engages with similar academic work in camp settings. The livelihood literature is of course not limited to refugee settings (see for instance Li *et al.*, 2021 on rural livelihoods in China). However, I will provide an overview of studies that specifically talk about livelihood strategies in refugee camps and barriers that can affect them. The literature review allows me to see that refugees’ livelihood strategies in a camp setting can be divided into the following sub-groups: education, sex work, farming, reliance on food assistance, relationship building and social networks.

As mentioned in the research journey (section 1.4.1), my mentor emphasised that given the longevity of refugees’ encampment in Dzaleka and other camps, many resort to education as a long-term strategy to develop their livelihoods. The literature reflects this by emphasising that it is long-term education programmes that most evidently underscores the humanitarian and development nexus (Mendenhall *et al.*, 2015). In the Eastern and Southern African context, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), argues, “[a]midst the global push for national integration of refugees into education and other sectors, and the need for alternative options for many young people who still cannot access national systems, the need to overcome historical gaps remains paramount” (Mendenhall, 2019, p. 83). This sentiment is shared in the extensive literature on refugee education in camps. For example, Bellino and Dryden-Peterson (2019) discuss how, despite plans for the national integration of refugees in Kenya, Kakuma residents continue to face issues with accessing adequate education programmes. Furthermore, Shohel (2022) discusses Rohingya children’s experiences of education in Bangladeshi refugee camps and how development and humanitarian organisations manage to circumvent legal restriction placed on the children.

Previous research done in Dzaleka also mainly focuses on education as a livelihood strategy. Crea (2016) finds students who partake in online higher education feel empowered and motivated to bring about positive change for their communities. The author also finds students have difficulty “balancing life and study in Dzaleka” due to food insecurity and constraint on freedom of movement (Crea, 2016, p. 19). It should be noted, however, that Crea’s (2016) participants were predominantly male. Another study by Crea and McFarland (2015) underlines that women in Dzaleka face issues with accessing education programmes as they are expected to fulfil care work and household duties. As a result, livelihood initiatives are not able to circumvent gender disparities and more men engage in education as a livelihood strategy (Crea and McFarland, 2015). Moreover, Dahya et al.’s (2021) study on education and technology sheds light on the importance of education as a livelihood strategy in Dzaleka. As the research process is ongoing, there are no extensive findings available yet.

Aside from education as a livelihood strategy in Dzaleka and beyond, several studies underline long-term farming projects are a major livelihood strategy in refugee camps. Awidi and Quan-Baffour (2021) shows that the cultivation of crops and vegetables constitutes to one of the most employed livelihood strategies in the Ugandan context. In the case of refugees in Tanzania, Boeyink (2020) has made similar observations when it comes to refugees’ farming practices. The author classifies these type of livelihood strategies as *displacement agriculture* whereby camp residents intentionally leave the borders of the camp to seek land from the surrounding host community (Boeyink, 2020, p. 70). A study from Zambia, Malawi’s neighbouring country, also discusses how the UN Food and Agricultural Organization helps refugees by supplying them with solar-powered irrigation systems (Carciotto and Ferraro, 2020).

Another livelihood strategy addressed by the literature is keeping busy and working to deal with the state of long-term encampment (Carpi *et al.*, 2020; Harvey, 2019; Omata, 2021). Harvey (2019, p. 2) argues volunteering and income-generating activities “help refugees overcome the structural constraints of their environment, reduce their vulnerability and re-establish the belief that life is moving forward”. In the same line of argumentation, Carpi *et al.* (2020) show that refugees in Greece employ volunteering as a livelihood strategy in the form of helping out in community initiatives. In that way, they “spend more meaningful time” whilst waiting for other livelihood opportunities (Carpi *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, in the case of the Kakuma refugee camp, Omata (2021, p. 871) highlights that refugees who are “incentive workers” for humanitarian organisations are receiving much lower salaries, termed ‘incentives’ due to legal work restrictions, than their Kenyan counterparts.

Sex work constitutes another strategy discussed in the literature on refugees’ livelihoods. Rosenberg and Bakomeza (2017) show, in the context of Uganda, refugee women are engaging in sex work as a livelihood strategy. Camminga (2020a; 2020b) investigates the precarious lives of queer refugees in Kakuma, Kenya and highlights how they navigate the attainment of livelihoods despite the government and UNHCR’s hostility towards them. Like Rosenberg and Bakomeza (2017), Camminga (2020a, 2020b) finds sex work is a commonly used livelihood strategy in the camp setting, more often used by queer refugees than others due to limited access to livelihood programmes.

Reliance on cash or food assistance is another major refugee livelihood strategy accounted for in the literature. Nabulsi *et al.* (2020) find that Syrian refugees in Lebanon highly rely on WFP cash assistance as a livelihood strategy (in combination with other strategies such as informal employment for the host community). Similarly, Hoque and Yunus (2020), in their

study with encamped Rohingya refugees, underline the importance of WFP assistance as a livelihood strategy, especially in a context where the rights to move and work are limited. Nevertheless, as Nabulsi et al. (2020) and Hoque and Yunus (2020) note, WFP assistance does not suffice to cover all livelihood needs. As a result, Rohingya refugees earn income from the local labour market despite official restrictions, rely on remittances as livelihood strategies (Hoque and Yunus, 2020). The authors also stress how livelihoods are often negotiated in relation to the camp environment and context, pointing to refugees' ability to adapt to new realities (Hoque and Yunus, 2020). Whilst these strategies are commonly used, farming and other enterprises appear to be a minimally used livelihood strategy amongst encamped Rohingya refugees (Hoque and Yunus, 2020). The study also interestingly found a significance of time spent in the camp in relation to the diversification of livelihood strategies, "[i]t appears that the average annual household income and receipts from non-WFP sources in the old wave are more than three times larger than those in the new wave" (Hoque and Yunus, 2020, p. 93). Thus, showing how time determines refugees' status in the camp.

2.3 The Role of Relationships and Social Hierarchies

The literature on the role of relationships and social hierarchies in refugee livelihoods is extensive. In fact, according to the studies discussed in this section, building relationships and creating social networks can be regarded as a strategy in itself. I particularly engage with studies which show how relations can enable or impede livelihoods.

Zakir Hossain's (2021) research with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh underlines the significance hierarchies due to age, gender, disability, and social rank for livelihoods. In that regard, Buscher (2016, p. 5) interestingly finds "[m]en's livelihoods are often less adaptive to new environments than are women's, whose childcare and household experiences can easily translate into domestic and service industry work", implying displacement might minimise previous social privileges of men. As aforementioned, van Stapele's (2021) study in Nairobi addresses men's insecurities that might arise when not being able to provide for their communities. The author demonstrates that ideas about masculinities and expectations put on young men to lead their families results in feelings of inadequacy and neglects men's need for vulnerability (van Stapele, 2021). These studies underline the necessity to look at gender relations in livelihood strategies and barriers and move beyond preconceived notions of who is vulnerable and privileged regarding livelihoods.

This relates to how social relations can both have a positive and negative effect on livelihoods. On the one hand, Vallet et al. (2021) as well as Awidi and Quan-Baffour (2021) show Village Saving and Loans Associations are often a vital source of livelihood in refugee camps as they can counteract restrictions on rights to financial assets and access to bank accounts. In that regard, Trapp (2018, p. 102) in a study on the Buduburam camp in Ghana notes, "the capacity and willingness to give and receive at the refugee camp proved central to refugee livelihoods and point to the empirical and conceptual need for the inclusion of distribution". Nabulsi et al. (2020) likewise highlight the role of relying on social networks as a livelihood strategy whereby debt is accrued from other families or friends as well as food and cash assistance are being shared. Hence, underscoring how making use of social relations can be a vital livelihood strategy in refugee camps.

On the other hand, Trapp (2018) also stresses that social relations can lead to negative consequences for livelihood strategies as resources may be distributed unequally amongst camp

residents. This is supported by studies like Boeyink's (2021) investigation of violence and exploitation in Tanzanian refugee camps whereby class structures lead to wealthier camp residents exploiting less well-off residents through employment arrangements. These studies point to the significance of how relationships can improve or impede refugee livelihoods which should be considered in this study of livelihood strategies in Dzaleka.

2.4 Barriers to Refugees' Livelihoods

The following studies provide a general insight into structural barriers that are found to impede livelihoods in refugee camps, with a particular focus on intersecting barriers. The literature mainly focuses on gender issues and has a gap in addressing other structural barriers.

The literature emphasises that refugee camps are not places of exception as infamously argued by Agamben but have social structures and inequalities like other geographies as highlighted in Sigona's (2015) take on 'campzanship'. Indeed, Trapp (2018) argues that by perceiving refugee camps as places of exception solely shaped by an informal economy risks minimising structural issues related to capitalism. This is in line with Brankamp's (2019) take on long-term encampment in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp which shows that underlying capitalist structures are prevalent in livelihood programmes, often fostering systems of oppression due to their intersection with sexism and racism. Grabska (2011) similarly highlights the inadequacies of livelihood programmes in Kakuma that seek to engage in gender-mainstreaming but fail to move past an essentialised understanding of gender and consequently endanger women. The study by Crea and McFarland (2015) as mentioned earlier also shows that educational livelihood programmes are not fully accessible for women due to other responsibilities put on them. This is supported by studies conducted in similar protracted refugee situations in Kenya and Jordan, such as by Dahya et al. (2019) and Hattar (2019) as they attribute gender disparities in education to distinct gender roles in livelihood attainment.

The literature extensively addresses gender-based violence and discrimination as barriers to livelihoods. However, the literature presented here emphasises the importance of viewing these barriers in relation to other oppressive systems. As Brickell and Speer (2020, p. 135) argue in their gendered and feminist approach to displacement, there is a need to highlight gender-based violence in displacement settings as it contrasts with mainstream literature's focus on "questions of global security and macro-level violence". Like Brickell and Speer (2020), Buscher (2016) emphasises the importance of understanding gender dynamics and how these might change due to displacement to account for a thorough comprehension of livelihoods. The author notes that women who are already taking on care work might not have the time to engage in livelihood interventions presented by humanitarian organisations (Buscher, 2016).

Furthermore, Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab (2020) show how injustices due to gender, sexuality, and race intersect with colonial legacies of migration control. In their research on refugee livelihoods in Jordan, Almakhamreh. Asfour and Hutchinson (2022, p. 602) argue that an intersectional lens can "specifically address the way in which aspects such as economic disadvantages, patriarchy, and other discriminatory systems contribute to the creation of layers of inequality, which in turn have an impact on the relative positioning of women and men". Their study interestingly finds that refugee women can capitalise on supposedly negative gender dynamics which ultimately improves their livelihoods. Also making use of intersectionality, Yacob-Haliso's (2016, p. 55) research on refugee women in Africa which argues that disadvantages experienced by participants "multiply" based on one form of

discrimination reinforcing others. Nevertheless, it is of importance to not essentialise women and gender and keep in mind that gender-based violence and discrimination can also affect other genders.

Chapter 3 | Methodology³

As discussed in the conceptualisation of livelihoods, a *relational* ontology should precede an investigation of livelihoods which will be addressed in this chapter. I then argue for a *migrant-centred* epistemology of care and concern. In doing so, I take on epistemological standpoints from different schools of thought, resulting in a comprehensive approach to study refugee livelihoods in Malawi. I then discuss the collaborative life history method used during the eight-week in-situ research in the Dzaleka refugee camp and the intersectional analytical framework. The chapter concludes with the methodology's ethical concerns, my positionality vis-à-vis participants and possible biases in participant selection.

3.1 Relational Ontology

This research employs a *relational* ontology which is built on an understanding of relations being central to our reality. As explained by Wilson (2008, p. 33), ontology refers to “the theory of the nature of existence, or the nature of reality”. According to a Western-centric ontology, for something to be regarded as “real”, a set of requirements needs to be fulfilled to prove the reliability and validity of this reality (Davis, 2012). In migration research, the interpretation of migration as a natural consequence of globalisation and the internationalisation of the capitalist system has occupied a dominant position (Escobar, 2007). This way of doing research raises concerns as it takes the assumed universality of the “hubris of the zero point” as a natural ontological fact and implies a monolithic viewpoint of phenomena related to migration, such as refugee livelihoods (Castro-Gómez as cited in Mignolo, 2009, p. 160).

In contrast, an ontology built *from* relations considers the relationship between the researcher and the participants as well as their own perceptions of reality (Escobar, 2020; Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone, 2022; Patel, 2016). This is in line with decolonial understandings of reality as promoted by Escobar (2020), Todd (2016), and Patel (2016) who argue that an ontology without decolonial consideration can reproduce the coloniality of Western knowledge's assumption of one universal reality. It therefore seems fitting to adopt a *relational* ontology for this research to reflect on my embeddedness in relations and power dynamics pertaining to the research which will be done more in-depth in later chapters (De Jong, Icaza and Rutazibwa, 2019). Nevertheless, I refrain from calling this a decolonial research endeavour *per se* but an attempt to understand livelihoods through building on multiple ways of knowing.

3.2 Migrant-Centred Epistemology of Care and Concern

Ontology is inherently related to epistemology as it asks the question “How do we know what is real?” (Wilson, 2008, p. 34). This research adopts a *migrant-centred* epistemology, as suggested by decolonial scholars Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone (2022, p. 53) and earlier by Gasper and Truong (2010) through their capabilities approach, whereby the way the research participants understand their reality is legitimate rather than validating it against reliability criteria. This is important as knowledges produced from the refugee experience are

³ This section is based on my RP methodology assignment, course “3211 Decolonial Research in the Development Context”, submitted on March 28, 2022.

often disregarded, something that this RP seeks to address by centring refugees' voices (Gasper and Truong, 2010; Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone, 2022). In doing so, this research speaks to the idea of doing knowledge *with* as opposed to studying *of* people as proposed by Rodríguez Castro (2020).

Besides a *migrant-centred* epistemology, this research draws on an epistemology of care and concern as developed by feminist scholars such as Code (2015) who argues for practically engaging in advocacy for the research participants. Similarly, Dalmiya (2016) argues for generating knowledge through taking responsibility for participants' well-being. This is critical as the research participants live in a setting of hostility which can lead to high levels of stress. The aim of my study was to not increase participants' stress levels but to offer a comfortable space for sharing their stories. Sörensson and Kalman's (2018) provide a guide to an ethic of "care and concern" whereby the authors interviewed migrants on their livelihoods and employed a methodology of self-reflexivity and increased community awareness. Community awareness was key in this research endeavour as the phenomenon of long-term encampment poses several challenges to communal living and sensitivity needed to be employed when creating a research space. Whilst Sörensson and Kalman (2018, pp. 708, 709) make use of terms such as "knowledge validation" which speaks against my onto-epistemological approach, their plea for an epistemological ethic that centres migrants' needs is compelling and acted as an ethical guide.

3.3 Collaborative Life History Method

3.3.1 The importance of Relations

My mentor, introduced earlier as my former colleague from a migrant-focused NGO, connected me with researchers and students from a refugee-led organisation⁴ in Dzaleka. Collaboration with students was essential to "co-construct" the research space (Smith, 2021, p. 7). With the organisation's help, two students were selected upon my arrival. Only three students had applied to participate in the research of which two were selected because of their translation skills and research experience. As I wanted to pay them an adequate amount for their work and my research was self-funded, I could only work with two students. They acted as collaborators and gatekeepers during the in-situ research. As I did not manage to obtain an official research permit from the Malawian Ministry of Homeland Security (MoHS), I will protect the student collaborators' identities. I will later talk more about ethical aspects of working with the students. Aside from guiding me in my care for participants, the relationships I built with the students and the organisation's staff, were immensely important as they also checked on my well-being and took on a role of care, underlining the significance of relations in research endeavours (Sörensson and Kalman, 2018).

The role of relations was emphasised by employing a *life history method* whereby participants and I exchanged life stories and reflected on similarities and differences (Tierney and Lanford, 2019). In that way, a life history methodology is a convincing approach to apply the ontology and epistemology. This was implemented through *interviews* in the form of non-structured dialogues. As Thompson and Bornat (2017, p. 22) argue, using life history interviews "offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgement inherent in its tradition". For this study's refugee stories which were formed during conflicts and political persecution, the life history method enabled participants to share their own

⁴ The identity of the organisation is intentionally omitted as the facilitation of my research may prove to be a security risk for local staff and students.

interpretation of these often-contested happenings (Ritchie, 2003). Moreover, the life history method allowed participants to elaborate on a multitude of biographical aspects and foster a “multi-dimensional” understanding of their lives (Winters, 2021, p. 139). The dialogue space was in the organisation’s facilities (right next to Dzaleka) where our conversations took place under the shade of a beautiful tree which provided some comfortability. Aside from dialogues, the collaborators and I engaged in observations.

3.3.2 Participant Selection

With the help of the student collaborators, 18 participants were selected based on their country of origin, age, and gender, whereby the goal was to represent a diverse group. Diversity was important to understand differentiated experiences of encampment and livelihoods. The table below provides an overview of participants which underlines a range of identities, age groups, and years spent in the Dzaleka camp. Seven participants come from the DRC, six participants from Rwanda, four participants from Burundi, and one participant from Malawi. Nine participants identify as female and nine participants as male, creating an equal gender balance for the study. The age of participants ranges from 19 to 64 years old, and the years spent in Dzaleka camp varies from three up to twenty years. To protect participants’ identities, the names presented here are pseudonyms which they chose themselves. Moreover, asking participants about their ethnicity can be highly sensitive given their experiences with genocide. Similarly, inquiring about sexual orientation can be problematic as it a crime under Malawian law (Currier, 2014). In line with an epistemology of care and concern, I only discussed these issues if the participant talked about them on their own accord. In section 3.5, I will reflect on ethical concerns regarding this approach.

Table 1

| Name | Country of Origin | Age | Gender (self-identified) | Years in Dzaleka |
|-----------|-------------------|-----|--------------------------|------------------|
| Alain | DRC | 26 | male | 6-7 years |
| Joseph | Burundi | 41 | male | 14 years |
| Bora | DRC | 44 | female | 3 years |
| Bisimwa | DRC | 25 | male | 10 years |
| Emily | Malawi | 39 | female | not applicable |
| Eric | Burundi | 64 | male | 9 years |
| Furaha | DRC | 34 | female | 7 years |
| Minani | Rwanda | 19 | female | 15 years |
| Gogo | Burundi | 33 | female | 6 years |
| Irakoze | Rwanda | 27 | female | 20 years |
| Sifa | Burundi | 39 | female | 16 years |
| Richard | Rwanda | 54 | male | 12 years |
| Kaem | DRC | 50 | male | 15 years |
| Luhande | DRC | 43 | male | 10 years |
| Naomi | Rwanda | 27 | female | 12 years |
| Peter | Rwanda | 70 | male | 10 years |
| Uwamahoro | Rwanda | 38 | female | 20 years |
| Yohana | DRC | 27 | male | 7 years |

3.3.3 Research Process

Before the dialogues, a question guide was produced whereby my team and I discussed our perspectives on possible questions and current themes, in line with Thompson and Bornat's (2017) guide on how to prepare for life history interviews. Moreover, we formulated a consent form which was translated into Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Swahili by the student. Moreover, adopting Code's (2015) and Dalmiya's (2016) approaches to care and concern, if the participants preferred to get to know me better first, we spent several meetings just talking and sharing aspects of our lives without it being used for the research. This is in line with Lugones' (2010) call for a research space which prioritises relations before productivity.

Participants were also advised they could stop the dialogue whenever they wanted, provide input on other aspects they found important to discuss, and they did not have to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. Dalmiya's (2016) book guided me in that regard and helped to centre participants' well-being. Informed oral consent was obtained after the participants received and read the consent form. If participants were interested, I provided them with the research design which they could comment on. Some participants had prior research experience and provided me with useful information of their own accord.

During the dialogues, some participants preferred me to guide the conversation and ask questions, others preferred to tell their stories in their own ways, in line with the *migrant-centred* epistemology. Depending on the availability and preferences of the participants, we met a second time, resulting in a total of 22 dialogues. The dialogues were recorded with my phone if the participants gave their consent or notes were taken if preferred. It was a priority to make sure the voice recordings were immediately uploaded to a secure cloud after the respective dialogue and then deleted from my phone.

3.3.4 Navigating the Context and Learning from Collaborators

Besides dialogues, I had planned for "artistic participatory creations" in the form of co-designed workshops (Santamaría *et al.*, 2020). However, the missing research permit made it difficult to have visible art workshops. Secondly, the students advised participants likely would not have the time to engage workshops as they would be busy pursuing livelihood strategies and as they also might not be comfortable openly sharing aspects of their lives with other participants. Therefore, in accordance with a *migrant-centred* approach, I made the decision not to pursue the art workshops. Nevertheless, one of the participants, a former journalist, acted as photographer, resulting in the images presented (and see Appendix 1).

3.3.5 Information Gathering

To keep track of the information gathered from the dialogues and observations, I kept a research diary that was regularly updated with fieldnotes and reflections. As Emerson *et al.* (2011, p. 143) explain, taking consistent fieldnotes is a valuable tool to keep track of acquired information, even if not initially perceived as important. This point proved to be vital for the analysis as some of the notes that I first considered fruitless, later turned out to show a lot about existing structures in the camp. The following section discusses how the information collected was analysed through an intersectional analytical framework and thematic analysis.

3.4 Intersectional Analytical Framework in Practice and Methods of Analysis

Making use of dialogue through a *migrant-centred* approach, should not result in methodological individualism that only looks at the micro level (Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone, 2022; Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab, 2020). According to Niekerk and Boonzaier's (2019) take on a decolonial feminist life history method regarding community psychology in South Africa, the nature of a life history method does not only put an emphasis on personal narratives but also seeks to connect them to structural issues that speak to power, oppression, and resistance. As discussed throughout the first two chapters of this paper, there is a need to investigate refugees' livelihood strategies and barriers from an intersectional perspective.

Coined by Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality stems from Black feminist thought and enables an analysis of intersecting systems of oppression. Consequently, making use of intersectionality as an analytical framework means to not look at these systems as separate categories but rather to view them in relation to one another and how one form of oppression may lead to another (Bastia, 2014; Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019; Thomas, 2020). Chapter two discussed relevant themes in livelihood attainment and barriers through an intersectional lens. As Overstreet, Rosenthal and Case (2020, p. 784) summarise (based on Collins, 2019) what an intersectional analysis should pay attention to:

Systems of power (e.g., capitalism, heterosexism, colonization, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and patriarchy) are interdependent; Intersecting systems of power shape societal inequalities and critical social issues (e.g., racial capitalism; gendered racism; white supremacist, colonizing, anti-Black, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchy); Systems of power operate on the macro-level (e.g., institutions, societal structures, policies, laws) and are linked to the conditions of people's lives on the meso-level (e.g., intergroup and intragroup relations) and micro-level (e.g., prejudice, internalized oppression).

As a method of analysis, this research followed an applied thematic analysis as introduced by Guest et al. (2011). Applied thematic analysis is commonly used to analyse data from explorative studies that deal with problems of practical nature whereby "the researcher carefully reads and rereads the data, looking for key words, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that will help outline the analysis *before* any analyses takes place" (2011, p. 6). Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts of the non-structured dialogues, fieldnotes, and research diary entries by developing codes according to significant themes from literature (education, agriculture, keeping busy, sex work, WFP cash assistance, relationships) and emerging themes from in-situ research (e.g., volunteering as labour, renting land from Malawians, mutual support for "motivation"). Regarding barriers to livelihood strategies, themes from intersectionality guided the thematic analysis (for instance gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality). The identified codes were peer-reviewed by the collaborating students, emphasising the collaborative nature of the research. The applied thematic analysis was used flexibly rather than adhering to Guest et al.'s (2011, p. 11) "rigorous, reliable, and valid fashion" as this speaks against the *migrant-centred* understanding of knowledge production (Simaan, 2017).

3.5 Ethical Concerns, Positionality, and Biases

There are several ethical concerns that arise from this research topic. Asking questions about someone's life is deeply personal and requires "messy dialogues" (Patel, 2016, p. 63). Whilst

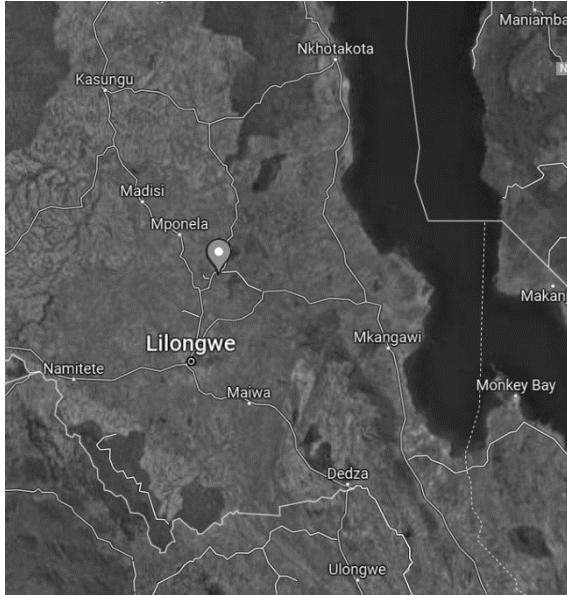
I have experience in the psycho-social support of refugees, that does not mean that it automatically led to mutual trust. It required what Thambinatha and Kinsella (2021) call “mindful sensitivity” whereby the researcher is aware of asymmetries produced by colonial difference. These power asymmetries were highly evident in my ability to enter and exit the camp as I pleased or by the fact that I could easily obtain a visa to fly to Malawi on account of my European passport. My white skin, or rather “Muzungu” identity, automatically put me at a privileged position when entering the camp as people usually assumed that I worked for the UN. I was not once asked why I was in the camp. This privilege enabled me to move freely through the camp whilst people assumed I had some form of authority. In contrast, many of my participants had never had a passport nor the option of having freedom of movement by the virtue of their birthplace.

George Dei (2000, p. 116) emphasises that these asymmetries need to be negotiated by, “transformative dialogue [which] must be centred by speaking of colonized peoples’ situated understandings of their histories”. In that regard, a remark in my first dialogue with participant Alain helped me to navigate asymmetries, Alain reminded me, “*when you are having those conversations with them [the participants], don’t expect them to tell you what you want to hear, but just allow them to express what they really feel out there... they’re really experiencing*”. This became a mantra throughout the other dialogues, and I often reminded myself to let go of preconceived notions about refugee livelihoods.

Looking at the positionality of the student collaborators, it is important to mention that both were from the DRC, male, highly educated and of a higher social rank. I had intended on working with a female student as well but due to the small number of women in degree programmes (as will be discussed later), this was not possible. I trusted my collaborators in selecting participants based on the aforementioned criteria, however, I am aware that there might have been personal biases in the selection. Moreover, we signed an agreement prior to starting the research to keep the gathered information confidential.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is something that my mentor addressed: refugee populations are often over researched. This relates to how Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021, p. 1) describe research as a “dirty word” as it has and continues to inform structures of oppression, especially regarding migration governance. As Alain notes, “*many people have been interviewed before... we are asked to get involved... but we never see the change*”. Hence whilst I aimed to centre refugee voices, Smith (2021) helped me in reflecting that despite my efforts to do research *from* relations, there are significant limitations as an outsider coming into a community. This was complicated by a lack of research permit, which limited visible collaboration with participants. My hope is that I have done justice to my participants, but I am aware my research might not bring the desired change camp residents are hoping for.

Chapter 4 | The Case of Dzaleka in Malawi: Emergency Turned into Long-term Encampment in Africa's Great Lakes Region



Map 1

Edited screenshot of Dzaleka's location in Malawi, source: google maps.

Today, the UNHCR continues to operate the camp in conjunction with MoHS, the Ministry of Health and non-governmental implementing partners such as Plan International Malawi (PIM), Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), and Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD). Moreover, UN agencies that operate at the camp are the WFP and the IOM (UNHCR, 2021b).

4.1 Camp Population

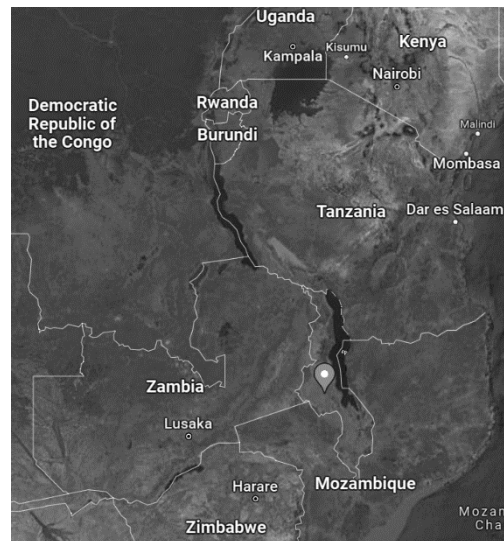
Contrary to its emergence as an emergency camp in the 90s, the Dzaleka refugee camp has been operating for 28 years and is highly congested today as its capacity has been stretched far beyond its limits. In September 2022, the UNHCR (2022b) states the camp hosts almost all the country's refugees at a number of 56,485 camp residents. That is approximately five times more than the intended capacity of the Dzaleka camp and about 4.8 per cent of Malawi's population (World Population Review, 2022). The pressure on the camp has been exacerbated by the government's recent move to enforce its encampment policy for all refugees in the country, including those integrated in the host society, married to Malawians, and with local businesses (Kunchezera, 2021).

Before delving into refugees' livelihood strategies, chapter 4 discusses why the Dzaleka camp and refugees of the Great Lakes Region prove a good case to study refugees' livelihoods in a setting of long-term encampment. This chapter also provides contextual information to understand the case of Malawi better.

The Dzaleka refugee camp is situated in the heart of Malawi, about 45 kilometres away from the capital Lilongwe (Brown, Saxena and Wall, 2022). Established in 1994 because of conflicts in the Great Lakes region and subsequent mass displacement, the camp was intended as an emergency measure to host a maximum of 10,000 to 12,000 refugees (Kunchezera, 2021; UNHCR, 2022d). The establishment of the camp was led by the UNHCR in cooperation with the Malawian government (United Nations, 2021).

Looking at the population composition of the camp, because of mass displacement in the Great Lakes Region in the 1990s, people from the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda form the majority of residents in the Dzaleka camp. As such, 62% of refugees are from the DRC with continuous arrivals of Congolese people (UNHCR, 2022d). Burundians form the second largest groups of refugees with approximately 12,000 people living in Dzaleka and Rwandese the third largest group with estimated 7,500 people residing in the camp (UNHCR, 2022b).

The histories of the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda are intertwined by their shared experience of Belgian colonial rule. Moreover, the history of displacement of people from the Great Lakes Region is intertwined as the world watched when the Rwandan genocide forced thousands of refugees into neighbouring DRC (Abell, 1996; Akokpari, 1999; Lemarchand, 1997). The consequential two Congo Wars resulted into the DRC one of “leading net producers of conflict-generated refugees”, mostly fleeing to camps in the region such as Dzaleka (Akokpari, 1999, p. 78). Like the DRC, Burundi experienced spill over from the Rwandan genocide, leading to a full-fledged civil war and many Burundians seeking refuge in countries of the region (Gaynor, 2021). In Rwanda, though many Rwandese refugees who had fled into Eastern DRC in 1995 were forcefully repatriated, people have continued to escape the country due to ongoing political tensions, persecution, and the issue of statelessness (Kingston, 2017).



Map 2

Edited screenshot of Dzaleka’s location in the Great Lake’s Region, source: google maps.

4.2 Malawi’s Refugee Policy

Looking at the history of population control in Malawi, a former British colony, many colonial migration policies were adopted after decolonisation (UNHCR, 2019). Refugees who enter Malawi based on the wish to seek asylum are obliged to report to local authorities and are *de jure* confined to the Dzaleka camp (Mvula, 2010). In that regard, it is worth noting that during the Kamuzu Banda regime, Malawi’s first political power after decolonisation, Dzaleka acted as a prison for political opponents and its name has not been changed since (Kayange, 2020). Underlining the influence of these prior forms of population control, participant Peter describes, “*the policy of keeping people here in the camp... We are like detainees. We are not official in the prison but we are in custody. To move from here to there to leave the camp, we have to get authorization. Yeah, that is a new system of detaining people*”.

Looking at Malawi’s refugee policies aside from the encampment approach, the country’s legal framework regarding migration governance can be understood as characterised by hostility towards refugees. Although Malawi is a signatory to the 1952 Refugee Convention, it has made nine significant provisions to the Convention (Healy, 2012). Most importantly for the topic of this research, it does not see Article 22 on Public Education as binding, Article 34 which pertains to refugees’ freedom of movement, nor Article 17 which upholds the right to an income, Article 19 regarding Liberal Professions, and Article 24 on Labour Legislation

and Social Security (UNHCR, 2019, p. 1). These legal provisions have severe consequences on the way refugees can live their lives as will be shown in throughout this research.

In addition to the provisions to international conventions, Malawi's Refugee Act underlines the country's hostile refugee environment. The Refugee Act was implemented in 1989, at a time where the country was governed under Kamuzu Banda's one-party system (Banda, 2014). It has since not been updated to accommodate the current refugee situation. As Mvula (2010) argues, Malawi's provisions to the Refugee Convention were solidified through the national Refugee Act as it does not detail basic refugee rights such as the right to appeal to asylum decisions. The lack of rights to economic activities are further restricted through the 1989 Refugee Act which stresses that refugees are not allowed to engage in any livelihood activities outside of the camp, including restricting farming to the land available within the perimeters of Dzaleka (Mvula, 2010). Thus, Malawi's restrictions to refugees' freedoms brings about the question how camp residents still manage to sustain their livelihoods as will be central to this paper.

Chapter 5 | Refugees' Livelihood Strategies in Dzaleka

Chapter 5 analyses my findings on participants' livelihood strategies in relation to existing literature and regarding the conceptualisation of livelihoods. During the in-situ period, I discovered that livelihood strategies in Dzaleka are diverse and abundant. These are among others but not limited to: education, volunteering for humanitarian organisations, farming, mutual support, livestock, cross-border trade, artisan, domestic work for wealthier camp residents, selling charcoal, sex work, working in other countries. Here, I will present the main strategies in more detail. First, I discuss education as a source of livelihood and its implications for relations, then I detail volunteering as a strategy, farming and renting farmland from Malawians, and lastly mutual support as a livelihood strategy.

5.1 Education and its Role for Relations and Networks

The analysis revealed education is the most important livelihood strategy amongst refugees in Dzaleka as it highly challenges their confinement and legal limitations. Almost all participants (17 out of 18) took part in education programmes provided by two main organisations in the camp. I will focus on how education can further professional and personal networks as well as education as a form of mutual support, and how being highly educated might impede receiving support from others.

Firstly, online higher education has increased online and on-site employment opportunities, consequently circumventing the education and labour restrictions placed on all refugees in Malawi. As Alain, a male participant from the DRC in his mid-twenties, describes, *“due to my online learning programme... I became used to finding like kick work like small projects to do online and then I would be paid for maybe designing a social media site”*. The life story Alain presented in our dialogue exemplifies how online higher education in Dzaleka can increase livelihood opportunities and lead to social and professional relations beyond the physical borders of Dzaleka. Due to his online engagement, Alain has been able to form connections with organisations abroad, enabling him and his peers to get funding to start their own refugee-led organisation which is now responsible for implementing online degree programmes for refugees and the host-community. Similarly, Bisimwa who studies one of the degrees provided highlights, *“education is playing a huge role in my life. It was giving me more opportunities... maybe six or seven [online] internships... I work with two universities from Canada”*. This points to online education's significance in helping refugees in building a diverse portfolio of online and on-site employment and constructing vital networks beyond the borders of the camp. It reflects the findings of Crea (2016) whereby refugees in Dzaleka feel empowered by online education. However, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, these livelihood opportunities are not equally accessible for all camp residents.

5.1.1 Education and Conditional Support

Aside from education enabling hybrid employment, the following story provides another perspective that somewhat counterbalances the assumption that a high degree of education is always beneficial for someone's livelihood in the camp. As argued by Peter, an elderly man from Rwanda who obtained a Master's degree in Europe prior to him fleeing his homecountry, *“I had to simplify myself... professional background it was very important to hide it, it was important to hide my educational background in order to be received, to be accepted in the community. If not, I would have been chased or killed. I don't know what was going to happen to me”*. Peter highlights

“When you arrive, behaving as a boss... It’s dangerous for you. Nobody will come to you, nobody will tell you anything,” underlying the conditional nature of support based on status. In our dialogue, Peter spoke about his lifeworld extensively, he started his story in the late 90s and continued until his present day livelihood strategies. He led the conversation, sometimes telling me to wait until I can ask clarification questions and focused on the idea of presenting himself as vulnerable in order to receive support from others. This way of holding a dialogue was in line with the *migrant-centred* epistemology and Peter’s own interpretations of his reality helped me to understand the benefits as well as downfalls of someone being highly educated. Indeed, Peter’s experience exemplifies how assumptions about someone’s perceived status (i.e. educational background and former profession) may lead to conflict within the camp population and implies that mutual support is conditional.

As argued by Peter, although mutual support acts as a vital source of livelihood in Dzaleka it is based on assumptions about someone’s social status. This is evident in the way people support each other’s education. As Richard, a teacher from Rwanda says, *“I like teaching. It’s why even now I’m assisting some more kids. Even when they pay nothing but I have a sorrow because of their state. I consider their future... That is why I prefer to help them”*. Despite only being able to eat once a day, Richard still helped another family consisting of nine people with a small donation so they could eat for at least two days. Also Minani a young woman from Rwanda helps other students with the little means she has. Minani uses some of the money she gets from her mother to pay for her peer’s school fees as she says, *“there are kids in the camp who are born in a family where they are really poor, and those kids are willing to go to school”*. Aside from Richard and Minani, other participants such as Irakoze, Bisimwira, and Yohana are paying for others’ education due to their lower social status. This demonstrates that support for others is done intentionally through minimising participants’ own needs.

These findings support Hanrahan’s (2015, p. 382) argument of relations being “embedded within livelihood strategies”. This is evident as relationships between Dzaleka camp residents either enabled education as a livelihood strategy such as through mutual support or networks and assumptions about someone’s status. It also is in line with Hanrahan’s (2015, p. 386) argument that, “caring for certain needs may require not caring for others”. In this case Richard prioritised caring for others rather than for himself. Furthermore, my findings align with the study by Zakir Hossain’s (2021) which stresses that livelihoods are dependent on social ranks. In this case, Peter’s perceived high social rank could have negatively affected his livelihood if he hadn’t hidden it whereas people’s low social rank has led to receiving support from others. This is particularly interesting when applying an intersectional lens, as the vulnerabilities associated with camp residents’ lower social status benefit their livelihoods as they receive support from others which shows “willingness to give” is conditional on social status (Trapp, 2018, p. 102). Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail which other structural factors played a role in Peter’s decision to “simplify” himself.

5.2 “Volunteering” for a Stipend

On-site employment constitutes the second most common livelihood strategy for participants as, like education, it bypasses refugees’ lack of official rights. This is most often done in the form of what camp residents call “volunteering” for one of Dzaleka’s humanitarian or development organisations in return for a so-called stipend. The word “volunteering” is intentionally in quotation marks here as my research revealed camp residents perform labour for humanitarian organisations equivalent to any other employee for a much lower salary. I chose to use the words “volunteering” and working simultaneously here to highlight the

participants' labour contributions. Ten out of seventeen participants (not including the Malawian participant) made use of "volunteering" as a livelihood strategy through which they gain access to a regular monthly income. Legally speaking, this revenue differs from an official salary as organisations are not allowed to officially hire refugees due to labour rights restrictions. Participants reported to be working for the following organisations: CARD, RELON (Refugee-Led Organization Network Malawi), PIM, UNHCR, JRS, and Advocacy Training and Education Hub. The "volunteering" positions range from educational facilitators and incubator programme coaches to gender-based violence and child protection officers.

5.2.1 "Volunteering" to Keep Busy

As discussed by participants, working for organisations in the camp provides structure throughout the week and helps in keeping occupied. As Bisimwa highlights, *"when I came, I didn't have things to do so I was just spending time... But now I've adapted to the camp because I've been here for quite long, so my day is like in the morning I go to work in the afternoon I come to school. [...] I mean I like being busy"*. Similarly, Yohana likes to stay busy and structure his day according to his position and education, *"I do my work and then when I have free time, I can have time to submit assignments, read and stuff like that. And sports as well, so I find time to exercise as well"*. These findings are similar to those of aforementioned studies on refugee livelihoods by Carpi et al (2020) and Harvey (2019) as having a busy lifestyle in the camp can contribute to building a state of normalcy. As mentioned in the conceptualisation of livelihoods, Harvey (2019, p. 2) argues volunteering and income-generating activities help refugees in Indonesia to counteract feeling in 'limbo'. This is confirmed in the case of the Dzaleka refugee camp as all participants engaged in labour activities for humanitarian organisations managed to create daily routines for themselves and use the money received to improve theirs and their families' well-being. Moreover, by taking part in "volunteering", they again challenge the government's lack of providing access to the local labour market.

Contrary to Carpi et al.'s (2020) research from Greece, however, refugees in Dzaleka do not volunteer to pass time before finding other livelihood opportunities. Rather they make use of working for humanitarian organisations as one of the main sources of livelihood. Participants themselves label their "volunteering" activities as work which emphasises the need for their labour to be recognised as such. This is in line with discussions about refugee camp economies as being classified as "informal" and the discourse this enables. As Trapp (2018, p. 97) argues, *"characterization as an informal economy erroneously assumes an a priori exclusion from the capitalist economy that limits our understanding of the nature and impact of economic activity in the refugee camp"*. This study highlights how refugees in the Dzaleka camp undertake "power-seeking practices" by performing their agency in the form of seeking de-facto employment in humanitarian organisations (Huq and Miraftab, 2020, p. 352). Thus, a conceptualisation of refugee livelihoods needs to consider these practices where the lines between informality and formality are blurred.

5.2.2 Unequal Employment Relations

Looking at participants' "volunteering" experiences through the lens of intersectionality enables us to see inequalities and social hierarchies at play. As Naomi, a female participant from Rwanda, highlights regarding her salary, *"it's not according to the work we are doing. We do a big work, little salary. Now it's 55 [thousand Malawi kwacha] but considering the Malawians, they are receiving 200 or 180 you see. [...] Why always refugees? Why?"*. Refugees perform the same labour as Malawians in the camp but only receive about a third of what their counterparts are being

paid. Gogo's statement about her work as a coach at one of the humanitarian organisations stresses how little the salary is, *"I can't say that it's enough money for us because you can spend that money in two days. And imagine how can you reach to finish a month? It's impossible"*. Thus, refugees in the camp are not able to sustain their livelihoods solely based on the income they receive from working for humanitarian organisations. Moreover, by differentiating between the salaries of refugees and Malawians, humanitarian organisations are creating social hierarchies between these two groups, as similarly found by Omata (2021) in Kakuma. As aforementioned, Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab (2020) point to the intersection of injustices due to race or ethnicity and colonial legacies of migration control. Applying an intersectional analysis, it is evident that these social hierarchies in the form of income inequality are shaped by Malawi's hostility towards foreigners as embedded through persisting colonial policies (see Chapter 4; UNHCR, 2019). These policies limit refugees' ability to engage in official employment and an adequate salary. Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail how this one form of discrimination fortifies other forms of discrimination (Bastia, 2014).

5.3 Renting Farmland from Malawians



Figure 2

Picture showing rented farmland in the village next to Dzaleka.

Cultivation and farming were described by the participants as the main livelihood strategy employed by Rwandese and Burundian camp residents. This can be linked to the generational knowledge they have about farming practices. Eric, an elderly man who fled to Malawi from Burundi, solely relies on farming for his family's livelihood. He explains, *"we learnt it from our parents after class, they taught us how to grow vegetables. ... Of course, I rent the farm from the host community. I do sometimes rent a half or a quarter of a hectare to plant maize and beans. You can't forget the legacy left to us by our ancestors"*, pointing to firstly to the significance of ancestral heritage and secondly to the role of renting land from the surrounding Malawian villages. Besides Eric, also Sifa, Joseph, and Minani engage in farming. The refugees' engagement with their natural environment supports Shizha's (2022) argument of moving past a human-centredness of livelihood strategies. Whilst this analysis does not completely manage to depart from a human focus, it does provide insights on Rwandese and Burundian refugees' intrinsic relation to nature.

Furthermore, the process of renting land from Malawians in the surrounding villages underlines how the camp's economy is intertwined with its surrounding, contributing to the argument that refugee camps are not isolated places of temporariness but that they play an active part in the host country's socio-economic structures (Trapp, 2018). As Uwamahoro, a mother from Rwanda describes, renting land from Malawians is done through negotiation with people living close to the camp and then a rental agreement is produced. She explains how the rental process works, *"we have to approach Malawians. We rent, we write a document that we have already rented the garden, for how many years and the amount of money you have given out... For every year, I rent it 70 000"*. This underlines that renting

land from Malawian requires a lot of money and has to be combined with other strategies, suggesting not everyone has same the opportunity to make use of this livelihood strategy.

Agricultural activities such as farming have been covered greatly in the literature as studies such as by Awidi and Quan-Baffour (2021) and Boeyink (2020) about refugees in Uganda and Tanzania show. Similar to the situation of refugees in Malawi, the cultivation of crops and vegetables constitutes to one of the most employed livelihood strategies in the Ugandan context (Awidi and Quan-Baffour, 2021). However, the authors do not provide details on how this process takes place, making it difficult to compare study outcomes. In the case of refugees in Tanzania, Boeyink (2020) has made similar observations when it comes to refugees' farming practices, calling it *displacement agriculture*. Both Boeyink's (2020) findings and the results presented in this study share some key features: camp residents' claim to agency by challenging their confinement and the active interaction with the local landowners. Yet, Boeyink (2020) presents different results when it comes to employment relations between refugees and local residents whereby Tanzanian farm owners or refugees often hire other refugees as agricultural workers. In the case of the Dzaleka, it is always the refugees who hire people from the host community and refugee community alike. Thus, the investigation of refugees' livelihoods in Malawi adds to our understanding of the possible dynamics between residents of refugee camps and host societies as refugees occupy a more privileged position than villagers from around Dzaleka. Like Boeyink's (2020) and Awidi Quan-Baffour's (2021) studies, I did not find any significance when it comes to gender in relation to farming practices as women and men (and potentially other genders) farm together.

5.3.1 Employing Others as Agricultural Workers

The relational nature of farming as a livelihood strategy is that it enables the employment of other camp residents (and Malawians) which on the one hand provides them with a source of livelihood but on the other hand does not suffice to sustain whole families. Irakoze, who now works for a refugee-led organisation, describes how she and her family was able to sell the cultivated tomatoes of others when they first got to Dzaleka, “[w]e could go farming or helping them to harvest. Because by that time, we were not fine. We didn't have anything for us like to start farming or whatsoever. We depended on working for others [...]. I was going with my mum”. However, Irakoze also told me that the money they made from selling tomatoes was not enough to feed the whole family. Similarly Furaha, a widow and mother from the DRC explains how she makes a profit from selling cultivated tomatoes. Nevertheless, Furaha is struggling to make ends meet for her and her family.



Figure 3

Picture showing the main market square in the Dzaleka camp.

Both these accounts show that the relational aspect of this livelihood strategy both benefits the participants as they get employed by other camp residents but at the same time “interdependencies” make them reliant on others for their livelihoods

(Hanrahan, 2015, p. 385). This is similar to Boeyink's (2021) findings on Tanzanian refugee camps where wealthier camp residents exploit others through employment arrangements.

5.4 Supporting Others for “Motivation”

“On recolte ce qu'on a semé” (Kaem, August 2022)
(“You reap what you sow”)

As the other livelihood strategies show, mutual support and relations are at the core of strategies in the Dzaleka camp. Mutual support can also be classified as a livelihood strategy by itself as already discussed in the literature review earlier. Supporting others in Dzaleka can generate what participants referred to as “motivation” which implies that at a later point, the person who helped another will receive food, social connections, help in return. Support is done in the form of but not limited to assisting others with bureaucracy, accompanying someone to the hospital, and creating networks for others.

I will focus on Kaem, an elderly participant from the DRC, acts as a wise person in the Dzaleka community and uses supporting others for “motivation” as one of his main livelihood strategies. He says as, *“a wise person... so I do always advise people how to live peacefully with others, how to behave in good way... So when you do it for one person, that other person can just refer another person just to come to you...you assist everyone in general, different nationality... Burundian, Rwandese, Congolose... and they acknowledge it by just motivating me with something. This is one way of getting income somehow”*. When Kaem talks about teaching others how to behave, he refers to the teachings of his Fuliro tribe in which he, as a Bahama clan leader, has traditional authority. With this authority, he advises people on their marriages, other relationships, and life in general. He stresses *“because we are keeping, we are teaching others our tradition, our culture, and I emphasize on that each and every time I meet with people. I should teach people not to forget, not to forget those values of humanism”*.

Seeing the passing on of wisdom and receiving a “motivation” from others in return as a livelihood strategy is in line with Shizha's (2022) argument of respecting African cosmologies and demonstrates the importance of looking at livelihoods beyond market structures. These findings relate to the studies discussed in the literature review by Trapp (2018) and Nabulsi et al. (2020) in that they underline the relational nature of livelihood strategies in Dzaleka. Linking the strategy of supporting others for “motivation” to the humanitarian and development nexus whereby the UNHCR promotes self-reliance and entrepreneurship, it shows that ‘reliance’ in Dzaleka is not always centered around the individual nor economic profit (Skran and Easton-Calabria, 2020). The following chapter will show how mutual support is conditional and not equally accessible as a livelihood strategy.

Chapter 6 | Barriers to Refugees' Livelihood Strategies in Dzaleka

This chapter looks at intersecting barriers to the livelihood strategies discussed above. Through the lens of intersectionality, it shows how one structural barrier often intersects with another and ultimately impedes the livelihood of certain groups of Dzaleka residents. Regarding farming as a strategy, I did not obtain enough information to sketch the dynamics of employment relations. Hence, my focus is on barriers to the other livelihood strategies. Moreover, the role of time spent in the camp as suggested by Hoque and Yunus (2020) was not evident in my findings.

6.1 Unequal Access to Education as a Livelihood Strategy

6.1.1 Gender Disparities in Education

As mentioned in Chapter 5, education and online employment as a livelihood strategy equally available for all camp residents. The participants who mostly benefited from this strategy were all male, from the DRC and in their mid twenties. Whilst female and elderly participants also shared their passion for education and highlighted the importance of the programmes, they did not take part in as many tertiary education programmes and online jobs which is in line with Crea and McFarland's (2015) findings that show gender disparities in access to education in refugee camps. These disparities were confirmed during the time I spent at the refugee-led organisation as participant Emily from the host-community was the only female graduate at the time.

Other studies conducted in similar protracted refugee situations in Kenya and Jordan, such as by Dahya et al. (2019) and Hattar (2019) provide a possible explanation for the gender gap in education: distinct gender roles in livelihood attainment. Likewise, these distinct gender roles were reported by my participants. For instance, Gogo, who is the woman leader of her community, argues that, *"their husband don't like their women to go to school. It's a big challenge that we have in our community. They choose for their their wives to go to the market, to do business, or to go to the farm. But I think to send them to school or their daughters, it's a problem that we have"*. Thus, emphasising that gender roles affect women's capacity to make use of education as a strategy to gain hybrid forms of employment. Like Gogo, other female participants echoed this sentiment and shared how their care work and household duties take up most of the time, making it difficult to partake in higher education. These findings correspond to Crea's (2016) study in Dzaleka which shows that camp residents have difficulty to balance life and education. It further reflects Buscher's (2016) study which highlights women's lack of time to participate in livelihood interventions due to care work.

Irakoze argues that on top of care work and household duties taking time away from education, many women face domestic violence at home when they disobey their husband's demand not to pursue higher education. She says, *"they start beating their wives, so wives most of the time become vulnerable"*. The gender disparities in education and hybrid employment point to how livelihood programmes such as online degrees need to engage in more gender-sensitive approaches as similarly discussed by Grabska (2011) in the case of the Kakuma refugee camp. My findings also show existing patriarchal power structures that limit women's livelihoods.

6.1.2 Learning Difficulties: The Intersection between Gender-based Violence and Ethnic Discrimination

The story of Naomi, who came to Malawi as a baby after her parents died in the Rwandan genocide, shows the need for a more gender-sensitive and that is aware of ethnic discrimination. Her story underlines that relations at the meso-level can impede education as a livelihood strategy through social hierarchies based on ethnicity and gender at the macro-level. Naomi was raised by guardians and her foster father sexually molested her as a young girl. She tells, *“I tried to report somewhere... So, for the issue of reporting in the camp sometimes doesn't work because you can just report to the [community] leader. Unfortunately, because of my physical appearance... This one maybe it's not one of our people... This one is from Kagame... Things like that, so you don't have to report... it can even cause more problems for you”*. Thus, due to the discrimination Naomi faced based on her Tutsi ethnicity and the assumption connected to it (i.e., being a spy for the Kagame regime), she was not able to report the sexual abuse she was facing at home, underlying that the reporting structures at the macro-level do not take ethnic discrimination into account. This led to her having difficulties to pursue her education.

She describes the severe consequences for her educational progress, *“I'm becoming a strong one, but because of those things which happened... instead of learning diploma in three years... I feel really stressful, headache, eyes. Then I go home without even learning. That's why I didn't continue with degree”*. Applying the lens of intersectionality to Naomi's barriers to education as a livelihood strategy, the fact that she was not able to report the gender-based violence she was experiencing due to the community leader's ethnic discrimination is in line with other studies which showed that people may experience multiple oppressions based on several identity markers (Camminga, 2020a; Camminga, 2020b; Hossain *et al.*, 2021; Pail, 2021; Rosenberg and Bakomeza, 2017).

Linking these issues to the humanitarian and development nexus, Peter criticises the lack of long-term institutional support for education in Dzalaka. He says the camp needs initiatives, *“through which people are mobilized for different development programmes... provide a good educational, social, economic framework... The camp was opened here in 1994... people arrive here think that it's there for temporal time... But it becomes long-term”*. Given the long-term nature of encampment in Dzaleka, Peter's call for the need of proper educational frameworks which take into account intersecting barriers to education as experienced by Naomi is in accordance with Stamnes (2016). The author highlights that whilst development initiatives like education in refugee camps are essential for refugees' livelihoods, they need to take inequalities into account to be accessible for all camp residents (Stamnes, 2016).

6.2 Barriers to “Volunteering” for Humanitarian Organisations

6.2.1 Patriarchal and Heteronormative Structures Limiting Access to Work

Aside from the unequal employment relations mentioned in Chapter 6, the role of gender and class is also prevalent in refugees' ability to access “volunteering” as a livelihood strategy. Bora, who is in her forties, reported to me that she has applied numerous times for volunteering positions at humanitarian and development organisations, but a younger male candidate was always selected instead. My observations in the camp confirmed this; most volunteer

positions, especially the more powerful, are held by men. In that regard, Irakoze shared an example with me, “*where women are being forced to sleep with the people who have good positions in that organization for them to be able to be given at least a place to work*”, underlining the camp’s patriarchal power structures. Thus, whilst volunteering for humanitarian organisations fosters the livelihoods of some camp residents, it is not equally available for all.

This is visible as Irakoze also told me that her queer friends have difficulty finding work at humanitarian organisations, she says, “*you see a man walking with another man... so they say whenever we want to look for a job it’s always hard for us to be given one*”. I did not gain more insight about queer refugees in the camp as none of the participants openly disclosed their sexual orientation or non-heteronormative gender identities. This can be attributed to the danger of being openly queer in Malawi and the camp due to the cisheteropatriarchal structures and homosexuality being a criminal offence (Currier, 2014). Nevertheless, the issue of queer refugees accessing “volunteering” as a livelihood strategy is in line with studies from Kakuma as discussed by Camminga (2020a; 2020b) and reports by ORAM (2021).

When we link these barriers back to the UNHCR’s policy of self-reliance in protracted refugee situations, it becomes evident that it is not equally attainable for all refugees (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018; Skran and Easton-Calabria, 2020). The fact that women and queer refugees face discrimination when applying to humanitarian and development organisations in the camp underlines the need for policies to consider intersectional barriers to their livelihood programmes as argued by Almakhamreh, Asfour and Hutchinson (2022).

6.2.2 Ethnic Discrimination Affecting “Volunteering” Opportunities

The story I shared about Naomi and her experience of ethnic discrimination while reporting sexual violence is not the only barrier she faced because of her ethnicity. As mentioned earlier, Naomi utilises volunteering as a livelihood strategy. A few years ago, her work at an organisation concerned with WASH was negatively affected by ethnic discrimination from her community leader. She recounts:

One person came to complain... she couldn't afford... basic needs. So now my boss gave me the referral letter to take her to the UNHCR... but because our leader... has this kind of discrimination in him about the ethnics... he could say that the one you are helping is tall like you... you are in the same [ethnic] group... he was insulting me... he could even say that you will never get the support while I'm still here, or if I'm still breathing... not from the organisation. So now 'cause I was working with them very nicely... he said that this girl will be sending pictures and names of people here to Rwanda... then he told the office that they have to check on me. So they asked me to write a letter explaining the conflict... They found that it was liar so I continue working with them so after that he just said... that I have stolen a machine, a computer in the office... All of those are challenges... because of my physical appearance.

Given that camp residents usually must report these issues to the elected community leaders (meso-level), who in this case was the perpetrator, Naomi sought help from the UNHCR directly. Yet, she says that the organisation has done “*nothing, because I reported it and they even have the documents... I could report each and every day, each and every year till I stopped going to the offices*”. The lack of institutional support she received from UNHCR and the fact that they use community leaders as direct link to camp residents raises concerns regarding the organisation’s awareness of and complicity in intersecting discriminations.

Observations and participant dialogues also revealed that it is people from DRC that mostly occupy positions of “volunteer” managers in humanitarian organisations as well as other positions of power. As reason why this is happening, Naomi explains that Rwanda’s history of genocide plays a role, “*people still have the history ideology of things which happened in Rwanda... everyone from that country is a criminal*”. Consequently, many Rwandese refugees would change their identity and pretend to be from the DRC in order to receive more institutional support and to climb up the social ladder within the camp community.

As Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab (2020) argue, injustices due to gender can intersect with systems of oppression linked to colonial legacies. In the Rwandan context, Mamdani (2020) argues for the persistence of colonial ethnic hierarchies between Tutsi and Hutu. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into depth on the dynamics of these hierarchies, but it could explain why Naomi continues to face discrimination. My findings are also in line with Yacob-Haliso’s (2016, p. 55) research as Naomi’s disadvantage multiplied based on one form of discrimination reinforcing another.

6.3 Mutual support: The Exclusion of Rwandese Refugees

As Naomi’s stories demonstrate, she faces discrimination due to her ethnicity. This form of discrimination is also visible in the lack of support other Rwandese refugees (of all ethnicities) have received from camp residents at the meso-level. Peter’s strategy of “simplifying” himself and hiding his educational background to receive support, as discussed in section 5.1.2, can be linked to the discrimination some Rwandese refugees experience when arriving in Dzaleka. Peter came to Dzaleka in 2012 after having to flee Rwanda for the second time⁵. In our dialogue he stressed the issues he was facing upon his arrival in the camp, “*it was part of my trauma... no person to speak with. I was rejected. People were afraid of me, they thought I had come to do manhunting whereas I had personal problems*”.

Richard, who was mentioned earlier as supporting others with his teaching, also does not receive support from other camp residents. Richard fled Rwanda to Dzaleka twelve years ago because he was persecuted due to testifying in Arusha⁶. Concerning his exclusion from support in the camp he says, “*I have not met any people I know from the war. It’s why I do not have any assistance from people... that’s why I struggle... to live myself difficulty but continue to live*”.

Although Kaem stressed that mutual support is a livelihood strategy that all camp residents benefit from, other participants painted a different picture when it comes to support. Irakoze from Rwanda, for instance, argues that “*people who come from the same ethnicity, same region, they are the only ones... supporting themselves. They are the ones doing well*”. This underlines the point that support is conditional based on a variety of factors. The analysis revealed that having group membership of being Congolese results in significant privileges for camp residents in terms of social networks.

The literature has neglected to address the persistence of discrimination based on country of origin in refugee camps. Although studies have largely covered discrimination based on

⁵ The first time he fled his home country was in the aftermath of the genocide. He ended up in a refugee camp in neighbouring DRC which was then attacked by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, and he was forcefully repatriated to Rwanda.

⁶ In Arusha, he testified at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

gender, there is a gap in addressing ethnicity-based discrimination in refugee camps and how this impedes livelihoods. Naomi, Peter and Richard's exclusion from support could be linked back to colonial ethnic hierarchies (Mamdani, 2020). My findings also confirm Sigona's (2015) argument that refugee camps are not places of exception but show systems of oppression like other geographies.

6.4 Gender beyond Women

"In a society, it's not just that women are victims... But the thing is... They [men] take rat poison. They eat it, thinking that the rat will die. They are killing themselves. They want to hold the power in this world. The money of this world. Everything of this world. They want it for themselves by wanting it too much. They are sacrificing their own boys"
(Bora)

Bora's quote highlights not only women are victims of gender-based violence or discrimination but that men also suffer at the hands of the patriarchal system. The sections above primarily discussed gender issues regarding women's livelihood strategies. However, the silences on violence against men and its effect on their livelihoods in Dzaleka are significant as well.

Indeed, Peter, who used to work for PIM as a human rights officer, explains, *"when the woman undergoes domestic violence, she goes to Plan. She's well received because she's a woman. But what happens when a man is abused? ... That is a matter of tribal or short cycle of wise people. They gather together and debate on that issue because he can't go to Plan. Men can be violated also"*. This corresponds to literature on gender issues in humanitarian settings (Camminga, 2020; Hilhorst, Porter and Gordon, 2018). Hilhorst, Porter and Gordon (2018, p. 9) argue that there is a "discourse whereby women and men are boxed into separate and rather stagnant categories, either binary or hierarchical. By prioritising these categorical issues, the debate may miss the mark regarding gender as relations of power that, like everything else, are cast into disarray during humanitarian crises". Similarly, Hudson (2018) asserts that creating hierarchies of vulnerabilities whereby women are equated with gender, may result in failing to account for other issues that arise from power asymmetries in gender relations. Thus, it is important to understand the power dynamics at play.

Participants' silences on gender-issues pertaining to men can be linked to ideas about masculinity and attached expectations. In line with van Stapele's (2021) study on how men feel pressured and overwhelmed by having to lead the family and provide. Kaem told me that, *"its hard yeah, honestly speaking... because when as a man, as a responsible for large family, when you are unable just to meet basic needs for your kids, for your family... it becomes somehow challenging"*. This sentiment was shared by others. Luhande for instance described not being able to provide for his family as traumatic, that he feels helpless when he arrives home to find he does not have enough food or cannot pay his children's school fees. He says, *"your head is now punished"*, emphasising the mental distress he experiences due to pressures of him having to provide.

Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of refugees' livelihood strategies in a setting of long-term encampment through the case of the Dzaleka refugee camp, Malawi. I problematised that, in contrast to its initial purpose as emergency response to conflict and genocide in Africa's Great Lakes region, the camp has been operating for more than twenty-eight years. Due to Malawi's encampment policy, all refugees are obliged to reside in Dzaleka. This shows discrepancies between the UNHCR's plea for refugee camps as a *temporary* solution and protracted refugee situations such as the Dzaleka camp in Malawi. Although the African continent hosts most the world's largest refugee camps, there is a gap in the literature in addressing the realities in this context, especially from an intersectional perspective. Furthermore, the humanitarian and development nexus, promoted by the UNHCR, limits its understanding of refugee 'self-reliance' to market spheres.

The aim of this paper was to shed light on refugees' ability to sustain their lives in a setting with immense legal restrictions. It also aimed at understanding how barriers impede these livelihood strategies. Through an interdisciplinary conceptualisation of livelihoods, this paper accounted for a comprehensive perspective on livelihoods that blur the lines between formality and informality. A *relational* ontology and *migrant-centred* epistemology as well as the collaborative life history method enabled an understanding of livelihood strategies in Dzaleka being both facilitated and hindered by relations. This is evident in the main findings of this research.

The most used livelihood strategy amongst interviewed camp residents is education. It is used to foster personal and professional networks beyond the camp which challenges education and labour restrictions in place. However, there are gender disparities in accessing education whereby mostly male participants benefitted from online employment opportunities due to distinct gender roles in livelihood attainment. Consequently, women may face violence when pursuing higher education. The findings underline the need for the humanitarian and development nexus, as promoted by UNHCR, to foster educational frameworks that consider these barriers.

Paying for education and teaching are also used to support others. Supporting others with the expectation of reciprocity is a livelihood strategy in itself whereby support is also done through for example giving advice, helping with bureaucracy. However, this support is conditional on the perceived vulnerability of other camp residents. In that way, having a high level of education prior to coming to Dzaleka can limit others' willingness to help. This intersects with support being conditional on refugees' group membership and ethnicity, disadvantaging camp residents from Rwanda.

"Volunteering" for a stipend by working for humanitarian and development organisations in the camp constitutes the second most employed livelihood strategy by participants. By "volunteering" for organisations refugees again challenge the legal barriers. Nevertheless, due to legal labour restrictions in Malawi, refugees receive significantly less income from humanitarian and development organisations as their Malawi counterparts. This demonstrates how organisations are creating social hierarchies between the two groups supported by Malawi's colonial policies of migration control. From an intersectional perspective, Rwandan participants experience inter-communal discrimination which disrupts their "volunteering" at organisations, limits their ability to report sexual violence to community leaders, and

in turn causes difficulties to focus on education. This illustrates how one form of oppression fortifies another and should not be looked at in isolation.

Social hierarchies are further visible in employment relations between refugee agricultural workers and their employers who are other refugees that rent land from the camp's surrounding villages. Findings show agricultural workers are mostly Rwandese and Burundian refugees who often do not get paid enough by fellow refugees and cannot solely live off farming as a livelihood strategy. Long-term farming projects also underline the *permanency* of encampment in Dzaleka. The information gathered does not provide enough insights into the full dynamics of Dzaleka's *displacement agriculture* (Boeyink, 2020), which is a limitation of this research.

Whilst many refugees in Dzaleka are 'self-reliant', the marginalisation of Rwandese refugees and women evidently highlights that this state is indeed not the panacea for protracted refugee situations (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018). Humanitarian and development organisation alike need to consider intersecting forms of oppression and structural inequalities that impede refugees' ability to employ and sustain livelihood strategies. They also need to consider that livelihood strategies operate outside of market structures as shown in my findings. The policy discourse on refugee self-reliance must not side-line the issue of long-term encampment which stands in stark contrast policy's plea for refugee camps as *temporary* measures.

Aside from not fully sketching the dynamics of agricultural employment relations, this research was limited in understanding the distribution of land ownership within the camp which could have accounted for a more thorough intersectional analysis. Moreover, the coloniality of gender could have been examined in relation to patriarchal oppression. As a researcher, I should have made the research more collaborative beyond working with local students and incorporate participants in the analysis. Future research should engage in a more thorough class analysis of the Dzaleka camp and shed light on other livelihood strategies not addressed.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Life in Dzaleka Camp in Pictures





