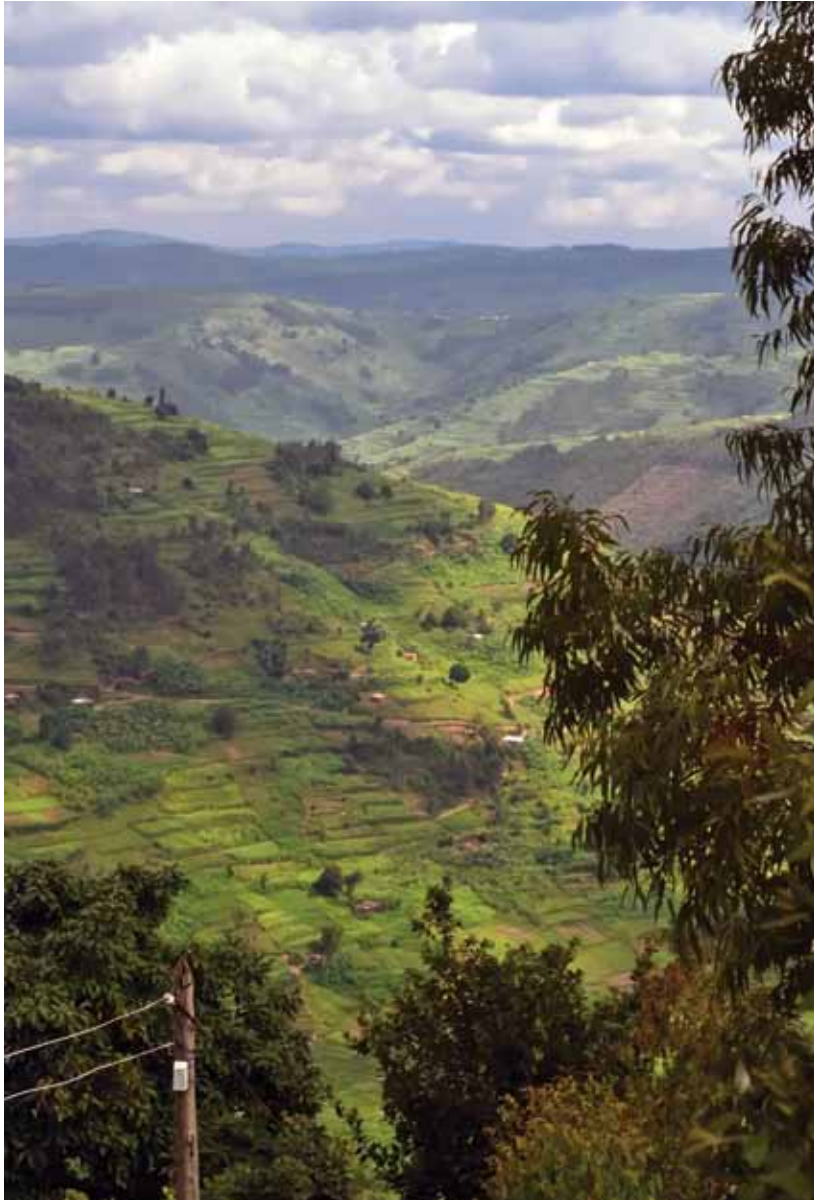


Life in refuge: across Rwanda's camps and Uganda's settlements

By Patrycja Stys

This is the view from the entrance to Rwanda's Gihembe Refugee Camp. Getting here, like accessing any other camp in Rwanda or settlement in Uganda, entails a long journey over dirt roads and winding creeks. The seeming remoteness of these sites of refuge, however, is an illusion. They are connected by invisible links of mobile networks, as well as their residents' physical mobility – be it to visit relatives or former neighbours, celebrate births and marriages or mourn deaths, engage in commerce or oversee lands and properties left in home countries. The spaces between are spectacularly vast, and just as incredibly overcome. ©Patrycja Stys





The camps themselves are akin to sprawling city-states, located far from host states' own bustling towns. Like Rwanda's Kiziba Camp, pictured here, they spill down hilltops in streams of buildings housing healthcare centres, schools, businesses, and people. They have their own boundaries, bordered with logs or rope. Security guards check your papers, ensuring you have acquired the proper documents to be granted access. ©Patrycja Stys



Once inside, it takes a few days to formulate a mental map of these city-states' subdivisions, the quarters or districts into which they are partitioned. Broad streets crisscross narrow alleyways, running between buildings whose varied construction of round kitchens, square rooms, or vaulted hallways – each painted in all-coloured solids or elaborate patterns – betrays the diverse nationalities and regionalities of their occupants. This is one such road, in Nakivale refugee settlement (Old Congo Area, to be precise) in Uganda.

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Within these subdivisions of refugee city-states, men and women live, struggle, pursue education and business, and care for their children. They do not merely wait for peace to come to their home countries, to return or be resettled; they build their futures with the scarcest of materials, surpassing the most trying of circumstances. This is Francine. She resides in Kyaka II, Uganda, and works as a seamstress in her own shop. Sophie, her daughter, likes to assist her mother after school. ©Patrycja Stys



Françoise also lives in Uganda, in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. He and his friends raised money working in others' fields, making bricks, and doing odd jobs in order to purchase a motorcycle, then others. Together, they run a motorcycle taxi service that carries passengers between the city-states' districts, to market, to see the doctor, or visit someone who lives further away. Their colleagues run a similar bicycle service, and opened a repair shop where they mend punctured tires and replace rusted chains. ©Patrycja Stys

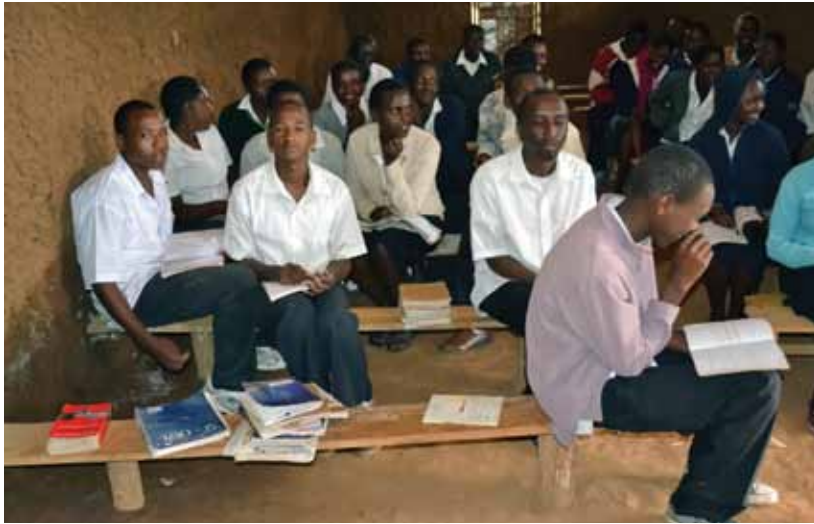


Different quarters and districts – across Uganda's settlements and Rwanda's camps – hold weekly markets. Vibrantly coloured and patterned fabrics are interwoven with stands of fruits and vegetables over which customers and merchants haggle. Goods on offer are produced by the city-states' residents, or carried by truck or foot from the nearest towns. What is unavailable locally is imported by barter or bargain. The trade networks that make these exchanges possible and profitable belie the seeming isolation of these interconnected city-states. This is a market in Kiziba Camp, Rwanda.

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Aline, following her trip to the market, waits her turn outside a salon in Kyangwali, Uganda. 'My daughter insists on going first. So now I'm out here, talking to you, with my hair a mess.' ©Patrycja Stys



When UNHCR funding ran out for secondary school scholarships in Gihembe Camp, Rwanda, students themselves founded and funded the Hope School. They raised money by making bricks, cleaning, washing clothing, and working in others' fields. They recruited teachers from inside the camp. The project drew the attention of aid agencies, which contributed books and scholastic materials. Today, children from Nyabiheke and Kiziba make the long voyage to participate in the Hope School, which runs competitions to send its brightest students to university. ©Patrycja Stys



School-age children take the same journeys between Rwanda's camps to participate in football championships in Kiziba, which has the largest stadium and club. Here, they are coached by Antha Banza, who used to work at the Rwanda Film Institute in Kigali before moving to the camp with his daughters. His teams encompass all age groups, boys and girls alike. ©Patrycja Stys



This is James. He was born in Kiziba, and had stopped crying shortly before this photograph was taken. He had recently broken his arm and had just had a cast put on it at the health centre. 'It's a good thing you had that camera with you. He's more interested in playing with it now than in the pain in his arm. But don't believe him when he tells you he broke it during football. He fell over his feet on his way to the pitch,' his mother told me. James was far from pleased by her disclosure. ©Patrycja Stys



Meet Frankie. His mother and I were discussing the community organisations and clubs in which she participated in Nyabiheke Camp, Rwanda. When I asked about her children, Constance said Frankie had started karate, but quit shortly thereafter. 'They hit me!' Frankie retorted. The photograph captures his mother's reaction. ©Patrycja Stys



Across these spaces and places of refuge, grandparents tell grandchildren tales they ought to know, of their origins and their countries in times before the conflict that precipitated their families' flight. This elder is a Banyamulenge Community Leader in Kiziba Camp, Rwanda. He recounts memories of the Kingdom of Vyura in Southeastern Congo, whose three kings fled to three different camps, taking their communities with them. Their descendants continue to meet regularly, despite the distances that separate them. They teach youth about their culture and the life and lives long-lost, reviving their traditions in exile – along with so many other communities. ©Patrycja Stys



Whilst remembering the past, people embrace the future. Women, many for the first time in exile, have taken positions of leadership in camp governance. In addition to teaching their children of the lands and customs from which they originated, they instruct them in gender equality and human rights. Amongst themselves, they debate representation and service provision, programmes to counter and address domestic abuse, and mechanisms to encourage young girls to pursue higher education. This is Jeanette Buregiyeya, Women's Representative in Kyaka II, Uganda.

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