

**REFUGEE CHILDREN'S FRIENDSHIPS AND
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THEIR
MIGRATIONS**

**Qualitative Case Study of Congolese Children's
Current Friendships in Finland and Past Experiences
as Refugees in Rwanda, 1996-2012**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Area and Research Questions

Of the 36.4 million people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2011, almost half were children.¹ Researchers have pointed out that there is a need for further research on war affected children which pays particular attention to the role of attachment relationships and social support available in peer relationships and extended social networks to compliment the studies that focus on the psychological symptoms and mental disorders.² In other words, refugee children's past experiences have been mainly studied from the point of view of psychology and social studies.³ From this perspective, this study can be seen to reduce this gap in the research – sharing some insights on the interpersonal relationship that the *Congolese refugee children*⁴ have with friends in post-migration situation.

In addition, the overall tendency and characteristic to previous studies made from psychological, sociological and communications perspective has been the lack of historical perspective and context.⁵ When looking at the phenomenon of identity and culture creation, the negotiations happen in interaction with others over time.⁶ Basically, these transitions – as negotiation processes between people that happen in communication – have a historical context and they are bound to the time and place where they happen. Also, according to Martin and Nakayama history – including personal history such as

¹ UNHCR 2011c.

² See: Stichick Betancourt & Tanveer Khan 2008, 323-324.

³ On studies made with a psychological or social focus, see: Alitolppa-Niittamo 2003; Boyden & Hart 2007; Watters 2008; Kumpulainen 2009; Haikkola 2012a; Lauritzen & Sivertsen 2012; Liebkind & Janiskaja-Lahti & Mähönen 2012.

⁴ When referring to *Congolese refugee children* in this study, I mean those children who are originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo that were under the concern of UNHCR, living in the camps in Rwanda. The refugee status determination in itself is a vast topic, and I am not going to concentrate on it in this study. On the refugee status determination, see for example: Boyden & Hart 2007; Rousseau et al, 2004; Schafer 2002; UNHCR 2012b.

⁵ On understanding behavior in its historical context, see: Tosh 2006, 36-37.

⁶ Kokkonen 2010, 20.

memories of childhood experiences – plays an important role in intercultural interactions of people⁷. From this perspective, the study in question also takes into consideration the historical context where the negotiations on identity and culture take place.

In Finland, research related to immigrant children and their adjustment to Finnish society started to interest scholars more in the 1990s when the larger influx of immigrants began. In the 2000s, studies on children with an immigrant background have concentrated, for example, on their school performance, multiculturalism, and encounters with the so called majority population. Researchers have also been interested in the so-called second generation immigrant children's family relationships, identity formation, and the categorizations related to those questions. Studies from the perspectives of linguistics and social psychology have been made for example through the Finnish Youth Research Society.⁸ In previous studies on migrations it has been repeatedly stated that interpersonal relationships are an important factor in attachment to a new or changed social environment or life situation.⁹ According to Lotta Kokkonen's study on refugees' interpersonal relationship networks, friendships – like other relationships – both change during transitions and contribute to the ways how refugees adapt to changes.¹⁰ Also, people generally describe three benefits of close friendship: 1) somebody to talk to; 2) a person to depend and rely on for instrumental help, social support, and caring; and 3) someone to have fun and enjoy doing things with. Furthermore, communication with friends has been stated to relieve loneliness and contribute to physical and psychological well-being.¹¹

Here the term *friendship* refers to a broad category of interpersonal relationships communicatively accomplished with peers, and characterized by voluntary, reciprocated, non-romantic affection and good will, according to William K. Rawlings.¹² This means that people choose who they view and treat as their friends voluntarily. Secondly, friendship is a mutual relationship shared between persons, and one-sided offerings of friendship do not constitute an

⁷ Martin & Nakamaya 2007, 129.

⁸ Haikkola 2012a, 13-14.

⁹ Berry 1997; Janiskaja-Lahti et al. 2003; Kokkonen 2010.

¹⁰ Kokkonen 2010, 11.

¹¹ Rawlings 2008b.

¹² Rawlings 2008a; Kokkonen 2010, 76.

operable relationship. Thirdly, friendships are contextually negotiated between persons, and they can complement, fuse with, compete with, and substitute for other interpersonal relationships. Sometimes it can be difficult to differentiate if people are communicating as siblings or as friends, and friendships might even substitute for a family if one does not have relatives close by.¹³ For example, some studies have shown that children who grow up without appropriate parental attachment figures can develop extraordinarily supportive relationships with one another. This has been the case for example in the studies made on children's relationships during World War II.¹⁴ Other studies have shown that refugee's interpersonal relationships in general have been substituted or complemented by other relationships.¹⁵ This must have happened to some Congolese refugee children in the camps of Rwanda simply because of the amount of children in the camps and the fact that some of them did not have any caretakers at all. Actually, 11 per cent of the refugee households were headed by minors still in 2006, according to the UNHCR¹⁶. The shared experiences and the special nature of such relationships as friendships could also explain why the refugee children from various countries¹⁷ that I have met during my work experience seem to have a deep common understanding with each other even without having a common language.

Friendships vary in terms of depth and duration from superficial short-term bonds to profoundly dedicated lifelong attachments. Also, according to Rawlings, friendships shape and reflect developments in social cognition, perspective-taking abilities, moral comportment, and cooperation as equals during childhood. In addition, during adolescence and younger adulthood, "friendships cultivate ethical sensibilities, and understandings and practices of intimacy, identity, and sociability".¹⁸ Psychologist Judy Dunn refers to earlier studies in saying that relationships in general are seen as the context where socialization takes place, in which communication skills are acquired, in which the regulation of emotions develops, and in which what the psychologists call the *self-system* – the set of potentialities which develop in an individual's

¹³ Rawlings 2008a.

¹⁴ Dunn 1993, 65.

¹⁵ Kokkonen 2010.

¹⁶ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 19.

¹⁷ Like children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, and Afghanistan.

¹⁸ Rawlings 2008b.

character in response to parental and other external influence – has its origins. Moreover, according to Dunn, early peer relationships play a key role in children’s development.¹⁹

The quality of the relationships defined as friendships is also important.²⁰ According to Rawlings, young people must adapt themselves to patterns of interaction determined by adults and older siblings for much of their childhood. Contrary to these relationships, friendships and peer interactions involve the collaborative and cooperative development of procedures for interacting between equals which lacks these power aspects.²¹ Furthermore, the reciprocal exchange and perspective-taking that is necessary for maintaining such relationships, tends to enhance children's sensitivity to others and their capacity for expressing and experiencing affection with an equal, and people in general.²² In short, childhood friendships are important.

However, young peoples own voice has been lacking from many of the previous studies done on their relationships or past experiences. This neglect of the topic of children’s agency reflects the wider position of children in the society. In other words, for a long time, children were regarded as mere objects of socialization rather than active participants in the socialization process, or in their lives in general. Childhood was merely regarded as preparation for adulthood rather than a valuable time period in its own.²³ Furthermore, the status of the children in earlier research done in the beginning of the 20th century was derived from seeing them as developmentally immature and incomplete or fragile versions of an adults, and therefore unreliable respondents or even “unknowing objects”.²⁴ Similarly, it was not before the research made by the historian Philippe Ariès that the very concept of childhood – childhood memories and our descriptions of childhood – started to interest scholars in a historical sense. It has been noted that Ariès’ *L’Enfant et la familiale sous l’ancien régime* (Centuries of Childhood first published in 1960 and translated in English in 1962) instigated the whole study of the

¹⁹ Dunn 1993, 2-3, and 58.

²⁰ Salmivalli 2005, 36-38, 40-41.

²¹ Rawlings 2008b.

²² Rawlings 2008b.

²³ Haikkola 2011, 1202; Jordanova 2000, 44-45.

²⁴ Farrell 2005, 29-30; Freeman & Mathison 2009, 2.

history of childhood.²⁵ Correspondingly, Kaisa Vehkalahti has argued that historical records on children's experiences are few and especially the material produced by the children themselves is lacking and researchers have to rely on different official documents²⁶. Furthermore, according to Salmivalli, majority of studies done on children's friendships have been done with usually white, North-American, and middle-class participants. Studies on the impact of different cultural and sub-cultural aspects on children's relationships are, however, becoming more popular.²⁷ Communication scholars like William K. Rawlings and Lotta Kokkonen have also been asking for more attention to these issues.²⁸

Thus, from historical perspective, the study is linked to contemporary and family history, and the history of childhood and organizations. According to Martin and Nakayama people from nonmainstream cultural groups have a hard time in retaining their histories. Yet these histories are vital to understand how others and how they themselves perceive them and why. The fighting in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – where the children interviewed for this study are from – continues even today. Thus, even though categorizing research as contemporary history might be difficult, it is safe to say that the history of the DRC is history in the making, warm as gunshots, still living in its people's memories.²⁹

Here, I also want to emphasize the active role taken by the refugee families and children in question – the perspective that they were not just helpless people waiting for someone to save them, or living on the goodwill of politicians, institutions, or Western donors. When the situation in their country was threatening the safety of them and their children, it was them who chose to leave their homes and families and made the effort. In the camps of Rwanda, they were actively contributing to the society around them in the ways they could. Similarly, their migration to Finland should not be seen as a 'saviour' or a happy end to their story either – it was them who actively pursued the opportunity to migrate to Finland and when the opportunity came it was them

²⁵ Ariès 1960/1996, 5-8.

²⁶ Vehkalahti 2010, 142.

²⁷ Rawlings 2008a; Salmivalli 2005, 15, 20-23; cf. Kokkonen 2010, 76-91.

²⁸ Kokkonen 2010; Rawlings 2008a.

²⁹ On the need for contemporary history, see Tosh 2006, 50-51.

making the decision. Moreover, their lives in Finland have challenges and problems as well. This is not to deny that many of these decisions were forced upon them – they might not have had a better choice – but it was still their own choice not to give up, and to find safety and refuge for themselves and their children.

Sources have been generally seen as the biggest challenge when studying the history of African people. There is general lack of written sources of African people's experiences about their past.³⁰ Having no personal accounts of people's experiences and relying on official documents is, of course, a general concern to all historians, and especially those interested in the everyday lives of people³¹. Finding relevant sources in Africa is, however, even more challenging since the history of the continent was mostly oral before colonialism hit the continent. According to historian and historical linguist Christopher Ehret, for most of the African continent written records did not exist before mid-nineteenth century, in several places even later.³² Thus, many historians have relied on oral testimonies also when it comes to the history of the Congo. After such works as those made by Jan Vansina, David Van Reybrouck and Jean-Pierre Chrétien, these oral testimonies are starting to be seen more strongly as valid sources for historical research also in the Western world.³³ Also, oral history has been seen as something that safeguards tradition and develops identities.³⁴ Consequently one might say that like culture, history is also something that is both learned by narratives but also created in interaction with others and within ourselves. Vansina and Chrétien have also underlined the importance of the language in African studies.³⁵ However, here one also has to note that the Belgian and Western influence did not stop only to political life and state actors in the Congo. For example, the Protestant and Catholic missionaries created many of the written forms of the local languages in order to teach the Bible. In fact, the Bible was many times the first book in the native languages, which the missionaries now also mastered after the

³⁰ Spear 2003, 169.

³¹ Jordanova 2000, 24.

³² Philips 2005, 86.

³³ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013; Vansina 1985 and Chrétien 2006.

³⁴ Philips 2005, 192.

³⁵ Vansina 1985 and Chrétien 2006.

writing chore.³⁶ French took its place as the official language, and Lingala³⁷ started to spread among the working population.³⁸ Therefore, even many of the sources on Congolese customs, culture and history that are used today have been created and influenced by Western anthropologist, ethnologist and colonial powers. These include oral testimonies collected by Western ethnologists, for example. Based on these interviews they, for instance, reckoned that there were 400 ethnic groups in the Congo in the 20th century which all had their own languages, habits, and political structures, although later research has found that there was a high level of homogeneity between these groups in the Great Lakes region.³⁹

Thus, the history of refugees is usually considered to be history of the forgotten or history of the ‘other’. The history of Congolese refugees is not only non-mainstream stories; it is also linked to the history of colonialism and sagas on mass emigration.⁴⁰ Furthermore, these are the stories of those who were discarded and dominated. Donatian Dibwe dia Mwemba sees history as partial, relative, and fragile when exposed to political pressure. According to him, until about 1970, Congolese history remained in the hands of non-Africans from Eastern and Western Europe and America. After that Congolese historians began to decolonize their recent history, but postcolonial history was largely neglected. Biographies began to be published in 1980. These publications touched on many domains – religious testimonies, and political debates about the exclusion of Kasai people for Katanga province for example – but one can see that the accounts of many marginalized groups, like children, were not documented.⁴¹

According to John Edward Philips, the so-called Africanization of history cannot just stop in pointing out the connections of the inhabitants and the supposed African diaspora. From the report of Philips: “We must strive to understand the ideas of the African time and place we study, to realize how Africans of the past conceptualized the world around them, including their

³⁶ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 57-59, 75.

³⁷ Lingala is a Bantu language which is spoken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, and Angola.

³⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 75.

³⁹ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 17, 23.

⁴⁰ Martin & Nakamaya 2007, 129-140.

⁴¹ Philips 2005, 17. Donatian Dibwe dia Mwemba is a Congolese historian.

societies, and try to figure out how they would have thought about the changes that were happening around them and to them.”⁴² However, one must keep in mind that there is no such thing as ‘one history of Africa’, as there is not one ‘history of the Congo’. The history of Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo has been very much a discourse between people holding different point of views, especially after the decolonization. This discourse has concentrated on the notions of identity and independence, as well as the economic, political, environmental and geographical factors affecting the history of the region.⁴³

Although the reports on Congolese made by the colonial powers bear many ideologies and values that are foreign to the locals, there is one point that has to be highlighted with regards to this thesis: the role of children in the so called Congolese culture. This point is made because most researchers seem to think that children have a central and important role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁴⁴ This special role is said to be related to the socioeconomic situation, where children are considered, for example, the main resources of support to the parents when they are getting old. Iliffe also refers to “supreme importance attached to having numerous children” in the competitive societies of cattle-keepers in the Great Lakes region, and even states that in the Kivu regions a barren woman used to mean a mother with fewer than three children.⁴⁵ These accounts have to be, however, read while keeping in mind the colonial ideology that saw the Congolese – including children – mainly as a labour resource. Furthermore, when one compares these findings on those made with other, mainly agrarian societies, the important role of children seems like quite a universal phenomenon, and not something that would be special to Congolese culture. However, the role of children keeping the Congolese kinships, communities, and society alive is highlighted in many of the studies made about the region. Toyin Falola, for example, states that children were the most important part of the chain of generations in the ‘African culture’, and kinship as a biological and ideological identity would not have been possible without children. Furthermore, Stenström has stated that for

⁴² Philips 2005, 44.

⁴³ See for example: Iliffe 1987; Iliffe 2007; and Reid 2012.

⁴⁴ Falola 2008, 252, 258-259; Iliffe 2007, 69; Stenström 2003, 58-59.

⁴⁵ Iliffe 2007, 115.

the Congolese, good life meant having many children.⁴⁶ While it is quite impossible to find out if this is actually the case, it is certain that industrialization and urbanization have affected also Congolese perspectives on the importance of children.

Children with a refugee background are also special in the sense that they have not necessarily participated in choosing the destination of their migration, and have often had no time or ways to prepare for the migration. In addition, the decision is not usually based on the so called drawing factors. In other words, refugees are people who have been forced to leave their country of residence. However, even though the children are often not asked for consent, they are usually one of the main reasons why people decide to leave their country and their homes in refugee camps. Parents might also put a lot of pressure on the children regarding their adaptation⁴⁷ to the new environment – for example learning the new language or performance in school. For instance, previous studies have found that when asked about their adaptation process the parents might answer even with telling how their children are doing.⁴⁸

From communication's perspective, this study can be seen to be related to the dialectical perspective presented by Martin and Nakayama that tries to summarize the three main conceptual perspectives to the study of intercultural and cross-cultural communication⁴⁹: 1) the social psychological perspective related to the works of Hall and Hofstede; 2) the critical perspective which focuses more on macro-contexts such as the political and social structures, including socio-historical context, that influence communication; and 3) the interpretive perspective that challenges the definition of culture.⁵⁰ In addition, the study can be seen to be related to the theory-into-practice school defined by Milton J. Bennett, because of its interdisciplinary nature and the fact that draws on studies made on several

⁴⁶ Falola 2008, 252, 258-259; Stenström 2003, 59.

⁴⁷ Generally the term *adaptation* refers to the process of adjusting to environmental conditions. Cools 2011, 29-31.

⁴⁸ Kokkonen 2010, 12-14, 56.

⁴⁹ According to the traditional definition *cross-cultural communication* involves comparisons of communication across cultures, whereas *intercultural communication* involves communication between people from different cultures. Gudykunst 2003, 1.

⁵⁰ Holliday et al. 2010, 91.

fields, including not only communication and history, but also anthropology, sociology and psychology.⁵¹

However, the subject of intercultural communication is beset by a major problem since there is very little agreement on what people mean by the term *culture* – after all, cultures do not talk or meet each other, people do. In this sense all communication is interpersonal communication⁵² and can never be intercultural communication⁵³. Furthermore, Scollon and Scollon point out that the focus of intercultural communication studies have shifted away from comparisons between cultures or individuals to a focus on the co-constructive aspects of communication, and the way how meanings and identities are constituted in and through the interaction itself.⁵⁴ The discourse approach to intercultural communication for example looks at discourse systems of multiple identities (such as gender or ethnicity).⁵⁵ Furthermore, intercultural communication is also closely linked to the representation of one's identity, which in turn is related to questions about personality and its social constructs.⁵⁶

This discussion on creating cultures is thus closely related to negotiations about cultural identities. Researchers Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman have, for example, divided identities into two sides: 1) the inherited cultural identities (that contain the imposed and presumed stereotypes, and are nested in the milieu and structures where the negotiations take place), and 2) the creative cultural identities (that are turning, invading, playing, and establishing their own territories and fostering cultural change). Furthermore, they see that these discourses on identities happen in the context of interaction.⁵⁷ Edward T. Hall, for example, has stated that all culture is communication.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Bennett 1998, ix.

⁵² Julia T. Wood defines *interpersonal communication* as something that deals with communication between people. Wood 1997, 21-22.

⁵³ According to Wood, *intercultural communication* refers to communication between people from different cultures, including distinct cultures within a single country. Wood 1997, 29.

⁵⁴ Holliday et al. 2010, 110.

⁵⁵ Holliday et al. 2010, 110-111.

⁵⁶ Holliday et al. 2010, 185.

⁵⁷ Holliday et al. 2010, 21.

⁵⁸ Hall 1998, 53-67.

The perspective taken to *culture* in this study is twofold and complimentary. On the other hand, cultures are seen to be created in dialogue and in negotiations that take place in interpersonal communication between people who are interacting with each other⁵⁹. This approach highlights the dynamic nature of cultures, and the fact that they are created “in the present” and between people in communication with each other. On the other hand, the historical context of the migrations described in this study highlights the fact that these negotiations on culture are influenced by the political events and past experiences of people. Put another way, the creation of culture is seen as a phenomenon that is been influenced by politics, governments, groups, and other actors, as well as the overall environment where these negotiations take places. Thus, the meanings that these actors and institutions – such as nation states – create cannot be taken out of the equation⁶⁰. However, the negotiation about culture is still seen to take place between people in interaction with each other. Thus, cultures are not seen as objects, places, or physical entities within which and by which people live⁶¹.

The epistemic perspective taken in this study is that usually taken in qualitative studies where understanding the source materials and the interview data, and analysing them is seen to be more important than the creation of facts, truths, or theories on behavioural patterns.⁶² I chose this approach since I wanted to bring attention to the complexities around people’s negotiations on identity and culture. Thus, this study does not aim to develop a theory on the children’s interpersonal relationships with friends or try to re-create the past of Congolese refugee children. In other words, I do not believe that the aim of this type of qualitative case study should be to develop universal criteria for effective communication, or complete historical account on the lives of the children. The aim here is simply to understand the children’s interpersonal relationships with friends better, while taking into consideration the historical context behind their migrations. In terms of theory creation, the goal is to create new insights and hypothesis for future studies⁶³.

⁵⁹ Holliday et al. 2010, 110.

⁶⁰ Holliday et al. 2010, 20; Jordanova 2000, 199.

⁶¹ Holliday et al. 2010, 26.

⁶² Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 16-18, 35; Fingerroos 2006 33, 83-85.

⁶³ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 19-20; Frey et al. 2000, 280–286; Reinard 2008a.

Furthermore, I believe that the pursuit of history is a “political occupation”, as stated by Ludmilla Jordanova.⁶⁴ Specifically, I agree with the researchers that think that all human beings are biased in one way or another. From this perspective, even choosing the research topic itself is a political decision. Furthermore, history as a discipline cannot be isolated from the world and the other historians, or from governments and political actors. As historical studies have shown, the so called past is a usable resource to persuade people. According to Jordanova, one can start to understand history as a political occupation for example when considering how new histories such as oral histories, women’s histories, and the history of childhood have been created. However, I also believe that there is such a thing as balanced, self-aware history⁶⁵. The key here is to understand one’s own preconceptions, values, and ideas, and also make the readers of the study aware of the positions and the approach that the researcher has taken⁶⁶. Choosing one’s study topic is, for example, influenced by the institutions and values of the ‘present’ – the time and place where the study is conducted. Another key factor in generating sound knowledge of the past is the selection, use, and citation of sources. The use of footnotes, for example can be seen as ways how the claims can be verified and a demonstration of the fact that the researcher is open to criticism, enabling the renewal of the study and evaluation of evidence provided. The goal of self-aware and balanced history is thus transparency. That is, historians should aim to openness in relation to sources, approaches, decision-making and interpretation, as stated by Jordanova.⁶⁷

Thus, history as science is not a field of clear boundaries, rather it is fluid and its value is based on the differences and varieties on the accounts that are given.⁶⁸ In this way, history can be seen as a dialogue that the researchers have between each other but also with the surrounding environment, people that they study, as well as other audiences.⁶⁹ Thus, the profession of an historian is totally unlike that of the researcher of natural sciences.

⁶⁴ Jordanova 2000, xiv.

⁶⁵ Jordanova 2000, xiv, 1-2, 9.

⁶⁶ Tosh 2006, 206-208.

⁶⁷ Jordanova 2000, xiv, 1-2, 9, 16, 17, 44.

⁶⁸ Jordanova 2000, 27.

⁶⁹ Kalela 2000, 26.

Understanding oneself as a researcher is also a central part of the qualitative approach in communication studies. The perspective taken on interview data is the same as the perspective that a historian takes towards official documents. In other words, understanding one's role as a researcher – constructing the study together with the participants – is similar to understanding one's role in interpreting the sources. Adopting this view is also important if one is going to escape from an essentialist 'us' versus 'them' view of culture.⁷⁰ Moreover, according to the qualitative method, objectivity can be seen as something that is created in the process of theoretical reasoning and through learning during the research process.⁷¹ Here, objectivity is seen as a result of identifying and acknowledging one's own subjective beliefs and attitudes. In other words, research should aim to be reliable, fair, realistic, and honest rather than 'objective' in the traditional sense of the word.⁷² For example, I addressed this issue in practice by keeping a research diary about the project that included my own perceptions and experiences. Based on this, I will also discuss my role as a researcher in the conclusions part of this study.

Finally, this study does not aim to make comparisons between here and there, nor between 'them' and 'us'. Rather, it can be viewed as a conversation that the present holds with the past. Furthermore, historians that study contemporary history have pointed out that separating past from present is useless, and sometimes almost impossible. To better understand the communication patterns and networks of Congolese children living in Finland, we must be aware of the history of their country of origin and their past experiences, from also when they were living in refugee camps in Rwanda.⁷³ One can also argue that history in itself – as narratives of the past – is about people interacting with other people. Furthermore, a study made on children's interpersonal relationships cannot aim to improve the relationships as such, and it should not, for example, aim for more control over them. Moreover, the findings of this study are by no means all-encompassing and comprehensive when it comes to refugee children's interpersonal relationships or their past experiences. In other words, the findings presented in this research should not

⁷⁰ Holliday 2010, 230.

⁷¹ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 16-18, 35; Fingerroos 2006 33, 83-85.

⁷² Kalela 2000, 55; Jordanova 2000, 94.

⁷³ Tosh 2006, 36-37.

be treated as generalizable facts that would apply and hold true to any relationships or histories concerning refugee children.

From these theoretical foundations, this study aims to find answers to two main research problems. Firstly, this study aims to understand the historical context behind the migrations of Congolese refugee children. More specifically, the study aims to better understand a) the reasons that forced Congolese children to leave their country of origin, as well as b) the living conditions in the refugee camps of Rwanda housing Congolese refugees between 1996 and 2012. Furthermore, the study takes a look at some of the more specific problems affecting especially children's lives in the camps of Rwanda, as well as the role of the main institutions charged with refugee affairs and the solutions they offered to solve these issues.

This is done by analysing the 72 documents and articles produced by the main organization charged with refugee matters – the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – as well as other international organizations whose documents could be found in the UNHCR-led Refworld online database, the UNHCR web page, or the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) global web page. Namely these include documents produced by the Action for the Rights of Children, the Amnesty International, and the IRIN.⁷⁴ The decisions on the sources and timeline used were done based on the availability of resources in Finland, their relevance, as well as the age of the children interviewed for this study. The study design and the sources will be described further in the following chapter.

Secondly, the analysis done based on the nine interviews of Congolese refugee children aims to better understand the interpersonal relationships defined as friendships that the children had in Finland. The perspective taken here is that these relationships can act as means of support for the children in question. More specifically, the study aims to better understand a) the children's definitions of friendships; b) the children's views on friendship initiation; c) the ways in which the children maintained these relationships. Besides the reasons deriving from the theoretical undertones of this study, the decision to concentrate on refugee children's interpersonal

⁷⁴ Direct links to all the documents and articles can be found in the reference list under the list of primary sources.

relationships, and their friendships more specifically, was made because of the limitations imposed by the translation services and other resources available. I also had to limit the extent of data and analysis because of the level of the study and the time and length restrictions related to conducting a master level study. The study design and the methods used in analysing both types of sources, as well as the decision-making process, are described in the next chapters⁷⁵.

1.2 Sources: Documents and Interviews

I used two different types of main or primary sources⁷⁶ in this research – official documents and interviews. The official documents used in this study include 41 documents or articles by the main intergovernmental organization charged with refugee affairs the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published between 1999 and 2012 and 31 documents or web articles produced by non-governmental organizations; the Action for the Rights of Children (ARC), the Amnesty International (AI), and the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). They made up altogether 736 pages of material and could be found from the UNHCR's Refworld pages, the global UNHCR web page, or the IRIN global web page⁷⁷. One of these documents also had a co-author and publisher – the United Nations-led World Food Programme.⁷⁸

However, it has to be noted that during the research process I also went through several other documents available at the UNHCR's Refworld online database by using the search engine and key words such as 'Rwanda', 'The Democratic Republic of the Congo', 'refugee' and 'children'. This was

⁷⁵ See chapters 1.1 and 1.2 of this study.

⁷⁶ The term *primary sources* refers to the raw material in historical research: in other words the sources that came to existence in the period investigated. See: Marwick 2001, 26-28, 155-172; Tosh 2006, 60-62.

⁷⁷ Direct links to all the documents and articles can be found in the reference list under the list of primary sources.

⁷⁸ UNHCR & WFP 2006.

while I was also simultaneously familiarizing myself with the previous research done in the field. This part of the research provided me with insights of the historical context behind the migrations of Congolese refugee children, as well as the violence in the DRC and Rwanda. Later in the process I also went through the archives of the newspapers the Guardian and the Observer but I could not find articles that would have described the experiences of the Congolese refugee children living in Rwandan refugee camps that would have supplemented my research.

Although the issues that concerned Congolese refugee children were represented in the UNHCR's documents, they did not provide details on Congolese children's interpersonal relationships. What comes to the issues on refugee children's friendships and relationships in general, these sources were merely descriptive in nature – describing the context, and not the content of these relationships. Thus, the analysis done based on them focused more on the general living conditions in the camps and some of the more specific problems that refugee children faced, as well as UNHCR's and the other actors' role and approaches to the situation in Rwandan refugee camps. The limitations imposed by the data available on refugee children's past experiences are familiar to those studying history of African countries. As it was described in the previous chapter – there is a limited number of written documents available on the Congolese refugees' past experiences, and those of children's interpersonal relationships in the Rwandan refugee camps and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo⁷⁹. Thus, I turned to the documents produced by the UNHCR and other international organizations simply because they were among the rare actors producing reports on the local conditions in the camps. However, one must keep in mind that the term 'local' is very controversial in terms of writing's about the situation and events that took place in the Great Lakes region. All these documents were produced by international organizations whose headquarters and roots are located in the so called Western world – another problem that is familiar to researchers interested in Congolese people.

⁷⁹ See: Jordanova 2000, 44-45; Spear 2003, 169; Stichick Betancourt & Tanveer Khan 2008, 323-324.

In addition, it is too much to assume that the interviews in question would completely reflect the voice of the children. After all, I was there to influence the questions and answers, and hence the whole data in question as an active participant designing the study together with children.⁸⁰ Here, interviewing is seen as interaction where researcher and participant collaborate to construct a narrative, and the end result cannot be thus representing just the informant's authentic voice.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the importance of hearing about the children's experiences in their own words and my interest in their friendships were the driving factors leading me to conduct the interviews. Moreover, although it can be questioned whose voice is actually heard in studies made on children's experiences, the theoretical approach that seeks and values the children's own viewpoint and sees them as reliable informants of their own experience founds the basis for this study.⁸² Correspondingly, the leading idea behind the design of this study was the belief that children are able and capable of explaining and sharing their own views on the meanings of friendships, as well as their manifestations in their own lives.⁸³ As it was described in the previous chapter on the theoretical foundations of this study, by taking a critical look to ourselves and our own preconceptions, values, and stereotypes we can strive to better understand the world around us, including deriving findings from the documents and interview data in question. In the case of the official documents, one must also at the same time keep in mind the attitudes and values nested in the documents, and the reasons for their creation.⁸⁴ From the perspective of communication theories, studying the role of intergovernmental organizations – for example that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – in shaping media flows and influencing attitudes is also closely related to the theories on international communication and developmental communication, and the studies made on propaganda and advocacy, for example⁸⁵.

⁸⁰ Lagström et al., 99-103.

⁸¹ Freeman & Mathison 2009, 90.

⁸² See for example: Farrell 2005; Fingerroos et al. 2006, 62-64. Freeman & Mathison 2009; Haikkola 2012; Lagström et al. 2010.

⁸³ Haikkola 2012a, 17.

⁸⁴ Spear 2003, 169-170.

⁸⁵ Gudykunst & Mody 2002, 5, 9, 257, 295, 415, 462-3, 465-456.

In analysing the biases of the official documents, I will now first take a look at the organizations and the different target groups and aims of the documents in questions.⁸⁶ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established on December 14th 1950 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to provide legal and political protection for *refugees*⁸⁷ until they could acquire nationality in new countries of residence. Initially, the UNHCR focused on helping the refugees and people that called displaced persons in Europe after World War II. In the 1960s, the organization shifted focus to Africa and parts of Asia and Latin America to aid refugees who are victims of war, political turmoil, or natural disasters.⁸⁸

The UNHCR's mandate is no less than "to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide", and its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees "irrespective of their race, religion, political opinion or gender"⁸⁹. Furthermore, the organization aims to ensure that people have the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, and for voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country. The UNHCR's mandate has been defined by the 1950 UNHCR Statute. In 2003, the UN General Assembly extended the organization's mandate "until the refugee problem is solved."⁹⁰ In recent years, the organization has expanded its role to include protecting and providing humanitarian assistance to whom it describes as persons of concern, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as stateless people.⁹¹

The refugee camps in Rwanda had, in most cases, been the only home that the nine children interviewed for this research had known before their migration to Finland. The interviewees have been born between 1996 and 2005, although their birth dates had not always been officially documented. All of the interviewees moved to Finland from the Rwandan refugee camps in

⁸⁶ Marwick 2001, 179-185; Spear 2003, 17.

⁸⁷ According to the UNHCR, a *refugee* is someone who has had to flee his country of nationality "due the fear him or his family members of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion in his own country of nationality". UNHCR 2012b.

⁸⁸ Mingst, Karen 2012; UNHCR 2011f.

⁸⁹ UNHCR 2012d, 3.

⁹⁰ UNHCR 2011f.

⁹¹ Katajala, Patrick 2002, 10-17; UNHCR 2012d, 3. According to UNHCR *stateless people* are "a largely overlooked group numbering millions of people in danger of being denied basic rights because they do not have any citizenship". UNHCR 2012c.

2010 and the interviews were conducted in the summer and autumn of 2012. The decision on the timeline used in analysing the documents (1996-2012) was done on this basis. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was the main body controlling the refugee camps of Rwanda in cooperation with the Government of Rwanda in 1996-2012. According to Prunier, it was the most important player in the Great Lakes crisis among the various specialized UN agencies⁹², which is also one of the reasons why I first turned to the documents available in the UNHCR-led Refworld pages.

The Amnesty International (AI) is an international non-governmental organization that works to promote all of the human rights described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁹³ adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, and other international human rights standards. AI's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights. AI's actions are based on its members' and other supporters' donations. It is financed largely by subscriptions and donations through its membership system.⁹⁴ The general weakness of the documents produced by the Amnesty International with regards to this study is thus that they rarely tell anything about the people who have survived or avoided human rights offences, but they rather focus on the problems related to human right issues.

Both the Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) and the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) are inter-agency initiatives which have close connections to the United Nations system. ARC was initiated by the UNHCR and the International Save the Children Alliance in 1997. Furthermore, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights joined the initiative in 1999. As of January 2002, the coordination activities of the project have been handled by the Save the Children which is a non-governmental organization based in the United Kingdom. It does mainly advocacy work on human rights issues

⁹² Prunier 2009, xvii.

⁹³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948.

⁹⁴ AI 2013.

regarding children and publishes research on instruments for advancing human rights, such as the ARC resource pack from 2009 on psychological support analysed here.⁹⁵ IRIN was launched in 1995, in response to the gap in humanitarian reporting exposed by the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath. It is said to be an editorially independent, non-profit news agency of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), funded entirely by voluntary contributions from governments and other institution. Nowadays, IRIN's principal role is to provide news and analysis about sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and “parts of Asia”, according to the organization itself. The networks’ target audiences are said to be the decision-makers in relief agencies, host and donor governments, human-rights organisations, humanitarian advocacy groups, academic institutions and the media.⁹⁶

Altogether, this part of the source material consists of policy documents, reference documents, legal information, operational publications, country information, advocacy documents, research papers, and information aimed at the so called general public. Furthermore, the genres of these sources range from web and news stories, thematic reports, funding appeals, and legal commentaries to policy and research papers. However, when studying the documents it was clear that all the sources had something in common. These 72 sources published on the Refworld database, or as web articles on the global web pages, were all showcase reports – mainly intended to inform donors and other partners about the organizations’ work in the region or draw attention to the issues the organizations in question were advocating for.⁹⁷

The official nature of the documents was made clear by the first line on the UNHCR’s Refworld web page that in 2011 claimed to be the “leading source of information necessary for taking quality decisions on refugee status”.⁹⁸ Essentially, the documents uploaded to the database were not meant to be read as stories on life experiences of refugees, or intended to, for example, contain information on the daily interaction and communication

⁹⁵ ARC 2009; ARC 2013.

⁹⁶ IRIN 2013a; IRIN 2013b.

⁹⁷ On the analysis, see: Marwick 2001, 179-185.

⁹⁸ Refworld has been developed, and is maintained, by the UNHCR Protection Information Unit & Electronic Publishing Unit, and the Division of International Protection. The documents are said to be carefully selected from – and with – UNHCR field offices, governments, international, regional and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and judicial bodies.

patterns in the camps of Rwanda. Furthermore, they did not describe children's relationships in detail or include quotations from interviews with children.

According to the managers of the Refworld pages, these were serious official factsheets and accounts on the political situation in the region. Another thing that the documents in question had in common was that they were openly aimed to influence and convince people – either policy makers or potential donors and advocates browsing through the pages looking for information. They mainly offered long lists of political events, numbers of people on the run, and situational analysis on events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and in Rwanda. The official and political nature of the documents produced by the UNHCR was highlighted even further by marking that they were approved by the United Nations General Assembly or by the UNHCR Executive Committee, for example⁹⁹.

However, even though the documents were not intended to describe the personal experiences of the refugees, they could still offer important insights on the migrations of Congolese refugee children and on the context of these transitions, as can be seen in the following chapters.¹⁰⁰ In addition, it can be seen that Congolese lives and histories were, and still are, highly influenced by global politics, and international actors, such as the UN and the UNHCR. However, one has to keep in mind that the writers of the documents in question used their texts to persuade and convince people – like journalists and researchers – to accept their values and actions. In addition to referring to internationally binding legal documents, this could be done by presenting information in a pervasive manner with pictures, tables and other assets to visualize certain issues, for example. The organizations might have for instance used certain catchy or effective wordings and terms, and tried to make the publications look as appealing as possible to seek the audience's attention – while at the same hoping that those wordings and terms would also find their way into the newspapers, or even the policy documents of donors and other policy makers. This way, they were aiming at guiding policy making and shaping the general opinion. In practice, this meant for example using buzzwords like “holistic approach towards the protection of refugees” which

⁹⁹ See: UNHCR 2006a; UNHCR 2006b; UNHCR 2007b; UNHCR 2010.

¹⁰⁰ On understanding the historical context, see: Tosh 2006, 36-37.

does not translate well in practical terms to describe the actual actions but could steer the donors' or journalists' views to issues that the organizations themselves considered important. In this case, using the buzzword "holistic approach towards the protection of refugees" referred to better coordination and cooperation on refugee issues, as can be interpreted from the analysis done later on in this study¹⁰¹.

The specific audiences and aims had many effects on what was expressed in the documents. Also, one has to be aware of the reasons why the organizations had such aims and audiences.¹⁰² One can start to analyse this by looking at the structural reasons behind the organizations' actions. Firstly, all the organizations were (and still are) almost entirely funded by direct and voluntary contributions, the bulk of which came from donor nations. In the case of the UNHCR, for example, financial constraints were naturally the most common explanation offered for problems in meeting the organization's standards. This funding structure created a paradoxical situation for the UNHCR. On the other hand, it had to be always showing enough results to the demanding customers – that being the donors – when at the same time also making sure that the contributions were kept in an adequate level enabling the organization to respond to the sometimes unrealistic demands. In other words, the donors did not like to see the UNHCR asking too much, or criticizing them, and they expected to see good return for their money, whereas the UNHCR needed adequate resources to complete the donors' expectations which often times meant demands and criticism.

Moreover, international politics is not a straightforward business and funding to, and decision making in, an international humanitarian organizations (such as the UNHCR or the Amnesty International), as well as interagency-initiatives (like ARC and IRIN), are dependent on economic situation, as well as many other issues affecting global politics. These include problems related to bilateral relations between countries, population growth, raising levels of inequity between and within regions, as well as climate change and environmental degradation among other issues. Compromising in today's global world is not made easy and nations have been most illogical even when

¹⁰¹ See chapter 2.4 of this study.

¹⁰² Marwick 2001, 179-185.

trying to decide over the most simple things supported by the large majority of people – such as the protection of children or refugees – as the examples of international decision making during the genocide in Rwanda and dealings with its aftermath in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the following chapters will show.

Thus, the multinational nature of the UNHCR's organization, for example, meant that its actions relied on the host governments' and international community's ability and willingness to meet their international obligations. To put it simple, an international organization like the UNHCR is only as good as its donors and owners (i.e. the UN member states) are. For instance, even donors publicly advocating for greater attention to children's needs have been reducing their funding for refugee assistance, according to Patricia Weiss Fagen.¹⁰³ Of course, one can criticize if the reason for this is, in fact, in the UNHCR's organizations' inability to protect children, or for example in amount or distribution of resources available. But when it comes to the UN – that is an international organization owned by its member states – this is primarily a question of political will and ability to make internationally binding decisions. Although the organization is mandated “to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide”¹⁰⁴ its actions and decisions were highly affected by donor countries' focus areas and politics. These political factors had to also be taken into account when writing the documents in question. In short, when analysing the documents it was many times more important to concentrate for example on what was not said and how the issues were presented, than the actual information presented in the texts.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps one of the most important factors affecting the documents produced by the UNHCR, and the way they should be analysed, was related to the way the organization was governed and organized. The key issue here is the UN's and the UNHCR's decision making process. It is easy to understand that a governing-body of 193 member states creates difficulties for an organization to administer and manage its actions. The UNHCR is governed

¹⁰³ UNHCR 2002a; Weiss Fagen 2003, 76.

¹⁰⁴ UNHCR 2012d, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Marwick 2001, 179-185; Tosh 2006, 93-96.

by the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Furthermore, the organization's budget and activities worldwide are overseen by the UNHCR Executive Committee which was composed by 87 Member States in 2012. The biennial programmes and the corresponding budget are presented by the High Commissioner¹⁰⁶ who reports annually to the ECOSOC and the General Assembly on the work of the UNHCR.¹⁰⁷ If this type of management structure, made by independent nation states, does not seem complicated enough on paper, it is even more complex in reality. The chapter 2.4 in this research will for example analyse how the actions in the camps of Rwanda were run and organized.

On the other hand, even international politics is managed by people. And even official documents led by strict aims, guidelines, and policies – such as the ones in question – had real people as their authors. Thus, one should not forget that even political documents are human artefacts and consider if the source material somehow also expressed the writers thoughts or political and other affiliations.¹⁰⁸ However, there was very little information available on the actual writers of the documents in question. Besides the organizations in general, the more specifically noted authors of the documents in question included the Refugee Children Coordination Unit¹⁰⁹, the UNHCR Geneva¹¹⁰, the UNHCR Centre for Documentation and Research in Geneva¹¹¹, the Executive Committee's 56th session (contained in the United Nations General Assembly)¹¹², and Allison Oman, the Mission Leader of the UN-led World Food Programme's (WFP) as well as the UNCHR's Joint Assessment Mission in Rwanda, and a consultant in the WFP's Emergency Needs Assessment Branch¹¹³.

The UNHCR's Headquarters were located in Geneva at the time when the documents were produced, and while it oversaw and supported the

¹⁰⁶ Appointed by the UN General Assembly, currently (2005 onwards) Mr António Guterres (Portugal). Previously (2001-2005) Mr Ruud Lubbers (Netherlands).

¹⁰⁷ UNHCR 2012e. The General Assembly is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations, composed of representatives of all the current 193 Members States, each of which has one vote. ECOSOC is coordinating the work of the UN-system on economic and social issues.

¹⁰⁸ Marwick 2001, 179-185.

¹⁰⁹ UNHCR 2003.

¹¹⁰ UNHCR 2005.

¹¹¹ UNHCR 2000.

¹¹² UNHCR 2006a; UNHCR 2006b; UNHCR 2007b; UNHCR 2010.

¹¹³ UNHCR&WFP 2006.

operations of the organization it was also responsible for developing policies and reporting, communicating strategic directions, and directing and supporting fundraising and resource mobilization. The Headquarters also prioritized and allocated resources.¹¹⁴ The current Child Protection Unit – perhaps the closest equivalent to the Refugee Children Coordination Unit from 2003¹¹⁵ – was also said to be developing strategies, frameworks and initiatives in 2012.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the authors responsible for the UNHCR global fundraising reports called Global Reports¹¹⁷ and Global Appeals¹¹⁸ consisted of an editorial board including several contributors from the regional and country offices, as well as the Executive Office and the operational departments. Moreover, the composition of these editorial boards included experts as well as more high-level staff – such as UN directors and senior staff members – as principal editors. Thus, although there was not much information available about the actual writers of the reports, it seemed that the production of the UNHCR’s documents was very much nested in the fundraising and donor relations branches of the organization. The UNHCR did not shy way of admitting this either. For instance, the global reports were simply categorized as fundraising reports in the organization’s web page. In the Global Report of 1999 it was mentioned that the report was produced by the UNHCR’s Donor Relations and Resource Mobilisation Service’s Global Appeals and Reports Unit.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, the editorial text of the 2007 Global Report stated that the UNHCR published its annual report to “inform governments and private donors about its activities and achievements in the previous year”¹²⁰. The reason for informing them was also stated clearly by declaring that: “As the organization depends almost exclusively on voluntary contributions to fund its programmes, the report is a vital means of informing donors about how their money was spent.”¹²¹ The editorial also defined the 2007 report’s target audience by stating that the publication was intended for the use of Executive Committee members, Standing Committee observers, governments and their

¹¹⁴ UNHCR 2012g.

¹¹⁵ UNHCR 2003.

¹¹⁶ UNHCR 2012g.

¹¹⁷ UNHCR 1999-2011.

¹¹⁸ UNHCR 2006c; UNHCR 2011d; UNHCR 2012a; UNHCR 2012d.

¹¹⁹ UNHCR 1999-2011.

¹²⁰ UNHCR 1999-2011.

¹²¹ UNHCR 1999-2011.

permanent missions in Geneva, the UN Secretariat, UN agencies, intergovernmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and regional organizations. The message was softened slightly by noting that many universities, academics, individuals and other groups might also find the report useful.¹²²

The historical context behind writing these documents, as well as the situation in the Great Lakes region at the time when the documents were written, were also influencing the ways the organizations were writing the texts. This includes, for example, thoughts and attitudes towards the colonial past and the first and second war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo described more in detail in chapters 2.1 and 2.2 of this study. Thus, the sources should be read in their historical context¹²³.

Because of the nature of these documents meant for fundraising and advocacy, they give a rather violent and rough image of the experiences of Congolese refugee children's lives in the Rwandan camps between 2000 and 2012¹²⁴. In other words, the documents and articles in question were highlighting the negative aspects of the Congolese refugees' lives. Although it would be naïve to assume that the interviewees in question were not influenced by the negative aspect of the so called camp life, the experiences of the refugees living in camps were not solely or dominantly negative. For example, most of their memories the children interviewed for this study seemed to have about their friends in Rwanda or Africa were positive. Consequently, one should not assume that the issues rising from the documents – like sexual violence or military recruitment – were the de facto personal experiences of the interviewees of this study.

The importance of hearing about the children's experiences in their own words, and my interest in their friendships were the key factors leading me to conduct the interviews. While working with refugee children in the past, I many times came across situations where only the children could understand one another, or only they could comfort and support each other – even without having a common language. Also, according to Judy Dunn, even very young

¹²² UNHCR 1999-2011.

¹²³ Tosh 2006, 88-113.

¹²⁴ On the missionaries' obsession with African 'savagery' and on over-emphasizing violence in historical research, see: Spear 2003, 177.

children can show considerable concern and make practical efforts to find ways of comforting their friends. For example, two classical examples of studies showing children's extraordinary supportive relationships were made with children growing up during World War II in concentration camps or nurseries.¹²⁵ Thus, I started thinking about this 'common understanding' that refugee children seemed to share, and what happens to these children's interpersonal relationships when they encounter a change like a migration from one country to another. What interested me the most was the children's friendships' and what role these interpersonal relationships had in the refugee children's lives. Thus, I wanted to interview Congolese children to know more about their relationships with people who they identified as friends.

The nine children interviewed for had spent approximately two years living in Finland at the time of the interviews. They had all arrived in Finland in the summer of 2010 when they were between 5 and 14 years old. The time spent in Finland was used as a qualification for participating in the research because this meant that all of the children in question had left the Rwandan refugee camps around the same time which enabled me to define the timeline of the historical analysis better. The interviewees had been born between 1996 and 2005, although their birth dates had not always been officially documented. Furthermore, based on the talks with Finnish officials and the families themselves the children originated from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known as the Kivu regions, where the conflict still on-going.¹²⁶ This put the children and the migrations of their families geographically on the map which in turn allowed me to better examine their past experiences, and the context behind their migration to Finland.

The time spent in Finland was also used as a qualification for participation because of language issues and the very limited amount of resources and translation services available. In other words, the two years meant that all of the children would have spent one or two years in preparatory class or in preschool learning Finnish, enabling me to conduct the interviews myself. The restriction was made also because it allowed me to get in contact

¹²⁵ Dunn 1993, 63-65.

¹²⁶ Adibe 2003, 94-95; The two provinces known as North Kivu and South Kivu are usually referred to as "the Kivus".

with the target group in question more easily. The other reason for this was that I had met Congolese families through my previous work experience in Finland. Also, I thought that these previous encounters would make the trust issues related to conducting this type of research easier. My views were shared by the Finnish city officials in charge of reception, guidance, support, and social welfare of the refugees in question.

Another pre-condition for the participation was the age, as I wanted to interview seven to 16-year-old school-aged children. This also had mainly to do with language issues and Finnish classes offered in schools, but I did not want to impose strict age limitations for the participation simply because I did not want to look at the children's relationships from a developmental point of view. In other words, I did not wish to highlight limitations imposed by children's development levels in my study.¹²⁷ This is related to the theoretical undertone of the study, and the current trend of today's childhood studies – which is seeing children as active and competent research participants, capable of explaining their own experiences and making decisions about their own lives despite their age.¹²⁸

From then on, the selection process of the research participants progressed quite naturally, since there were only very a limited amount of Congolese refugee families that met the pre-set qualifications for participation. In addition, in the initial discussions with the social services staff working with the families in question, it came up that there might be some limitations to the study due to some life situations. Thus, because of sensitivity issues and practical limitations (like travelling costs), I had to rule out the participation of some children. After these final, and unpredicted, restrictions I started to contact the possible informants systematically.

There were no difficulties in getting the participants interested in the study, and all of the three different families that were contacted were happy to meet with the researcher in their homes or other places of residence. This was surprising because previous studies have found that adult refugees and asylum seekers might find interviews uncomfortable because of their previous experiences of persecution in their home countries, or, for example, long

¹²⁷ On the so called developmentalism see: Farrell 2005, 6.

¹²⁸ See: Farrell 2005, 1, 61.

interviews and hearings when applying for a refugee status or an asylum permit.¹²⁹ Here it has to be highlighted that the social services, or other city officials, did not take part in designing the study or choosing the research participants. However, I informed the officials in charge of refugee issues about the interviews taking place and presented them with the initial research design. Subsequently, the staff of the social services of the city also gave me their permission for conducting the interviews and assisted me in getting contact with the children and their parents whom I had met before. In practice this meant that the translator made available by the social services made the first contact with the parents by calling them and asking if they wanted their children to take part in the research. This was done by following the instructions that I had given to the translator prior to the call. When the parents of three families then gave their children their permission to participate in the study, the translator also assisted in making the appointments for the interviews. Basically this meant agreeing on the times when I could come and meet the children and conduct the interviews. From that point onward in the process I was on my own, and the social services' staff was not involved in, or for example following, the interviewing process.

The parents of the children did, however, attend parts of the interviews in one way or another in all of the four interview occasions. First, the parents were welcoming the researcher in their homes and giving their permission for their children to take part in the study. Secondly, the parents were occasionally present in the same room where the interviews were taking place – for example napping in the couch, providing snacks for the interviewer and the children, or listening parts of the conversation. In all of the four occasions the children also explained or translated parts of the interviews to their parents. If the parents were talking during the interviews it had mostly to do with disciplining their children who they thought were behaving inappropriately (when the children were for example joking or shouting). The parents were also interested in knowing more about the purpose of the study and the role of the researcher. It seemed clear for the parents that the interviews concerned their children and their relationships and all of them treated this with

¹²⁹ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 5.

respect. The parents did not, for example, disrupt any of the interviews or present their own ideas, or try to answer any of the questions on behalf of their children. This created an impression that the parents trusted the researcher and also their children when it comes to completing the interviews.

Three of the interviewees were girls and six were boys. The age of the interviewees varied from seven to 16 years. All the children in question had siblings living in Finland, and thus I did not interview any families with just one child. However, I did not interview all the children of the families in question since some of them did not fit in the pre-set age qualifications of the study. Moreover, one of the children who would have met the preconditions set for the study did not turn up for the interview. In other words, I used non-random sampling in choosing the research participants¹³⁰.

The semi-structured thematic interviews took place during June and August 2012 and made up altogether 129 pages of transcribed material. When I had completed interviewing nine children I felt that my data had reached the so called saturation point. In other words, I noticed that the findings started to repeat what was already found in the previous interviews, and I felt that had enough diverse findings to enable me to complete the analysis.¹³¹

When referring to the interviews in this study, I will use the pseudonyms chosen by the children, followed by their age, sex (m/f), and the date of the interview. I will also state if the interview was done in a group (G), or individually (I). For example, *Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012 G* refers to an interview done in a group with 16 year-old Pierre and his siblings on 27 June 2012. When transcribing the text I also included some sounds and my own observations in parenthesis, for example if the children were speaking in other languages than Finnish between their responses or if they laughed.

¹³⁰ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 18.

¹³¹ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 62-63.

1.3 Methods

This chapter will focus on the methods used in analyzing the two types of sources used in this study, since the documents and the interviews as well as the selection procedures and samples of these sources were described in the previous chapter. However, the part about the methods used with regards to the interview material in this chapter also offers more information on the methods used in conducting the interviews. The analysis procedures taken in this study are qualitative in nature.

History as a discipline is notoriously eclectic methodologically, using a wide range of approaches constantly drawing from other disciplines. However, engagement with the chosen sources is a fundamental part of historical practice. This refers to examining how the sources fit to larger patterns. For example, according to Jordanova, in the sources themselves there is very little of what we call ‘history’.¹³² However, history as a discipline differs a lot from natural sciences where the distinctions between the sources (nature) and the operations performed on analyzing them are relatively clear. For historians, any trace of the past is potentially useful, but conventionally the sources are divided into primary and secondary sources. Here the term *primary sources* refers to the so called raw materials – the direct evidence of the era being studied – whereas, the *secondary sources* are those created by historians and other commentators of the past.¹³³ In other words, writings about the past are generally considered secondary sources, compared to the materials that were produced in the time and place that is being studied.¹³⁴ The distinctions made on these basis are, however, always not this clear, especially when studying contemporary history.

Furthermore, the texts and documents of the past do not offer an access to what was, only what was said to be. Thus, the articles and documents studied here did not offer their functions or author’s aims directly, and these had to be found by the researcher.¹³⁵ Put another way, a central part of a historians work is finding out to which extent the so called raw materials

¹³² Jordanova 2000, 28, 30.

¹³³ Jordanova 2000, 30-32.

¹³⁴ Jordanova 2000, 33.

¹³⁵ Jordanova 2000, 85, 91; Kalela 2000, 93-94.

actually resemble the time and place that is being studied, and this is essentially linked to interpreting the authors and people's own intentions that are presented in the materials either consciously or unconsciously, and either inside the text or 'between the lines'. Thus, historian's work includes using a lot of imagination on analyzing how the sources were constructed and using those processes, as well as the content of the materials, to reach sensible conclusions. This creativity also includes being aware of oneself and one's own ideas and values.¹³⁶ Thus, the overall goal of historical methods would be to foster critical thinking towards the sources and evidence, and knowledge altogether. On the other hand, the historian's task is to put the sources in the context where they were created¹³⁷. Furthermore, Jorma Kalela has pointed out that the historian him/herself is not outside this time-and-place continuum, and the paradox of writing about the past in "today's terms" is always present – every text, artefact or testimony is a product of the time and place where it was created, and this applies even to the historical research itself.¹³⁸

From this historical perspective, I started analyzing the documents by first going through the previous research done on the history of the Great Lakes region (including that of the children, refugees, Africans, and the UNHCR's and other organizations' actions in the region), as well the source material available in the Refworld online database. Here I used keywords and the search engine available on the Refworld page to find every possible document that would contain information about the lives of Congolese refugee children. I did not have any pre-set hypothesis about the issues that I could find, and I was open to new perspectives that came along during the process.¹³⁹

After conducting this phase of the study together with the literature review, I already had an overview of the issues that were discussed in the materials produced by the UNHCR and other international organizations. Thus, I chose to concentrate on the living conditions in the Rwandan camps housing Congolese refugees, and the specific problems concerning refugee children – like military recruiting and sexual violence. I also wanted to know

¹³⁶ Jordanova 2000, 33; Kalela 2000, 85-86, 91.

¹³⁷ Kalela 2000, 100.

¹³⁸ Kalela 2000, 122.

¹³⁹ On the qualitative approach, see for example: Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 19-20.

more about the role of the UNHCR and its partners in the camps, as well as the solutions they offered to improve the conditions in the camps and address the issues concerning refugee children¹⁴⁰.

I had to do some restrictions on what documents to include in my analysis already during this phase of the study. Based on the initial analysis and literature review, I chose the ones that I thought contained the most relevant information with regards to the issues I had found when going through the resources available in the Refworld pages. Later on, I also complimented these sources by checking the UNHCR and IRIN web pages for relevant information regarding the themes that were identified during the process.

After this part of the study – which already contained a lot of analysis and interpretation of the sources – I went through the documents again. This time, I organized the themes I found under different sub-categories such as: poverty; land problems; demographics/population; women and children; education, health; food; problems concerning refugee children; military recruitment; violence; sexual violence; and responses and solutions offered, among others key words and themes. This was done by not only analysing the texts, terms, words, and language used, but also by critically examining the values and reasons that might have led the authors of these documents to create such texts and ideas, as well as keeping in mind the historical context and the place and time where the documents were written.

Then, I went through the documents again and combined my findings under different themes, trying to find the first and second order explanations to my findings. In this process, I also mapped the similarities and differences of the information offered in the documents also by comparing these findings to each other and the previous studies done in the field. According to the qualitative method, which I used in going through the sources produced by the UNHCR, AI, ARC and IRIN (as well as the interview data), the content analysis is carried out throughout the research process.¹⁴¹ In other words, the critical examination – by for example analysing and interpreting the authenticity and reliability, biases, context, and influences of the documents –

¹⁴⁰ See chapter 1.1 of this study for more information on the specific research questions.

¹⁴¹ On qualitative data analysis and method, see: Eskola & Suoranta 2008; Frey et al. 2000, 280–286.

does not have a starting or ending point.¹⁴² Thus, one has to keep in mind that the analysis continued even during the writing process.

As part of this study is based on analysing the interviews – or oral testimonies¹⁴³ – of the Congolese children living in Finland, the source material used in this study is intended to be complimentary, also giving the people in question an opportunity to be heard.¹⁴⁴ However, analysing the interviews in question historically as oral testimonies requires a lot of improvisation¹⁴⁵. From historical perspective, one would first have to understand their narrative nature, and check them against other sources – after all, written sources do not perform when you read them, but people always do and interaction between people in interview situations is complex.¹⁴⁶ Also, historian Jari Eilola has pointed out that children have the tendency for creativity and improvisation in interviews in his study about children's narratives as witnesses to the Swedish witch trials.¹⁴⁷ However, this improvisation can be, of course, also seen as part of the narratives that children create in interaction with others in the interview situation.¹⁴⁸

In interviewing the children, I used an interdisciplinary ethnographic method combining thematic open-ended interview questions with drawing and *storytelling exercises* (see Annex 3: Framework for the Interviews.) The drawing and storytelling exercises¹⁴⁹ were used to structure and supplement the interviews and guide the conversation, and the artefacts that the children produced are not the subject of the study here. As Melissa Freeman and Sandra Mathison have pointed out in their studies, drawing exercises can also reduce the influence of the group on its members, and work as icebreakers for shy children or add focus to the conversation, and act as alternate forms of representations of feelings and emotions.¹⁵⁰ I felt that this type of methodology was best for getting the children involved in the study.

¹⁴² Marwick 2001, 179-185; Tosh 2006, 88-113.

¹⁴³ Fingerroos et al. 2006; Tosh 2006, 310-338.

¹⁴⁴ Fingerroos et. al 2006, 17-20.

¹⁴⁵ For example, on the convention of naming 'strangers' in Central Africa, see: Likaka 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Chrétien 2006, 28-37; Jordanova 2000, 53; Philips, 180-181.

¹⁴⁷ Eilola 2009, 27.

¹⁴⁸ Jordanova 2000, 53.

¹⁴⁹ The *story-telling exercises* refer to questions where the children were asked to continue the story. See Annex 3: Framework for the Interviews. See also: Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 7, 58.

¹⁵⁰ Freeman & Mathison 2009, 114.

The drawings and stories also helped me to get as fruitful accounts of their experiences as possible. Researchers like Jari Eskola and Juha Suoranta have also found that participatory methods work especially well with children, and they are also becoming more popular in today's childhood studies.¹⁵¹ In addition, John C. Reinard has noted in his studies on communication research methods that a qualitative ethnographic method works the best in situations where: a) questionnaires are inappropriate; b) setting is so new that hypotheses are undeveloped; and when c) the aim is to develop analytic inductions.¹⁵² I felt that my research met all of these preconditions, and that the methodology I chose for the interviews fitted well to the particularity of the topic and the characteristics of the group being studied. I did not have any preliminary set hypothesis about my research problem and I was also open to new perspectives that came along during the interviews.¹⁵³ The perspective taken to the friendships in this study was that they can act as a means for support for the children in question.

Furthermore, in this study, communication is seen as a systemic process in which individuals interact with and through symbols to create and interpret meaning. This process is seen as a dynamic and ongoing phenomenon that includes a group of interrelated parts that affect it, including the physical environment where, for example, the interviews are taking place. According to Julia T. Wood, communication is also symbolic and includes abstract representations of other things that are presented not only through language but also through nonverbal behaviors, as well as arts.¹⁵⁴ Whereas these nonverbal behaviors or artefacts that the children created during the interviews were not the main focus of this study, I also used them to understand the children's answers better.

I wanted to involve the children in the research as participants designing the study as much as possible and give them ownership and make them feel empowered about the project. This resulted into giving the children the possibility to choose, for example, how they wanted to conduct the interviews – individually or in groups – and decide if they wanted to participate

¹⁵¹ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 7, 58; Farrell 2005, 29-30; Freeman & Mathison 2009, 109-129.

¹⁵² Reinard 2008a.

¹⁵³ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 19-20.

¹⁵⁴ Wood 1997, 14-17.

in the drawing. Consequently, children from two of the three families decided that they wanted to be interviewed together in a group, whereas the siblings of the third family wanted to be interviewed separately. Moreover, all except one child took part in the drawing. Still, the instructions of drawing a 'life line' of important life events and relationships¹⁵⁵ were not followed by all of the children. In fact, the technique of discussing the relationships through the drawings and texts that the children produced seemed to work best with the youngest participants, whereas the 12-16 year olds seemed to enjoy simply discussing the topics of the interviews while doodling something that did not necessarily relate to the exercises. However, even with these older participants, the visual exercises sequenced the interviews so that I could have individual conversations with all of the children, as well as interview them as a group.

The average length of the four¹⁵⁶ interviews was 40 minutes and the average time spent interviewing one child was approximately 20 minutes. The length of the interviews was determined by the children in cooperation with the researcher, and 20 minutes seemed to be appropriate time for keeping the interviews interesting for the children. The fact that the interviews were done in the children's own homes, where the parents and siblings could be present, and that they could choose how they wanted to conduct the interviews, contributed to building the trust between the participants and the researcher.

The key words in designing this type of study are anonymity, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection.¹⁵⁷ I resolved the concerns related to these ethical concerns or questions in several ways when conducting the research. For example, the children and their parents were asked for their consent before the interviews not only by the translator but also in person by the researcher. With two of the three families the children had to act as translators in explaining the content and the idea of the study for their parents on these occasions. The names of the participants were also changed by giving the children the possibility to choose their own pseudonyms, which also gave them more ownership of the project. This helped the children to better understand the concept of anonymity. I also explained that the interviews

¹⁵⁵ See Annex 3: Framework for the Interviews.

¹⁵⁶ Containing of two group interviews with 3-4 participants, and two individual interviews.

¹⁵⁷ See: Lagström et al. 2010. 17.

would be recorded and then erased in due course, and that I would delete all information that could identify the children from the responses or be otherwise harmful for them, respecting their anonymity and special status as refugees and their need for protection.

I presented myself to the children by telling that I was a student writing a book on Congolese children's friendships and experiences in order to graduate from school. This seemed to be a more understandable way of explaining my role as a researcher, rather than just saying that I was a university student writing my master's thesis – which was clearly a concept which the children found hard to understand. Furthermore, the children were encouraged to ask questions whenever they felt it was necessary. The participants could also choose to leave the study or refuse to answer questions at any given point of the research without any explanation.

I also wanted to safeguard the ethics of the study also by not asking the children about their possibly harsh past experiences directly, since I felt that I did not have the necessary resources available to support them, if needed, or hear them properly in an ethical manner at this point of my studies. The children themselves did not bring up these issues in the interviews either, at least not directly, although, some of their answers on the lost and long-distance relationships reflected the sorrow and possibly harsh past experiences. I will discuss these findings further when discussing the possible effects of the past experiences to the children in question.

Ethical questions become particularly important when studying children, and refugees, also when it comes to the possible outcomes of the study. The ethical concerns should, however, not become a block preventing conducting the research. As Hanna Lagström has noted, one must be careful to not to rule out any studies regarding children and youth that are classified as sensitive or difficult simply in the name of research ethics.¹⁵⁸ According to Melissa Freeman, Sandra Mathison and Ann Farrell, the protection of children has been highlighted, for example, because ethical guidelines for medical research were used as a basis for ethical guidelines for social research, and since children were seen as particularly fragile and developmentally

¹⁵⁸ Lagström et al. 2010, 17.

incomplete human beings in previous studies.¹⁵⁹ In relation to this particular research and topic, I assessed that gathering information on children's interpersonal relationships with friends should not be harmful to the participants and that the study could be conducted in an ethical manner. While I do not think the past experiences of Congolese children would be too sensitive or difficult to study in general, I assessed that I could not interview the children in question about their past without being able to offer further support (like access to psychosocial services, for example), if necessary. I found the findings on the level and impact of violence in the Great Lakes region in 1996-2012 useful in making this decision, since to me it seemed that the children could not have avoided at least of some of the impacts of the wars in the region. These ethical concerns are also related to the respect towards the interviewees as human beings, and not considering them as 'objects' or 'informants' who would not be affected by the study. In future, it would be, however, important to hear about the children's past experiences, as long as this could be done in ethical manner and with respect.

I hoped that the study could be a positive and empowering experience to the children and their families. Also, according to researchers Noora Ellonen and Tarja Pösö, children have expressed both stress and empowerment from having the opportunity to be heard in studies made on even the most sensitive issues.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, ethical concerns are common in studies that are made new settings and on topics that have not been studied in detail. Finally, one has to be practical: if I would have had the translation and support serviced needed to conduct a study on the effects of violence and harsh living conditions to refugee children's interpersonal relationships, I would have asked them about those issues. In addition, it would have been very interesting to go and conduct interviews in the camps of Rwanda with the refugee children who were still living there and, for example, compare these findings to the findings on the interpersonal relationships of the interviewees who were now living in Finland. In a doctoral level study, for example, one could also imagine adding on other types of interpersonal relationships to the study – such as children's relationships with their parents or siblings. Since all this was,

¹⁵⁹ Farrell 2005, 1-6; Freeman & Mathison 2009, 2-7.

¹⁶⁰ Ellonen & Pösö 2010, 192-210.

however, impossible to do with the resources available and restrictions imposed by the guidelines on master level studies, I decided to focus on children's interpersonal relationships in Finland, and furthermore those with the people that the children regarded as friends.

In analysing the interview data, I also used a qualitative method where the content analysis is seen as an on-going process.¹⁶¹ In other words, I analysed the data throughout the course of the research, also during the interviews.¹⁶² Furthermore, according to the principles of qualitative data analysis listed by Thomas Lindlof, the data must be physically and conceptually reduced to some manageable points during the process.¹⁶³ I did this by first choosing the themes in which I wanted to concentrate by coding and categorizing the interview data which I had transcribed under 20 different themes that emerged during the study, for example: meanings of friendships, good or best friends, lost relationships, and changes in friendships. In choosing the themes, I also familiarized myself with previous studies made on children's relationships, friendships, and childhood research and immigration issues in general. The overall strategy for processing the individual responses to different categories was to identify the key recurring themes, and note what was said was implicit or explicit (i.e. direct discussion of a topic or indirect allusion, unspoken understanding and/or avoidance). Thus, the pauses and the passages where the children were speaking with each other in their mother tongue, for example, were also a central part of the interview data. This also included identifying when the children were making references to their previous homelands (usually referred to as 'Africa' by the children).

The next step was to map the similarities and differences of the interview data, and to find out how those compared with each other but also to see how the findings related to the theories and results presented in the previous research. First, I tried to find the participants' own explanations on their experiences, attitudes and behaviour, and then the explanations offered by previous research. Second, I combined these two with my own analysis of the interviews. In accordance with the qualitative method, I was searching all of

¹⁶¹ Frey et al. 2000, 280–286.

¹⁶² Eskola & Suoranta 2008.

¹⁶³ Frey et al. 2000, 280–286.

these explanations throughout the study.¹⁶⁴ The aim of this type of data analysis was to not only combine the similarities, but also to show the differences and the variation of the data and use it as comprehensively as possible. Furthermore, I used mainly *analytic induction* in the analysis which means that I inferred meanings from the data rather than tried to find out if the data compared with some theoretical expectation from another source (i.e. *deductive analysis*).¹⁶⁵

In other words, I proceeded with analysing the interviews even when conducting them, while all the time being aware of the settings and actors involved in this interaction. Furthermore, I kept in mind the historical context where the children in question were coming from, as well as the language issues and ethical questions related to this study. The analysis that was done was not only based in the transcribed texts, but also the observations made throughout the research process – of myself, the children and the environment where the interviews were conducted.¹⁶⁶

Finally, I have to note that writing an interdisciplinary study like this is a challenging task that also requires a lot of edits and compromises, as well as prioritizing. Thus, the following pages can be read as the ‘top of the iceberg’, or a simplification of the thinking process conducted during making this study. Many restrictions had to be made during the writing process simply because I did not want to return a 500-page master’s thesis, and sometimes this lead to not having enough space to discuss all the research findings in detail. Thus, when reading this study one has to keep in mind that the sources themselves did not write-up the findings described in this study – I did. In other words, all the arguments made on the living conditions in the Rwandan refugee camps, as well as on the children’s friendships, are based on an in-depth discussion on insights, self-analysis, and comparison to previous research findings conducted throughout the study. Also according to Jordanova, the material itself does not matter – it is the way it is been used and mirrored to previous research¹⁶⁷. When it is possible I will discuss this thinking process in this study, as I have already done in this chapter. However, a more detailed

¹⁶⁴ Frey et al. 2000, 280–286; Reinard 2008b.

¹⁶⁵ Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 19; Frey et al. 2000, 280–286.

¹⁶⁶ Holliday et al. 2010, 232.

¹⁶⁷ Jordanova 2000, 23.

analysis of the things I have learned during the process, ideas for future research, and limitations encountered during the research process will be presented in the conclusions part of this thesis.

2. CONTEXT: ISSUES AFFECTING THE CHILDREN'S LIVES PRE-MIGRATION TO FINLAND

2.1 Colonial Legacy, Mobutu's Zaire, and the Wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

There is not just 'one history' of Africa, as there is not just one history of the country now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Thus the following introduction to the conflict that forced the families and the children in question to flee from their country of origin, and the situation in the camps housing Congolese refugees in Rwanda is not meant to be read as the whole 'truth' of the events that took place in the Great Lakes region. It is simply my own analysis and interpretation about the events and situation – an account of a person who has never set foot in Africa. The perspective taken here is that with a critical examination of ourselves – and by being aware of our own preconceptions, values, and stereotypes – we can strive to better understand the world around us. In addition, Congolese refugees' own active role, as decision makers and actors shaping the world around them, forms the central viewpoint to the whole study, as described in the introduction on the theoretical foundations of this study.

No historical account of the situation of Congolese refugees in Rwanda can be made without considering the problematic history of the Great Lakes region. The problems these refugees faced and the experiences that still affect their lives are the consequence of a complex chain of events in the history of Central Africa. First, one must take a look at the colonial past of the region. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) emerged in 1885 as the Congo Free State and became a Belgian colony in November 1908. During this time, the country was practically the personal possession of a single ruler, King

Léopold of Belgium¹⁶⁸. From then on it was known as the Belgian Congo until it achieved political independence on June 30th 1960¹⁶⁹, and changed its name to Zaire in 1971.

According to Emizet Kisangani, the colonial past left Zaire¹⁷⁰ with four legacies.¹⁷¹ Firstly, the Belgians divided their colony into “small administrative entities along arbitrary tribal lines”. This created ethnic groups where none had existed. The second colonial legacy, according to Kisangani, was urbanization and it “explains the consolidation of ethnic identity in Zaire”. Thirdly, the colonial past also “shaped ethnic identity through its discriminating policies of development”. In other words, some regions and ethnic groups benefited more than others in terms of resources and access to political participation. Furthermore, according to Kisangani, this favouritism “unleashed political conflicts as ethnicity became politicized in the post-colonial period”. Finally, one severe colonial legacy was the “integration of Zaire into the world economy”.¹⁷²

While one cannot deny that Zaire’s integration to the world economy was ‘signed, sealed and delivered’ during the colonial period, this was not the beginning of the phenomenon. According to Van Reybrouck, the country’s involvement in the world economy had started already a long time before – in the 16th century during the slave trade when the river Congo estuary was the most active slave port in Africa. The four hundred kilometre foreshore exported approximately four million people (including children) mainly to the Americas and the Caribbean. This is one third of the total amount of slaves sold in the trans-Atlantic trade, and means that Congolese were also actively involved in shaping the histories and societies in those countries importing the slaves. These influences can be found from surprising places still – like from the Brazilian rumba music.¹⁷³ Even more importantly, the slave trade had profound impacts on Congolese societies, destroying families and eating away

¹⁶⁸ Renton et al. 2007, 2.

¹⁶⁹ More on the first years of independence and the so called Congo crisis see for example on: Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 293-343.

¹⁷⁰ Name of the country 1971-1997.

¹⁷¹ Kisangani 1997, 4-5.

¹⁷² Kisangani 1997, 4-5.

¹⁷³ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013 33-34, 179. Van Reybrouck is a Belgian author, archaeologist and cultural historian.

the political ties that were based on kinship and chieftains.¹⁷⁴ One should also note, that while slave trading was not something totally new to Congolese societies, the volume and rules applied in the trans-Atlantic slave trade were something totally different. In addition, the East was interested in Congolese slaves (including children) as well as ivory and established trading routes through Zanzibar towards the Arabian Peninsula, Middle-East, Indian Peninsula and China already in the 19th century.¹⁷⁵ Without going into too much detail on the precolonial history of the region, this is just to make the point that the region had not been intact to “foreign influences” and its history – although perhaps being more regional before the Western explorers – had always been dynamic. People, ideas, and materials had travelled within the African continent already a long time before the Belgian ‘conquest’.

What can be said of the colonial period, however, is that even compared to the times of slave trade, this was a time plagued by extreme brutality and violence towards Congolese people by the colonial rulers and their local intermediates – including mutilation, cutting, beating and sexual violence targeted to the local population.¹⁷⁶ According to sociologists like Renton, Seddon and Zeilig, “there is no doubt that the advent of Léopold’s colonialism was a disaster for the local population”. The biggest killers were famine combined with diseases – associated with forced labour migration policies – and it is impossible to say how many died directly to the causes associated with the brutal violence.¹⁷⁷ However, the colonial powers – church and missionaries, state and foreign companies – also introduced preventive measures to population loss, such as medicines and schooling. Between the First and Second World War Africa’s total population was growing, and the most rapid growth was experienced in Belgian Congo where the colonial powers showed strength in fostering higher fertility and decreasing infant mortality by mission work and health measures taken in commercial food production and labour, according to Iliffe.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the average life

¹⁷⁴ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 35.

¹⁷⁵ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 39-43.

¹⁷⁶ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 101-107. For further reading on violence during the period in question see: Hochschild, Adam 1998/2004. Also on the study on colonialism and violence, see: Hokkanen & Särkkä (2008).

¹⁷⁷ Renton et al 2007, 2, 31.

¹⁷⁸ Iliffe 1995, 240.

expectancy in the country over the last century has been less than 45 years, according to Van Reybrouck.¹⁷⁹

The aim behind the Belgian colonialism is central when discussing about the effects to the local population. The goal of the colonial conquest was simply exploiting the land and country of its resources, including the people. According to Kisangani as well as many other scholars, the major challenge that Zaire faced in the post-colonial period was that most Congolese were not experienced in running the state bureaucracy – in the way that Westerners understand it should be run – since the colonial system had limited their access to power.¹⁸⁰ In fact, according to Kevin Dunn, this ideology of considering “the white man as father and African as child” – usually just referred to as *paternalism* – was the philosophical framework and justification of the Belgian occupation of the Congo. Belgians had used the colony for economic exploitation, and the structure of the colony was not designed to benefit Congolese themselves.¹⁸¹ According to Van Reybrouck, the de-colonisation happened too quickly, allowing for huge instability to follow.¹⁸² He describes the situation by, for example, stating that at the time of the independence the country had sixteen citizens that had completed a university degree.¹⁸³ Furthermore, returning to a ruling system based on kinship and chieftains was no longer possible.

The brutality and the paternalistic ideology of the Belgian rulers also left their marks on Congolese culture, their collective psychological memory, and for example their perception of Europeans, and other westerners.¹⁸⁴ During the times of the first encounters, Congolese considered the white people to possess some magical powers – they could be considered to be pale ghosts or spirits of the water, for example. In other words, the Congolese people’s sentiments about the white explorers varied somewhere between respect and disbelief.¹⁸⁵ I believe that after the colonial experience the sentiment must have been something totally different.

¹⁷⁹ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 13.

¹⁸⁰ Kisangani 1997, 5.

¹⁸¹ Dunn 2003, 68; Kisangani 1997, 7-8.

¹⁸² Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 239-278.

¹⁸³ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 278.

¹⁸⁴ On the study of memory and culture, see: Tosh 2009, 331-346.

¹⁸⁵ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 55-57.

The Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Protestant missionaries came to Congo right after the explorers and Belgian rulers, followed by American Baptists and Methodists in 1884 and 1886. The French Catholics founded two parishes in the eastern and the western part of the country in 1880. The missionaries used different kinds of tricks to convince the people to be baptized in their tradition – including music boxes and pictures. As it was also stated earlier, they also created many of the written forms of the local languages in order to teach the Bible.¹⁸⁶ When it comes to the children and teenagers of the region, they learned the European life style close up. The boys acted as servants, whereas the girls became housewives in every sense of the word. There were not many Western women in the tropics, so the colonial rulers accepted many types of relationships with the local women, including child marriage.¹⁸⁷ The churches were also actively involved in using Congolese children in their missionary work. Many of the first habitants of their mission posts in the Congo were children, who were then educated to spread the religions further. Eventually, the Catholics defeated the Protestants as the number one religion with the support from the Belgian State.¹⁸⁸

The missionary run schools were also the places where the local population learned about Western morals and ethics, Belgian history, but also increasingly about their own country and the differences within it from the colonial viewpoints. The schools worked as training centres of obedient ‘colonial children’ where the state, church and big businesses were teaching them nothing on the French Revolution, for example, but everything on the Belgian successes. Congolese children were singing songs about the colonial rulers as the founding fathers: “we were becoming Arabic slaves, the Belgians saved us”.¹⁸⁹ This shows the power of religion and education in shaping national identities.

The missionaries introduced Congolese also with football which spread across the country, gaining wide popularity. For the colonial powers the game was more than just play – it also had an educational side since it was not morally as precarious as drinking or dancing, for example. Football was also

¹⁸⁶ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 57-59, 75.

¹⁸⁷ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 75, 79.

¹⁸⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 82-87.

¹⁸⁹ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 125-127, 182-183.

seen as a measure to prevent unrest in the male population. Ironically, the Leopoldville's football stadium also became the place where the riots that led to the independence started, and also the place where Mobutu held his first speech after his coup in 1965. According to Van Reybrouck, football is still the most important 'religion' in the Congo, alongside with Christianity.¹⁹⁰ Football was also the favourite thing the children interviewed for this study liked to do with their friends.¹⁹¹

Belgians were also taking Congolese people (including children) with them to Europe to educate them or to display them in world fairs meant to exhibit 'exotic and primal people' to Europeans in the 19th century. The Congolese they took with them were, however, persistent in following their own customs and, for example, used to treat their sicknesses with their own traditional medicines when in Europe, according to Van Reybrouck. Furthermore, the Belgians were careful of not making Congolese too accustomed to Western habits since they noticed that the locals who had gotten schooling or went to Europe were gaining attention among the locals and were getting less 'obedient'. Their fears were not unfounded, since it was indeed the Congolese soldiers who served in the two World Wars in the Belgian side, journalist, and intellectuals who started hiccupping about the colonial rule and dreaming about independence in the first instance.¹⁹²

Furthermore, the colonial period was the time when the first interethnic groups were born, according to Van Reybrouck. The Western ethnologist could find 400 different ethnic groups in the 20th century which they separated by their customs, forms of societies, artistic traditions, and often also by languages and dialects. Whereas, in precolonial times the enormous country was defined by high linguistic and cultural homogeneity.¹⁹³ This is also connected to larger questions on tribalism, state and identity creation, and creating boundaries between ethnic groups in a region where none had existed before.¹⁹⁴ The process was sealed finally when the Belgian rulers introduced a system that limited the people's ability to move within their own country

¹⁹⁰ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 184-189.

¹⁹¹ See more on the role of football in the children's current life in chapter 3.2 of this study.

¹⁹² Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 76-79, 82-83.

¹⁹³ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 23, 122-124

¹⁹⁴ Vail 1989.

without an official document assigned by the state administration. This was reinforced by forced migrations within the country. According to Van Reybrouck, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is still one of the rare countries where there is an official bureau for migrations within the country, and it is still difficult to move in the DRC without an official document called “ordre de mission”¹⁹⁵.

This process also profoundly changed Congolese people’s interaction within their villages and families, eating away the political and social ties that were based on kinship and chieftains, but also reinforcing the nuclear family model, as well as enhancing monogamy.¹⁹⁶ One of the most severe consequences of these groupings was the division of Bantu language speaking people to “Tutsis” and “Hutus”, based on their occupations and appearances as well as some other arbitrary qualities. This particular division was originally made both by the colonial powers but also by the local intermediaries enjoying the Belgian support.¹⁹⁷

One can also see the execution of private land owning principles and the late introduction of monetary compensation for work even today.¹⁹⁸ All in all, the effects of the colonial period to the local population were diverse but overall severe: people had become serfs; their lands had been robbed and made barren; cultivation had declined to the most rudimentary crops; trade was not benefiting them; professions were disappearing; and people were getting weaker and malnourished. The population declined also from another simple reason – people were moving away from the river and lake areas to reside in more remote locations where the state could not reach them.¹⁹⁹ Congo’s vast natural resources have been exploited ever since by different African nations, Western powers, multinational companies, and rebel and criminal groups.²⁰⁰ Without many benefits to the local population, one might ask if even the current situation in the DRC is, in fact, just another form of slavery and exploitation of the region and its people.

¹⁹⁵ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 128.

¹⁹⁶ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 35, 83, 87, 119-122.

¹⁹⁷ Vail, 1989; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 124.

¹⁹⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 89, 92, 98-99, 137.

¹⁹⁹ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 106-107.

²⁰⁰ Renton et al. 2007.

All in all, Zaire was a product of the international community which supported the country's national survival politically, economically, and militarily.²⁰¹ The Western powers, namely the United States and Belgium, also supported the despotic and kleptomaniac rule of Mobutu Sese Seko for more than 30 years (from 1965 to onwards). This was done because – according to some of the most common explanations offered by scholars – they wanted to prevent the country from falling under communist rule and secure their investments.²⁰² However, there has also been opposing views offered for their support, like the ones represented by historians Idesbald Goddeeris and Sindani E. Kiangu. According to them it was capitalism, not communism, which was the key element here. In other words, they argue that the Western world made use of the Cold War framework, and highlighted an alleged Soviet threat, in order to justify its interventions and to protect its enterprises and income.²⁰³

Whatever the reasons for the Western support were, the consequences of Mobutu's reign to the country were also severe. According to Gérard Prunier, Mobutu ran Zaire as a poorly managed private estate, and “destroyed his country in order to keep ruling it”.²⁰⁴ In other words, the country got disintegrated even more under Mobutu's rule which had serious impacts on the way it could deal with the political changes in Rwanda later on. According to Prunier, Zaire's government structure was “so rotten that the brush of hand” could have caused it to collapse.²⁰⁵ Thus, after the end of the Cold War, Mobutu was forced to amend the constitution and his regime came to a rapid decline. However, since the Zairian state was no longer a viable political entity, the country was left vulnerable for the various conflicts in the region – and especially the eastern part of the DRC became known as the cockpit of crisis. Consequently, it is also no wonder that the crisis in the neighbouring Rwanda played such big role in shaping the conflict that can still be seen in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ See more on the first years of independence and the so called Congo crisis: Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 293-343.

²⁰² Adibe 2003, 95; Kisangani 1997, 42; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 345-446.

²⁰³ Goddeeris & Kiangu 2011, 60.

²⁰⁴ Prunier 2009, 77. Prunier is a French historian and journalist specialized in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.

²⁰⁵ Prunier 2009, xxxi.

²⁰⁶ Adibe 2003, 93, 95; Kisangani 1997, 43, 52; Prunier 2009, 1-67; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 427.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which killed 500,000 Tutsis – or three quarters of their original population – within two weeks, led to the victory of the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) over Hutu extremists. The killings soon spread to the neighbouring Zaire, since besides the mass killings of its people, the victory of the RPF was overshadowed by the massive concentration of the ex-Rwandan army (ex-FAR) and the much-dreaded Hutu-militia (the Interahamwe) in Zaire, mostly in the eastern part of the country and as the Kivu regions.²⁰⁷ Paradoxically, this part of Zaire was also home to thousands of Tutsis and other *Kinyarwanda*²⁰⁸ speakers who had fled or migrated to the country earlier from Rwanda and other parts of Africa.²⁰⁹ In other words, after the genocide in 1994, the people living in the eastern part of Zaire were joined by approximately one million Hutu, amongst them many responsible for the killings during the genocide. Consequently, this led to a situation where some of the perpetrators and survivors of genocide now lived together.

According to the Director of Immigrant Services who also participated in the official Finnish selection trips for the so called quota refugees in Rwanda, this eastern area next to the Rwandan, Burundian, and Ugandan border is also where most of the children interviewed for this study are originating from.²¹⁰ This is supported by the fact that all of the children interviewed for this study spoke Kinyarwanda as their mother tongue, as well

²⁰⁷ Adibe 2003, 94-95. North Kivu and South Kivu.

²⁰⁸ *Kinyarwanda* belongs to the Bantu group of Niger-Congo family of languages and is one of the official languages of Rwanda. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinyarwanda is especially spoken in the Kivu regions where the speakers of the language have mainly fled or migrated from the neighbouring Rwanda. The language is also spoken in Uganda and Burundi, and is closely related to Kirundi. When studying the languages, one must also keep in mind that there were no actual national borders between Rwanda and the DRC and the region was organized in kingdoms before the colonial powers divided Africa in the Berlin conference in 1885. Furthermore, the border between the Belgian and German colonies differentiating the Kivu regions from the current Rwanda was not demarcated until as late as 1910. On the ancient history, kingdoms, and colonialism in the Great Lakes region see: Chrétien 2006, 41-83, 85-199, and 201-290.

²⁰⁹ Adibe 2003, 95-96; Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 257; Prunier 2009, 37-67.

²¹⁰ Interview with the Director of the Immigrant Services, 20.1.2011. According to the UNHCR, the voluntary and safe return migration and settlement of refugees in areas close to their home country are among the best options for solving the refugee issue. However, this is not always possible. Thus, these people can be chosen for resettling in a third country under the so-called refugee quota. Under the refugee quota, Finland accepts persons whom the UNHCR has designated as refugees or other foreigners who are in need of international protection for resettlement. In Finland, Parliament decides annually in connection with the approval of the state budget how many quota refugees Finland will undertake to accept. Since 2001, the number of quota refugees accepted by Finland has been 750 per year. At present, there are some 25 countries that receive quota refugees. Migri 2013.

as the fact that the families in question had all been granted the refugee status by the UNHCR in Rwanda, and gone through several screening processes and interviews (also with the Finnish officials) where their nationalities, places of residence and rights to seek for asylum in another country were carefully examined. When studying the languages of the region, one must also keep in mind that there were no actual national borders between Rwanda and the Zaire and the region was organized in kingdoms before the colonial powers divided Africa in the Berlin conference in 1885. Furthermore, the border between the Belgian and German colonies differentiating the Kivu regions from the current Rwanda was not demarcated until as late as 1910²¹¹.

The North and South Kivu regions are geographically marked by highland areas, forests, lakes and volcanic activity. The Kivu regions in question were – and still are – densely populated agricultural regions. Also according to the UNHCR, the majority of Congolese refugees in Rwandan camps had been farmers in their country of origin.²¹² Because of the regions' altitude, sleeping sickness is not a problem, which makes cattle tending easier. On the other hand, the soil as well as the climate allows cultivation of valuable crops such as coffee, tea, and quinine. The soil is also rich of tin and coltan (a vital ingredient in mobile phones). Two thirds of the whole the Democratic Republic of the Congo is covered by rain forest. All in all, the country is marked by great biodiversity and geographical varieties, also keeping in mind that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the same size as the whole Western Europe.²¹³ However, the species as well as the country's mineral wealth is disappearing in a growing speed as a result of the conflict and its historical roots in colonial exploitation.

Furthermore, the journey of one of the three families in question can be traced back all the way to the pre-colonial times when their relatives moved to the eastern part of the current DRC to farm and cultivate land. Like so many times before in the study of African history, the first language was the key for revealing these roots. During one of the interviews all four children (as well as both of the parents of the family) stated that their mother tongue was in

²¹¹ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 142.

²¹² UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 9, 18.

²¹³ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 22-25.

fact *Kinyamurenge*, not Kinyarwanda. Furthermore, they added that this was their mother tongue in the literate sense of the world, since they had inherited their first language from their mother's side. When asked to elaborate this further, the parents and the children explained that those who speak Kinyamurenge are also able to understand Kinyarwanda which is a similar language. However, they thought that simply describing the language as a dialect was not precise enough.²¹⁴

According to the online Kinyarwanda-English dictionary, the word *murenge* is a synonym to *mulenge*, and it means “an administrative sector or a village” and also refers to a place called Mulenge in the current DRC. Consequently, the word Kinyamurenge is a synonym to Kinyamulenge, a language spoken by the *Banyamulenge* population that appears in the accounts made on the precolonial history in the DRC.²¹⁵ Here it has to be mentioned, however, that I have not seen the word Kinyamurenge used in any of the previous studies used in this study. Nevertheless, my argument is also supported by an article made by the non-profit organization A New Continent.²¹⁶ Furthermore, according to both Chrétien and Van Reybrouck, the Kinyamulenge language is still spoken by the Banyamulenge community from the Southern Kivu Province of the Eastern DRC.²¹⁷

By the 1990s, both the Kinyarwanda and the Kinyamulenge speaking populations in the Kivu regions were mapped under the same term *Banyarwanda* (those from Rwanda). This categorization was made based on the languages the people spoke and sometimes also the way they looked like.²¹⁸ The two words Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge began to be used as synonyms to designate perhaps as many as 300,000 people, irrespective of their place of residence or historical roots. This includes, the small highly localized Banyamulenge community, numbering no more than 30,000 people, according to René Lemarchand.²¹⁹ This is also exactly the population that I believe one of the families is part of. According to Lemarchand, the Banyamulenge

²¹⁴ Brown (m) 10 years, 8.8.2012 G; Jake (m) 12 years, 8.8.2012 G; Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G; Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G.

²¹⁵ Kinyarwanda.net 2012; Lemarchand 1999, 3, 6, 21-22; Lemarchand 2009, 9-13; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 426.

²¹⁶ A New Continent 2012.

²¹⁷ Chrétien 2006, 41-83; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 426-427.

²¹⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 425-429; Lemarchand 1999, 15-20.

²¹⁹ Lemarchand 1999, 3, 6, 21-22

community is a perfect example of how geography, history and politics created a new set of identities within the Great Lakes area, and he points to the fact that while the roots of the phenomenon were in Rwanda, the justification for the existence of the categorization was found in Zaire/the DRC.²²⁰ This is also closely linked to the nationalist sentiments before and after the independence and the consolidation of ethnic identity in Zaire, mentioned by Kisangani.²²¹

In fact, certain political actors in considered that all the *Banyarwanda* (those from Rwanda), were privileged during the Belgian rule and they began to be marginalized already right after the independence, and during Mobutu's regime. While parts of this population had received some special attention from the Belgian rulers, research shows that it was, in fact, the high population density, the severe lack of cultivable land and food, and the rise of nationalist campaigns that were the actual reasons behind putting the populations in question to the ill-starred position of 'being different' and 'belonging somewhere else'.²²² In fact, Mobutu had denied the Banyamulenge/Banyarwanda of their Zairian citizenship, thus rendering them stateless and hence vulnerable to legal and illegal acts of harassment by the Zairian state already in 1981.²²³ Thus, the situation that followed after the 1994 genocide was especially hard for the Kinyarwanda and Kinyamulenge speakers in Zaire, although these people had every right for Zairian citizenship. In other words, they found themselves threatened by both the Hutu military groups and the Mobutu regime. In addition, it should be noted that Kinyarwanda is still not an established national language in the country.²²⁴

As a result of the complex situation after the genocide, the Hutu military groups benefited from the cover of the refugee camps in Zaire, and growing international sympathy towards the civilians. According to Tatiana Carayannis and Herbert Weiss, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had neither the mandate nor the capacity to disarm the tens of thousands of camp residents, not to mention the ability to block the

²²⁰ Lemarchand 1999, 15-22; Lemarchand 2009, 9-11.

²²¹ Kisangani 1997, 4-5; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 364-369.

²²² Lemarchand 2001a, 10-23; Lemarchand 2001b, 15-28; Lemarchand 2009, 3-15; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 364-369, 425-429.

²²³ Adibe 2003, 95-96; Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 257; Lemarchand 2001a, 17; and Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 425.

²²⁴ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 25, 426-427.

flow of arms into the camps. Renton, Seddon and Zeilig go even further by saying that the camps became centres of training and organization for the ex-soldiers of the FAR and the Interahamwe – and the funds that were made available to the camps by the UNHCR and its partners perpetuated the cycle of killings.²²⁵ However, when discussing the complex situation in Zaire after the 1994 genocide one must also highlight the fact that a large part of the Rwandans that had fled to Zaire were not part of the ex-Rwandan army (ex-FAR) or the Hutu-militia (the Interahamwe) – and had not participated in the killings in Rwanda. They were people who simply wanted to flee the country since they were afraid of, for example, a counter attack by the new Tutsi-led Rwandan government.²²⁶

To make the situation even more multi-layered, the Tutsi of the Banyarwanda community were no innocent either. In fact, there was also a coincide of interests between the new Tutsi-led Rwandan government and Congolese Tutsi, since a number of Banyarwanda had also joined the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan opposition in its struggle against the Hutu-dominated regime in Rwanda, and they had been armed and trained by the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).²²⁷

When it comes to the relatives of the children in question, it would be interesting to understand how they identified themselves at this point in time, and whether they thought they belonged to the categories of being a *Tutsi*, *Hutu*, *Banyarwanda*, *Banyamulenge*, or if they simply considered themselves as Congolese. I was unable to find this out during the interviews with the children, since this did not appear to be a central issue for them.²²⁸ Moreover, since I understand this kind of identity negotiation to happen in interaction with others, it is actually impossible to stop it in one place and time. In other words, it is a constant dialogue between the individuals in interaction with each other and the surrounding environment. I will return to the identity question when I discuss the lost and long-distance relationships of the children. The point that needs to be made here is that, eventually the parents and the

²²⁵ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 258; Renton et al. 2007, 176-177.

²²⁶ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 431.

²²⁷ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 259.

²²⁸ See chapter 3 of this study on the children's friendships.

children did decide to flee – and not stay, take arms, and wage war in the DRC.²²⁹

In the summer of 1996 – when the oldest interviewees of this study Pierre and Jason were born – the conflict between the Banyamulenge/Banyarwanda and the Interahamwe militia, developed to such intensity that on 8 October 1996 the acting Governor of South Kivu gave the Banyamulenge/Banyarwanda six days to leave Zairian territory.²³⁰ It was announced that those who failed to leave would face military action and “presumably mass expulsion by the Zairian authorities”.²³¹ Following these actions, the Banyamulenge/Banyarwanda (backed by the Tutsi-led Rwandan government) undertook a pre-emptive strike against the Zairian army (Forces Armées Zairoises or FAZ) and the now two year-old Hutu refugee camps in the Kivus. Moreover, as soon as the attacks against the camps began, Rwandan government forces crossed the border and joined the offensive. When the RPF then took this decision to go after the remnants of the ex-Rwandan army and the Interahamwe present in Zaire, it also changed the course of actions that might have been referred to as a civil conflict into an interstate war. This also marked the beginning of the First Congo War (November 1996 to May 1997).²³² In addition to the Congolese casualties, it has to be noted that the killing of more than 200,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees during the 1996-1997 war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was an extreme case of peacekeeping failure for the UN and the international community.²³³

The military force employed on both sides of this war was overwhelmingly foreign – despite the fact that some Congolese had their own political ambitions, and getting rid of Mobutu was one of them. According to Carayannis and Weiss, among the former “somewhat non-military and weak leaders of the Congolese revolutionary parties”, backed by the Rwandan, Angolan, and Ugandan governments and other international sponsors, there was one that emerged as the principal spokesperson of what became known as

²²⁹ This includes both parents of the children in question, since all of the nine children I interviewed had both a mother and a father in Finland at the time of the interviews.

²³⁰ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G; Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012 G; Lemarchand 1999, 21-22.

²³¹ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 259.

²³² Adibe 2003, 95-96; Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 259.

²³³ Kisangani N. F. Emizet 2000.

the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL), Laurent Kabila, who then became the president of Congo in May 1997.²³⁴

According to Prunier, the international community tried to hang on to the image of the new Tutsi leaders of Congo, having long supported the Mobutu regime and still bearing the guilt of not helping the Tutsi in Rwanda when they needed it the most.²³⁵ However, according to Clement Adibe, gradually Kabila's Congo was looking a lot like Mobutu's Zaire also in its treatment of the Tutsi minority population and in its dealings with the RPF-led Rwandan government. In a symbolic gesture aimed to eliminate all traces of the Mobutu regime, Kabila renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo (La République démocratique du Congo, or the DRC) in 1997, changed the flag, national anthem, and national currency, and renamed streets and towns – reverting to the names used in 1960s.²³⁶ According to David Van Reybrouck, slightly thereafter the tensions between the Rwanda and the DRC were rising, and Kabila turned his back to his former allies in Rwanda and Uganda.²³⁷

In the summer of 1998, the relations between Kabila and the Rwandan Tutsi-dominated government had reached a breaking point. By the end of July, Kabila had terminated the Rwandan Mission of Cooperation, and asked the Rwandan military to leave the country. The fighting started again in August 1998. This was the beginning of the Second Congo War, referred to as African World War (1998-2003, or still continuing).²³⁸ According to Carayannis and Weiss, “the next 20 days after Kabila's decision profoundly changed the history of Africa and plunged it into the second phase of the ‘First African Continental War’”.²³⁹ Most of the interviewees of this study have been born during this African World War, and had lived most of their lives in Rwanda prior their migration to Finland.²⁴⁰ Thus, it is safe to assume that the families in question were soon on their way to – if not already living in – the Rwandan refugee camps housing Congolese refugees.

²³⁴ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 260.

²³⁵ Prunier 2009, 334-335.

²³⁶ Adibe 2003, 97; Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 267.

²³⁷ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 452-453.

²³⁸ Prunier 2009; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 452-453.

²³⁹ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 270-271.

²⁴⁰ Interview with the Director of the Immigrant Services, 20.1.2011.

Refugees International and International Rescue Committee (IRC), among others, estimate that more than five million people have died from causes associated only with this Second Congo War since it began in 1998 – making it the world's most lethal conflict since the World War II. Furthermore, according to the study made by IRC and the Burnet Institute in 2008, the majority of deaths have been due to preventable and treatable conditions. In addition, children – who are particularly susceptible to infectious diseases, malnutrition and neonatal- and pregnancy-related conditions – accounted for 47 per cent of these deaths, even though they constituted only 19 per cent of the total population, according to the estimates.²⁴¹

As a result of the years of conflict fought between troops from eight countries (the Democratic Republic of the Congo DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Angola, Zimbabwe, Chad and Namibia) and other alliances²⁴² an estimated two million of Congolese people are still internally displaced in the DRC in 2013, and more than 400,000 Congolese refugees currently remain outside the DRC, according to the UNHCR.²⁴³ Despite the official end to the war with the signing of various peace- and cease-fire agreements (for example the Lusaka peace agreement in 1999²⁴⁴) and the implementation of the Transitional Government in 2003, the conflict continues, especially in the eastern part of the country. According to Carayannis and Weiss, the withdrawal of foreign forces in 2002 created a power vacuum in the east and increased the violent, anarchic conflict between ever smaller groups that no major actor effectively controls. Furthermore, they claim that virtually nothing has been done to protect Congolese people, and continue by concluding that “this failure to respond early and adequately to the Third War, and its continuing impact on the peace process, constitutes probably the greatest weakness in the entire attempt by the UN to bring about peace in the Congo”.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ IRC & Burnet Institute 2008, Refugees International 2011; Robinson, Simon May 28, 2006. On the estimates, see also for example: Renton et al. 2007, 208-209; BBC 17 October 2012; and Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 454.

²⁴² Prunier 2009, xxiv. The estimates on the number of countries and troops associated with the African World War differ. For example, Van Reybrouck refers to nine African countries and approximately 30 different local armed troops. See: Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 453.

²⁴³ UNHCR 2011a.

²⁴⁴ For more information on the Lusaka peace agreement, see: Prunier 2009, 223.

²⁴⁵ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 284-285.

Consequently, the fighting over the country's vast natural resources and political power continues. According to Prunier the problems in the eastern DRC are (in this order): demographic, agrarian, ethnic, and economic²⁴⁶. Van Reybrouck has also found many issues that have affected every stage of the conflict which include: 1) the post-mortem of the Rwandan genocide; 2) weakness of the state; 3) overpopulation in the Great Lakes region; 4) unstable old colonial borders; 5) ethnic tensions cause by poverty; 6) natural wealth of the eastern regions; 7) militarization of the unofficial economy; 8) global demand for minerals; 9) local arms trade; and 10) the weakness of the United Nations.²⁴⁷ He also points out that the type of war fought in the DRC today is inexpensive. This might be difficult to understand, but the weapons and other resources used in war in the DRC are actually available with very low cost. Moreover, the poverty in the country means that the war, and pillaging related to it, are ways to earn a living for many people in the DRC.²⁴⁸

The control over the country's mineral wealth combined with poverty and the lack of working government structure have been offered as the most common explanations on why the fighting still continues by for example researchers Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon, and Amnesty International (AI).²⁴⁹ According to the AI, the biggest single factor fuelling the fighting in 2003 was "the competition between rival militia – backed by various international actors alongside with Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC governments – to control and profit from the immense riches of the DRC's natural resources."²⁵⁰ The military control of a region also permitted, according to AI, the "political and military leaders of the local and foreign forces to extort taxes from the local population and to monopolise customs duties on cross-border", while "the militia rank and file, who see little or nothing of the riches accrued by their leaders, are given free rein to pillage and loot following a military victory – and to rape and to kill".²⁵¹ Also according to the UNHCR in 2011, competition

²⁴⁶ Prunier 2009, 325.

²⁴⁷ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 455.

²⁴⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 463.

²⁴⁹ Renton et al. 2007, see e.g. 173.

²⁵⁰ AI 2003, 1.

²⁵¹ AI 2003, 1; BBC 29 June 2012.

over resources and land was one of the main triggers of the conflict, in addition to long-standing ethnic rivalries.²⁵²

Still, the conflict that we see today is much more complex phenomenon than the simple presentation made here. For example, Prunier wants to point out that the roots of the conflict lie in African politics, and emphasizes the conflict's nature as an African phenomenon. Whereas Van Reybrouck also refers to the conflict as a global phenomenon, mentioning the global companies' interest in the countries minerals and other natural resources. Furthermore, Van Reybrouck argues that the new global power structure and economy meant that the Congolese economy is now also part of them – in all their negative and positive aspects – as he shows in his report of trade between China and the DRC.²⁵³

Since Kabila was shot in 2001, the DRC has been led by his son Joseph who was confirmed as the legitimate president in November 2006, following the July 2006 general elections. In 2011 he was re-elected for a second-term as a president.²⁵⁴ According to the BBC, the country still held more than half of the world's cobalt, 30 per cent of all diamonds, 70 per cent of coltan, as well as huge deposits of gold, copper and various other minerals in 2011.²⁵⁵ However, the years of war and conflicts have left the country desperately poor. The 2013 Human Development Report, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), placed the fourth most populous country in Africa and 11th largest country in the world – the Democratic Republic of the Congo – in the bottom of all the 187 countries surveyed in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and income (components of the human development index, HDI).²⁵⁶

²⁵² UNHCR 2011a.

²⁵³ Prunier 2009, 330-331; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 477-514, 553-572. For more information on the Congo wars see: Prunier 2009.

²⁵⁴ BBC 9 December 2011; Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 271-272.

²⁵⁵ BBC 9 December 2011; BBC 22 November 2011.

²⁵⁶ UNDP 2013.

2.2 Living conditions in the Camps of Rwanda

Fleeing from war is never easy. According to Loveness H. Schafer, the decision to run is usually made with little or no advance planning, in times of extreme stress, and social disorganization. Under these circumstances, especially women risk being raped or sexually exploited.²⁵⁷ Also, according to Van Reybrouck, numerous families had to flee through thick forests and rivers with no food and shelter and minimal hygiene in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).²⁵⁸ In these circumstances it is easy to get lost or ill, in addition to being killed when caught. Thus, the loss of close interpersonal relationships did not stop when Congolese refugees left their places of residence, but continued during the whole journey to Rwanda.

Poverty was the prevailing condition framing the families' lives in the DRC, and also in the refugee camps in Rwanda. Its extent and influence in the lives of the Congolese children – and their interpersonal relationships – would deserve a study of its own. In fact, one could write a thesis just on the concept of poverty in the Great Lakes region. As described in the introduction, I made my analysis on the situation in the camps in Rwanda by examining the official sources of the UNHCR as well as non-governmental actors writing about the region. Once more I have to emphasize that the following analysis is just a scratch on the surface of the actual experiences of the people in question, and having the first-hand reports from the Congolese refugees themselves would paint a much more complete picture of their lives in the camps. Keeping in mind these limitations, I aim to describe the living conditions in the UNHCR camps housing Congolese refugees from 1996 to 2012 in the following paragraphs.

Throughout the 2000s there were four camps housing Congolese refugees in Rwanda: Kiziba, Gihembe, Kigali (urban refugees) and Nyabiheke (see Annex 2: Map of Rwanda, 2013). However, at least still in 2006, there were also 2,857 Congolese refugees living in the Nkamira transit camp due to land constraints in the other camps.²⁵⁹ At the end of the year 1999 there were

²⁵⁷ Schafer 2002, 31.

²⁵⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 435-437.

²⁵⁹ UNHCR 2011b; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 6 and 19.

32,951 Congolese refugees in Rwanda, and in the end of 2005 the number had risen to 41,403. In the 2012-2013 Global Appeal it was estimated that in January 2012 there were still more than 55,000 Congolese people under the concern of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) living as refugees or asylum seekers in Rwanda²⁶⁰ and the numbers were on the rise because of the volatile situation in the eastern DRC.

According to the World Bank, the life expectancy at birth for females in Rwanda as a whole was 53.4 years in 2005 (56.4 in 2010) and 51.2 years for men (53.8 in 2010), when the average life expectancy for people living in a low income country in 2005 was 56.9 years.²⁶¹ These figures were brought down for example by the amount of children that died before the age of five years. However, the child mortality figures have declined significantly from 134.2 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003 to only 60.4 deaths in 2010 in the whole Rwanda, according to the World Bank.²⁶²

According to the UNHCR's and the World Food Programme's (WFP) study in 2006, there were approximately 28,000 (0-17 old) Congolese refugee children living in Rwanda. The UNHCR, the WFP, and MINALOC (Rwandan Ministry of Local Government) carried out a registration in 2005, after which movements, new arrivals, repatriation, births and deaths could have been updated into the UNHCR ProGress database. The refugee children consisted 60 per cent of the Congolese refugee population also in 2009.²⁶³ If one should find a positive aspect from this, it would be the fact that Congolese children had always friends to play with.

Many of the documents under consideration in this study mentioned "five global priority issues for the UNHCR" in regards to refugee children.²⁶⁴ These issues, or concerns, were: 1) separation; 2) sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence; 3) military recruitment; 4) education; and 5) the special needs of adolescents.²⁶⁵ Yet, the overall all-encompassing phenomenon that characterized and affected the children's lives in the

²⁶⁰ UNHCR 2007a, 477; UNHCR 2012a, 32.

²⁶¹ World Bank 2013a.

²⁶² World Bank 2013a.

²⁶³ UNHCR 1999-2011, Global Report 2009, 37; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 18-19. The term *children* here refers to refugees that are under 18 years old and "persons of concern" to the UNHCR.

²⁶⁴ See: UNHCR 2003 p. 1 or UNHCR 2006a, 1.

²⁶⁵ UNHCR 2003, 1.

Rwandan camps was poverty. For example, according to the UNHCR, many children were born as refugees and due to the poor education programmes and limited access to schooling they were not learning skills that would assist them with reintegration in their country of origin, or in finding work as young adults.²⁶⁶

Furthermore, there was great variation on the information offered on the levels of school enrolment and participation in the documents produced by the UNHCR in 2000-2010.²⁶⁷ In the 2011 Global Appeal, the UNHCR's target was to enrol 15,000 refugee children "or all those of concern aged 6-11 years" in primary education. However, in the same document the UNHCR predicted that approximately 3,000 refugee children were not able to complete primary school as a consequence of a 20-40 per cent of shortfall in the organization's funding in 2011.²⁶⁸ Still, the organization reached its target of enrolling children to school by 80%. Although this is a good figure, it should be noted that school enrolment figures do not necessarily correlate with the quality of schooling. It is, for example, unknown whether the children actually learned to read or write in the schools. It is also unclear what the children were taught and because of the variation of the UNHCR's implementing partners it is safe to assume that there were great dissimilarities in the level and quality of teaching. Nevertheless, in terms of the children's relationship formation, it seems like the schools were important places to make new friends in the Rwandan camps.

The children and their families in question had often experienced shortages in the availability of water supplies and food items in the Rwandan camps. Although all camp-based refugees received food assistance in 2000-2010, the standards were not always met – according to the UNHCR due to temporary problems with availability – but also because food items were generally used as a currency by the camp residents. All in all, there was a widespread dependency on humanitarian aid among Congolese refugees in 2000-2010. For example, in 2011 there was no vocational or skills training provided in the camps – according to the UNHCR, also due to the shortfall in

²⁶⁶ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 9.

²⁶⁷ UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010.

²⁶⁸ UNHCR 2011d, 35, 37.

the organization's funding.²⁶⁹ This aspect of the poverty could be also seen when I was visiting Congolese refugee families' homes the first time right after their migration to Finland in 2010. Many of the Congolese families I met did not have a daily eating routine in the Western sense, and the children could, for example, take me to the water tap in their kitchen explaining to me that the tap was as a miraculous fountain where the water just kept on pouring.

According to the UNHCR documents, the children in the Rwandan camps were also doing the daily chores of the family, and sometimes even providing for the whole family. On the positive side this meant that children were also developing close relationships with other co-workers. Still, gathering firewood was a really challenging, time consuming, and dangerous task in the camps. Generally it was women and children who were sent for wood gathering, and due to land constrains often they had to go to private forests where it was illegal. Firewood was reported to be a special problem in Rwandan refugee camps, at least in 2006, since sufficient fuel was not provided to the refugees in the camps by the UNHCR or its partners. In fact, in Nkamira and Gihembe camps it was reported that refugees had to purchase the additional cooking fuel at a very high cost although the UNHCR's mandate was to supply all the refugee fuel needs. Budget constrains were offered as an excuse for not meeting these standards in the UNHCR's and the World Food Programmes' 2006 joint study.²⁷⁰

There was also a general lack of land in the densely populated Rwanda. This was stated repeatedly in the documents produced by the UNHCR in 2000-2010. Especially during the first half of the 2000s, this also had to do with the reintegration assistance to the Rwandan returnees, competing for limited land space with the refugees among other groups. Yet, this was also related to the Rwandan government's priorities. As it was mentioned before, the majority of Congolese refugees in Rwanda were farmers in their country of origin, but because of the land constrains and lack of cultivable land they could

²⁶⁹ UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010; UNHCR 2011d, 37; UNHCR & WFP 2006.

²⁷⁰ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 29, 37.

not become self-sufficient or supplement their food rations with agricultural activities outside the camps in Rwanda.²⁷¹

This, in turn, left the refugee community to develop survival strategies of their own, also putting them at risk of exploitation. On the other hand, the high population density is likely to influence the socialization process of the children, who perhaps came to terms with a more communal way of life in the camps of Rwanda. In fact, I believe that the main secrets to survival within the camp context were cooperation and innovativeness. This in turn surely forced the children in question to develop social skills from very early on in their lives. Furthermore, as described before solidarity and community-based social networks were not totally foreign to the Congolese who had lived in villages led by chiefs and based on kinships a long time before the colonial powers took over. One should not, however, be naïve and expect that the way of life in the densely populated camps marked by poverty was easy, or that the communities in the camps were totally homogenous and supportive. In fact, the situation might have been totally the opposite, and the lives in the camp could have been filled with several conflicts between different people because of the scarce basic resources and employment possibilities available to them.

Some of the interviewees did, indeed, find the situation in the camps of Africa much more conflict-prone, with kids more easily getting into fights with each other. This is easy to imagine because of the reasons listed before, but also because of the lack of psychosocial services offered to children, and refugees in general, in the Rwandan camps. Of course, the sheer number of the children also increased the probability of the fights.

In fact, the demographics were one of the greatest challenges to the inhabitants of the camps and the UNHCR and its partners, with populations growing by some 30 births a month still in 2012.²⁷² Also, according to the UNHCR, there was a problem with the crowded shelters. The average camp area per refugee was 16.2 square metres in 2012, significantly lower than the standard (45 square metres). Also, approximately 2,000 shelters were not rehabilitated or reconstructed, exposing families to extreme weather conditions still in 2011. Primarily, this created sanitation and hygiene problems but,

²⁷¹ UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 9, 18.

²⁷² UNHCR 2012a 33.

according to the UNHCR, this type of conditions had also far-reaching consequences, leading to sexual and gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, early pregnancies and increased high school drop-out rates for girls, prostitution, and protection and psychosocial risks for children and other vulnerable individuals.²⁷³ In other words, besides being more vulnerable to diseases, living outside the tents and forcing people to go to forests or other remote areas outside the camps to relieve themselves exposed them to sexual abuse and other risks that were common in the region. In 2011, for example, approximately 65 per cent of people of concern to the UNHCR did not have access to adequate sanitation in Rwanda²⁷⁴. These difficulties must have also affected the most vulnerable populations – like children, people with disabilities, and pregnant women – the hardest.

Finally, the sheer existence of the Nkamira transit camp – and the distance of the refugee camps from the DRC border in general – caused worries from the beginning of the DRC crisis. Prunier, for example, stated that the Rwandan government “had no intention of letting these potentially useful refugees simply melt into Rwandese society, and it forced UNHCR to accept, albeit with some reluctance, opening camps almost directly on the border, practically within shooting distance of the Hutu camps on the other side” in 1995.²⁷⁵ Moreover, although other camps than Nkamira were not located right next to the border, one can see that the DRC was, in fact, still very close (see Annex 1: Map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2013). For example, the Kivu regions are about four times the size of whole Rwanda (see Annex 2: Map of Rwanda, 2013), which is still a small area compared to the whole territory of the 11th largest country in the world.²⁷⁶ Thus, having reinforcements ready to be enrolled near to the DRC border made sense for the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) that was fighting against the remnants of the ex-Rwandan army and the Interhamwe in a region that was much larger than Rwanda. Furthermore, although the distances inside the DRC are great, the distances between Rwanda and the Kivu regions are not.

²⁷³ UNHCR 2012a, 33.

²⁷⁴ UNHCR 2011d, 37.

²⁷⁵ Prunier 2009, 57.

²⁷⁶ Prunier 2009, 48.

Until 2006 at least, local Rwandans were also given access to the health and nutrition centres and markets within the camps and there was – for the most part – no real barrier between the camp and the outside area. The UNHCR also admitted that some refugees left the camp to visit local markets, hospitals and to attend primary or secondary schools.²⁷⁷ From a communication's perspective this also means that the children's and their families' interpersonal relationship networks were not only limited to the camp environment, but they were also actively in contact with the surrounding society, including Rwandan populations. The influence of the outside environment in the interviewee's lives can perhaps best be seen in their ability to understand Swahili, as well as other languages such as words in French and English. All in all, it seems that the people living the refugee camps had a lot of interaction with the local environment. Also, this comes to show that the life in the refugee camps of Rwanda was not as one sided as one might have originally imagined. Consequently, the children who had spent most of their lives in the camps had their identities moulded also by the Rwandan society, and interactions with the local population, and not just by the Congolese refugee community and the camp environment.

The interaction with the local environment did have some serious negative aspects as well, and the life outside the camps was not highlighted in the documents produced by the UNHCR. This probably has to do with safety and protection issues and the UNHCR's unwillingness to report about the 'openness' of the refugee camps to the donors. However, it is clear that the children living in the Rwandan refugee camps – including those I had met and interviewed – did not live in a safe 'vacuum' and the dangers of the surrounding environment were also present in the camps. Consequently, the general tendency of thinking of refugee camps as closed or protected entities does not apply here.

While recognizing the active role taken by the families of the children interviewed for the study, it would be naïve to assume that they had not been influenced by the issues presented in this chapter. Poverty, lack of land, demographics, and the violence imposed by the surrounding environment

²⁷⁷ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 20.

were among the issues affecting the children's lives when they were living in Rwanda. According to Lotta Kokkonen, friendships like other relationships both change during transitions and contribute to the ways how refugees adapt to changes.²⁷⁸ Also, according to research on friendships, people generally describe three benefits of close friendship: somebody to talk to, to depend on and rely on for instrumental help, social support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with.²⁷⁹ Thus, friendships provided support to the children also in the camp environment.

Although most of the children interviewed for this study seemed to keep in contact with their relatives and friends overseas, it should be kept in mind that all of the children in question had lost many of their close relationships in the past. Besides leaving the relationships that the children had developed during the time they had spent in Rwanda, the Congolese refugee families had left many of their relatives, friends and neighbours behind already when they left their country of origin. In addition, relatives and friends could be lost in conflicts already before the flight, or on the way to Rwanda. Some of the children might have also lost their friends when some became child soldiers or "wives" to the groups that were recruiting children from the refugee camps of Rwanda, as well as somewhat natural deaths caused by the general conditions and poverty in the camps. From this perspective, one also might assume that the children in question had started losing relatives and friends once the First Congo War started, at the latest.

Kokkonen has shown that these lost and long distance relationships are a fundamental part of refugee's relationship networks also after the migration. According to her, the people who have died or been lost can be very important to refugees who may speak of them as if they were still part of their relationship network.²⁸⁰ Five of the nine interviewees of this study wanted to go and visit the friends they had in Africa, and one of them mentioned that he would perhaps rather visit them someplace else than in Africa "maybe in Australia or the United States" because: "it is a different world out there, so

²⁷⁸ Kokkonen 2010, 11.

²⁷⁹ Rawlings 2008b.

²⁸⁰ Kokkonen 2010, 3; 111-120, 187-189.

many people”²⁸¹. Since this response came from a 16 year-old boy, one also has to wonder whether this had to do with his memories, and past experiences of living in the camps of Rwanda, as well as stories he had read and heard on the political situation in the DRC. One should, of course, also keep in mind his refugee status and the fact that as a 16 year-old he probably understood that his safety could not be guaranteed if he was to return especially to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Furthermore, nine year-old Nene did not want to visit old friends in Africa at all²⁸², and 16 year-old Pierre was not sure if he wanted to go²⁸³. The youngest of the research participants was five years old when he moved to Finland, and his experiences of past relationships did not come up in the discussions²⁸⁴. 12 year-old Annika refused to discuss about her past friendships and memories of living in Rwanda (and perhaps also in the DRC). When asked whether she remembers her friends in Africa, the girl noted:

A: Well, I guess I do not remember.

Interviewer: There is no one that comes [to mind]. Do they ever call you or?

A: They call a little. I cannot/feel able to speak [Sighs].

...

Interviewer: Does it ever happen to you that if you hear someone’s voice when someone calls you remember that is your friend?

A: Yes.

Interviewer: But if they do not call you do not remember them?

A: I guess not. Little, remember little. But I don’t want to/feel able to speak to my friends in Africa anymore. I do not feel up to it.²⁸⁵

The difficulties and sadness that comes from maintaining long-distance relationships could be seen from Annika’s answer. When thinking about the

²⁸¹ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

²⁸² Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G.

²⁸³ Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012 G.

²⁸⁴ Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G.

²⁸⁵ Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 I. In Finnish: A: no emmä varmaan muista. H: Eikö yksikään tuu [mieleen]. Soittaako ne koskaan sulle tai? A: Ne soittaa vähä. Mä en jaksa puhua. [huokaa]... H: Käykö sulle sitte koskaan niin, että jos sä kuulet vaikka jonku äänen ku joku soittaa niin sä muistat et se on sun ystävä? A: Joo. H: Mut jos se ei ole soittanu niin sitte sä et muista sitä? A: No ei varmaan. Vähä muista vähä. Mut mä en jaksa puhua Afrikkaan enää kaverin kanssa. Mä en jaksa.

past experiences of Congolese refugee children described in this chapter, it is easy to imagine what had caused her to feel unwilling or unable to talk to the people that were calling her from abroad. However, it is uncertain whether this had to do with some harsh past experiences, or for example the sadness of losing relationships in general. It was also interesting to notice that many of the children who participated in the drawing exercise were creating pictures from their lives in Rwanda – like houses, airplanes or animals that they had seen – but none of them indicated that the people in the pictures would have represented their friends outside Finland. Thus, although the children in question seemed to still have memories of their lives and people they regarded as their friends in Rwanda, or elsewhere in the world, they did not highlight these lost or long-distance relationships in their drawings. Or, they did not at least show it to the researcher. This did not happen even when discussing about these relationships directly with the children.

All in all, it seemed that the children's memories of their lost relationships differed. Whereas the younger were having difficulties in having clear memories and explaining their past relationships, the older children had developed specific memories of certain events in their past. For example, on one occasion outside the research process I encountered a situation where an eight-year-old Congolese refugee boy saw a friend in Finland whom he had met last time in Rwanda two or three years before when the two boys were just five to six years old. The amazement of the sudden encounter could be clearly seen in their reactions, and they were quick to explain the situation to me. They started playing together, and I have never seen such a strong image of children's ability remember their once lost relationships.

All of the children of this study were interested in hearing stories about their country of origin – or Africa in general – from their parents, and the memories of the older children were not only restricted to relationships. For example, one of the oldest interviewees said that he always listened to the news about his homeland, and when asked if he his parents told him stories about his country of origin, he responded that he did not need to be told stories, since he already knew how it was:

Interviewer: ... What about your parents, have they told you a lot about the history there, how has it been, stories?
Js: I know [how it is]. You [they] don't have to tell me stories. [Smiles.] I know, you don't have to tell me.
H: Are you interested in hearing those [stories]?
Js: Yes.
H: Those kind of stories. Ok.
Js: Yes I am interested. I always listen to the news.²⁸⁶

The fact that Jason mentioned that he was “always” listening the news is interesting also because, according to David Van Reybrouck, radio is the most popular media in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).²⁸⁷ This leads to think that Jason might have already started listening to the news while he was in the DRC, or in Rwanda. Furthermore, it is interesting to think that nowadays children like Jason are using modern technologies, such as the internet, to listen to news broadcasts in their own language from the DRC, for example.

Besides friends, almost all of the children stated that they still had relatives living in Africa. However, this was clearly an issue that the children felt most anxious and unwilling to talk about. This is understandable when one takes into account the problematic history of the region, and the deaths and losses that the children and their families must have experienced. In addition, this might have to do with the family reunification processes many times taking place once part of the family has found a safe refuge. Because of the official disputes and sensitivities related to these issues, the children might sometimes feel confused on what they can, or should, tell others about their relatives. Also, as family relations were not the main focus of this study, I decided not to push these questions much further. Previous studies have, however, shown that family separation can be understood as an ambiguous loss, in the sense that the temporary absence of other family members cannot be fully acknowledged because of the perpetual uncertainty and permanent risk to them. Researchers have also found that shared family memories attenuate the pain of the absence.

²⁸⁶ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: H: ... Entäs sun vanhemmat, onko he kertoneet sulle paljon niinku historiasta siellä, minkälaista on ollu, tarinoita? Js: Mä tiedän [miten se on]. Ei [niiden] tarvitse kertoa. [Hymyilee.] Mä tiedän, ei tarvitse kertoa. H: Kiinnostaako sua kuulla niitä [tarinoita]? Js: Joo. H: Semmoisia juttuja, tarinoita. Joo. Js: Kiinnostaa. Aina mä kuunnella[kuuntelen] uutiset.

²⁸⁷ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 502.

Furthermore, despite sadness and anger, the experience of separation and reunification can also allow people to make plans that keep them going.²⁸⁸

2.3 Specific Issues Concerning Refugee Children

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been marked by a number of human rights abuses, including the extreme use of sexual violence²⁸⁹. At least 200,000 cases of sexual violence were reported between 1997 and 2009 according to the United Nations. Even this is thought to be a significantly low estimate because of under reporting and difficulties in collecting the data.²⁹⁰ One reason for the under reporting is that sexual violence is deeply stigmatized in Congolese culture. The extent to which Congolese men have been targeted for sexual violence, for example, remains largely unknown.²⁹¹

While the use of mass rape and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war are not a new feature in civil and interstate conflicts anywhere, the violence in the eastern DRC has featured unique and disturbing characteristics – with reports of young girls and elderly women being tortured, brutally mutilated, and violently raped, often also by multiple perpetrators. Many have been also killed after being raped, or forced to witness the torture and murder of their families. In fact, after reading the studies made in the eastern DRC by for example the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in 2010, it almost seems that no one was spared from the effects of sexual violence – irrespective of their age or ethnicity.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Rousseau et al. 2004, 1095, 1099.

²⁸⁹ It should be noted that the refugee conventions do not explicitly include gender-based crimes or fears as one of the acceptable reasons for flight qualifying women for asylum. After the genocide in Rwanda the international community has, however, begun to accept rape and sexual exploitation as international crimes, crimes against humanity, and a form of torture. Still, members of the UN have not yet followed this progressive trend and amended the international refugee conventions to include gender-related violence as a valid reason for grant of asylum. Schafer 2002, 36-37.

²⁹⁰ UNFPA 2009. See also for example: IRIN 2011 and UNHCR 2000, 28.

²⁹¹ Bartels et al. 2010, 5-6, 36.

²⁹² Bartels et al. 2010, 1, 5, 7, 35-36.

Rape is an extremely effective wartime weapon causing people to flee and leave their households. It is strategically used to shame, demoralize, and humiliate the enemy. By systematically raping women and girls, armed groups assert power and domination over not only the women, but also the men and communities as a whole. Furthermore, it is an inexpensive and readily available wartime weapon in a situation where there is scant resources and low access to arms – such as in the case of the conflict in the DRC. Furthermore, the pillaging that the armed combatants in the DRC exercised in order to meet their material needs meant that they were directly confronting civilians.²⁹³ According to Leena Kumpulainen, sexual abuse can be also used as a punishment for something that a child or his/her family has allegedly done. Also, according to Kumpulainen, the amount of rapes rises in conflict situations because the perpetrators are more commonly left unpunished.²⁹⁴

As rape is highly stigmatized in Congolese society many women and their children have been abandoned by their husbands and communities and become isolated, homeless, and destitute. Traditionally, rape has been regarded as a deeply reprehensible act and an extreme humiliation for the victim and her family – especially her husband – in Congolese culture.²⁹⁵ In other words, sexual violence was also used to signify the weakness and inability of the men of the community to protect their women against assaults – which was often perceived as the ultimate humiliation. Furthermore, rape is not a new trait in the history of the neighboring Rwanda. During the genocide of 1994 women were subjected to widespread sexual violence committed by Hutu militias, soldiers of the Rwandan army (Forces Armées Rwandaises – FAR) and by civilians. According to the umbrella organizations for women’s civil society organizations in the DRC, Réseau des Femmes pour un Développement Associatif (RFDA) and Réseau des Femmes pour la Défense des Droits et la Paix (RFDP), members of militia groups and soldiers raped Tutsi women, but also Hutu women. Also, after the victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) raped Hutu women with the aim of revenge. The women’s organizations explained that

²⁹³ Bartels et al. 2010, 1, 5, 7, 35-36.

²⁹⁴ Bartels et al. 2010, 1, 5, 7, 35-36; Kumpulainen 2009, 7.

²⁹⁵ RFDA & RFDP 2005, 26-27.

sexual violence had existed in the area on a smaller scale also in peacetime. They state that domestic violence in Rwanda was widespread, and many women were subjected to sexual, physical and psychological violence in their homes. Moreover, the rural areas in Rwanda had experienced resurgence of domestic violence and of cases of rape committed against women and girls following the war and the genocide, according to the organizations.²⁹⁶

Also, according to the researchers of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, the transition of a country from a conflict to a post-conflict stage can produce elevated levels of sexual gender based violence. Women were found particularly vulnerable in these situations, as they were forced into unfamiliar roles and responsibilities in families and the greater community that may normally have been reserved for men – such as becoming the head of household – in a society that is characterized by volatility, weak social institutions and widespread impunity.²⁹⁷ According to Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch colonial ideology which adhered to traditions of male supremacy and the introduction of private property laws reduced women's access to land in Central Africa. Yet, although women might not own the land in Rwanda or the DRC, they have always made a lot of decisions concerning the land.²⁹⁸ According to Loveness H. Schafer, in Rwanda, women farmed the land for their fathers, and later for their husbands. Under Rwandan and Congolese customary law which governs women's property and inheritance rights, property passes through male members of the household.²⁹⁹ Adapting to the situation, women have invented commercial opportunities in the informal economy, outside of men's control. In addition, according to Leroy Vail, women also pass a large part of the local cultural knowledge and habits to their children, and the women's role and impact in transforming children's cultural identity has not been researched in detail.³⁰⁰

Women and girls, or women and children, were usually mentioned together in the UNHCR's reports about problems that the refugees faced. The linkage between women and children is obvious because they were – and still

²⁹⁶ RFDA & RFDP 2005, 28.

²⁹⁷ Kelly et al. 2011, 21.

²⁹⁸ Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997, 64-68.

²⁹⁹ Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997, 64-68; Schafer 2002, 44.

³⁰⁰ Vail 1989, 339-341; Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 403-405.

are – the biggest groups under concern to the UNHCR.³⁰¹ Even more importantly, the difficulties and problems women faced in their lives were easily projected upon their children. Also, it was stated that in 2006 50.8 per cent of the households were female-headed, and 11 per cent were headed by a minor in refugee camps in Rwanda.³⁰² Therefore, many of the children had either a mother as their single parent or no parents or caretakers at all. All of the children interviewed for this study had their mothers with them in Finland at the time of the interviews. However, since the numbers of female and minor-headed households in the Rwandan camps were so high, these families were part of a minority in this sense. The children who were interviewed for this study were happy to have their mothers with them also during the settlement to Finland, and the role and impact of mothers to these children's cultural identity formation would deserve more attention by researchers. Still, the majority of Congolese children were raised by single mothers or without parents or caretakers in Rwanda, where there were very little resources and women's rights to property and land were limited.

In addition, sexual violence against children and women had continued to exist in the Rwandan refugee camps. In other words, sexual violence – also affecting Congolese children – had not ceased to exist in the camps of Rwanda that should have been under the UNHCR's control. However, the information about the level, impact and more in-depth examination of this issue was lacking from the documents in question – supposedly mainly because they were not aimed to examine sexual violence in the Rwandan camps specifically, but rather meant for resource mobilization and advocacy.³⁰³ In the field where the UNHCR operates, publicly admitting that this problem had continued to exist in the camps under its control – pointing to the UNHCR's inability to protect the people – could supposedly affect the organization's funding. Even in this study, the issue was not revealed until a careful analysis of all the sources together, and by comparing these findings to other sources. Whether the UNHCR's donors had failed to notice this, or whether these hints of violence in the camp were aimed for donors to put more pressure on the

³⁰¹ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 19.

³⁰² UNHCR & WFP 2006, 19.

³⁰³ See for example: UNHCR & WFP 2006.

Rwandan government that was also supposed to protect the refugees, remains unknown. My interpretation of the issue would be that the UNHCR was using the listings of violence in the camps to put pressure on both the donors as well as the Rwandan government to give attention to these issues, while at the same time trying to balance with not revealing too much of its own inefficiency in protecting the people.

The documents in question also offered some general information on the forms and reasons behind the problem of sexual violence in the camps. According to a study made by the UNCHR and the World Food Programme (WFP), the most recurrent forms of “sexual gender based violence” in the camps of Rwanda were domestic violence and early pregnancies involving minors. Especially young girls were reported to be exposed to sexual exploitation. According to the UNHCR, “cultural-based behaviours and intra-household relationships” were “the most difficult barriers for a proper referral system and follow-up actions from a legal point of view”.³⁰⁴ These so called harmful traditional practices included female genital mutilation, under-aged and forced marriages, “cases between cousins”, and “other types of sexual exploitation”, as also stated by the UNHCR.³⁰⁵ Many of the rape victims were also reported to suffer from rejection from their families and community.³⁰⁶ While being a severe problem, the UNHCR’s way of describing the issue “harmful traditional practices” resembles the terms used by the early missionaries, anthropologists, and explorers when they were explaining polygamy in Congo. Calling sexual violence “cultural-based behaviour” or “traditional practice” is troublesome. When did sexual violence become purely a ‘Congolese practise’?

This question was not answered by the UNHCR’s in the documents in question. However, some information was offered on what the UNHCR meant by using these words. According to the UNHCR’s and the WFP’s joint study in 2006, there were cases of domestic violence because of women were refusing to have sexual intercourse with their husbands because of fear of HIV

³⁰⁴ UNHC & WFP 2006, 49.

³⁰⁵ UNHCR 2006a, 3; UNHC & WFP 2006, 49.

³⁰⁶ UNHCR 2000, 28.

infection.³⁰⁷ ‘Harmful traditional practices’ and the disruption in family roles were also offered as reasons for child abuse by the UNHCR. Girls were generally found specifically at risk of genital mutilation, under-age and forced marriages, and “other types of sexual exploitation” in the UNHCR’s reports on the five global priority issues for refugee children.³⁰⁸ In 2002, for example, the UNHCR reported that refugee girls in Rwanda had been victims of a traditional marital practice called “rapt”, where a suitor kidnapped a girl, raped her, and then asked her family for permission to marry her. According to the UNHCR, this was explained as an option for suitors who did not have the money to pay for a bride’s dowry, as it forced the girl’s family into accepting the marriage proposal. Although this practice was against Rwandan law, it was still continuing in 2002 according to the Global Report.³⁰⁹ In the camps, these kinds of practices had actually been seen as a means to protect the girls from further violence. Under-age and forced marriages, for example, were sometimes seen as a way to safeguard the financial and physical safety of a girl. This is quite understandable if one thinks about the prevailing conditions of the women living in the camps – poverty, having no property or inheritance rights, and on top of it all, having no official nationality. Even the girls themselves could think that a marriage could be the best way to protect them from (further) violence.³¹⁰ According to Kumpulainen, however, poverty and the threat of violence usually prevent girls from attending school, and make them targets of sexual violence and maltreatment later on. As also stated by Kumpulainen, early childbirth also creates health problems and the poverty increases even further when a girl is not able to attend school because she is pregnant or has a child.³¹¹ Thus, the issue of sexual violence in the camps is related to larger questions on equity, women’s rights and empowerment, education, and it is also linked to legal and health issues.

According to the UNHCR, sexual violence against children in general – not just in Rwanda – could happen both inside and outside school environment. In general, both boys and girls could become victims of sexual violence, but

³⁰⁷ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 29-30, 49.

³⁰⁸ UNHCR 2006a, 3

³⁰⁹ UNHCR 1999-2011, Global Report 2002, 136.

³¹⁰ Kumpulainen 2009, 7-8.

³¹¹ Kumpulainen 2009, 7-8.

certain groups were at particular risk. According to the UNHCR, these included: unaccompanied and separated children; children in detention; child soldiers; adolescents; mentally and physically disabled children; working children; girl mothers; children born to rape survivors; boys as survivors; and child perpetrators. The general policy documents also referred to something they called ‘survival sex’ or forced prostitution among refugee girls and, at times, refugee boys as well.³¹² This is linked to military recruitment of children – which also has to do with poverty and the separation of minors from their families and the lack of agricultural or other income-generating activities in the camps. According to the UNHCR, refugee children in general regularly confronted sexual violence “partly due to the tasks they were assigned in their communities – supporting the meagre family income; covering educational needs; fuel and water collection; and caring for animals”.³¹³ There were no numbers of the level of the problem of sexual violence against children in the camps but taking into consideration the history of the phenomenon in the Great Lakes region, as well as the living conditions in the camps, it would have been hard not to be affected by the problem by one way or another if one was living as a Congolese refugee in Rwanda.

“Sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence” were mentioned as one of the five global priority issues concerning refugee children in the policy documents of the UNHCR³¹⁴. According to the UNHCR, refugee children faced an increased risk of sexual violence because of their level of dependence, their limited ability to protect themselves, and their limited power and participation in decision-making processes.³¹⁵ Also according to Kumpulainen, refugee children can be in a more vulnerable position than other children because the protection of the family and community does not necessarily work in crisis situations.³¹⁶ According to the UNHCR, those responsible for sexual violence were mainly members of the community or people from the wider host community” but they could be also peacekeepers and, on occasion,

³¹² UNHCR 2003, 2; UNHCR 2006a, 3.

³¹³ UNHCR 2006a, 3.

³¹⁴ UNHCR 2003, 1.

³¹⁵ See: UNHCR 2006a, 1 and UNHCR 2003, 1-2.

³¹⁶ Kumpulainen 2009, 7.

humanitarian workers including teachers.³¹⁷ More specifically, the abuser could have been a member of the army, or other armed groups, as well as a police, or a caretaker of a child who had been separated from his/her parents. This might have been the situation especially in Rwandan refugee camps since the presence of armed groups in the camps was reported regularly, and because many children were separated from their parents.³¹⁸

However, the documents in question did not offer information on who were the main perpetrators in the Rwandan refugee camps, or on the number or on the characteristics of the reported cases. In fact, sexual gender based violence was said to be mostly reported to the women committees and “solved within the social structures present in the community”³¹⁹, rather than formally reported to the police or the UNHCR in Rwanda.³²⁰ How these issues were actually addressed and discussed within the communities is unclear by simply analysing the documents, and would deserve more attention from researchers. In the eastern DRC, the majority of the perpetrators were identified as armed combatants in the case study made by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in 2010 but the number of civilian rapes also increased by 17-fold from 2004 to 2008 while the number of rapes committed by armed combatants decreased.³²¹

Besides sexual violence, the use of child combatants is another main character defining the conflict in the DRC. All the armed groups taking part in the conflict – including the armies of the DRC and Rwanda – have been reported to have used child soldiers in their ranks during 1990s and 2000s.³²² In 2003, the DRC was one of the countries with the largest number of child combatants³²³ according to the Amnesty International (AI).³²⁴ Furthermore, according to the AI’s report on the DCR, in 2006 it was estimated that at least 30,000 children were attached to the armed forces and armed groups in the

³¹⁷ UNHCR 2006a, 3.

³¹⁸ Kumpulainen 2009, 7; UNCR & WFP 2006, 19.

³¹⁹ The term *social structures* refers to the women committees, but also the refugee SGBV (Sexual Gender Based Violence) social workers, and camp managers.

³²⁰ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 49.

³²¹ Bartels et al. 2010, 2.

³²² AI 2006, 1; AI 2011; UNHCR 2003, 7.

³²³ Child soldiers are generally referred to as *kadogos* (which means small in Kiswahili) in parts of Central and East Africa.

³²⁴ AI 2003, 1.

conflict zones of the eastern DRC – constituting up to 40 per cent of some forces. In the report of AI, about 40 per cent of these children were girls. In early 2005 for example, it was believed that around 12,500 girls were associated with the armed forces and groups. Some children interviewed by the Amnesty International were only six years old when they were recruited to fight in the DRC, and they might have spent up to ten years in the forces.³²⁵

According to the UNHCR, most of the child soldiers in the world at large were adolescents in 2005.³²⁶ In addition, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers mentions that there were no confirmed reports on the use of child soldiers by Rwandan government forces in 2009, but several Rwandan armed groups based in the DRC continued to use child soldiers.³²⁷

The military recruitment of children continued in the refugee camps of Rwanda. The UNHCR's and the World Food Programmes' joint study stated that the military recruitment of Congolese refugee children from the camps of Rwanda was an on-going phenomenon and a "major problem" in 2005-2006 although it was perceived as a taboo by the households "like early pregnancies".³²⁸ In the 2005 Global report, it was stated that 150 children disappeared during the year from Byumba and Kiziba camps, and it was estimated that there was still 2,000 Rwandan child soldiers in the DRC.³²⁹ The location of the Nkamira transit camp right next to the border must have also had some severe consequences. For example, Prunier stated that the existence of the camp that caused worries already from the beginning of the DRC crisis. According to him, the refugees living in the Nkamira camp were seen potentially useful by the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) already in 1995, and that the Government did not let them "simply melt into Rwandese society".³³⁰

The UNHCR sources did not reveal who were behind these so called disappearances. It was reported in the documents that the "secret" recruitment campaigns that went on in the camps were hidden by the families from the UNHCR and other authorities. This suggests that the recruitment was

³²⁵ AI 2006, 1, 6.

³²⁶ UNHCR 2005, 4.

³²⁷ Dilworth 2009, 24.

³²⁸ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 49-50.

³²⁹ UNHCR 1999-2011, Global Report 2005, 135.

³³⁰ Prunier 2009, 57.

done within the communities. According to the interviews made by the UNHCR and the WFP in the camps, it was youth committees who passed the information and identified new recruits. The recruitment was then usually done “in groups, with many children between the ages of 14-17 taken at once”.³³¹ The UNHCR states that these campaigns were mainly kept secret because of the “lack of confidence in authorities to address it [the recruitment] effectively without causing reprisal”.³³² Thus, it seems that the camps were not closed politically either. After all, why would the families let their children to go and fight for a cause they themselves did not believe in? On the other hand, one must also stop and think the history of the Great Lakes region and the poverty in the camps. Besides, using child soldiers is a worldwide phenomenon, especially in prolonged crisis situations.

I find the UNHCR’s camp officials’ awareness of the recruitment campaigns combined with the Rwandan government’s inability – or unwillingness – to address the issue alarming. In the UNHCR’s report made in 2003, it was argued that the Rwandan authorities had been “slow to react and show no interest” in removing ex-combatants from the Rwandan camps housing Congolese refugees.³³³ This would suggest that the UNHCR saw the military recruitment of children in the Rwandan refugee camps mainly as an issue that should have been addressed by the Rwandan government – which sounds hardly feasible if the Rwandan government forces themselves were still involved in the DRC conflict, and recruiting child combatants in their ranks.

All in all, the documents of the UNHCR did not offer many explanations on why children were still being recruited from the refugee camps in Rwanda. The report in 2006 mentioned the “proximity to conflict and border areas” as a reason for making refugees children more “susceptible” to military recruitment.³³⁴ In the same Global Report, the UNHCR also highlighted the responsibility of the hosting governments in preventing recruitment. However, without hesitation, it also acknowledged that funding constraints had reduced the UNHCR’s and its partners’ “capacity to support governments and

³³¹ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 49.

³³² UNHCR & WFP 2006, 49.

³³³ UNHCR 2003, 22.

³³⁴ UNHCR 2006a, 4.

communities to address the socio-economic causes”.³³⁵ It was also mentioned that limitations on movement and the right to work could exacerbate the problem. This suggests that the people who were recruiting the child soldiers – and perhaps the soldiers themselves – were led to go freely in and out the camps. Perhaps soldiering was, in fact, one of the negative “coping strategies” or “income-generating activities” described elsewhere in the texts.

What comes to girl combatants, “a lack of gender perspective in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes” was offered as one of the reasons for the problems they faced.³³⁶ According to the Amnesty International (AI), many children suffered from violent treatment during their time in the armed forces. In addition, the UNHCR explains that children were many times used to carry supplies or to serve as cooks, servants or spies and messengers. Girls and boys are exposed to different kind of treatment in the forces, according to Dilworth and AI.³³⁷ While girls are generally the ones being used as sex slaves and domestic servants, boys are more often sent into combat.³³⁸ Moreover, the UNHCR reported that the sexual abuse against girls in the armed forces included forced marriage and early pregnancies. According to the report of AI, some children had also been instructed to kill their own families, or they were given drugs and alcohol.³³⁹ Like Leena Kumpulainen has explained – by forcing children to take drugs or kill their families, they could not return home and they could become more dependent on armed groups.³⁴⁰

Unaccompanied minors, and children separated from their families, were seen particularly at risk to be recruited in the general policy documents of the UNHCR. Non-adequate food rations and lack of educational opportunities were also seen as a problem here.³⁴¹ The search of firewood and other work outside the camp environment were seen as risks that could expose children for abduction to military service and sexual abuse. The fact that parents were often offered money if their children enrolled “which is accepted due to the

³³⁵ UNHCR 2006a, 4.

³³⁶ UNHCR 2006a, 4-5.

³³⁷ AI 2003, 6; Dilworth 2009, 247; UNHCR 2005, 4.

³³⁸ AI 2003, 6; Dilworth 2009, 247.

³³⁹ AI 2003, 6; UNHCR 2005, 4.

³⁴⁰ Kumpulainen 2009, 7.

³⁴¹ UNHCR 2005, 4-5 and UNHCR 2006a, 5.

economic conditions in the camp”, was acknowledged by the UNHCR as well, hence again offering poverty as the reason behind the problems affecting children.³⁴²

According to research, while many children are forced into soldiering, others enroll themselves voluntarily. In this case, voluntariness is a relative term. Most of the explanations offered by different scholars for this voluntary enrolment include poverty, access to protection, and income. According to Dilworth and Kumpulainen for example, propaganda and parental pressure can also play a decisive role in making the children choose the military. Some children might also wish to serve their community or ethnic group, or get revenge for abuses committed to their family or community.³⁴³

Witnessing violence in general, was also cited as one reason to join armed groups by the interviewees of the study made by Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.³⁴⁴ Scholars like Rachel Brett and Irma Specht have pointed out that peer group can exert pressure for children to enroll to the military. For the girls their vulnerability to abuse was one of the factors making them join the army, when boys explained that the reason for their enrolment was the need to protect the female members of their family from sexual abuse.³⁴⁵ Like the former girl combatant from the DRC explained:

When there is the war and you are a woman, you risk your life; you risk your life because you are a woman and the men will rape you if you don't protect yourself. When they go in the villages, they will catch the small girls, the mothers, even the grandmothers, and they abuse them. Then they take you along with them and they still rape you or they kill you then. There are many girls who have children but who didn't decide. [. . .] Then when you know what the men do, you will make the war with them, like that, you have a weapon and you can protect yourself. - Vanessa, girl, DRC³⁴⁶

This means that the specific problems concerning children – sexual abuse and the use of child soldiers – are interlinked. In other words, if one did not choose the army, one got raped or killed. If you had a weapon, you could protect yourself but you were still “in war” with the men – the war of protecting yourself from further abuse while at the same time killing and abusing others.

³⁴² UNHCR 2006a, 3; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 50.

³⁴³ Dilworth 2009, 244; Kumpulainen 2009, 7.

³⁴⁴ Kelly et al. 42.

³⁴⁵ Brett & Specht 2004 27, 95, 123.

³⁴⁶ Brett & Specht 2004, 95.

Also, according to Brett and Specht, many of the children do not realize the irreversible nature of their decision. Kumpulainen has explained that the development of the arms industry, and the fact that light automatic weapons have become general, is also one of the factors leading to child recruitment.³⁴⁷ Children make cheap and obeying armed forces. Furthermore, with light weapons becoming the norm, adults or large vehicles are not needed to even carry the guns which makes being in war even more inexpensive. Then again, many child soldiers are not given weapons to carry at all.

One cannot discuss the conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Rwanda without addressing the issue of children born to rape victims. A common concern that the Congolese research participants brought up in the 2011 study was that the child, and sometimes the mother, would not know who his or her father was – resulting into problems in family cohesion. In South Kivu some children have also had to endure separation or loss of their families as a result of sexual violence, as also stated before.³⁴⁸ The researchers of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative had also noticed a diminished capacity and willingness of Congolese families to adopt orphans or unwanted children due to the levels of poverty in the DRC, especially in the eastern provinces. All in all, poverty puts children who already faced stigma – such as children born of rape or demobilized soldiers, who are sometimes thought as “offsprings of the enemy” – to an even more difficult situation.

While not wanting to overemphasize the negative effects of the surrounding environment in Rwanda, it is hard to imagine that the children and their families were not at least aware of these more specific negative issues concerning children – the sexual violence and military recruitment that continued in the crowded camp areas. Psychologists have found that exposure to violence has been a key risk factor to refugee children’s mental health when they have been resettled in high-income countries. The same researchers have shown that stable settlement and social support in the host country have a positive effect on the child’s psychological functioning.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Brett & Specht 2004, 111; Kumpulainen 2009, 7.

³⁴⁸ Bartels et al. 2010, 45; Kelly et al. 2011, 36, 40.

³⁴⁹ Fazel et al. 2012, 266-282.

As previous research has shown, interaction with friends relieves loneliness and contributes to physical and psychological well-being of people.³⁵⁰ In other words, friendships can be seen as central support mechanisms for refugee children – not only in Finland but also in the Great Lakes region. Although I do not believe that friendships would remove the psychological effects of hardships and violence, I see them as central mechanisms in helping the Congolese children overcome their experiences, survive, and get by in their lives. If one looks at the crowded camp areas from this perspective, one can actually find a lot of positive aspects from the community-based way of live, where sharing, interaction, and cooperation were surely the means for survival.

As I have shown, the children were also active in working together for supporting the family income and created their own social networks when gathering firewood, finding water, and supporting their families in other daily tasks. This was also mentioned by 16 year-old Jason in the interviews³⁵¹. The work that the children were doing in the camp environment included finding innovative solutions for survival with friends. The situation in the camps would also lead to assume that the main places where the children made friends and maintained their friendships were either at school, or while working to support the family income. However, during the interviews the children noted that they also had time to play football in the camps. The children played in the camps – like children at any place do – and the work that they were doing could have been also understood as some kind of a game.³⁵²

However, in a place where 11 per cent of the households were headed by minors, some children also took part in the negative coping strategies – like child-soldiering and prostitution. Again, this is not meant to say that the children and the families in question had any first-hand experiences of these issues, but the reality is that the refugee shelters were no panic rooms with soundproof walls that would have blocked the surrounding environment out. Also, as it was shown in the UNHCR documents in question, some of the refugees did not even have any shelters and there were practically no boundaries between the camps and the surrounding environment.

³⁵⁰ Rawlings 2008b.

³⁵¹ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

³⁵² Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

According to psychologists, the degree of post-traumatic stress disorder is associated with personal experiences of traumatic events, especially those occurring when away from home. Additionally, migration journeys and post-migration experiences might be highly distressing for children. However, some studies have also found that the number of traumatic events before migration is not a predictor of post-traumatic stress disorder, emphasizing the importance of considering the refugee's whole experience so far, rather than just the pre-migration events. Furthermore, the researchers have pointed out that evidence suggests that good overall functioning of refugee children – like high educational achievements – can coexist with mental health symptoms.³⁵³

Research has also shown that some types of parental exposures are more strongly associated with children's mental health problems than children's own exposures to violence. Children have been, for example, found to be particularly vulnerable to parents' experiences of being tortured.³⁵⁴ This is also closely related to the children's interaction with their parents and the content and way information is shared. In interviews made with refugee families from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Montreal, the families mentioned suffering due to uprooting, and especially separation. The number of traumas associated with organized violence reported by the families was very high in the nuclear family alone: 35% of families had experienced torture; 40% imprisonment, 15% execution; 10% disappearance; and 70% various forms of harassment. The figures for extended family were also very high.³⁵⁵

According to the researchers from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, who made field studies in the eastern DRC in the 2000s, rape survivors faced multiple medical problems, including HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. Pregnancy, infertility and genital mutilation were also common consequences of rape in the DRC. The psychosocial consequences of sexual violence were found devastating. It should be also noted that witnessing rape of one's own family members has profound effects on children's lives. Child's perception of his or her parent can change to be more negative as a result of experiencing traumatic events. Previous research

³⁵³ Fazel et al. 2012, 270.

³⁵⁴ Fazel et al. 2012, 270.

³⁵⁵ Rousseau et al. 2004, 1098-1099.

also suggests that this would result to more neuroticism and low self-esteem among children. In other words, parents' psychological state can also influence that of their children. The researchers from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative proposed that this would be particularly the case in the eastern DRC where hundreds of thousands of survivors lacked psychosocial support that would help them to cope with the trauma resulting from sexual violence.³⁵⁶

Furthermore, the threat of sexual violence has already had a significant negative impact on the DRC's development. Women in the DRC are seen as vital economic actors and the constant threat of attack in fields, for example, has crippled traditional means of income generation. Also, because of the financial loss, families were less able to afford children's school fees, leaving the next generation of the workforce ill-equipped. The researchers note that sexual violence also impacts the way marriage, gender roles within the family, and customs and values are practiced and experienced by communities. The Congolese research participants interviewed for the 2011 study were also concerned about the deteriorating moral and cultural education, and the effects of physical disconnections of the children from their communities and traditions. Furthermore, social scientists and psychologists have pointed out that it will be difficult to rebuild communities without functional families.³⁵⁷ The findings of the 2010 case study that implied that there was a normalization of rape among the civilian population in the DRC, also suggests that there is an erosion of social support mechanisms and bonds that should be there to protect civilians. Furthermore, the case study stated that the work to support the well-being of children affected by rape in eastern DRC had "barely begun" in 2010.³⁵⁸

It is safe to assume that the loss of lives attached to both of these problems – the military recruitment of and sexual violence against children – had affected the Congolese families in question by just judging the levels of deaths as well as the wide occurrence of these issues in the Great Lakes region. No matter how severe or non-severe the impacts of these issues Congolese

³⁵⁶ Bartels et al. 2010, 1; Kelly et al. 2011, 36.

³⁵⁷ Kelly et al. 2011, 11, 21, 37.

³⁵⁸ Bartels et al. 2010, 2, 46.

children interviewed for this study were, before anything they and their families were the true survivors. They used their skills and wits to survive in the camps, after first taking themselves and their children away from the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I see that a key to this survival was cooperation and interaction, and support received through interaction in interpersonal relationships.

2.4 The role of the UNHCR and the Solutions Offered to Address the Problems in the Camps of Rwanda

Usually it is the governments that guarantee the human rights and security of their citizens, but when civilians become refugees this safety net disappears. The UNHCR's role as the advocate for international protection of refugees and for persons seeking asylum has been criticized, and not the least in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region, where the United Nations' response to the genocide in 1994 and its aftermath is generally seen as a major failure in the organizations history, as mentioned above. According Gérard Prunier, for example, the international community did not deal with two main political problems related to the genocide, and these are: 1) how to stop it and 2) how to deal with its perpetrators³⁵⁹. In other words, the UN was left in its usual difficult position of having to manage what its member states did not want to touch directly, and according to Prunier this resulted into asking the humanitarians to play a "non-acceptable role" of political substitutes in the Rwandan camps. Furthermore, Prunier stated that some humanitarian non-governmental organizations understood this and withdrew from the camps, whereas the UN agencies did not have the luxury, and their situation got worse when the time went on.³⁶⁰ This in turn, of course, casts a dark shadow on the UNHCR's and other humanitarian organizations' work in the region still.

³⁵⁹ Prunier 2009, 347.

³⁶⁰ Prunier 2009, 344, 347-348.

The perception of the UN and its organizations in the region are mixed. According to Tatiana Carayannis and Herbert Weiss some Congolese saw the West dominating the world organization. According to them “the UN failed to act in the one area which it has the sole advantage – the ability to mobilize more resources than some regions are able to, for peace enforcement”, referring to the UN’s unwillingness to use coercive force during the Congo wars³⁶¹. This was because the major powers on the Security Council – and the United States in particular — refused to bear the costs required to finance such combat missions and risk the political fallout that may result from their own war casualties.³⁶²

Furthermore, Carayannis and Weiss have specified two groups in the DRC which had problematic relationship with the UN – the Katangans and the Lumumbists, the two most prominent forces in both Kabila regimes – whose mistrust dates back to the 1960s when both of the groups felt that the UN’s involvement in the events prevented their attempts to gain more power and independence. According to Carayannis and Weiss, the UN’s recent performance in the DRC has “only deepened these suspicions and widened the Congolese population’s disappointment in the UN”³⁶³. They mention the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s (MONUC’s) failure to protect Congolese against the massacres committed by the rebel movement called the Rally for Congolese Democracy–Goma (or the RCD-Goma) in Kisangani in May 2002 as an example of these recent events.³⁶⁴ Nevertheless, and in spite of the perceptions of the UN failing to protect Congolese and Rwandan peoples, all the parties in the war saw the UN as the only actor able to enforce the regionally brokered peace, according to Carayannis and Weiss.³⁶⁵

However, in order to assess the issues affecting refugee children, one must also keep in mind that the responsibility for refugee well-being did not rest only on the UNHCR, but this also depended on the Rwandan host governments’ ability and willingness to meet its international obligations, as

³⁶¹ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 291.

³⁶² Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 285, 291.

³⁶³ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 285.

³⁶⁴ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 285.

³⁶⁵ Carayannis & Weiss 2003, 285.

well as on the donor countries' political focus areas. Thus, in addition to providing basic international legal protection for displaced people, the UNHCR worked with the Rwandan government, other UN agencies, and nongovernmental and regional organizations to provide housing, food, and material assistance to refugees in Rwanda 1996-2012. Moreover, Rwanda was selected in January 2007 to become one of the pilot countries for the One UN 'Delivering as One' Reform, aiming to meet the needs of the Rwandan Government and its development partners more effectively and coherently through the UN Country team.³⁶⁶

There was great variation and changes among the UNHCR's implementing and operational partners throughout the years 1996-2012. In the camps of Rwanda, the UNHCR was responsible for the provision of non-food items in 2000-2010, and all camp-based refugees received food through the UNHCR's implementing partner the United Nations-led World Food Programme (WFP).³⁶⁷ For example, in 2006 the WFP was in charge with the food transport and delivery system to the distribution end point in the camp. On the meanwhile, the UNHCR was in charge of providing primary and secondary education, vocational training, health services, as well as access to water, firewood, soap, sanitation, and adequate shelter to the refugees through its 'implementing partners'. In 2006, these partners included the American Refugee Committee, the Africa Humanitarian Action, the Jesuit Relief Services (Jesuit Refugee Service in 2011), the Save the Children Foundation (UK), the German Technical Cooperation-TOR and MINALOC (Ministry of Local Government or Ministère de l'Administration Locale, de la Bonne Gouvernance, du Développement Communautaire et des Affaires Sociales – the Rwandan Government ministry charged with refugee affairs).³⁶⁸ The amount and variation between implementing partners might seem nice in documents meant for fundraising purposes, but especially when one looks at the changes in the lists of partners between 2000 and 2010, this does not paint a cohesive picture of the services available for the children.

³⁶⁶ Mingst, Karen 2012; UNDP 2012.

³⁶⁷ UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010; UNHCR 2011b.

³⁶⁸ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 17.

For example, in 2006 the American Refugee Committee was in charge of health, shelter, construction, water, sanitation, and infrastructure activities in Kiziba, Gihembe, and Nyabiheke camps housing Congolese refugees. The African Humanitarian action provided health and nutrition services in Kiziba camp. The Jesuit Relief Service provided vocational training, education, and community services in Kiziba and Gihembe camps. The Save the Children Foundation (UK) was the primarily responsible for child protection, although they also undertook education programs in Nyabiheke camp. Also, the German Technical Cooperation-TOR was primarily involved in transport, fleet maintenance, fuel management, warehouse services and environmental activities. Furthermore, MINALOC was in charge of all sectors (health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education) in the Nkamira transit camp in 2006 where it was the UNHCR's only implementing partner.³⁶⁹ It is troublesome to think that the Rwandan Government ministry charged with refugee affairs was the one in charge of the transit camp that caused worries from the start, especially if the country was still recruiting soldiers from the camp in 2006.

In fact, the Rwandan MINALOC was also the camp administrator in all the four camps and the Nkamira transit centre housing Congolese refugees in 2006, and in collaboration with the UNHCR, charged with the overall function of service coordination. Within the Rwanda's governmental structure MINALOC and the CNR (Conceil National pour les Réfugiés) were the main bodies in charge of refugee issues in 2006. The UNHCR transferred all responsibilities for registration and refugee status determination to the CNR in 2003.³⁷⁰ Prior to 2003 there was no centralized fully equipped governmental department responsible and in charge of the management of refugee affairs. Furthermore, although the CNR became operative in early 2004, the national asylum system had made slow progress, according to the 2006 UNHCR Global Appeal, due to a "lack of capacity and expert knowledge".³⁷¹ As one might guess, in a document meant for fundraising and advocacy this criticism could only mean two things: more political or economic support for the issue.

³⁶⁹ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 17.

³⁷⁰ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 17-18, 33.

³⁷¹ UNHCR 1999-2011; UNHCR 2006c.

In the UNHCR's documents the protection and security was said to be the direct responsibility of the Government of Rwanda, although the UNHCR was playing an important role in "assisting the government to guarantee protection under international refugee law and to seek durable solutions for the caseload".³⁷² However, given Rwanda's involvement in the crisis in the DRC and its own problems related to dealing with the aftermath of the genocide, it is not very realistic to assume that the Rwandan government would have emphasized the protection of the refugees in its internal politics, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000 when the country still had many of its own citizens living as refugees outside its boundaries, trying to return back to their country. In addition, the country was then still openly associated with the conflict in eastern DRC. The statement could be also interpreted so that the UNHCR was downplaying its role in protecting refugees and praising the Rwandan government's involvement because the country was making good progress in terms of development after the genocide. The underlying reasons behind this praise would then be the genocide and the bad conscience caused by the UN's failure to protect the Rwandans from it – and even the Congolese from its aftermath.

The high complexity of the UNHCR's operations in Rwanda, and the amount of its implementing partners, also raise questions about the coordination and influence of the ground level actions. The UNHCR's and WFP's study stated that the ground level coordination structure was functioning fairly well in 2006, with refugee committees having access to MINALOC and the UNHCR to raise issues. Coordination meetings involving the Refugee Executive Committee, the UNHCR and all the implementing partners were taking place on a monthly basis. Problems raised in the 2006 study were the closure of two of the UNHCR's field offices, leaving "many camp officials concerned that the UNHCR would no longer play a unifying role in the coordination process between the various organizations", and the UNHCR budget cuts in general.³⁷³ Since this statement was made by the UNHCR itself, it would be useful also to have an external assessment to compare on how the structure and the cooperation between the UNHCR and its partners (especially with

³⁷² UNHCR & WFP 2006, 17-18.

³⁷³ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 34.

MINALOC) was actually working. I have, however, been unable to find such an assessment that would be publicly available.

Furthermore, in 2006 the American Refugee Committee, the Jesuit Relief Service, and the African Humanitarian Action were all dependent on the UNHCR for some portion of their budget. As it is stated in the 2006 report, the reduced funding had, for example, forced the above mentioned partners “to change their own program plans and caused lots of worry and uncertainty”.³⁷⁴ Nevertheless, while the study team of the report was pleased with the cooperation of the different actors in the camps, it was also “unimpressed overall by the level of assistance and services provided to refugees, especially given the length of time the caseload has lived in Rwanda”.³⁷⁵ This slight criticism by the UNHCR might have been directed towards MINALOC and the Rwandan government, or just meant as a justification for more support.

The most common explanation offered by the UNHCR on why the organization’s standards were not met – stated both in the study made with the WFP in 2006 and the Global Needs Assessment in 2008, and repeated in the Global Reports produced in 2000-2010 – was, unsurprisingly, the financial constraints.³⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the persistence of political instability in the eastern DRC and the prevailing poverty in the region cannot be overlooked either when searching for reasons why the targets had not been met. After all, the UNHCR and its partners were working in some of the world’s most difficult and risky environments. However, the great number of partners – and the differences between them – has surely affected the actions and results of the UNHCR throughout 1996-2012. The UNHCR’s role was to monitor and coordinate the camps. Furthermore, it fulfilled its mandate through the support of several implementing partners. The documents and the research literature in question did not, however, offer profound explanations on how these implementing partners were chosen, how they functioned together, and how dependent they were on the UNHCR financially. Also, the intergovernmental nature of the UNHCR made it harder for it to publicly criticise the actions taken by governmental bodies such as MINALOC.

³⁷⁴ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 34.

³⁷⁵ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 9.

³⁷⁶ UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010; UNHCR 2008; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 17.

It should be also noted that the number of people working for the UNHCR in Rwanda in 2000-2010 was in average 66 in total, including all international professional, local and national staff, and the UN volunteers. At the end of the year 1999, there were 32,951 Congolese refugees in Rwanda, and in the end of 2005 the number had risen to 41,403. Furthermore, this was just the number of Congolese refugees, not including the other “people of concern to the UNHCR”, like the internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, asylum seekers, and refugees from other countries³⁷⁷. On average 66 UNHCR staff members compared to around 30,000-40,000 Congolese refugees, and between a total of 56,380 (in 2000) and 699,559 (in 1999³⁷⁸) people of concern to the UNCHR.³⁷⁹ The numbers speak for themselves and show that the UNHCR and its partners – including the Rwandan government – had a huge task ahead of them in assisting all these people.

In all of its activities, the UNHCR is said to be paying “particular attention to the needs of children and seeks to promote the equal rights of women and girls”.³⁸⁰ To achieve this, the organization had introduced special units, hired specialized staff, and instituted changes in practices both in its headquarters and in the field, according to Weiss Fagen. How much this had translated to positive changes in the lives of children in Rwandan refugee camps was absent from the documents in question. However, Weiss Fagen points to the fact that, in this work, the general problems have been related to cooperation between the organizational divisions and programme segmentation – in other words putting women and children in competition with each other and with other programmes for resources and attention. According to Weiss Fagen, this has been especially the case in country offices and in headquarters, whereas the camp level usually communicates better across sectors.³⁸¹ I interpret this so, that the camp level people who are usually the ones best aware of the situation had to sit and watch the country office and headquarter level people fight over money. While it is unclear if the incoordination between organizational sectors affects the funding targeted to issues related to women

³⁷⁷ Mainly people from Burundi.

³⁷⁸ These were mainly returning IDPs.

³⁷⁹ UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010.

³⁸⁰ UNHCR 2012d, 3.

³⁸¹ Weiss Fagen 2003, 75, 83.

and children, it seems that the voices of the camp level actors might have been lost in the process. The irony of the so called vulnerable groups has been repeated in several studies made of the UNHCR, since women and children generally amount to 80 per cent of the refugee population. According to Weiss Fagen, meeting the protection and assistance needs of women and children should be considered as the core of the UNHCR's work rather than "beneficiaries of additional projects" and the work should be based on "serious assessments of their needs, separately and collectively from the other population".³⁸²

According to the UNHCR, the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence required "a holistic, multi-sectoral approach, including health care, psychosocial support, legal and justice support and safety and security".³⁸³ This meant closer cooperation between the different international organizations and non-governmental organizations acting in the region either independently or as the UNHCR's implementing partners. The UNHCR was also said to be continuing "participatory research with children to identify protection risks and community-based responses for protection from abuse, violence and exploitation".³⁸⁴ I was, however, unable to find such a study available in public.

For example, in the 2010 Global Report it was stated that "all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence received appropriate support, including psychosocial, medical and material assistance".³⁸⁵ I was unable to find out whether this was true. The UNHCR also noted that the protection of the people was the responsibility of the states, "whose full and effective cooperation, action and political resolve are required to enable the UNHCR to fulfil its mandated functions", referring to the responsibilities of the Rwandan and the DRC governments.³⁸⁶ This request for cooperation was repeated in almost all of the UNHCR's documents dealing with the refugees in Rwanda, and in all the documents studied in this paper. These statements were clearly directed towards the policy makers and the intention was to make the Rwandan

³⁸² Weiss Fagen 2003, 84-85.

³⁸³ UNHCR 2006a, 4.

³⁸⁴ UNHCR 2006a, 4.

³⁸⁵ UNHCR 1999-2011, Global Report 2010, 40.

³⁸⁶ UNHCR 2006b, 1.

and the DRC governments to recognize the so called refugee problem in the region. The UNHCR might have also hoped that these wordings would have found their way to the policy documents of the donors as well as the governments of the Great Lakes region.

The importance of education was also presented as a protection tool against sexual – or any kind of – violence.³⁸⁷ In Rwanda, the UNHCR's implementing partner Jesuit Relief Service was providing primary and secondary education for Congolese refugee children in the camp schools of Gihembe and Kiziba in 2003-2006. In 2006, Safe the Children Foundation (UK) was the primarily responsible for child protection, and it also undertook education programmes in Nyabiheke camp. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, MINALOC was in charge of all sectors, including education, in the Nkamira transit camp in 2006 where it was the UNHCR's only implementing partner.³⁸⁸ However, I could not find a study where the actions taken on education would have been assessed and examined separately. According to Kumpulainen, the most important reason for arranging education for the refugees as early as possible is “the moderation of psychological traumas produced in exile and the protection of risk groups”.³⁸⁹ In school environment it might be also possible, according to Kumpulainen, to reveal some wider problems affecting the children at home or at the community.³⁹⁰ This seems to be the approach that the UNHCR took as well, when it addressed the importance of education.³⁹¹

However, there were also other kinds of preventive strategies presented by the UNHCR in the policy documents in question. Strengthening women's leadership and women's and girls' capacities were seen as one solution. Working on a community level was also seen as an important tool in improving the situation. Individual responses and solutions also included actions like monitoring initiatives taken with regard to safety and promoting the respect for women's and girl's rights.³⁹² There was little information on how these strategies were turned into practice in the documents in question. It

³⁸⁷ See: UNHCR 2006a, 4.

³⁸⁸ UNHCR 2003, 22; UNHCR & WFP 2006, 17.

³⁸⁹ Kumpulainen 2009, 8.

³⁹⁰ Kumpulainen 2009, 8.

³⁹¹ See: UNHCR 2005, 5; UNHCR, 2006a, 6.

³⁹² UNHCR 2006a, 4-5.

seems that in the case of Rwanda and the UNHCR, this type of work mainly included information, awareness-raising and education programmes on women and children's rights – like the nation-wide sensitization campaign on child abuse that was organized in 2001-2002, and according to the report published in 2003, also benefited refugee children.³⁹³

The UNHCR staff was also said to have been receiving training on prevention and responses to sexual gender based violence in Rwanda. Also, in the 2010 Global Report it was stated that the four training sessions on the prevention of sexual violence organized in Rwanda benefited over 170 refugee men and women, as well as 40 UNHCR and partner staff. In addition it was stated, that two training sessions on reproductive health counselling and preventing and responding to sexual violence were also organized for refugee youth.³⁹⁴ The UNHCR was also said to be working for changing the attitudes towards the “Congolese traditional practice of wife abduction” in the 2003 Global Report.³⁹⁵ However, the use of resettlement was also seen as one of the strongest solutions for the problems affecting refugee women and girls.³⁹⁶ Taken the complex historical context of the phenomenon, it is, however, questionable if resettlement could be used as a solution for this purpose in the Great Lakes region.

Poverty in general was offered as the main excuse of all types of problems the refugees faced in the camps – including sexual violence – in the documents in question. Refugee households in Rwanda were reported to be highly dependent on the general food ration delivered to them monthly by the UN-led World Food Programme (WFP). However, even with the food aid and the non-food items offered by the UNHCR and its implementing partners, many houses were unable to meet their full food and non-food needs and had to resort to “negative coping strategies”, including child labour, child abandonment, and prostitution to survive.³⁹⁷ Refugees were also using the ration as the primary source of income to meet all of their unmet needs, which created further problems in Rwanda. Economic stress and especially the use

³⁹³ UNHCR 2003, 22.

³⁹⁴ UNHCR 1999-2011, Global Report 2010, 40.

³⁹⁵ UNHCR 2003, 22.

³⁹⁶ UNHCR 2006a, 4-5.

³⁹⁷ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 18, 21, 26, 30.

and selling of the food ration were reported to be the most common causes of domestic violence in Rwanda.

The UNHCR also offered a number of solutions to address the problem of military recruitment of children, many of them being similar to the solutions offered when talking about sexual violence. For example, in the global thematic report on international protection of children produced in 2010, the UNHCR mentioned a “systems approach” in regards the protection of “children of concern” in general.³⁹⁸ This “comprehensive manner” on protection of children is similar to the cooperation model offered in regards to sexual violence. While this approach was said to differ from the issue specific approach in its way to address the matters from a broader angle, it also emphasized the need for cooperation between the different national institutions and non-governmental organizations, in addition to international actors like the UNICEF.³⁹⁹ In the 2007 policy document as well, the UNHCR mentioned cooperation between “its international and non-governmental partners” as the first strategy for prevention, response, and solution in regards to military recruitment. The “development and strengthening of national, legislative, judicial, and administrative structures for the protection of children” were also seen as solutions.⁴⁰⁰

The more practical solutions listed by the UNHCR in the general policy briefs regarding refugee children included education, income-generating and recreational activities, family reunification, and psychosocial services.⁴⁰¹ According to the Action for the Rights of Children inter-agency initiative⁴⁰², the use of the term *psychosocial* is based on the idea that the biological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, social, mental and material aspects of the wellbeing of people experience cannot necessarily be separated from one another.⁴⁰³ Thus, the term *psychosocial services* probably referred to support that emphasize both the psychic and the social aspects of well-being. There were also some situational assessments introduced – like the children’s rights promotion campaign that was done jointly by the UNHCR, UNICEF and Save

³⁹⁸ UNHCR 2010, 4.

³⁹⁹ UNHCR 2010, 4.

⁴⁰⁰ UNHCR 2007b, 6.

⁴⁰¹ UNHCR 2006a, 5.

⁴⁰² Initiated by the UNHCR and Save the Children in 1997.

⁴⁰³ ARC 2009, 9.

the Children in Rwanda with regard to child disappearances and recruitment in camps.⁴⁰⁴ Lists of missing children were established during this project “to assist ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] and UNICEF in conducting tracing activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo”.⁴⁰⁵ The demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes were naturally seen as important means to protect the children as well.⁴⁰⁶

Still, it is interesting that the UNHCR could not explain the problem of military recruitment in the camps. As the UNHCR’s mandate in Rwandan refugee camps was to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problem, and its primary purpose was to “safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees”⁴⁰⁷ it was, however, no surprise that military recruitment in camps was a taboo for the UNHCR. In fact, it almost seemed like the cooperation between the UNHCR and its implementing partners, the “systems approach”, and the “holistic, multi-sectoral approach”⁴⁰⁸ were used as complex ways of saying that the UNHCR alone could not address the problems of child recruitment and sexual violence in the camps – it needed the Rwandan, the DRC governments’ and the armed groups’ commitment and support in demobilizing the soldiers, and the whole international community’s help.

One can also wonder whether holistic methods work better than targeted responses in issues where age and gender are concerned. For example, Weiss Fagen has stated that the UNHCR should broaden its perspective on protection – so that it would become the responsibility of all people – and contain not just legal but also physical and social components. What she meant by this was that the UNHCR (legal) protection officers should work more effectively with the surrounding environment, cooperate more, and integrate their actions with community services, education, and healthcare and programme staff. In addition, the programme and services staff should

⁴⁰⁴ UNHCR 2006a, 5.

⁴⁰⁵ UNHCR 2006a, 5.

⁴⁰⁶ UNHCR 2005, 5.

⁴⁰⁷ UNHCR 2011f.

⁴⁰⁸ UNHCR 2006a, 4.

prioritize mobilizing and supporting community-based social systems and networks, according to her.⁴⁰⁹

While I will not go as far as analysing which would have been the best solutions to organize the UNHCR's actions in Rwanda, I agree with Weiss Fagen in that the donors as well as the budget managers should have recognized that supporting human rights – and especially those of children – can be advanced only if the basic needs of the refugee community are met.⁴¹⁰ This would have meant overcoming the damaging shortcomings in funding and establishing the political will for refugee protection. Besides the UNCHR and the Rwandan and the DRC government, the international community and the UN member states could have also been more vocal and active to address the so called refugee problem in the area, regarding not only Congolese refugees but the whole Great Lakes region.

In addition, a common weakness in the documents in question was the failure to address the issues related to children born to rape victims. Taking into account the nature of the conflict in the Great Lakes region where rape is still used as a weapon of war – and also given that abortion is illegal in the DRC – it is strange to neglect this issue.⁴¹¹ While understanding the sensitivity of the matter, the psychological challenges related to having a child born from rape do not disappear by ignoring the topic either on political or social level. As sexual violence is still regarded to be highly stigmatizing act, leading to isolation and rejection from the surrounding community in Congolese culture, using rape as a weapon of war will have far-reaching consequences on children – or even to the whole international Congolese community and Congolese culture in the future. The documents in question did not, however, really take this issue into consideration, and I see this as a major weakness in the UNHCR's approach. Though it is unclear whether examining the long-term consequences of rape should be an issue that would fall directly under the UNHCR's mandate, I feel that it could have acknowledged the issues related to sexual violence more strongly in its documents – by not just advocating for change in policy papers and funding appeals but also – by studying the

⁴⁰⁹ Weiss Fagen 2003, 85.

⁴¹⁰ Weiss Fagen 2003, 85.

⁴¹¹ Bartels et al. 2010, 45; IRIN 2011 and UNHCR 2000, 28.

phenomena and publicly analysing the needed responses in the community level.

While it is obvious that the UNHCR and its partners were working on preventing sexual violence and military recruitment in the camps, the day-to-day actions that the organizations were doing were not clear in the documents studied. One can, of course, wonder if the resources that the UNHCR had in Rwanda were best used in actions or in reporting. However, as the two are interlinked they should not be treated as separate. This is also important because the nature of the funding of the UNHCR – which is largely based on the organization's ability to show results.

It is also important to keep in mind that the United Nations has another organ mandated specifically to advocate for the protection of children's rights – the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF. However, although the UNHCR was said to have been cooperating with the UNICEF on issues related to education and child protection throughout 2004–2010, the UNHCR was said to be the main responsible, together with the Rwandan Government, on the safety, rights and well-being of the refugees.⁴¹² The UNICEF had also shifted its focus in Rwanda; from emergency and recovery assistance, and small projects to supporting the Rwandan Government at policy level after the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 and the endorsement of Rwanda's Aid Policy in 2006. Moreover, the UNICEF's target group was all the children living in Rwanda, not just refugee children.⁴¹³ However, since the UNICEF had been present in Rwanda from 1986 onwards, the fact that it was usually missing from the UNHCR documents raises questions on the role it had in Rwanda 1996-2012 in protecting the rights of Congolese refugee children. Answering these questions would require taking a closer look at the UNICEF's actions in Rwanda, but this was not possible in this study. However, this brings us back to the debate about coordination between the UNHCR and its partners.

The role of the UNHCR and the solution models it offered to address the issues affecting the children's lives in the camps must have also had effects on the children's attitudes towards institutions, and humanitarian agencies. Furthermore, the refugees' interaction with different non-

⁴¹² UNHCR 1999-2011 Global Reports 2000-2010.

⁴¹³ UNICEF 2012a; UNICEF 2012b.

governmental actors, as well as state actors, does not stop once they have moved to Finland either. For example, not getting into a team or not having a hobby was brought up as a problem during the interviews, and it was seen as the responsibility of the social services in Finland.

The double role that the social services have in Finland, as the primary financial and social supporter of the refugees creates trust issues. While social services staff is expected to assist the refugees and support their adjustment to Finland in all possible ways, they, on the other hand, have a great power over the refugees' lives as the government officials directly in contact and responsible on immigrant affairs, including their financial support. This contradictory role that the social services has in Finland goes by no means unnoticed by the refugee communities – including the children – and causes tensions between the two especially in matters that cannot be solved by official means or in sensitive issues, for example those regarding the children. Previous research has found that this distrust that the refugees have on the officials dates back to the problems they have had with the state in their countries of origin as well as their experiences related to the asylum seeking process.⁴¹⁴ After analyzing the role and solutions offered by the UNHCR to address the issues affecting refugees – and especially children – I may now add one item to the list of reasons causing Congolese people's mistrust to institutions: the UNHCR's and its implementing partners (including the host government's) shortcomings in protecting the refugees from further harm and violence in the refugee camps. On the other hand, Lotta Kokkonen has also found that the so called weak ties, such as relationships with teachers, neighbours, doctors, and police officers are important providers of social support for refugees living in Finland. However, disappointments within these relationships were found to be significant for the adults, as they could affect their feelings of belonging to the new social environment in negative ways.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 5.

⁴¹⁵ Kokkonen 2010, 92-110.

3. FRIENDSHIPS AS MEANS OF SUPPORT FOR THE CHILDREN

3.1 Children's Definitions on Friendships: Different and Similar Friends

The following chapter will concentrate on the Congolese refugee children's definitions of their friendships and differences and similarities between people they identified as friends. This is important because, in order to understand the relationships that the children had in Finland, one must first understand what they themselves thought the term *friend* meant. Two of the nine interviewees thought that there was no difference between the words *mate*⁴¹⁶ and *friend*⁴¹⁷, while others regarded that the term *friend* referred to someone who was more than "just a schoolmate", or someone who was "closer to ones' heart", as it was gestured while enquiring more information about the difference.

Some of the children even found the same two terms in their mother tongue Kinyarwanda which confirmed their belief that there was a difference between the words. According to the online Kinyarwanda-English dictionary, there are actually several words to describe the term. While *inshuti* or *umushuti* mean simply "a friend", *ubushuti* refers to friendship and the word *gucudika* means "to become friends, befriend". Furthermore, *inkoramutima* refers to: 1) "a close friend", 2) "a sweetheart", or 3) "something close to a person's heart". This word is stated to be deriving from the verb meaning "to do" or "to repair" (*gukora*) and the word *umutima* which means heart. Furthermore, according to the dictionary there is another special term to describe a very close friend *umunywany* which derives from the term *kunywana* which means "to drink together". There is also a special term to

⁴¹⁶ 'Kaveri' in Finnish.

⁴¹⁷ 'Ystävä' in Finnish.

describe one’s companions, or colleagues (*mugenzi*), and interestingly the word *gushoboka* is a verb that means both “to be possible or manageable” and “to be friendly, affable”.⁴¹⁸

However, two of the interviewees thought that all the people in their class in school or preschool were their friends, and for many the word friend was practically a term to describe someone who they played with. This understanding of friendships as something that simply manifests itself through play is somewhat in contradiction with the traditional categorizations of adult friendships in communications studies, where friends are divided to casual, close, and best friends.⁴¹⁹ Consequently, it is an example on how the children’s viewpoint to the world can differ a lot from that of the adults.

The number of friends the children said they had varied greatly in the study because of the differences in understanding what being a friend meant, but also since some counted their friends when asked for their amount, whereas others kept adding on new names to their list of friends as the interviews went on. This – in addition to counting, siblings, relatives, neighbours, councillors, teachers, all classmates, and other people as friends – made keeping track on the number of friends very difficult. Thus, the numbers of friends presented in the table below should be regarded as rough estimates of the children’s closest friends that are based on their initial responses (see Table 1).

Table 1
Number of the Children’s Closest Friends

Number of Friends	Number of the Respondents
2 – 3	2
4 – 5	2
7 – 8	1
9 – 10	1
10 <	2
Total number of respondents:	8

⁴¹⁸ Kinyarwanda.net 2012.

⁴¹⁹ See for example: Kokkonen 2010, 77.

Two of the eight participants had either two or three closest friends⁴²⁰ which they identified by name (see Table 1). Two others estimated the amount of their friends to be four or five⁴²¹. Nine year-old Jasmin specified that these four people were her best friends, and in addition she had “100 friends in that other school.”⁴²² 10 year-old Brown estimated that he had seven friends in Finland, while “maybe 100” of his friends were living in Africa or elsewhere in the world.⁴²³ Annika mentioned nine of her classmates as her friends, and she regarded two of them to be her best friends.⁴²⁴ Two of the children mentioned they had more than ten friends. 12 year-old Jake said he had seven friends living in Finland and approximately ten friends living elsewhere in the world.⁴²⁵ Whereas, 16 year-old Jason counted that he had altogether between 50 and 70 friends living in different places in Finland, of whom five were his best friends. In addition, he estimated that he had 7-10 best friends or relatives living in Africa or elsewhere in the world, like Australia, the United States and Sweden.⁴²⁶ The youngest of the participants was not asked how many friends he had exactly, because it seemed that he regarded all children in his preparatory class as friends, and had just started to learn numbers.⁴²⁷ While all of the children said they had people that they identified as their close friends living in Finland, or elsewhere in the world, the sheer amount of friendships does not tell much about the quality or content of these relationships.

According to Christina Salmivalli, previous studies on children’s development psychology and relationships have concentrated mainly on their relationships with *peers* – a broad category of people characterized by their similarity to one another in terms of age, social, emotional and cognitive development.⁴²⁸ Also, according to Rawlings, in the early to middle school years, children choose friends of their age and gender, who “share their physical characteristics” and enjoy doing the same activities together.⁴²⁹ This

⁴²⁰ Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G and Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012.

⁴²¹ Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I and James (m) 13 years, 27 6.2012 G.

⁴²² Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I.

⁴²³ Brown (m) 10 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴²⁴ Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 I.

⁴²⁵ Jake (m) 12 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴²⁶ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴²⁷ Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴²⁸ Salmivalli 2005, 15-21.

⁴²⁹ Rawlings 2008b.

can even be seen in the general definitions of friendships, also cited above. Yet, all peer relationships are not categorized as friendships.⁴³⁰ Looking at the findings of this study, similarity to one another was not the main characteristic defining the friendships. According to Salmivalli, some researchers have found that heterogeneous relationships are more common in some cultures than others. For example, Finnish children's peer relationships have been found to be very homogenous in terms of age differences.⁴³¹ All in all, by looking at responses of the children in question from an outsider's perspective, there was a great variation among the people that the children defined as friends. One notable difference was the age. Many of the research participants mentioned that they played with children that were considerably younger than them, and at least two of the interviewees had adults as friends. For example, nine year-old Nene had an older female friend living as her neighbour whose doorbell she rang "almost every day", whereas 12 year-old Annika consider her teachers as friends.⁴³²

However, age differences among friends were looked upon differently among the participants. While some of the younger participants found it amusing that their older siblings were playing what they thought as children's games with younger kids, or having older women which they called "grandmas" as their friends, most of them seemed to understand the importance of having friends, regardless of their age. For example, being able to play games in bigger groups and having friends that spoke the same language were mentioned as benefits of having friends. This also relates to the past experiences of the children. In the camps of Rwanda, there were a lot of different aged people living very near to each other and many children to play with. One can understand the different context that the children were accustomed to by, for example, comparing the population density of Finland and Rwanda: in 2005 there were approximately 17.2 people living in square kilometre of land, whereas the corresponding figure for Rwanda in 2005 was 382.2 people per square kilometre of land, according to the World Bank and

⁴³⁰ See: Salmivalli 2005, 35-36.

⁴³¹ Salmivalli 2005, 15, 20-23.

⁴³² Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G and Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 I.

Food and Agriculture Organization estimates⁴³³. Also, the average camp area per refugee was still 16.2 square metres in 2012, according to the UNHCR.⁴³⁴

Another defining characteristic was that all of the children had friends from both sexes, and thus there seemed to be no differentiation between boys and girls as friends. Furthermore, one of the interviewees had also many physically challenged friends whose conditions differed greatly from one another.⁴³⁵ These findings are in contradiction with earlier research emphasizing that childhood friendships would be characterized by conformity pressures and preferences for similarity to others in age, sex and other demographic characteristics⁴³⁶. I think that this has to do with the children's past experiences of living in the crowded Great Lakes region, as well as the community-based life style that the children had been accustomed to in Rwanda, and also perhaps in the villages of their country of origin. However, psychologists specialized in child development have found that age-related changes might affect the ways children see their peers. They state that by the age of 10 years children become more aware of differences between themselves and their friends in personality and temperament, and they may even consider certain differences to be as important in a friendship as similarities.⁴³⁷

However, when asked about the differences and similarities, most of the children regarded their friends to be very similar to themselves. Therefore, whereas the friendships might have seemed very different from an outsider's perspective, this was not necessarily obvious to the children in question. For the younger children being similar to one another basically meant that their friends enjoyed doing the same things as them, which also relates to the topic of the next chapter – the different manifestations of friendships. The older participants, on the other hand, could also specify different personal traits by which they considered their friends to be similar to them. For example, one

⁴³³ World Bank 2013b.

⁴³⁴ UNHCR 2012a, 33.

⁴³⁵ Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 I.

⁴³⁶ See: Rawlings 2008b, and Scott R. & Scott W.A. 1998, 19.

⁴³⁷ Bukowski et al. 1996, 102-106.

of the boys mentioned that he does not have many friends that would be very quiet and timid, and thus dissimilar to him.⁴³⁸

However, the word “different” caused some confusion among the research participants, and for example children from two families understood it to be a synonym to ‘being Finnish’. In other words, they understood the question “are your friends different than you or similar to you?” to mean “do you have native Finnish friends?”, thus also differing themselves from native Finns. This was interesting also because earlier, when the children were asked to name and count their friends, they did not seem to care about the differences in the age or gender of their friends, for example. The confusion they had on what it means to be different or similar to one another, as well as the conformity pressures exposed by siblings, can be seen from the response of this nine year-old girl and her conversation with her siblings on the issue:

Interviewer: Are your friends similar or different than you?
J: [Older brother. Says something in Kinyarwanda]
N: One is...
P: [Another older brother. Interrupts] Are they different [continues in Kinyarwanda – explains what he thinks is the question?]
N: [Continues]...Finnish. One is Burmese. S/he is not like/with me...what...
J&P [Brothers interrupt their sister again, speaking in Kinyarwanda].
N: No, I don't have different [friends].
J & P: [Brothers laugh]⁴³⁹

It seemed that it was simply using the term *different* that caused the confusion. Sociologist Lotta Haikkola has also found that young people tend to either emphasize their ethnicity or create a collective identity of so called foreigners, thus distancing themselves from what they understand being Finnish means.⁴⁴⁰ This relates to the discussions about immigrants' identity negotiations on an institutional and societal level. *Transnationalism* as a term has intrigued scholars from the beginning of 20th century, and it still seems to be the key

⁴³⁸ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴³⁹ Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G; James (m) 13 years 27.6.2012 G; Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012 G. In Finnish: Haastattelija: Onko sun kaverit samanlaisia kuin sinä vai erilaisia? J: [Vanhempi veli. Sanoo jotain kinyarwandaksi] N: Yksi on.. P: [Toinen vanhempi veli. Keskeyttää] Onko ne erilaisia [jatkaa kinyarwandaksi -- selittääkö, mitä kysymys hänen mielestään tarkoittaa?] N: [Jatkaa]...suomalainen. Yksi on burmalainen. Hän.. hän ei oo mun kaa.. mitää.. J& P: [Keskeyttävät siskonsa, puhuvat kinyarwanda.] N: Ei mulla oo erilaisia. J&P [Veljekset nauravat].

⁴⁴⁰ Haikkola 2012a, 9-10.

perspective in studies about migrations.⁴⁴¹ The approach taken in this study is, however, different. In this study the identity negotiations of the Congolese refugee children are seen to happen in interaction with other people.⁴⁴² In other words, I see these negotiations as something that people undertake in their interpersonal relationships in dialogue with each other. This is supported by the answer of the nine year-old Nene described above, where she – together with her siblings – negotiated what it means to be “different”, and was convinced that she does not have “different friends”. However, this does not mean that the environment and past experiences of the children would not affect the process, but the discussions on ‘transnationalism’ where it is understood as something that happens in people’s interaction with something called “the society” does not apply here.

Furthermore, *nationalism* and *transnationalism* are usually seen as terms which relate to institutions, culture, and networks as something that would be inherited from the influence of living or having been affected by one or several nation states⁴⁴³. Thus, people studying intercultural interactions have been referring to the identity negotiations that happen in communication context by using terms such as *hybrid identities* or *third-culture building*, to separate their idea of the process from the way of thinking this as a phenomenon that happens in nation-state or society level between social hierarchies, structures or groups.⁴⁴⁴ However, I think that even these terms fail to encompass all the factors and influences that have to be included when one thinks of identity negotiations of children who might have no memories of their country of origin. These children are between several cultures, changes, and transitions constantly when they are interacting with other people. Since I see culture also something that happens in interaction, and in interpersonal relationships between people, the phenomenon of identity building becomes even more complex.

⁴⁴¹ See: Haikkola 2012a & 2012b.

⁴⁴² For more information on identity negotiations from a communication’s perspective, see: Cools 2011, 208-213.

⁴⁴³ On these types of studies, see for example: Haikkola 2012a. Haikkola differentiates between local and transnational struggles of identity formation. From Haikkola’s sociological viewpoint, in the local struggles the negotiations happen in the intersection of the second-generation young people’s transnational family networks, ethnic hierarchies, and the constructed category of immigrant and local multi-ethnicity.

⁴⁴⁴ Kokkonen 2010, 25.

Whereas the so called weak ties – such as relationships with teachers, neighbours, doctors, and police officers – were not the main focus of my study, it seemed that they played an important role in the refugee children’s lives.⁴⁴⁵ Some also regarded their neighbours or teachers as friends. This has to do with different meanings of friendship, which the children defined more by the time spent and the things done together, than voluntariness and similarity. Furthermore, many of the other participants of the study considered their older siblings and relatives as their friends. In fact, eight of the nine interviewees regarded their siblings also as their friends. One girl mentioned her sisters as her best friends.⁴⁴⁶ In addition, even the boy who did not agree that his brothers were his friends had difficulties in explaining what the differences between the relationships were, as the following example shows:

B: Well [pause]. Yes, in a way that we are friends but [pause]. I cannot explain [laughs]. We are friends. But [pause] we are like brothers and we can [pause]. We are like brothers we [pause]. So, sometimes we play like football. So. And, sometimes there are others and. And, sometimes I can play with my friends [pause]. And, with my friends when we play with these [brothers]. Sometimes I play with these [brothers].

Interviewer: So, you can also have your own friends?

B: Yes.

Interviewer: So, that you do not always have to have all brothers with you?

B: Yes.⁴⁴⁷

The fact that the children were close to their siblings and regarded them as friends – regardless of differences in age for example – has to do with the importance of the so called intra-ethnic relationships during a migration to another country and the context of their migrations. When it comes to the children in question, the experiences related to being a refugee might have also affected their relationships with their siblings, making them more ‘friendship-like – supportive, and cooperative – and thus, creating extraordinary supportive relationships. Researchers of interpersonal communication have found that

⁴⁴⁵ For more information on refugees’ weak ties, see: Kokkonen 2010, 92-110.

⁴⁴⁶ Jasmin (f) 9 years 13.6.2012 I.

⁴⁴⁷ Brown (m) 10 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: B: Noh [tauko]. Ollaan silleen, että me ollaan kavereita, mutta [tauko] Mä en osaa selittää [naurahtaa]. Me ollaan kavereita. Mut [tauko] me ollaan veljet niin ja me voijaan [tauko]. Me olemme niinku veljet me [tauko]. Niin me joskus leikitään niinku jalkapallo. Niin. Ja joskus tulee jotain muita ja. Ja mää voin leikkiä minä ja mun kaverit [tauko]. Ja mun kavereita kanssa ku me leikki näitte [veljien] kaa. Joskus mä leikki näitten kaa [veljien]. Haastattelija: Niin, et sitte voi olla myös omat kaverit? B: Niin. Haastattelija: Että ei oo pakko olla aina... kaikki veljet mukana? B: Joo.

transitioning to friendships between siblings involves emphasizing personal validation and cooperation over competition and hierarchical, role-based interaction.⁴⁴⁸ Previous studies have, however, also shown there is a wide range of individual differences in the sibling relationships and interaction in general. Psychologists have found different combinations of hostility and friendliness among young siblings, for example.⁴⁴⁹ Individual differences must also exist among the children in question, but as sibling relations were not the focus of my study these issues would require further attention by researchers.

According to the children, one of the best parameter for the quality of the relationship was the time spent together. Many of the children defined that being best friends or friends meant spending a lot of time together. The other qualities a good friend included the ability to apologize and “be nice”. This was also related to conflict management, and the ability to solve arguments. The children in question wanted to be friends with people who did not fight, argue, curse, call each other names, or do other “bad stuff”. All these issues were listed as qualifications to be a good friend. Good friends were also seen as people who would help others, and not cheat, tell secrets, or lie.

Whereas helping friends (if they had problems) was mentioned in several of the responses, sharing secrets was not cited separately as one of the things that friends did together. However, when asked by the interviewer, not-telling secret to others was mentioned as one of the characteristics of a good friend in few of the responses. Also, according to previous research, the extent to which young children discuss about secrets, problems, or fears varies greatly. Judy Dunn has found that there seems to be a greater variation in this, than there is in other aspects of the young children’s close relationship. For example, some children do not talk about their secret problems and fears with friends, whereas others regard this as an important part of their relationships. Previous research has also suggested that there would be some gender differences, with girls sharing secrets and problems with friends more likely than boys.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ Rawlings 2008a.

⁴⁴⁹ Dunn 1993, 43-45.

⁴⁵⁰ Dunn 1993, 69.

All in all, the friendships of these particular children had an important meaning to them. These were the relationships where they spent a great deal of their time and distanced themselves from the world created by adults. The children had many relationships with people of different age, gender or physical characteristics, yet they categorized all of them as friends. They even enjoyed spending time with their teachers and siblings so much that they identified them as friends. The children shared many similarities with their friends but they also could see the ways where they were different from themselves. The past experiences of the children might have made them closer with their siblings, but it seems that they had also made them more social towards the people around them and willing to choose people that on the surface would look very different as their friends. This is in contradiction with previous studies, where children's friendships have been seen to be determined by similarity to others. This would imply that these particular children's friendships would be more complex than previous studies have shown.

How the children became friends with people was sometimes a mystery even for the children themselves. It seemed to be some sort of a 'love at first sight kind of' event that the participants found hard to explain, and the overall pattern defining the children's friendship initiation seemed to be unpredictability. However, it was clear that the children became friends mostly with people living around them in their neighbourhood, or with people they met in school, through hobbies and intra-ethnic relationships, and thus the environment where the children lived played an important role in their friendship initiation.

Repetition and persistence were considered as the main drivers in making friends. In almost all the answers it was highlighted how persistent one had to be if one wanted to get friends, and the same perhaps also applied to maintaining the friendships. The children explained that you should not become disappointed if you did not make friends the first time you met new people. One's own activity was also seen as the key driver in getting new friends. Put another way, the key was to play together time and time again and eventually you would find people who would always play with you, like one can see from the answers of seven year old Mufarme and 16 year-old Jason:

Interviewer: ...So, how do you get friends? If someone asks you how to get friends? If someone asks for your advice then how would you advice? How people become friends?

M: Well, like play with him/her all the time.

Interviewer: Yes.

M: And I and I say to him/her what we play, so he/she wants [to be friends with me]. Then he/she becomes a friend.⁴⁵¹

Interviewer: Is it easy to get friends? How do you get friends?

Js: If you play with him/her when s/he comes here for a day and sometimes. Then you become friends.

Interviewer: So, you have to try yourself as well?

Js: Yes. If you do not try, you do not get a friend [smiles]. You have to try yourself always.⁴⁵²

Furthermore, the most common advice given by the children to someone who was looking for a friend was to just to go and ask people if they wanted to play. This also means that the children understood that friendships were voluntary in nature – at least to some extent. Nine year-old Nene explained that she became friends with a girl who she helped to get home after the girl had fallen over and hurt herself. She was especially proud to declare that they became friends after she helped her, as well as the fact that the girl had told her father that Nene had helped her daughter. In addition, Nene saw breaks in school as good opportunities to make friends with new people “who were playing alone”.

N: Well, if you go for example for a break [in school] and then he/she plays alone. Then you can go and ask that “can you play with me”.⁴⁵³

Also, 12 year-old Jake advised to get to know new people on one’s own initiative, but also understood that it might took some time and persistence and take several meetings before one could become friends:

Jk: Well, it is just like that “can you play with me”. Then we could play there for example, like for another day for example, or then meet. Then you can say when you have... You can say that “can you be my friend”.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: H: ...No, miten saa kavereita? Jos joku kysyy sulta neuvoa, niin miten sä neuvot että? Miten tullaan ystäviksi? M: No, niinku leikkiä koko ajan sen kanssa. H: Joo. M: Ja mä ja mä sanon sille mitä me leikitään niin se haluaa ol[la kavereita minun kanssa]. Sitte se tulee kaveri.

⁴⁵² Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: H: Onko helppo saada kavereita? Miten saa kavereita? Js: Jos leikkii sen kanssa kun se tulee tänne päiväksi ja joskus. Sitte tulee kaveriksi. H: Eli pitää itekin yrittää? Js: Joo. Jos et yritä niin et saa kaveria [hymyilee]. Sun pitää yrittää ite aina.

⁴⁵³ Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G. In Finnish: N: Noh, jos vaikka menee välitunnille [koulussa] ja sitten se leikkii yksin. Sitten sä voit mennä pyytämään että ”voitko leikkii mun kaa”.

The older children emphasized the importance of hobbies and centres outside the school environment in getting friends, whereas the younger respondents did not either see the difference between their schoolmates and other friends, or they had got to know most of their friends in school. As stated before, the children in question did not really differentiate their friends between casual, close, and best friends in the interviews, even when asked. Also, even if best friends were mentioned they included all kinds of people – close and distant.

In previous studies on refugees' experiences on friendships in Finland, it has been noted that study and hobby groups were an important place to meet new friends, whereas people from one's own intra-ethnic group or with other immigrants were usually considered as the closest friends.⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, previous studies on adult's experiences have found that refugees have felt that it was difficult to develop relationships with so called native Finnish people.⁴⁵⁶ However, researchers like Anne Alitolppa-Niittamo have shown that variations exist within every culture and especially in a situation where there has been long-standing ethnic tensions and interstate conflict – such as in the case of the Great Lakes region – it is not easy to create supporting and well-functioning relationships even with one's own intra-ethnic community.⁴⁵⁷ In other words, there are also variations and conflicts in intragroup relations.

The fact that the children in question did not know practically any Finnish when they went to school or playgrounds has, of course, also affected their friendship initiation. Getting to know so called native Finns was generally regarded to be difficult also in this study. Two of the interviewees stated that getting friends in general was not easy. Furthermore, all except one of the interviewees stated that they had more friends in Africa than they currently had in Finland. However, the majority of the friends the children interacted with daily at the time of the interviews were living in the same neighbourhood, or very near to them. Neighbours, and especially children living in the neighbourhood, were regarded important. This is somewhat in contradiction with earlier studies made with adult Somali refugees, for example, which have

⁴⁵⁴ Jake (m) 12 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: No, no kun se on vaan, että ”voitsä olla leikkii mun kaa”. Sitte me voitaisiin siinä leikkiä, niinku jos toisena päivänä vaikka tai sitte tavataan. Sitte voi ku on. Sanoo että ”voitko sä olla mun kavveri”.

⁴⁵⁵ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 40-43; Kokkonen 2010, 79-80.

⁴⁵⁶ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 38-40; Kokkonen 2010, 81, 133-136.

⁴⁵⁷ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 53-55.

found that geographical proximity did not seem to be important factor in regulating social contacts.⁴⁵⁸ In other words, the results of this study would suggest that although the refugee children in question had friends living around the world and elsewhere in Finland, their daily interactions with friends were defined more by the geographical proximity than other factors.

One of the oldest interviewees stated that it was hard to find Finnish male friends if they did not play football, whereas girls were easier to get to know. In the same discussion he admitted that native Finns rarely asked people to visit their homes. When asked by the researcher, if he had noticed any difference in this between Finns and other nationalities, he agreed that finding friends becomes easier once one has a common language.

Js: But it is hard to find Finnish boys [to be friends with] if one does not... if one does not play football with him. It is going to be hard to find friends

Interviewer: What [pause]? Is it the starting of conversation – the most difficult [part] – or what is the most difficult?

Js: No, girls are not difficult [to get to know] but boys are difficult [laughs]. If you go play with a Finn [or with Finns], a boy does not talk. For example if someone plays football with you that is easy but [pause]. But if you are not in a team with Finns or [if] neighbours can [not] become your friends, it is going to be difficult to make friends.⁴⁵⁹

The difficulties of learning Finnish were expressed by many of the research participants, and the children were for example memorizing the difficult experiences they had when they went to school, knowing just a few initial phrases in Finnish. Like 10 year-old Brown quite sarcastically explains:

B: [Guess how much] fun I had when I went to school and I just knew how to say hello “moi, terve!” Then when teacher asked like something I did not understand. So, what can we [say/do] when teacher says “why do you have to sneeze?” [What is making you sneeze?] [Laughs]⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 4.

⁴⁵⁹ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: Js: Mutta suomalaisia poika se on vaikea löytää [kaveriksi] jos se ei.. ei pelaa hänen kanssa jalkapallo. Se tulee vaikea löytää kavereita.. H: Mikä [tauko] onks se se alottaminen et miten alottaa puhumaan – se on varmaan kaikista hankalin – vai mikä on kaikista hankalin? Js: Ei tyttö[jä] ei oo hankala [saada kaveriksi], mutta poika on hankala [naurahtaa]. Jos menee leikkii suomalaisia[sen] kanssa, poika ei puhu. Vaikka joku pelaa teijän kanssa jalkapallo se on helppo, mutta [tauko]. Mutta ei [tauko] jos sä et ole suomalaista[en] kanssa joukkue tai naapurei[sta ei] voi tulla sinun kaveri, se on vaikee tulee kaveri.

⁴⁶⁰ Brown (m) 10, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: [Arvaa oliko] Mulla oli kiva ku mä menin kouluun ja mä osasin vaan tervehtiä ”moi terve”. Sitten kun ope kysy jotain mä en ymmärrä. Niin, mitä me sitte kun ope sanoo ”Miks sua aivastuttaa?”. [Laughs.]

However, some of the children reminded that their own language also felt difficult at times, like 16 year-old Jason:

[Earlier during the interview the researcher has expressed that it is a shame if one forgets one's first language and if one does not learn to read or write in Kinyarwanda]

Js: Since sometimes it is difficult for us to say all the words. One does not always. One does not always know how to write. It is difficult to write our language.

Interviewer: Yes?

Js: There is like three words at the same time. There comes some...

Interviewer: Compounds? Like in Finnish? But that there is three words after each other?

Js: Yes. We also have three [words/prefixes/suffixes⁴⁶¹] after each other. That many do not understand. It is difficult.⁴⁶²

Language usually played a key role in the friendship initiation of the participants, whether they were getting to know people in school, or anywhere in the surrounding environment. Language difficulties were also mentioned as one of the key issues preventing the refugees from interacting with others in the study made by Kokkonen in Finland.⁴⁶³ Researchers have also pointed out that language learning is inextricably linked to issues of culture and identity, especially when it is forced. Schumann has for example referred to a 'language shock, the severity of which is influenced by how the individual reacts when confronted by new words and expressions, and way how the learner deals with those feelings. The other important factor influencing language learning, according to Schumann was culture shock which the learner experiences when s/he finds that his/her problem-solving and coping mechanisms do not work in the new situation.⁴⁶⁴ Julia T. Wood has even explained that people learn their cultural values, beliefs and norms in the process of learning a language.⁴⁶⁵ However, the way both Schumann and Wood define social groups – as people who speak the same language and their implications that the speakers of the

⁴⁶¹ Please note: for example each Kinyarwanda noun has three parts: the augment, the class marker, and the root. See: Kinyarwanda.net 2012.

⁴⁶² Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: [Haastattelija on maininnut aiemmin, että on sääli jos unohtaa oman kielensä ja ei vaikkapa opi kirjoittamaan tai lukemaan kinyarwandaksi.] Js: Kun joskus meidän on vaikea sanoo kaikki sanat. Ei joskus. Ei osaa kirjoittaa. Se on vaikea meidän kieli kirjoittaa. H: Niin? Js: Se tulee joku kolme sanaa samaan aikaan. Se tulee joku... H: Yhdyssana? Niinkuin Suomessakin? Mutta että on kolme sanaa peräkkäin? Js: Joo. Kun meilläkin tulee kolme[sanaa/etuliitettä/loppupäätettä?] peräkkäin. Toi moni ei ymmärrä toi. Se on vaikee.

⁴⁶³ Kokkonen 2010, 133-136.

⁴⁶⁴ Holliday et a. 2010, 119.

⁴⁶⁵ Wood 1997, 249.

same language would share the same culture – are problematic with regards to the theoretical approach taken in this study with regards to the creation of cultures.

What can be also seen from this study is that refugee children's interpersonal relationships like friendships play a key role in learning a new language. On the other hand, learning a new language helps in friendship initiation. For example, it seemed to be especially important to get to know other Kinyarwanda speakers who knew a bit more Finnish in order to get to know people outside the intra-ethnic group. All the children in question had siblings living in Finland, and siblings and parents could also have a role in friendship initiation by introducing the children to new people. On the other hand, the children had always siblings to rely on which might also have reduced their urge to find new friends. In one of the interviews it was also mentioned that parents might set some limitations on with whom their children should become friends with: "daddy says that you have to find good friends"⁴⁶⁶. While family relations in general seemed to be a sensitive subject for the children in question, all except one of the children also regarded their siblings as their friends and all of them regarded their parents as significant people in their lives.

School served as a place where one could get to know others who were in the same situation – in a preparatory class learning Finnish, or even with other Kinyarwanda speakers with a refugee background. However, it seemed that it was outside the school environment where the children got to know their own intra-ethnic community and other friends from the larger inter-ethnic or intercultural community who had spent more time in Finland. The importance of this group of people was highlighted especially in the discussions that dealt with friendship initiation in Finland and the first experiences the Congolese children had with interacting with their surrounding environment – whether it involved getting to know neighbours or children from school or hobbies.

In fact, hobby teams and football games served as good example of this behaviour where "someone inviting others" ended up in team formation between Kinyarwanda speakers, other immigrants, and so called native Finns.

⁴⁶⁶ Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012 G; Nene (f) years, 27.6.2012 G.

These groups, or teams, then served as so called entry points to the surrounding environment, sometimes including children from various cultural backgrounds that children referred to for example as simply ‘Africans’. Thereafter, by getting to know other children, the children also got to know people who spoke Finnish, or other languages. Children got to know some Finnish speakers outside the school environment, but these usually seemed to be people who lived close by or played in the same hobby club, or worked with the children as teachers or social workers. Below you can see how Jason explains how he first got to know people in Finland. In another instance, Jason also mentioned that “all Africans” play football together each Tuesday and Thursday in a nearby field.

Interviewer: Was it [getting friends] easy for you when you first got here?

Js: Umm, yes. Because when I was in school, there was someone. Someone was. It is an African friend that I was always with. Then I went to football [training/game] with him, then I played with Finns, [then they] come and play with me as well.

Interviewer: But was it easier at first to have someone who speaks the same language?

Js: Umm

Interviewer: Since in the beginning you did not speak Finnish straightway, so?

Js: Yes. Then I learned a bit of Finnish because I had one friend who spoke our language. It is good that s/he speaks [also] Finnish language.

Interviewer: That I have heard also from many others that I have spoken to, that in the beginning it is good to have one friend in that preparatory class or try to find a friend somewhere who speaks Kinyarwanda.

Js: Yes, from the preparatory class s/he [newcomer] will find one that can [speak Kinyarwanda].⁴⁶⁷

Young Yun Kim has suggested that immigrants’ communication networks change gradually to include more people from the majority population.⁴⁶⁸ The children in question, however, seemed to have various relationships with people from several different ethnic backgrounds who they categorized as

⁴⁶⁷ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: H: Oliko susta [kavereiden saaminen] helppoo aluksi, kun tulit tänne? Js: Äää, oli. Koska kun mä olin koulu[ssa], siellä oli. Oli joku. Se on afrikkalainen kaveri jo[nka] aina minä olin hänen kanssa. Sitte mä menen jalkapallo hänen kanssa, sitte pelaa suomalainen kanssa, [sitten ne] tulee minun kanssakin pelaa. H: Mutta onks se aluksi helpompaa kun on joku jonka kanssa puhuu samaa kieltä? Js: Äää. H: Koska sillan aluksihan sä et heti puhunu suomee niin.. Js: Joo. Sillo mä oppi vähä suomee, koska mulla on yks kaveri se puhu meidän kieli. Se on hyvä se puhuukin suomen kieli [suomen kieltäkin]. H: Sen mä oon kuullu monelta muultakin, jonka kanssa mä oon jutellu et aluksi on hyvä et on yksi kaveri siellä valmistavalla luokalla tai yrittää jostain löytää jonku kaverin, joka puhuu kinyarwanda. Js: Joo, sieltä valmistavalta se löytää [jonku] joka osaa.

⁴⁶⁸ Kim 2001, 121-142.

friends very early on after their migration to Finland. Hence, time spent in Finland did not seem to explain the amount of native Finnish friends. This has also been found to be the case in previous studies dealing with immigrant's friendships in Finland.⁴⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the so called intra-ethnic relationships were crucial for the friendship initiation of the children in question.⁴⁷⁰ The intra-ethnic relationships of the interviewees of this study included people who spoke the same language as the participants, as well as relatives like siblings and parents. However, by looking at the phenomenon of ethnic or cultural identity formation from a communications perspective, one has to note that identity formation is a dynamic process where one's views of oneself, self-image and self-concept as well as the feelings of belonging to certain cultural or other groups is constantly being negotiated in interaction with others. Although, the process is influenced by societal factors (such as history and politics), and it is influenced by the time and place where it happens, the actual identity negotiation happens in interaction with other people, like friends.

Nevertheless, interpersonal relationships with other immigrants of the same origin, as well as the larger inter-ethnic network of immigrants, can work as the 'means' or 'entry points' of getting to know new people, and thus provide an input to developing the sense of belonging to the new environment. It is also important to keep in mind that attachment to a new social environment is a reciprocal process and the phenomenon does not exist without other people. Language plays a key role in this dialectic process.⁴⁷¹ What was also interesting to notice was that the so called weak ties – referring to for example neighbours, officials, councillors, and teachers – did not come up in the discussions about friendship initiation. In other words, although the children listed officials, councillors and teachers to their lists of friends, none of the children presented examples on how one becomes friends with these people – except for neighbours.

⁴⁶⁹ Kokkonen 2010, 81.

⁴⁷⁰ See: Berry 1997 and Kokkonen 2010, 85-86.

⁴⁷¹ Kokkonen 2010, 169-171.

3.2 Children's Interpretation on Maintaining Friendships: We Play Together

This chapter intends to analyse how the children maintained their friendships and how their understanding of friendships manifested itself. Observational research has shown that children's interactions with their friends differ from those with other people. Friends for example spend more time interacting with each other, and their behaviour in conflicts differs. Although, children can even fight more with friends, they are more likely to attempt conciliation and be considerably more forgiving than they are with 'non-friends'.⁴⁷²

Young children's inability to articulate and elaborate their understanding of friendships further than simply saying "we play together" has often been taken as evidence against the importance and sophistication of their friendships. Yet, as the studies made on relationships show, the establishment of a shared world of play is in itself an achievement that depends on shared interest and goals, and that requires compromising one's own wishes for the joint interest of play. Furthermore, even when the children have the required verbal and cognitive skills they are not always aware of how they interact with friends.⁴⁷³ This applies to adults as well – as I do not believe it is easy for anyone to explain and describe one's own interaction patterns with friends in detail.

The way the children interviewed for this study understood their friendships was also manifested through doing, and especially through play. In other words, being a friend and maintaining the friendship meant doing something together – like visiting each other, playing football, or hanging out. As one of the boys explained:

B: [Explaining his painting.] These mean that when we are best friends.

Interviewer: Yes?

B: That we do not have any fights. We are always just [in] peace.

Interviewer: Well, good.

B: So this means that.

Interviewer: What about [that other drawing]?

⁴⁷² Dunn 1993, 60.

⁴⁷³ Dunn 1993, 61-62; Gottman & Parker 1986, 3.

B: [Reading from the drawing.] This says that, when you are friends you have to play together and play football... football.⁴⁷⁴

In order to play successfully the children need to communicate clearly and listen to others; to agree more than disagree; to be able to compromise; and to manage conflicts, as listed by Judy Dunn.⁴⁷⁵ This was also seen in the participants' responses, as they wanted to be friends with people who did not fight, argue, curse, call each other names, or do other "bad stuff". For example, the youngest of the respondents, seven-year-old Mufarme, told a story of himself always teasing others when he was younger, resulting into having a lot of conflicts and his friends not liking him. According to him, this was not the case anymore, and he had calmed down although the older siblings seemed to disagree by giggling to his self-analysis.⁴⁷⁶

Some children could find differences in the games they played in Finland and in the camps of Rwanda. In Finland, it seemed that the children's friendships evolved around playing football and other games. Whereas, for example, one of the oldest interviewee's thought that he visited his friends more often in Africa. This might have to do with language issues, and having a lot of people who spoke the same language around when living in the camps in Rwanda. He went on explaining that spending time together in the camps could involve just going around and hanging out together. Moreover, Jason mentioned that in "Africa" friends could for example work together.⁴⁷⁷

Something that was common on the children's activities with friends in Rwanda and in Finland was playing football together. Furthermore, it is an activity where one does not necessarily need to have a common language, or a lot of financial resources. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial powers introduced the game to Africans, and the sport also had an educational as well as political aspect.⁴⁷⁸ Sports have been studied, for

⁴⁷⁴ Brown (m) 10 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: B: [Selittää piirustustaan] Nämä tarkoittaa sitä, että.. kun me ollaan parhaat kaverit. H: Niin? B: Että ei meillä ole yhtään riitaa. Me on aina ihan rauha. H: Joo, hyvä. B: Niin tää tarkoittavat sitä. H: Entäs sitte [tuo toinen piirustus]? B: [Lukee piirustuksesta] Tässä lukee, että ku ollaan kavereita pitää leikkiä yhdessä ja pelaa jalkapalloo.. Jalkapalloo.

⁴⁷⁵ Dunn 1993, 66.

⁴⁷⁶ Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴⁷⁷ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁴⁷⁸ Van Reybrouck 2010/2013, 184-189. Football and sports as a global, as well as African, phenomenon has also interested many scholars. See for example: Majumdar & Hong 2007.

example, the point of view of politics, religion, class and gender, as well as ethnicity, identity, immigration, and adaptation. Football and other sports have also been linked to ideas on nationality-building and imperialism⁴⁷⁹. Here, football is one of the things that continued to be a part of the children's lives when they migrated to Finland. What makes the phenomenon even more interesting, is that its historical roots that lie far away in the colonial times.

Seeing and playing with friends in school was also regarded important. It was interesting to notice that, even though the children in question had met many of their friends in school – or through their other friends in school – having a hobby, and especially being enrolled in a sports team, was regarded to be very important by the children, also in terms of getting more friends. In one of the families, for example, one of the siblings had played football in a team for a couple of years. The others had expressed their wish to join a team many times, but according to the children the social services had failed to enrol them in a team. This seemed to have affected their self-esteem and the family dynamics in some ways since the siblings that were not enrolled in the teams seemed somehow ashamed to admit it, whereas the one who had a team appeared to be very proud of having one. Getting to know native Finnish people was found particularly difficult if one was not playing in a team, or did not have a hobby. Furthermore, the children who were interviewed in groups were also openly discussing their success or failure of getting in the teams. Thus, not having a hobby club or a sports team can be seen as a limitation to friendship initiation. It is interesting to note that relationship formation between adult refugees and native Finns has also been found to usually take place in organized occasions – like work meetings or trainings in previous research done on refugees' interpersonal relationships.⁴⁸⁰

The question of children being enrolled in a sports team or other hobby club – that usually requires some money – in order to get or meet friends is, however, quite a new one. This could have to do with a larger phenomenon in the Finnish society, that has its roots in the increase of economic inequality between people and regions, and further divide between social classes. However, this would require more examination. I have been unable to find

⁴⁷⁹ See: Hokkanen 2007; Mangan 2012.

⁴⁸⁰ Kokkonen 2010, 81, 133-136.

studies that would refer to the same phenomenon in Finland. The phenomenon might be also related to urbanization and children enjoying playing with each other in organized activities rather than independently. Furthermore, whether this was indeed a problem that the social services could solve – for example with more funding or staff resources – would also need more research. Nevertheless, for the children the question of having a hobby seemed to be a critical one in terms of friendship initiation and maintenance, and their expectations were directed towards the Finnish officials in charge of refugee issues.

Although it is not possible to draw big conclusions from as small of a sample as nine children, one could also notice a difference in the level of Finnish language skills and some of the friendship patterns between the children who were practicing a sport regularly in a team, and those who did not. Getting to know the children in one's neighbourhood was, for example, found to be much easier if one was playing sports in a team with some of them, and if one had a lot of friends in the neighbourhood one was more likely to practice Finnish with them. In addition, some of the children mentioned that they did not see their friends as often as they did during the school year because of the summer holiday travels of their friends. This is also related to the question why the children living in the neighbourhood were regarded to be so important – 'seeing them around' daily was easy.

All the children in question were living quite near schools and playfields in apartments or temporary housing that the Finnish officials had found for them. This meant that they usually lived in neighbourhoods with other refugees, families with low income, and others who received social support from the Finnish state. This, of course, also relates to the hobby possibilities available for the children. While it is natural that the place of residence affects the relationship patterns of people, it would be interesting to examine whether this actually had an impact on the kind of friendships the children developed, or if the neighbourhood was even restricting them to maintain certain kind of relationships. In the case of Congolese refugee children, who are so called involuntary migrants, this also raises questions about their adaptation process to the life in Finland, as well as their dealings with possibly traumatic past experiences. Psychologists have highlighted the

same issue by saying that attention to mental health in the context of everyday stressors – including socioeconomic disadvantages – needs greater attention. Moreover, they say that parental worries about financial problems have a particular adverse effect on the mental health of refugee children.⁴⁸¹ In other words, the place of residence and the difficulties in not getting into hobby teams might have a serious impact to the relationships that the children develop in Finland. This phenomenon would deserve more attention from the researchers of communication.

Further on the language issues, the children teamed up with other speakers of their mother tongue Kinyarwanda also to learn Finnish. Other Kinyarwanda speakers could for example teach the children a few initial phrases in Finnish which they needed in interacting with other children. It also seemed that the teaming up with other Kinyarwanda speakers, as well as other children with an immigrant background, happened in regular basis and was fairly organized. Furthermore, children were open to inviting more people from other neighbourhoods to come along, including native Finnish speakers. As 16 year-old Jason explained:

Js: There are many Africans playing football [smiles]. Everyone. Every Tuesday and Thursday is football...

Js: Everyone [is] young. If you are a young African, you play football every Tuesday and Thursday [gathering in a field nearby]

Interviewer: That is very good since in [other place, name removed] there is no such thing.

Js: No, no there is no. It is a bit [pause]. But [name of the place removed]. [A friend] who lives [name of the place removed] comes there [to play] every Tuesday and Thursday.⁴⁸²

Besides football – which was clearly the most popular pastime mentioned in the interviews – many of the children mentioned different trips like going to beaches, and hobbies like swimming, as their favourite things to do with friends. Some of the children also mentioned playing with snow and other winter games as their favourite hobbies with friends. Here one has to take into

⁴⁸¹ Fazel et al. 2012, 273.

⁴⁸² Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: Js: Siellä on paljo afrikkalainen se pelaa jalkapalloo [hymyilee]. Kaikki. Joka tiistai ja torstai on jalkapalloo... Js: Kaikki [on] nuorii.. jos on nuori afrikkalainen se pelaa jalkapalloo joka tiistai ja torstai [kokoontuvat läheiselle kentälle] H: Se on tosi hyvä, koska taas sitte tuolla [paikan nimi poistettu] ei oo semmosta. Js: Ei, ei oo. Se on vähä [tauko]. Mutta [paikan nimi poistettu]. [Kaveri] oka asuu [paikan nimi poistettu] tulee sinne [paikan nimi poistettu] [pelaamaan] joka tiistai ja torstai.

account the timing of the interviews, as they were conducted during the summer and early autumn.

The children also shared a similar sense of humour with their friends, and created stories or behavioural patterns that others necessarily did not understand. In previous studies it has been stated that shared humour, gossip and self-disclosure play an important role in young children's peer relationships but their amount varies. Some giggle together all the time – for example by playing with words – whereas for others this type of joking is rare. Playing with words in general is found to be a special feature in young children's relationships with familiar friends and affectionate siblings.⁴⁸³ The children interviewed for this study behaved in this way – for example laughed and joked together at different pronunciations of words – during both of the group interviews of this study.

Both boys and girls mentioned many outdoor activities as their favourite things to do with friends, and there seemed to be no real difference in the activities between the boys and girls, or, for example, in the level on how active they were in playing sports. The amount of friends and the nature of the activities did not differ greatly between boys and girls either, since both mentioned spending time and playing with friends in bigger and smaller groups. For example, both boys and girls said that they played football or other sports in teams, and that they liked to play with snow. Since the majority of the small sample of participants were boys, drawing wide-ranging conclusions on the differences between girls' and boys' games is not possible in this study. The differences among the activities that the children enjoyed doing with their friends still seemed to be rather individual than gender-related in this study. This is also in contrast with previous studies on children's relationships where friendships were seen to be nested in same-sex cliques that exert strong conformity pressures and promote similarity to others⁴⁸⁴.

All in all, many of the things the children did with friends did not seem to cost anything – apart from the sport club fees negotiated with the city officials. The children had also gotten used to outdoor games in the camps of Rwanda, and one of the biggest differences in the life in Finland seemed to be

⁴⁸³ Dunn 1993, 67-70.

⁴⁸⁴ Rawlings 2008b.

that they now had more time to play from the daily chores of the family that were normal for the camp environment.⁴⁸⁵ Contrary to the camp life, playing video games like the football video game FIFA, or “shooting games” with XBOX were mentioned as things that some of the boys liked to do when visiting their friends’ house or a youth club in Finland.

The children did not specify if they did different things with different friends. It is, however, very likely that the relationships that the children had with their older neighbours or with younger children differed from each other. One of the children, who had physically challenged friends, mentioned that she was sometimes scared that her friends would get hurt during play, and thus did not literally play with all of her friends in the physical sense of the word. She did, however, mention sharing stories, kidding, laughing, and even “fighting” as things that she did with her friends. Thus, the physical challenges did pose some limitations to her friendships, but did not prevent her of being friends with “almost all her classmates”.⁴⁸⁶

What comes to difficulties in maintaining friendships, issues related to conflicts and competitiveness in close relationships have raised many questions in previous research. Whereas young children usually state that they do not quarrel with friends in interviews, observational research has shown that friends do argue and fight and are competitive with each other. In fact, competitiveness between young male friends might be more frequent than among young male acquaintances.⁴⁸⁷ Still, the most general response to the question on how the children dealt with conflicts with their friends was simply to avoid having any quarrels. If a conflict did, however, occur the most important thing to do was to apologize, like Jasmin explains here:

Interview: What about if there is something. If in some group there is a disagreement, or a fight, then how do you solve it in the group?

J: Well, you apologize.

Interviewer: But does everyone realize [to do] that?

J: Yes.

Interviewer: Understands that now I have to apologize?

J: Yes. “Now we hug”. I him because [pause]. One boy he well. Well, he did something bad to me. Then we hugged. Then he apologized. Then it was cleared.

⁴⁸⁵ UNHCR & WFP 2006, 29, 37.

⁴⁸⁶ Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 I.

⁴⁸⁷ Dunn 1993, 70.

Interviewer: Did that feel nice?
J: Yes.
Interviewer: How did it feel?
J: Well good because he asks [for an apology]
Interviewer: Yes. And then one can be friends again, you think?
J: Yes.⁴⁸⁸

There were some differences in terms how the children dealt with conflicts. For example, 16 year-old Jason noted that solving conflicts with relatives was different than solving them with friends. He also stated that none of his relationships in Finland had terminated, as they had done in Africa, but concluded that this might have something to do with his own behaviour, as can be seen from the conversation below.

Interviewer: But have you ever had a situation where your friend has started to sulk or does not speak to you at all?
Js: No! [Laughs] Here in Finland no.
Interviewer: No?
Js: But in Africa sometimes it comes, a fight. [Someone says] bad about someone and then starts to fight with him/her. Then it ends.
Interviewer: What [happens] then?
Js: If one wants to be friends again?
H: Yes.
Js: Then you have to apologize to him/her or play with him/her a lot, Apologize and s/he forgives you, says sorry to you.
Interviewer: Is it different if you have an argument with a relative?
Js: No, if you are relatives you do not argue [laughs]. If something bad happens, your mother will tell you to go and apologize "s/he is your relative".
Interviewer: What about with friends: has it ever happened to you that someone has been your friend first and then stopped being your friend, so that you are not friends anymore? Has everyone stayed friends with you?
Js: Here in Finland everyone is friends. No one has yet said to me that "I am not your friend" [Says this with a smile but perhaps is feeling a bit self-conscious, playing with a pen etc.]
Interviewer: Do you know why it could be like that? Why does it feel that here everyone has stayed [friends with you]? Have you thought about that?
Js: Umm. I don't know [laughs] now yet. But I. Because when I went there I did not fight, or do them harm, or curse, no. If I curse or fight, s/he went away immediately.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I. In Finnish: H: Entäs sitte jos on joku. Jos jossain ryhmässä tulee semmonen erimielisyys tai tappelu, niin mitenkäs siellä ryhmässä se selvitetään? J: No pyytää anteeksi. H: Mut älyääkö kaikki [tehdä] sitä? J: Joo. H: Tajuaako et nyt pitää pyytää anteeksi? J: Joo. "Nyt halataan". Mä hän[tä] koska[tauco]. Yksi poika tota. Yota toi se teki mulle jotaki pahaa. Sitte halattiin. Sit se pyysi anteeksi. Sit se on selvit[et]ty. H: Tuntuko se kivalta? J: Joo. H: Miltä se tuntu? J: No hyvältä koska se pyytää [anteeksi] H: Niin, ja sit voi olla taas kavereita, niinkö? J: Niin.

⁴⁸⁹ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G. In Finnish: H: Mutta onko sulla koskaan ollu semmosta tilannetta, että sun kaveri on alkanu mököttää tai ei puhu sulle ollenkaan? Js: Eih! [Naurahtaa] Täällä Suomessa ei. H: Ei? Js: Mutta Afrikkassa joskus se tulee, tappelu. [Joku sanoo] jostakin pahaa ja sitte rupee tappelee hänen kanssa. Sitte loppu. H: Mitä sitten? Js: Jos haluaa, tulla

Simple explanations on why Jason did not fight with his Finnish friends, but did so with his friends in Africa could be the need to adapt to the Finnish society. In relation to this, language issues and considering that having Finnish friends was very important could have played a major role. Jason was also referring to her mother teaching him not to fight with his relatives.

In general, fights were considered horrible, and the interviewees were reluctant about discussing friendship termination due to conflicts. However, conflicts could also be considered as parts of the relationships in the children's responses. For, example 12 year-old Annika, nine year-old Jasmin, and seven year-old Mufarme told stories about teasing their friends or playfully fighting with them.⁴⁹⁰ In addition, the siblings who took part in the interviews as a group were occasionally teasing each other during the interviews by, for example, giggling to each other's responses or commenting them.

The challenges that the children had in interacting with friends were usually related to difficulties in understanding due to language issues. This was especially the case when the children were describing their friendship initiation phases or the time when they moved to Finland and went to school. Here, the relationships with children that were in similar situation were found to be important. This can be seen from Brown's answer below.

[After a storytelling exercise where the children were asked to continue a story where two new children met in school.]

Interviewer: Is it easier that way: to come together with another new kid [to a school]?

B: Yes, because when we come together. Like if I was in [name of the place removed] because I had one friend there. And then when we come to this school, and then because, well, we do not know a lot of Finnish,

vielä kavereiksi? H: Niin. Js: Sun pitää pyytää häneltä anteeksi tai leikkii hänen kanssa paljo. Pyytää häneltä anteeksi, se antaa sulle anteeksi, sanoo sulle anteeksi. H: Onko se eri juttu jos sukulaisen kanssa tulee riitaa? Js: Ei. Jos ollaan sukulaisia ei riitele [naurahtaa]. Jos tulee joku paha sinun äitisi sanoo sulle, että mene pyytämään anteeksi "se on sinun sukulaisesi". H: Entäs ystävien kanssa: onko sulle koskaan käyny niin, et joku on ollu aluksi sun ystävä, mut sitte se on lakannukki, et ei oo ollukaan enää sun kaveri? Onko kaikki vielä pysyny sun kavereina? Js: Täällä Suomi[essa] kaikki on kavereita. Ei vielä oo sanonu mulle "en oo sun kaveri" [Sanoo hymyillen, mutta ehkä hieman vaivaantuneena, pompottelee samalla kynää yms.] H: Tiedätsä mistä se vois johtua? Miksi se tuntuu siltä et täällä kaikki pysyy [ystävänä]? Ootsä miettiny sitä? Js: Äää, en tiä [naurahtaa] nyt vielä. Mutta mä. Koska kun menin sinne minä ei tappellu tai tehny niille pahaa tai kiroile, ei. Jos mä kiroilen tai tappelen se heti meni pois.

⁴⁹⁰ Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I; Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 and Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G.

and s/he is like, and s/he is like similar to me, so then we become friends, we help each other. Then we become friends.⁴⁹¹

Nevertheless, it is also worth mentioning here that all of the children spoke Kinyarwanda as their mother tongue and Finnish as a second language fairly well, considering that they had spent just two years in Finland. Many of the children had also started learning English in school. Also, one cannot underestimate the children's exposure to different languages during their journey to Finland. For example, some of the children had learned to understand some French or Swahili.

All in all, being friends and maintaining friendships meant spending a lot of time or playing together. According to Judy Dunn, researchers have used to assume that friendships in early childhood were inevitably transitory and unstable, but this assumption is not supported by evidence gained from longitudinal studies.⁴⁹² Despite the consistent features, changes do, however, occur in the communication of friends across time for example due to differences in cognitive abilities and concrete social experiences, and in circumstances and opportunities for participation in friendships. Furthermore, the rate of these changes varies between individuals. According to Rawlings, friendships persist to the extent that individuals treat each other in mutually fulfilling ways, according to shared definitions of required contact, evaluative standards, and appropriate actions.⁴⁹³ For example, children can vary in the extent to which they express concern and try to help and support their friends.⁴⁹⁴ Kokkonen has also found that refugees' friendships vary in terms of quantity and quality.⁴⁹⁵

In previous studies it has been found that friendships are particularly important in situations where keeping in contact with relatives and family has not been possible.⁴⁹⁶ As it has been stated before, all except one of the

⁴⁹¹ Brown (m) 10 years, 8.8.2012 G. H: Onko se helpompi niin, että tulee [kouluun] yhtäaikaan uutena? B: Niin, koska kun me tullaan yhdessä. Niinku jos mä olin niinku [paikan nimi poistettu] ku mulla oli siellä yks kavereita. Sit ku me tullaan tähä kouluun ja sitte koska niinku me emme osata paljo suomi[ea] ja hän niinku, ja hän niinku on samanlainen ku minä, niin sitten me tulemmme kavereita, me autetaan toisia. Sit me tullaan kavereita.

⁴⁹² Dunn 1993, 59-60.

⁴⁹³ Rawlings 2008b.

⁴⁹⁴ Dunn 1993, 62-70.

⁴⁹⁵ Kokkonen 2010, 76-91.

⁴⁹⁶ Kokkonen 2010, 90.

interviewees said they had more friends in Africa than they currently had in Finland. In addition, two of the nine interviewees mentioned they have seven to ten best friends living in Africa or elsewhere in the world. Here they referred to not only to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but also United States, Australia, Sweden and other countries where their friends had migrated. Previous studies have also shown that refugees living in Finland have interpersonal relationships with people living all around the world.⁴⁹⁷ Kokkonen's study also indicates that refugees are living in realities where long distance relationships and locally based relationships are both constantly negotiated, creating a sense of belonging.⁴⁹⁸

In those interpersonal relationships where the children were still interacting with their friends, or relatives living in other countries, using the phone was the main means of communication. In addition, one of the children described how he uses Skype or sometimes Facebook to keep in contact with his friends living outside Finland⁴⁹⁹. Phone calls seemed to be the most common way of keeping contact with people who live far away, although one of the interviewees noted that it is not easy to keep in contact by phone since "there are just two phones there [in Rwanda/the DRC], and you have to walk to your friend's place to make a call".⁵⁰⁰

On the other hand, one of the children stated that it is easy to keep contact with others who speak the same language⁵⁰¹. Furthermore, four children said that they missed their friends in Rwanda or elsewhere in the world. For example, nine year-old Jasmin explained:

Interviewer: Do you miss them [your friends in Africa]?

J: Yes, but I have gone [to the phone]. Then they, then they say that "I want to hug you in the phone".

Interviewer: Yes. Have you called them?

J: Yes. No, they have called me. I did not even call there/him/her but they just call.

Interviewer: Call you?

J: Yes.

H: Do you want to go and visit them sometime?

⁴⁹⁷ Kokkonen 2010, 21-22.

⁴⁹⁸ Kokkonen 2010, 3.

⁴⁹⁹ Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁵⁰⁰ Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012 G.

⁵⁰¹ Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G.

J: Yes. I want to [do that].⁵⁰²

The children's friendships did not stay the same even when they migrated to Finland. In fact, when I first started the study I did not realize that the children in question belonged to a group of people who were experiencing so many simultaneous changes and challenges. Besides the migration and the normal developmental changes related to puberty, the loss of friends the children experienced did not stop after the migration to Finland but continued throughout migrations between places or changes in schools. For instance, one of the families in question had moved four times in the two years spent in Finland. In addition, all of the children in question had – or were about to experience – a move from preparatory class or preschool to a so called normal primary or secondary school class.

Although these changes might not seem significant, they still had profound effects to the children's relationship formation and support networks. As one of the interviewees noted "I had 100 friends in that other school"⁵⁰³. Another child explained that he had got to know all his friends in preschool, and had to leave at least four of his friends behind whereas just one of his friends went to the same school with him⁵⁰⁴. Previous studies in the field of psychology have, for example, shown that children who lost their friends because the friends moved away showed a decline in the frequency of competent social play with their peers over the subsequent year. Children have been also found to show signs of distress and anxiety in similar situations.⁵⁰⁵ The situation might be even more severe in the case of the refugee children, since they also might have to deal with traumatic experiences, in addition to losses and changes in their relationships. According to previous research, these many simultaneous transitions – such as puberty and migrations and the experience of living under simultaneous different stages – can cause severe problems to immigrant youth. For example, Anne Alitolppa-Niittamo calls the

⁵⁰² Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I. In Finnish: H: Jäikö sulla ikävä niitä [sinun kavereita Afrikassa]? J: Jäi, mut mä oon menny [puhelimeen], sit ne, sit ne sanoo, et ”mä haluun halata sua puhelimessa”. H: Niin. Oletko sinä soittanu sinne? J: Oon. Ei, ne on vaan soittaneet mulle. Mä en oo ees soittanu sille mut ne vaan soittaa. H: Soittaa sulle? J: Niin. H: Haluatko sä joskus käydä näkemässä niitä? J: Niin, haluan.

⁵⁰³ Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I.

⁵⁰⁴ Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G.

⁵⁰⁵ Dunn 1993, 64.

refugee youth by the name ‘intervening generation’: generation under many intervening stages of status, norms, and expectations.⁵⁰⁶

All in all, the relationships the children had with people they regarded as friends were dynamic and variable in nature.⁵⁰⁷ According to Rawlings, working relationships take time to develop and maintain and the time available for friends varies depending on the simultaneous demands of other relationships and commitments – such as school and family.⁵⁰⁸ According to Kokkonen, refugees have usually experienced various challenges in maintaining their interpersonal relationships due to death, lack of possibilities to keep in touch, and loss.⁵⁰⁹ Judging from the findings of this chapter, it seems that immigrant families are facing many challenges in their interpersonal relationships also after the migration. This argument is supported also by research done by Kokkonen and Alitolppa-Niittamo.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Alitolppa-Niittamo 2003, 19, 26-29.

⁵⁰⁷ Kokkonen 2010, 32.

⁵⁰⁸ Rawlings 2008b.

⁵⁰⁹ Kokkonen 2010, 234.

⁵¹⁰ Alitolppa-Niittamo 2003; Kokkonen 2010.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Main Findings and Recommendations

Giving attention to Congolese children's experiences allows us not only to develop new thinking on theorizing childhood, friendship formation and maintenance, as well as history, but also to critically examine the complex practices and ideologies related to the process referred to as 'creation of cultures'. In fact, the main realization deriving from this study is that calling the group of children under consideration here simply "Congolese refugee children" is actually misleading. When referring to Congolese refugee children in this study, I meant those children who were originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that were under living in the camps in Rwanda, and then from 2010 onwards as immigrants in Finland. However, defining these children by categorizing them into groups like "Congolese", "Rwandan", "immigrants", "Africans" or "Finnish" is useless. These children are a generation in the middle of multiple transitions, categorizations, norms, stereotypes, historical influences, globalization and internationalization, and my findings articulate the contribution children – as active citizens – make to the so called cultural reproduction and creation of dynamic identities. In other words, these identities are not necessarily linked to any time or physical place but they are created in interaction with others in interpersonal relationships 'in the present'.

Furthermore, I agree with Scollon and Scollon in that intercultural communication is beset by a major problem since cultures do not talk or meet each other, people do. In this sense all communication is interpersonal communication and can never be intercultural communication. Fortunately, the focus of intercultural communication studies has shifted away from comparisons between cultures or individuals to a focus on the co-constructive aspects of communication, and the way how meanings and

identities are constituted in and through the interaction itself.⁵¹¹ Still, intercultural communication as a field should put more focus on making an even clearer separation from seeing cultures as objects, places, or physical entities within which and by which people live⁵¹².

However, the historical context of the migrations described in this study highlights the fact that these negotiations on culture are influenced by the political events and past experiences of people, as well as the environment and time where they take place. Thus, the meanings that these actors and institutions – such as nation-states – create cannot be taken out of the equation⁵¹³. However, the individual negotiations about culture are still seen to take place between people in interaction with each other.

The complex chain of events in the country today known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) forced the children interviewed for this study to flee from the eastern part of the DRC to the refugee camps in Rwanda, and eventually to move to Finland in 2010. This context behind the migrations, as well as the analysis done on the documents produced by the UNHCR and other international actors, shows that the Congolese lives and histories are highly influenced by global politics, and international actors like the UNHCR. Even defining the group of people that moved to Finland from the camps of Rwanda as ‘Tutsi’ or ‘Banyarwanda’ for example is a highly political question, nested in the history of the region called the Great Lakes in the Central Africa.

According to the UNHCR, the overall and all-encompassing phenomenon that characterized and affected the children’s lives in the Rwandan camps was poverty. There was also a general lack of land, wood, water and other necessities and income generating activities in the densely populated refugee camps. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that refugee children did not live in a safe vacuum in the camps in Rwanda 1996-2012, and the dangers arising from the problematic past of the Great Lakes region were also present in the camps. In other words, the people living in the camps had a lot of interaction with the surrounding environment, and the

⁵¹¹ Holliday et al. 2010, 110.

⁵¹² Holliday et al. 2010, 26.

⁵¹³ Holliday et al. 2010, 20; Jordanova 2000, 199.

general tendency of thinking of refugee camps as closed or protected entities does not apply to the situation in Rwandan refugee camps. In fact, there were no real barriers between the camp and the surrounding environment. This had many positive, but also negative influences in the refugees' lives. For example, the special problems of sexual violence against children and military recruitment of children – characteristic to the crisis in the Great Lakes region – had continued to exist in the Rwandan refugee camps under the UNHCR's control. Thus, it is clear is that the children living in these camps were not living in a protection bubble that would have defended them from further abuse after fleeing from their country of origin. Furthermore, one can predict that these specific issues have and will continue to influence the interpersonal relationships of Congolese people also in the future.

While the main purpose of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees, and its mandate is to coordinate international action to protect refugees, its role in the Rwandan refugee camps housing refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been that of a monitor and of a coordinator. All in all, the UNHCR offered a lot of explanations and solutions when it comes to sexual violence in the documents under examination but could not explain the problem of military recruitment in the camps. In fact, the military recruitment of children in the camps of Rwanda was seen as a taboo by UNHCR. Perhaps soldiering was, in fact, one of the negative “coping strategies” or “income-generating activities” described elsewhere in the documents under consideration here.

While offering multiple and also individual solutions for both of the specific problems issued here, the “cooperation between the UNHCR and its implementing partners”, the “systems approach”, and the “holistic, multi-sectoral approach” were the main solutions offered by the UNHCR to address the problems of child recruitment and sexual violence in the camps. The UNHCR also highlighted the Rwandan government's role in the protection of refugees in the documents in question, and offered poverty, legal issues and its budget cuts among other reasoning, as justifications to the fact that its obligations were not met these and that specific two problems affecting children were still on-going. My interpretation of this was that the UNHCR

was using the listings of violence in the camps to put pressure on both the donors as well as the Rwandan government to give attention to these issues, while at the same time trying to balance with not revealing too much of its own inefficiency in protecting the people.

Although it is obvious that the UNHCR and its partners were working on preventing sexual violence and military recruitment in the camps, the day-to-day actions of the organizations' were not clear in the documents studied here either. For example, the UNHCR could have acknowledged the issues related to sexual violence more strongly in its documents, by not just advocating for change in policy papers and funding appeals but also by publicly analyzing them. The documents in question did not, however, really take this issue in to consideration and I see this as a major weakness in the UNHCR's approach. Another major weakness in the UNHCR's documents was the failure to address the issues related to children born to rape victims. While understanding the sensitivity of the matter, the psychological challenges related to having a child born from rape do not disappear by ignoring the topic either on political or social level.

The most common explanation offered by the UNHCR on why the organization's standards were not met was financial constraints. This is related to the fact that the documents in question were openly aimed to influence and inform its donors and other policy makers, and to advocate for more funding and support to the organization. There was also great variation and changes among the UNHCR's implementing and operational partners throughout the years 2000-2010. This might have looked good in documents meant for fundraising and advocacy purposes, but did not paint a cohesive picture on the UNHCR's actions and coordination of its activities, or on the services provided for the children. The multinational nature of the organization meant that its actions relied on the host governments' and international community's ability and willingness to meet their international obligations. The UNHCR's actions and decisions were highly affected by donor countries' focus areas as well as international politics at the time the documents were published.

The general weakness of the documents produced by the UNHCR, as well as the Amnesty International, the Action for the Rights of Children and the Integrated Regional Information Networks, was that they

rarely told anything about the people who have survived or avoided human rights offences, but they rather focus on the problems related to human right issues. Because of the nature of these documents meant for fundraising and advocacy, they gave a violent and harsh image of the experiences of Congolese refugee children's lives in the Rwandan camps. In other words, the documents and articles in question were highlighting the negative aspects of the Congolese refugees' lives. Although it would be naïve to assume that the interviewees in question were not influenced by the negative aspects of the so called camp life, the experiences of the refugees living in camps were not solely or dominantly negative. For example, most of their memories the children interviewed for this study seemed to have about their friends in Rwanda or Africa were positive. Overall, the study in question shows how the sources that are available for studying the lives of Congolese people are still highly influenced by Westerners, and there is a general lack of first-hand accounts on the refugees' life experiences, and especially those of the children.

The interviews, on the other hand, opened opportunities to understand the children's friendships, and the various issues affecting those relationships. Based on them, I was able to find more information about children's friendships, and better understand what role these interpersonal relationships had in the children's lives. More specifically, I was able to find more information on the children's definitions of their friendships and differences and similarities between people they identified as friends. Looking at the findings of this study, similarity to one another was not the main characteristic defining the friendships of the children in question.

In fact, from an outsider's perspective there was a great variation among the people that the children defined as friends. The participants had many relationships with people of different age, gender or physical characteristics. The term different caused some confusion among the research participants. The past experiences of the children might have made them closer with their siblings but it also seems that they had made the children more social towards the people around them, and willing to choose people that on the surface would look very different as their friends. These findings are in contradiction with earlier research emphasizing that childhood friendships would be characterized by conformity pressures and preferences for similarity

to others in age, sex and other demographic characteristics⁵¹⁴. This would imply that these children's friendships would be more complex than previous studies have shown.

The children in question became friends mostly with people living around them in their neighbourhood, or with people they met in school or through hobbies in Finland. Thus, the environment where the children lived played an important role in their friendship initiation. One's own activity, repetition, and persistence were considered as the main drivers in making friends. Previous studies on adult's experiences have found that refugees have felt that it is difficult to develop relationships with so called native Finnish people.⁵¹⁵ Getting to know native Finns was generally regarded to be difficult also in this study. Two of the interviewees stated that getting friends in general was not easy.

Having a hobby – and especially being enrolled in a sports team – were regarded to be very important by the children, also in terms of getting more friends. Especially getting to know native Finnish people was found particularly difficult if one was not playing in a team, or did not have a hobby. Relationship formation between adult refugees has been also found to usually take place in organized occasions – like work meetings or trainings.⁵¹⁶ Furthermore, the children who were interviewed in groups were also openly discussing their success or failure of getting in the teams. Not getting into a team or not having a hobby was brought up as a problem during the interviews and it was seen as the responsibility of the social services. Thus, not having a hobby club or a sports team can be seen as a limitation to friendship initiation.

The children in question, however, seemed to have various relationships with people from several different backgrounds who they categorized as friends very soon after their migration to Finland. The majority of the friends the children interacted with daily at the time of the interviews were living in the same neighbourhood or very near to them. These included people from the children's own so called intra-ethnic as well as the larger international group of friends, as well as the so called native Finns. This means

⁵¹⁴ See: Rawlings 2008b, and Scott R. & Scott W.A. 1998, 19.

⁵¹⁵ Alitolppa-Niittamo 1994, 38-40; Kokkonen 2010, 81, 133-136.

⁵¹⁶ See: Kokkonen 2010, 81, 133-136.

that the time spent in Finland did not explain the amount of native Finnish friends, as previous research has suggested.⁵¹⁷

Language played a key role in the friendship initiation of the participants. What can be seen from this study is that refugee children's friendships play a key role in learning a new language. On the other hand, knowing a language helps in friendship initiation. Furthermore, the children's interpersonal relationships with one's own intra-ethnic community as well as the larger inter-ethnic network worked as the means or entry points of getting to know new people, and thus provided an input to developing the sense of belonging to a new environment. Hobby teams and football games served as good example of this behaviour in this study where "someone inviting others" ended up in team formation – in more than the sporty sense of the word – between Kinyarwanda speakers or members of the larger international community with various cultural backgrounds. It also seemed that this teaming-up happened in regular basis and was fairly organized, and that the children were active in inviting new people to come along.

Friendships manifested themselves through doing, and especially play. In other words, being friends and maintaining these relationships meant doing something together – like visiting each other, playing football, or hanging out. Some children could find differences in the games they played in Finland and in the camps of Rwanda. The children had gotten used to outdoor games in the camps of Rwanda, and one of the big differences in the life in Finland seemed to be that they now had more time to play from the daily chores of the family that were normal in the camp environment. Something that was common on the children's activities with friends in Rwanda and in Finland was playing football together. Furthermore, it should be noted that this is an activity where one does not necessarily need to have a common language or a lot of financial resources. All in all, many of the things the children did with friends did not seem to cost anything – apart from the sport club fees that needed to be negotiated with the city officials and parents.

There was no real difference on the activities between the boys and girls. The amount of friends and the nature of the activities did not differ

⁵¹⁷ Kim 2001, 121-142.

greatly between boys and girls either. This is also in contrast with previous studies on children's relationships where friendships were seen to be nested in same-sex cliques that exert strong conformity pressures and promote similarity to others⁵¹⁸. Friendships termination was avoided. Fights were generally considered to be horrible. However, conflicts could also be considered as parts of the relationships in the children's responses.

All except one of the interviewees said they had more friends in Africa than they currently had in Finland. Furthermore, two of the nine interviewees mentioned they have seven to ten best friends living in Africa or elsewhere in the world. Here they referred to not only to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) but also the United States, Australia, Sweden and other countries where their friends had migrated. Previous studies have shown that the lost and long distance relationships that refugees have are a fundamental part of refugee's relationship networks.⁵¹⁹ Kokkonen's study also indicates that refugees are living in realities where long distance relationships and locally based relationships are both "constantly negotiated, creating a dialectic process of belonging and transnationalism".⁵²⁰ This is related to the discussion of immigrant children independently creating and maintaining the so called transnational ties to their country of origin. Five of the interviewees wanted to visit their friends in Africa, and one mentioned that he would perhaps rather visit his friends somewhere else. One of the children did not want to visit old friends at all, and another one was not sure if he wanted to go to Africa. Thus although these relationships seemed important to the children in question, they were also regarded to be challenging and sometimes difficult to maintain. Some referred to using modern technologies (such as Facebook and Skype) to keep in contact with their friends living elsewhere in Finland or abroad, but using the phone was the main means of communication in the long-distance relationships, especially between relatives and friends who still lived in Africa.

Although most of the children seemed to keep in contact with their relatives and friends overseas, it should be, however, kept in mind that all of

⁵¹⁸ Rawlings 2008b.

⁵¹⁹ Kokkonen 2010, 3; 21-22, 111-120, 187-189.

⁵²⁰ Kokkonen 2010, 3.

the children in question had lost many of their relationships in the past. However, in the case of the interviewees, the loss of friends did not stop in Finland but continued throughout the children's lives, especially if the children were moving from school to school or from place to place. In other words, the children's friendships did not stay the same even when they migrated to Finland and the children in question belong to a group of people who are facing many simultaneous changes and challenges.⁵²¹

The children's memories of their lost relationships differed. Whereas the younger were having difficulties in having clear memories and explaining their past relationships, the older children had developed specific memories of certain events in their past. The memories of the older children were not only restricted to relationships. All of the children of this study were interested in hearing stories about their country of origin – or Africa in general – from their parents. Here, memoirs can be seen to make for a counterweight to the so called official stories, by taking account of first-hand reports of witnesses and actors.

All in all, the friendships of these particular children had an important meaning to them, and the study shows that friendships supported children's adaptation to transitions and made getting used to new things easier. Furthermore, also according to previous studies, social engagement, cooperation, and conflict management, and expressed emotions are greater among friends than they are among non-friends. In addition, self-awareness and self-esteem as well as "knowledge about others and the world" have been said to be enhanced in friendships. The children's friendships serve as both emotional and cognitive resources and these relationships are likely to be forerunners of subsequent ones, or even a "foundation for egalitarian relationships in adulthood".⁵²² Especially if one looks at adaptation to a new situation from a communications' point of view, where interaction with others is seen as the place where the adjustment or developing the 'sense of belonging' happens, these voluntary supportive peer relationships are crucially important.

⁵²¹ Alitolppa-Niittamo 2003, 19, 26-29.

⁵²² Bukowski et al. 1996, 5; Rawlings 2008b.

Based on these research findings, there are a few recommendations and comments that I would like to make. First of all, future research should give more attention to the every-day experiences of refugees living in the camps of Rwanda, and further research on war affected children should pay particular attention to the role of attachment relationships and social support available in peer relationships and extended social networks. Furthermore, the active role and agency taken by the children and their families should not be neglected in these studies, and refugees should not be merely regarded as people that live on the mercy of others, or in a protection bubble provided by Western donors.

Secondly, there is still a general lack of sources on African people's experiences – at least in English – and researchers should focus on finding personal accounts of people to compliment the official documents that are often produced by Westerners. Thirdly, more attention should be given to the lost and long distance relationships, and the other effects of war, violence and poverty to children's interpersonal relationships networks. Especially the children born to rape victims and the effects of sexual violence and military recruitment of children would serve more attention from researchers, as well as the general public. Moreover, the international community should recognize the gender-based crimes or fears as one of the acceptable reasons for flight qualifying women for asylum.

More attention should be also given to the migration journeys and post-migration experiences, emphasizing the importance of considering the refugee's whole experience so far, rather than just the pre- and post-migration events. This includes recognizing the everyday stressors – including socioeconomic disadvantages like not getting into hobby clubs – and the parental worries about financial problems that have effects on children. In other words, for example the place of residence might have had a serious impact to the relationships that the children develop for example in Finland, and this would deserve more attention from communication scholars. Future studies could, for example, examine if there really are differences in the level of Finnish language skills and the friendship patterns between refugee children who are practicing a sport regularly in a team, and those who are not.

Also, the extent to which information about the past and current events is shared between refugee children and their parents would need to be studied

in detail. In addition, in the future, it would be interesting to study the long-term impacts of the refugee children's past experiences to the children's interpersonal relationship formation.

4.2 Limitations and Discussion

I feel that the methodology I chose for the interviews fitted to the particularity of the topic and the characters of the group being studied, and I succeeded in getting the children actively involved in the study as capable participants designing the study together with me. However, based on the entries on my research diary, there were two major challenges that I encountered during the interview process. The first was the limitations imposed by the choice of language for the interviews. I chose to conduct all the interviews in Finnish, and not to use translators mainly because there was just one translator in Finland who spoke the same mother tongue as the children in question with very limited possibilities to assist in this type of research due to financial reasons. Moreover, until very recently Congolese families had used Swahili⁵²³ even with officials which none of the children in question spoke fluently or even fairly understood because there were no official Kinyarwanda or Kinyamurenge speaking translator available in Finland. Furthermore, as all of the children had spent one or two years in preparatory class or in preschool learning Finnish, I did not see the language question as an issue that should prevent me from conducting the study. In fact, all of the children were expected to have the ability to study in Finnish at the time of the interviews. However, it is generally questionable whether the current school system allows the children to learn the language well enough to be able to follow teaching in Finnish after just one or two years spent in a preparatory class possibly without

⁵²³ Swahili is a part of the Bantu language subgroup of the Niger-Congo family of languages. Generally referred to as the 'lingua franca' used in much of East Africa, it is one of the most widely understood languages in Africa, and official language in Tanzania, and Kenya. Many speak Swahili as their second language after their own tribal language also in the DRC and Uganda.

any previous school experience. Despite all this, the children had nevertheless used Finnish in and outside the school environment and with friends and officials for the past two years.

I also tried to solve the challenges related to using Finnish in the interviews by explain the parts that I felt the children might have difficulties in understanding as simply as possible and marked the questions or conversations about the difficulties to the transcribed interviews. Furthermore, the children's drawings supplemented the conversation from this perspective as well. Also, as understanding and interacting with others has to do with much more than words, when it was possible I used gestures, facial expressions, and other means of non-verbal communication to explain my ideas.

However, when it comes to the subject of the study – the friendships of these children – one should not underestimate the language difficulties of the participants in question. Pioneers of the history of Africa like Jan Vansina and Jean-Pierre Chrétien have also underlined the importance of the language in African studies.⁵²⁴ In fact, the children brought up the difficulties they had with the Finnish language for example in the discussions about friendship initiation and memories of migrating to Finland. The responses of the children could have been different if the language of the interviews would have been Kinyarwanda. On other hand, using an interpreter might have also influenced the interview situation by making it too formal. Furthermore, I had to translate the transcripts of the children's interviews in English. This might have caused some differences in meanings but I tried to avoid this, also by providing the original transcripts of the quotes used in the text in the footnotes.

The second major challenge I encountered when designing and conducting the interviews was related to the issue of being able to distance myself from the officials in the eyes of the participants. Like I mentioned before, I described my role as a researcher to the parents and the children, but I could not know for certain if they fully understood that I was not working for the social services or other officials. On the other hand, as the parents of the children did not for example limit or disrupt the interviews, it seemed that they trusted me and understood my role.

⁵²⁴ See: Vansina 1985 and Chrétien 2006.

I also started questioning whether the fact that I had met all of the families in question previously through my work experience together with the officials was actually working against building the trust between me and the participants rather than creating it. Moreover, I wondered whether I could really promise that nothing that the children said could be used against them or to harm them, as I understood that many of the people reading the study could also be officials in charge of immigration issues working closely with the families in question. This is also why I chose to leave out the transcribed interviews completely from the appendixes and erase any information on the children's relationships and life experiences that I felt that could be harmful or dangerous and have negative effects on their lives. Furthermore, there were some issues that the children did not want to talk about, or some that I had to leave out from the paper because of issues related to anonymity. These issues were mostly related to family relations, official matters or past experiences.

The questions related to ethics are more complicated when it comes to refugees and children as the target of the study. I concluded that as refugees, the children still belong to a group of people that requires special protection. Here I was thinking for example the fact that refugees are people whose own state has failed to protect them.

The general weakness of the documents produced by the UNHCR, as well as the Amnesty International, the Action for the Rights of Children and the Integrated Regional Information Networks, was that they rarely told anything about the people who have survived or avoided human rights offences, but they rather focus on the problems related to human right issues. In addition, these sources did not offer a lot of information about the journey of the children in question, their day-to-day experiences, or the history of the families in question. Furthermore, they were highly influenced by Western organizations' and donors' priorities.

In studying these documents, I had to acknowledge that my own views on the issues presented in the documents could be also quite Eurocentric, or Finland-centered, because of the place where I was born and raised. Thus, one might ask, could I even begin to understand the reasons and events that led these people to Finland? My somewhat ambitious answer is yes. In fact, I believe all people in Finland have some understanding on what conflicts and

war can do to families and children. My closest own personal experience of the issue of forced migration being that all my relatives from my father's side were forced to leave their homes and resettle in Finland during the Second World War as part of the population of the Karelia region that was lost to Soviet Union during the war. This personal background is not to say that this would ultimately make me better in understanding the history of the children in question but just meant to introduce my personal take to the issue and to show that forced migrations are a world-wide phenomenon. This is also to say that the issues that affected the 'life path' of the children in question are not that distant, strange, or different to us so called Westerners, and by taking a critical look to ourselves and our own preconceptions, values, and stereotypes we can strive to better understand the world around us, as according to the theoretical foundations described in the introduction.

Nevertheless, in the future, it would be interesting to hear the refugee children's comments on the issues presented in the analysis done in this study. Furthermore, I would like to find more information on the positive life experiences of the refugees that were living in the camps in Rwanda. Moreover, what comes to the UNHCR's documents, it would be interesting to have access to the more internal documents of the UNHCR's field operations, as well as to have more information about its partners' activities in Rwanda as well as get more information on the writers of the documents in question. The documents studied here contained country information, policy documents and procedural guidelines. The individual case files consisting of information concerning individual refugees and asylum seekers, for example, are not open for research. Individual case files are also created only for a small number of the millions of people of concern to the UNHCR.⁵²⁵

What comes to the two more specific issues – sexual violence against children and the military recruitment of children in the camps in Rwanda – the information about the level, impact and more in-depth examination of these issue were also lacking from the documents in produced by the UNHCR. Furthermore, in the future, I would like to see the Congolese generation studied here writing their own history. The whole history of the Great Lakes region,

⁵²⁵ UNHCR 2012f.

especially from 1990 onwards, still seems to be a blur for the so called Western world, and it is crucially important to make people aware of the stories of these people who are often forgotten by the so called international community.

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I PRIMARY SOURCES

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II INTERVIEW DATA

Interviews with the Congolese Refugee Children in Finland, 13 June – 8 August 2012

Annika (f) 12 years, 13.6.2012 I

Jasmin (f) 9 years, 13.6.2012 I

Nene (f) 9 years, 27.6.2012 G

James (m) 13 years, 27 6.2012 G

Pierre (m) 16 years, 27.6.2012

Brown (m) 10 years, 8.8.2012 G

Jake (m) 12 years, 8.8.2012 G

Jason (m) 16 years, 8.8.2012 G

Mufarme (m) 7 years, 8.8.2012 G

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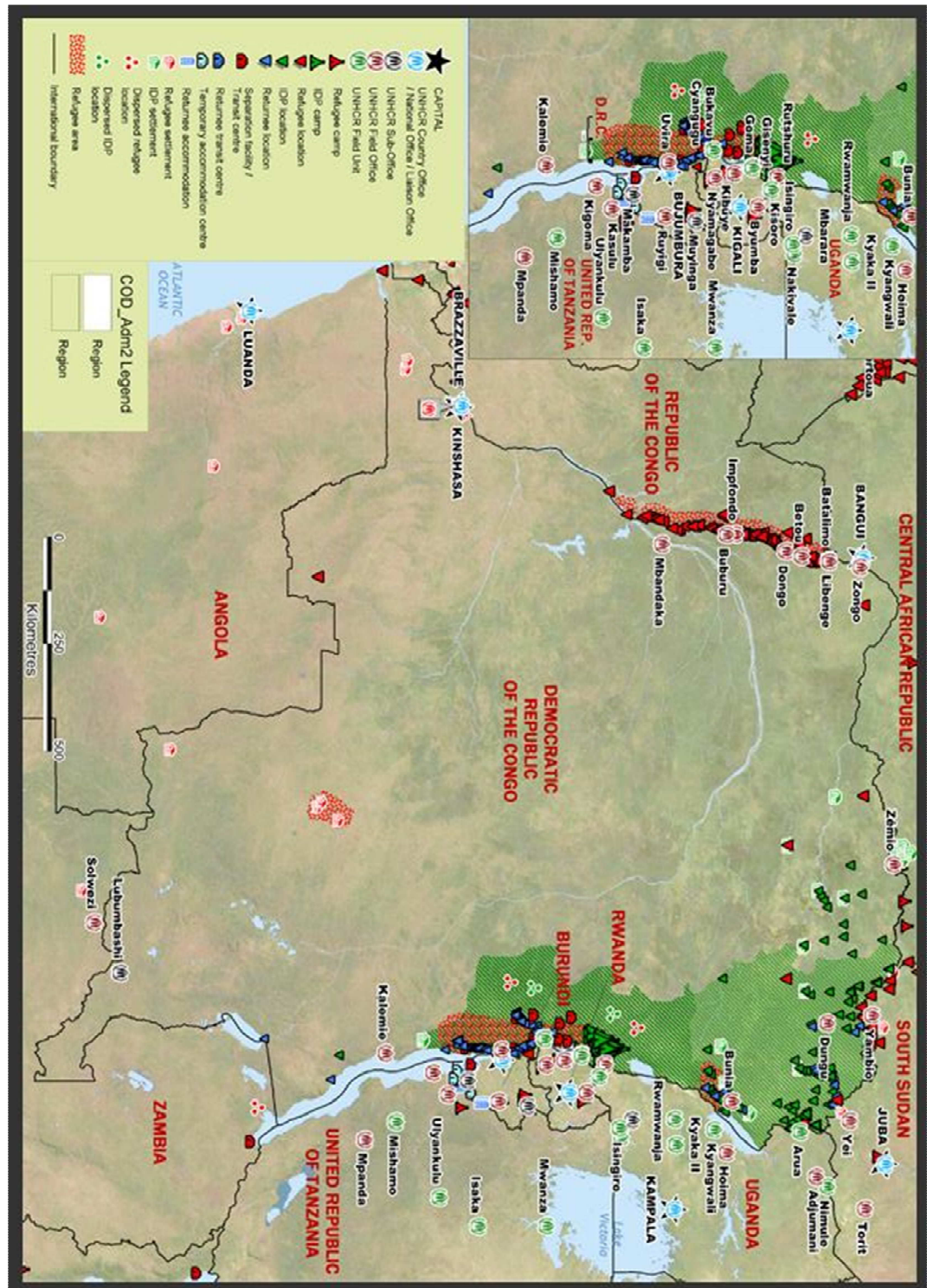
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III ANNEXES

Annex 1: Map of Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2013

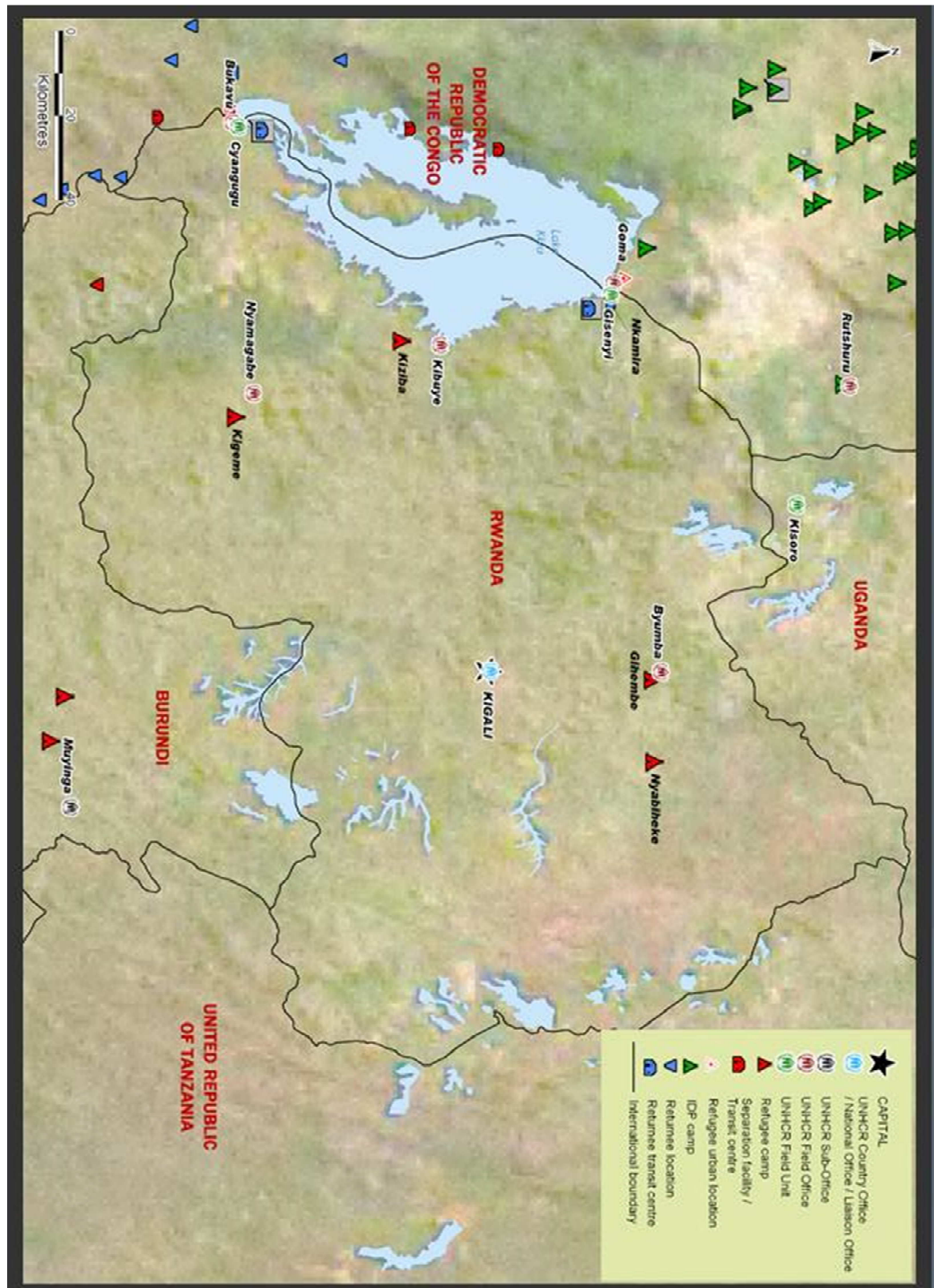
Source: UNHCR web page, Country operations profile, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Retrieved from:

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Annex 2: Map of Rwanda, 2013

Source: UNHCR web page, Country operations profile, Rwanda. Retrieved from: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e45c576&submit=GO> in 22.11.2013.



Annex 3: Framework for the Interviews

Exercise 1 (storytelling & drawing): Draw a line/picture about your life including your friends and the most important events that have affected your relationships. You can also draw places where you usually go with friends/where they are/where you have met them. (Will be then used as a base for the conversation during the interview.)

Exercise 2 Continue the story (storytelling):

Examples:

- a) It is a summer day and children are playing football in the field. David has found a new friend called Patrick. Imagine what has happened / continue the story.
- b) It is another summer day and kids are swimming in the lake. Patrick is not speaking to David and is mad at him. Imagine what has happened / continue the story.
- c) Liisa is on the yard of her new school. There she sees Siiri. Imagine what has happened / continue the story.

Questions for the Interview:

Warm-up questions/Background information

- Who belongs to your family? Do you have relatives close by?
- Who are the most important adults in your life besides your family?
- Have your parents told you about family's history? What have they told? Are you interested in hearing about it? (Africa/Rwanda/DRC)
- What languages do you speak?

Friendships

- How do you say friend in the languages you speak? Are there differences in the terms between the languages OR between words 'friend' and 'mate'? (In Finnish 'ystävä' and 'kaveri')
- What does it mean to 'be a friend'?
- How many friends do you have?
- Who is (/was) your best friend? What are good friends like?
- What do (did) you like to do together?
- Where do you see your friends? Where do your friends live?
- Are your siblings your friends?
- How do you get friends? What advice would you give to someone who is looking for a friend?
- Are your friends similar or different to you?
- Are your friends young/old, girls/boys?
- What are your hobbies/what are you interested in? Have you got friends there?
- What is nice/difficult about friendships?
- What is the difference between friends here and friends in Rwanda?
- Do you have friends in Africa/Rwanda/DRC or elsewhere in the world? How many? How do you keep in contact with them? Do you want to visit them?
- In Africa/Rwanda/DRC: What did you like to do there (with your friends)?
- What is different here? (Compared to Africa/Rwanda/DRC)
- Do you fight/argue with your friends? What do you argue about?
- What do you do to solve the fight/argument?
- Have any of your friendships changed/terminated?

