

# On Broker Exploitation and Violence: From *Madalali* to Cartel Bosses in the Food Aid Resale Economy of Tanzanian Refugee Camps

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## ABSTRACT

It is a poorly kept humanitarian secret that wherever food aid is given, it is also sold, as recipients seek to vary their diets to include culturally desired food, start businesses, or deal with economic shocks. This holds true in Nyarugusu refugee camp in Tanzania, the site of this research. While this article addresses the supply side of the World Food Programme resale system, its main focus is the demand side, providing one of the first in-depth studies on what happens *after* the sale. Engaging with the political and development anthropology literature on brokers, the author introduces the intermediaries who make up this system, including low-level *madalali* brokers and refugee and Tanzanian ‘bosses’. There is agreement within brokerage research of the moral ‘ambiguity’ or ‘ambivalence’ of these figures, a nebulous quality that is heightened by the seemingly innumerable different types of brokers. This article contends that a Marxian conceptualization of social class, beyond Bourdieu’s widely applied social capital theory, is productive in understanding the threat of violence that a small cartel of bosses has set up in collusion with Tanzanian police to maintain the exploitative food aid resale pyramid. Members of this elite class are, in turn, ‘products and producers’ of a structurally violent encampment and aid system.

## INTRODUCTION

In August 2017, at a food distribution centre in Nyarugusu refugee camp in north-western Tanzania, I saw a World Food Programme (WFP) field manager step out of a WFP-branded car, yell and shake his finger at three

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I would like first to thank my research assistants; unfortunately, I cannot thank them by name because of government crackdowns on researchers and the camp space in general (for more on this, see Boeyink and Falisse, 2021). I would also like to thank the camp resident interlocutors who openly shared their knowledge of this secretive and unjust food aid system. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers and to colleague Kirsten Campbell; their detailed and valuable insights significantly shifted and improved the arguments of the paper. Thank you to the Leverhulme Trust Perfect Storm Scholarship for funding this research.

Burundian refugee women trading food rations. The women explained that the officer said, ‘it is illegal to buy and sell aid’, and if continued, ‘they would take the food away and put them in jail’. A lower-ranking WFP officer later confirmed that it was illegal and it was the responsibility of Tanzanian police to control it, but conceded that ‘it is hard to stop people’.

Four years later, in 2021, I was told a story about a Tanzanian from a neighbouring village who entered the camp seeking brokers, known in Swahili as *madalali*,<sup>1</sup> to whom he could advance cash to collect food aid to resell outside the camp. This would-be entrant to the resale economy, who was offering to buy at significantly higher prices, was brought to the attention of the *dalali*’s financier, a prominent refugee trader known locally as a ‘boss’. Quickly the police arrived and arrested the Tanzanian man on the charge of illegally buying and selling food rations.<sup>2</sup>

Building on the two stories above, this article offers a close look at the system of food ration resale, long known to be part and parcel of humanitarian aid.<sup>3</sup> In Nyarugusu, every resident I asked has sold rations at some time, and most do it regularly. While I briefly explain the supply side motivations for selling food aid, the main focus of the article is the demand side of buyer and seller brokers who redistribute this food across East Africa. The participation of brokers in exploitation reproduces humanitarian violence inseparable from encampment (Branch, 2009). This state violence is instrumentalized by elite traders who use the police as a cudgel to maintain the highly stratified food aid resale pyramid, which both reflects and evolves from the agrarian markets surrounding the camps. This bolsters and enriches the police who are ‘digging aid’ and functioning as military-style occupiers (Brankamp, 2019).

I begin with a brief background on the strict and violent encampment milieu in Tanzania, which raises methodological and ethical sensitivities around precarious ‘invisible’ livelihoods. Next, I preview the anthropology literature on brokerage, arguing that it is a nebulous concept due to the seemingly boundless forms of brokerage in market societies. I argue that conceptualizations of brokerage benefit from a pairing with Marxian class theory to account for exploitation and violence which sustain elite accumulation. The article goes on to describe the rationales of sellers on the supply side of the

1. *Madalali* is the plural form, *dalali* is singular.

2. Interview, Burundian dalali, Nyarugusu camp, 10 November 2021.

3. When asked their opinions of WFP and of the NGO subcontracted to distribute food aid, the most common response from my interlocutors in the camp is that they consider them ‘thieves’ or ‘burglars’ who steal their aid. Many people reported that their ration measures were significantly below what was recorded on the receipts. One informant claimed that their neighbour was a worker for the NGO and that he always had large WFP-branded sacks of food at his home. While I am unable to substantiate these claims, it is not uncommon in displacement settings to find collusion between authorities, implementing partners and WFP to divert and profit from aid (Jaspars et al., 2020; Pottier, 1996). This is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

system before examining the logistics and individual stories of madalali and bosses across the socio-economic spectrum. Close scrutiny of these resale networks, which is mostly absent from humanitarian and forced migration literature, reveals the system of police bribes that enables and stratifies the unequal pyramid structure. The final section synthesizes the study with concluding thoughts on the possibilities of class consciousness and resistance in Tanzanian camps.

## **Background**

Victor<sup>4</sup> was the first person who alerted me to the scale of the resale economy early in my research in 2017. In 2015, he fled to Tanzania with nearly 200,000 other Burundians to escape the political crisis that resulted in widescale protests, an attempted coup and state-sponsored repression when Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza overstayed his two-term limit established after the Burundian civil war. Victor, like most others, had already lived as a refugee in Tanzania during the war but struggled to reintegrate upon returning to Burundi without safe access to land or livelihoods (Falisse and Niyonkuru, 2015; Purdeková, 2017; Schwartz, 2019). Dalia is a Congolese woman who fled South Kivu province in 1996 due to violence during the First Congolese War. Unlike Victor, she is wealthy enough to own a car that she keeps stored outside the camp, but her income and influence are dwarfed by elite refugee ‘bosses’ such as Baraka and Paul, introduced below. Congolese refugees make up just over half of Nyarugusu’s population of nearly 140,000 people and have built a strong economy as a result of living in the camp for more than 20 years. Most Burundians arrived with very little in Nyarugusu and two other nearby camps, Nduta and Mtendeli, and had to rebuild their livelihoods from scratch (Boeyink, 2020).

Despite the impressive scale of the camp economy, since the 1990s, Tanzania has had one of the most restrictive refugee policies in the world, which requires refugees to live in camps without rights to movement or employment outside the camp. The policy of encampment was enacted because of the convergence of a severe reduction in state capacity resulting from economic crisis and Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and the massive displacements of hundreds of thousands of Burundians, Rwandans and Congolese to Tanzania.<sup>5</sup> Since the 2015 election of President John Magufuli, assaults on refugee livelihoods have accompanied constant directives for Burundian refugees to leave. Key moments include the sudden shutdown of a popular and effective cash transfer programme in August 2017, which

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4. All names in this article are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the informants.

5. For more extensive histories of Tanzanian refugee and migration policies since colonialism, see Brankamp and Daley (2020); Chaulia (2003).

was replaced by the current food aid system (Boeyink, 2019); the closure of vital camp wholesale and retail markets shared by surrounding Tanzanian communities; and the cancellation of a UN-led transition away from encampment policy (Rudolf, 2019). The past two years (2020 and 2021) have brought a harrowing escalation of terror with even small-scale businesses inside the camp being destroyed by the police, accompanied by alarming reports of Burundian refugees being kidnapped, ransomed, starved and tortured in police stations, and illegally repatriated and imprisoned through cooperation between Tanzanian and Burundian security and intelligence officers (Boeyink and Falisse, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

In addition to Victor and Dalia, this article also introduces archetypal actors in the system such as Burundian madalali, Didier and Pascal, two non-camp residents who cross the borderland to buy and sell aid; Baraka and Paul, whose wealth and power inside the food aid resale cartel make them ‘famous’ across the camp; Félicien, a Burundian teacher who defies the cartel’s control of trade at his own risk under the cover of night; and Julia and Ernest, two Tanzanian bosses who sit securely at the top of the pyramid.

### **Methodology and Ethical Considerations**

During an initial seven months of fieldwork beginning in July 2017, I met Dalia, Victor and Félicien through research based on the financial diaries methodology inspired by the book, *Portfolios of the Poor* (Collins et al., 2011). My research assistants (RAs), who were camp residents, recruited 77 Congolese and Burundian households at cash distribution sites, at randomized households sampled from walking different zones, and at the facilities housing newly arrived refugees. The selection is admittedly somewhat biased, particularly among Congolese, as the Bembe ethnicity (the same as the lead RA) was overrepresented, leaving Banyamulenge Congolese notably absent. While neither entirely random nor statistically representative of the camp, the sample covered a wide range of wealth and income representing socio-economic strata similar to Omata’s (2017) research on stratification in Buduburam camp in Ghana. My RAs and I met with the households every two weeks to record their sources of income, expenses, debts and movements over the course of a year. Beyond gathering financial data, these repeat meetings helped us build strong relationships and rapport, which allowed for open conversations about our interlocutors’ displacement histories, their perspectives on events in the camp, and sensitive topics such as illicit livelihood activities. Victor and Dalia introduced us to other madalali and bosses who described their roles in the system.

From 2017 onwards, we interviewed refugees, Tanzanian host community members, humanitarian workers and Tanzanian officials. In 2018, I

conducted two UN consultancies researching the socio-economic conditions and agricultural systems in the three camps (Nyarugusu, Nduta and Mten-deli) and host communities. Between August and October 2019, the RAs interviewed nine refugee and Tanzanian bosses about their roles and histories in the trade networks, using snowball sampling. In November–December 2020, we surveyed 35 of the financial diary households about their ration resale practices and their perceptions of madalali, bosses and the food aid system as a whole. In total the fieldwork included more than 400 interviews, surveys and focus group discussions with refugees, Tanzanian hosts and humanitarian actors, in which aid and livelihoods were often topics of discussion, feeding into this research.

The nature of the research requires significant ethical sensitivities because I am exposing a clandestine economy and reporting substantial levels of bribery and exploitation. In an important article — part of a special issue — in the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Polzer and Hammond sound a note of caution about researching ‘invisible displacements’: ‘academics who lift this veil in the name of illuminating “creative livelihood strategies” or “flexible identities” may inadvertently be alerting powerful states, the UN, or NGOs to the ways in which their rules are circumvented, and thereby reduce the space for life-saving creativity and flexibility in remaining invisible’ (Polzer and Hammond, 2008: 418). As the authors point out, ‘invisibility is ... fundamentally relational; its impacts depend on the power relations and interests connecting those who see and those who are to be seen (or not)’ (ibid.: 417). In a more recent edited volume with a similar focus, *Invisibility in African Displacements* (Bjarnesen and Turner, 2020), Loren Landau recognizes the ethical dilemma of people’s research being used against their informants. However, he argues:

Such (in)visibilization weakens scholarship, ironically excluding from the frame the displaced in their full humanity less [*sic*] their faults be used against them. This book moves beyond such self-silencing. Its authors situate visibility within an overt recognition of the politics surrounding displacement and knowledge produced about it. This means at once acknowledging the legal frameworks and their impact on the construction of socio-political realities, without reifying them or allowing them to structure the narrative. It explicitly recognizes that the social categories produced by laws and policies are potentially oppressive, but also offer opportunities. (Landau, 2020: 254)

Taking up this argument, I aim to analyse and critique the exploitative and violent politics of encampment and food aid. As I contend throughout this article, those with the most power — the bosses and the police protecting their cartel — are gaining the most from the system. Their actions cause people who are unprotected by the cartel — such as Félicien, whose story we will come to later — to dangerously invisibilize themselves outside of the camp to earn a profit. This article is uncovering a structurally violent food system, which causes malnutrition and exacerbates poverty through the institutional violence wrought by the criminalization and delegitimization of

food aid resale. And last, but by no means least, my RAs and interlocutors were insistent that I should tell of the unjust system.

### ON (REFUGEE) BROKERAGE

‘The study of these “brokers” will prove increasingly rewarding, as anthropologists shift their attention from the internal organization of communities to the manner of their integration into larger systems. For they stand guard over the crucial junctures or synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole’ (Wolf, 1956: 1075). This quote by Eric Wolf comes from the heyday of brokerage research in political anthropology, the 1950s and 1960s. More than 50 years later, Deborah James announced ‘the return of the broker’, after Marxian structural critiques of global inequality from the 1970s onward had replaced the focus of Wolf and others on brokers. James ultimately settles on a dialectic position between a narrow focus on the individual level of the broker and a recognition that ‘the broker creates and perpetuates such conditions, and indeed embodies the contradictions which ensue’ (James, 2011: 336). I fully support her call to study brokers, but add a modification. While brokers are indeed shaped by and shapers of a given society, the sheer ubiquity and seemingly infinite typologies of brokers in the world broadly, and in refugee situations particularly, requires a recalibration of brokerage research. I argue that a Marxian approach can aid in adding specificity to widely varying levels of power amongst brokers.

The earliest work on brokerage focused on colonial contexts where taxation, labour and resources were extracted from indigenous populations. Through indirect rule, chiefs acted and benefited as interfaces between the colonialists and indigenous populations. The common attribute for all types of brokers is the sense of ‘moral ambiguity’ (James, 2011: 319) or ‘ambivalence’ (Bierschenk et al., 2002) between their communities and colonial powers. According to Bierschenk et al. (2002), the first account of brokerage in political anthropology was by Gluckman et al. (1949), who analysed the village chief mediating between kinship and the colonial state. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) noted the continuity of indirect rule or what he calls the ‘bifurcated state’ long after colonialism, where customary leaders or ‘decentralized despots’ retain their power after independence.

Following formal decolonization, anthropologists widened the scope beyond chiefs and other political mediators. Bierschenk et al. (2002) note that strong central states were retreating due to economic crises in the 1970s and SAPs in the 1980s and 1990s. This reduced the state’s ability to extend power and administration. Aid previously distributed to the state now passed through intermediary NGOs and opened the space for ‘development brokers’ who ‘can be found wherever decentralised aid is present’ (Bierschenk et al., 2002: 8). James’s article focuses on the rapid political and societal

transformation following apartheid in South Africa, which has spawned new types of brokers or ‘hustlers’ who creatively channel resources to and from poor and disenfranchised people through bureaucratically complex land reform and redistribution programmes (James, 2011: 319).

With the augmented focus on brokerage beyond the rural chief, the focus has expanded for what may be considered a development or humanitarian broker. In the globalized development and humanitarian apparatus, structures of aid are increasingly devolved, from donor to UN organizations such as WFP, large NGOs like the International Rescue Committee, and additional subcontracted national and local organizations and private businesses. The sheer number of broker types risks theoretical opacity. Refugee studies literature offers multiple examples. Riva and Hoffstaedter’s (2021) research on NGOs in US detention centres and in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, presents brokers as ‘helping refugees gain their legal status’ (ibid.: 6). Cindy Horst partially explores Somali *mukhalis* in Kenya who profit by assisting people to attain resettlement to North America or Europe or to attain documents and cross regional borders (Horst, 2006: 190–94). Vancluysen and Ingelaere (2020) examine elected, customary and religious ‘cultural brokers’ in Ugandan refugee settlements who resolve disputes in the Uganda–South Sudan borderlands. A study among Burmese refugee camps in Thailand illuminates refugee ‘power brokers’ who determine refugee status of new arrivals (Saltsman, 2014). My point here is not to critique what I consider excellent research, nor to disparage studies of brokers generally, but rather to point to the dizzying array of actors who can be considered brokers. If brokerage is to be a productive concept, I argue it needs to be paired with additional theory to make sense of the variance.

Simon Turner (2006) and Bram Jansen (2018) more thoroughly analyse the role of middlemen in Tanzanian and Kenyan refugee camps. Turner offers three types of Burundian ‘liminal experts’ in Lukole camp in Tanzania, known in the camp as ‘big men’. They are the elected street or village leaders who are the mediators recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); incentive workers employed by humanitarian organizations; and successful businessmen. According to Turner, elected leaders keep Burundian politics alive in exile despite UNHCR’s attempt to create an apolitical space of exception. NGO employees, known as ‘incentive workers’, are more educated and speak English or French. Finally, prominent businessmen engage less in camp or Burundian politics and have little contact with camp authorities or NGOs yet offer a different kind of authority through independence from the humanitarian apparatus. Engaging with Turner’s work and building on Dorothea Hilhorst’s (2003) conceptualization of ‘interface experts’, Jansen creates a typology of brokers who possess ‘campital’, which is a combination of status (such as elites, elders, traditional, political and religious leaders), financial wealth (through businesses or remittances), and the characteristic of being ‘campwise’ — which is similar to Turner’s understanding of liminal experts who skilfully and

creatively manage the humanitarian system (Jansen, 2018: 114–15). These brokers find interstitial spaces where they may have limited influence with humanitarians, but ‘their power in their own communities is considerable’ (ibid.: 69–70).

Turner (2006: 769) recognizes that protracted displacement erodes previous markers of status, creating new hierarchies of class. Moreover, implicit in Jansen’s clever camp formation is a Bourdieusian understanding of social capital, which reproduces social class. However, neither scholar engages with the tomes of class theory; their definition and theory of class is assumed. Zooming out more broadly, where class is used in forced migration literature, Bourdieu’s social class theory is the go-to option for explaining socio-economic stratification (Omata, 2017; Van Hear, 2004). Mostly absent from these understandings of brokerage, class and inequality in camps is an analysis of the role of exploitation, which is fundamental to Marxian conceptualizations of class (Boeyink and Falisse, forthcoming). While Karl Marx’s work does not neatly apply to Africa generally (Kroeker et al., 2018), his work has been constantly debated and adapted. His understanding of ‘primitive accumulation’ or violent dispossession through feudalism or slavery as a precursor to capitalist development is an important example (Marx, 1867/1990). David Harvey, in conversation with Rosa Luxemburg, argues that violent or ‘predatory’ accumulation never fully ended, but is in dialectic relationship with the reproduction and expansion of global capital. This process, which he famously terms ‘accumulation by dispossession’, is often characterized by finance capital and credit backed by state violence. Another influential neo-Marxist, Erik Olin Wright, expands Marx’s binary views on the proletariat and bourgeoisie to point out that certain groups can be both *exploiter* and *exploited* (Wright, 1985), which is directly applicable to the intermediary role of brokers. The work above offers macro histories in the *longue durée*; however, as Eric Wolf — an innovator in the anthropology of brokerage — argues: ‘used as discovery procedures, and not as fixed assemblies of postulates, [Marxian approaches] direct attention to the forces that generate the social fields in which people engage one another’ (Wolf, 2001: 61).

My focus here is to offer an empirical study of encampment and humanitarian aid. Admittedly, I barely scratch the surface of Marxian literature; however, I posit that the focus of Marx and others on class exploitation is productive in understanding the gulf in power between a dalali broker like Victor, struggling to find a viable livelihood, and the elite class of the refugee cartel. Those in a ‘middle class’ like Félicien are trying to circumvent the cartel’s control but their position is precarious. A view of class exploitation and violence could be applied to displacement intermediaries generally to further the brokerage discussion. In the following section, I explore the supply side of the food aid system, which creates the imperative for ration recipients to sell at a loss, which consolidates the wealth of the elite.



**‘AGENTIVE CONSUMPTION’**

It has long been known that food aid in refugee and humanitarian settings gets sold back into local and regional economies. Nearly 30 years ago, K.B. Wilson acknowledged that food rations were insufficient for refugee diets and that they sold rations to vary their diets, obtain other goods, or start businesses (Wilson, 1992). In Tanzania, Johan Pottier noted many reasons for Rwandan refugees to sell their rations including the lack of cultural appropriateness of the food, the high costs of food preparation and adverse health effects. In the camps, rural Rwandans preferred root crops such as cassava to WFP-distributed maize, which many claimed caused diarrhoea and other health issues (Pottier, 1996: 327–30). Along these lines, evidence was given that selling WFP food by refugees was a sign of distress rather than surplus (Reed and Habicht, 1998). More recent studies tell similar stories in Kakuma camp in Kenya (Oka, 2014), as well as in Kasulu district in Tanzania where Nyarugusu is located (Landau, 2002: 277–78). Indeed, every camp resident I asked — men and women, young and old, Burundian and Congolese — have at one time or another sold food; most do so routinely. Oka calls these practices ‘agentive consumption’: ‘The purchase and consumption of foods that are desired and familiar, unlike the passively received, largely unpalatable, and culturally and logistically unsuitable relief food, generate a counter-narrative of the refugee as an agent as opposed to a perpetual recipient of global largesse’ (Oka, 2014: 24). Agentive consumption is why refugees, even poor households, decide to sell food rations at a loss to purchase more expensive, but desirable, foods from nearby markets.

**Food Aid Realities in Nyarugusu**

Every month or month and a half, depending on funding levels, camp residents in Nyarugusu are given maize flour, Super Cereal (a fortified food blend), pulses (most commonly beans or split peas), vegetable oil and salt. Since I began research in 2017, the Tanzanian refugee situation has faced ‘chronic underfunding’ and in that year WFP was only able to provide on average 62 per cent of the recommended 2,100 kilocalories of food per person per day, with ration quantities fluctuating frequently (UNHCR, 2019). The humanitarian assemblage has decided to automatically make women the head of the household, and the vast majority of households I spoke with say it is the woman’s responsibility to make decisions concerning ration sales. This adds to a long list of unpaid labour for women and girls including firewood collection, ration collection, cooking and most care responsibilities.

Of the 35 households we surveyed regarding their ration-selling practices, only eight reported that they do not sell food (except on rare occasions). The latter explained that they have no other income and ration reductions mean that, if they sell at a loss, the food will not last until the next distribution.

For the others, the decades-old research on ration consumption and sales mentioned above still rings true in Nyarugusu. A Congolese woman, Bernice, explains a common logic: ‘people sell [maize] flour because of a lack of food variety. It doesn’t mean that they are getting enough food’.<sup>6</sup> To put it more bluntly, Julien, a Burundian man exclaims: ‘WFP food helps us not to die directly but it seems we are dying slowly. It is not suitable for a human being to eat the same food for five years’.<sup>7</sup> Most people keep the Super Cereal, salt and, to a lesser extent, the vegetable oil, whereas maize flour and split peas were often sold because they cause diarrhoea and indigestion for many. People often sell all of the food that causes health issues and keep various portions of other foods. More culturally desired foods such as *dagaa* (anchovies and sardines) transported from Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria, or locally grown cassava flour, palm oil, and local fruits and vegetables are coveted by those who can afford them.

Some people sell greater quantities when rations are funded at higher levels whereas others sell even when aid is cut, because of the previously mentioned ill health effects of maize and split peas. When beans are distributed rather than split peas, people have a dilemma about whether to sell or not because beans are more popular to eat but also fetch higher prices on the market due to demand. Households are also forced to sell more when experiencing economic shocks such as medical expenses. Some use the sales to fund small businesses: one Congolese woman, Florence, explained that for her household of seven, the rations of five members are adequate to feed the household. The remaining two ration portions are used as business capital.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, a Burundian woman, Lucy, explained, ‘I kept my children and myself hungry for three months so we could eat more later after I started a business’.<sup>9</sup> Most commonly, however, people are selling larger portions of rations because of the poor camp economy, which is the result of the increasing assaults on markets and livelihoods by the Tanzanian state.

Three decades ago, Wilson summarized the plight of food aid in Tanzanian camps: ‘at present refugees experience the worst kind of institutionalization: one which both restrains their ability to meet their own needs, and yet is itself starved of adequate resources to meet their needs and too politically emasculated to secure their rights’ (Wilson, 1992: 232). He convincingly argued that donors should substitute food aid with cash — an idea which is unanimously favoured by the camp residents I asked. I will not labour this point further, because, unlike the humanitarian zeitgeist of Wilson’s time, there is now a humanitarian consensus, especially within UNHCR and WFP, of the value of cash over in-kind food donations (ODI, 2015). Moreover, every aid worker I spoke with in the camp was

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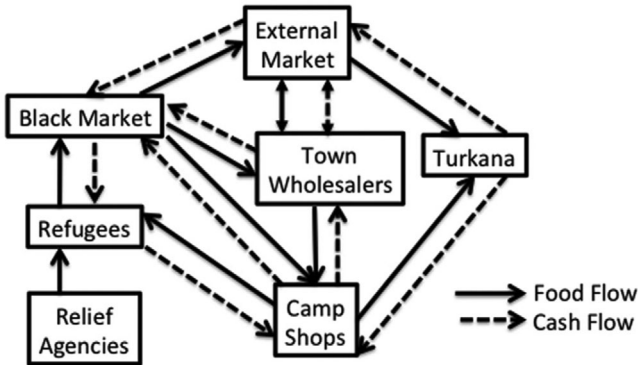
6. Interview, Congolese woman, Bernice, Nyarugusu camp, 17 October 2017.

7. Interview, Burundian man, Julien, Nyarugusu camp, 19 November 2020.

8. Interview, Congolese woman, Florence, Nyarugusu camp, 18 August 2017.

9. Interview, Burundian woman, Lucy, Nyarugusu camp, 9 November 2017.

Figure 1. Food Aid Black Market (Kakuma Camp, Turkana)



Source: Oka (2014: 30)

disappointed by the withdrawal of cash transfers that took place in August 2017 and, behind the scenes, the WFP country director was attempting to lobby the government to reinstate cash or at least to allow vouchers in the camps.<sup>10</sup> It is the Tanzanian state that needs to be convinced of the merits of cash. However, I am afraid that presenting the argument for the efficacy and efficiency of this modality would backfire and convince the state that withdrawing cash is an effective weapon to further impel refugee repatriations, which is its priority. Instead of cash, which largely bypasses the need for logistical middlemen, food aid feeds a substantial industry of brokers at the back end of distribution.

### FOOD AID RESALE NETWORKS

In his study of refugee camp consumption, Oka lingers only briefly on what happens after residents in Kakuma camp, Turkana, sell rations: ‘According to the research participants (refugees, traders, and relief workers), around 80 to 90 per cent of the refugees sell part or most of their food package on the black market’ (Oka, 2014: 29). The author offers a useful illustration, reproduced here in Figure 1. However, both in the figure and throughout the article, he refers to an opaque and mystified ‘black market’ where food aid is sold, without expanding further on the characteristics of this market.<sup>11</sup> What was surprising to me was not the existence of such markets, but rather the scale and levels of organization required to maintain these enterprises. To

10. More information about the circumstances of the cash transfer shutdown can be found in Boeyink (2019).

11. I refrain from using the term ‘black market’ unless referring to others’ use of it due to the pejorative connotation, which only further criminalizes these markets.

my knowledge, apart from work by Susanne Jaspars (2018: 131–32) and her colleagues (Jaspars et al., 2020), ration-trading networks in displacement situations have not been a subject of significant research.

### **Kigoma Agrarian Economy**

Agrarian trade in Tanzania has a history of tight state control from colonialism until the 1980s (excluding a brief six-year lull beginning in 1957). Bryceson (1993: 1) notes the negative history of traders in Tanzania: ‘For decades, traders have been pariahs in Tanzania, accused at best of being unproductive and at worst being super-exploitative’. How traders — who function as brokers — are perceived by the state depends on the state’s orientation toward the market. Until economic liberalization, the state was seen as ‘declaring war’ and criminalizing ‘black marketeers’ or *walanguzi* through fines, imprisonment and seizure of their products (Bryceson, 1993: 99; Maliyamkono and Bagachwa, 1990: 31). This war ultimately failed: because informal trading ‘was done ubiquitously on a part-time basis in relatively small amounts, such an amorphous, moving target was not readily incorporated in the campaign’ (Bryceson, 1993: 100). Agricultural policy today remains mostly liberalized and ‘amorphous’ trading continues to be the modus operandi of agrarian markets, which are mirrored and simultaneously mutated in the food aid resale out of camps.

Kigoma region, which hosts the remaining three camps,<sup>12</sup> has long been the poorest in Tanzania (United Nations Tanzania, 2019). The vast majority of people in Kigoma practise subsistence farming and are caught in a cycle of low crop productivity and low incomes due to lack of access to capital, credit, inputs and storage facilities. Most cannot afford to transport their crops to more lucrative markets, which makes them reliant on *madalali* within their villages who have connections to buyers with capital from larger towns and cities in Tanzania, as well as Burundi and Rwanda.<sup>13</sup> *Madalali* at the village level purchase crops with their own capital or through advances provided by traders who have financial capital and connections to markets across Tanzania and eastern and southern Africa. Since *madalali* are their only link to markets, farmers are forced to sell at lower prices than they would achieve in larger markets. For this reason, the farmers I interviewed resent and distrust *madalali*, who they believe do not offer fair prices. I heard many claims that *madalali* do not pay on time and deliberately use inaccurate

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12. Before 2012 there were additional camps in Kigoma and neighbouring regions. Nyarugusu, Nduta and Mtendeli are considered refugee camps whereas in central Tanzania, Ulyankulu, Mishamo and Katumba are considered ‘settlements’, where the residents are former refugees from Burundi who have been naturalized as Tanzanian citizens.

13. For a robust overview of *madalali* in Tanzania, see van Donge (1992) and Molony (2008). Wegerif (2017) offers an in-depth analysis of staple food distribution from across the country to Dar es Salaam.

crop scales. This agricultural brokerage system is not only replicated in the food resale markets, but many of the madalali also run crossover businesses in the camps as bosses.

### **Madalali**

The majority of refugee madalali operate on a small scale and have more in common with Victor than with relatively well-off Dalia. Some people sell to neighbours; for example, Bernice purchases maize flour near the WFP food distribution centre and, for convenience, sells it at the market which is closest to her home inside the camp.<sup>14</sup> Before it was shut down, camp residents would also take their rations to the Common Market at the entrance of the camp, which was accessible to both refugees and neighbouring Tanzanians, and sell to brokers like Lydia, a Burundian woman who buys and resells WFP vegetable oil.<sup>15</sup>

Tanzanian and Burundian madalali also come from outside the camp seeking brokerage livelihoods. Tanzanians from neighbouring villages pay a bribe or sneak into the camp to gather food on the Congolese side of the camp to sell as retail in small local markets. Burundian madalali, such as Didier and Pascal, cross over by bicycle from Makamba province. Didier had long traded food in Tanzania and learned that, compared to Tanzanian borderland communities, maize flour in Nyarugusu is far cheaper and already milled. He makes the trip twice a week; he sells what he can to Tanzanian bosses and transports the rest of the rations back to Burundi.<sup>16</sup> Pascal brings his goods back to Makamba province where he has found an enthusiastic market. Much of the overhead cost is incurred by the necessary bribes to soldiers at the border, the police station in the nearby village, and the police at the camp entrance.<sup>17</sup> Didier says these expenses take around 40 per cent of his profits. This trek is not always successful, however: ‘Sometimes the police accept that we pay something, sometimes no. If they do not accept then we return back, but we can find paths to escape the police. If you are caught it is a very dangerous issue because you cannot get the time to discuss bribes, they are so furious and send you to jail’.<sup>18</sup> Pascal, who has on occasion been arrested and had to pay out all of his earnings, is more forceful in describing the risks of encountering the police: ‘To work on Tanzanian land is very dangerous, it is a suicide job because we use so much effort just to make a living’.<sup>19</sup> For refugee madalali, there is some insulation from the police due to a system of protective bribes, described below.

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14. Interview, Congolese woman, Bernice, Nyarugusu camp, 17 October 2017.

15. Interview, Burundian woman, Lydia, Nyarugusu camp, 17 August 2017.

16. Interview, Burundian migrant, Didier, Nyarugusu camp, 14 August 2019.

17. Interview, Burundian migrant, Pascal, Nyarugusu camp, 26 October 2019.

18. Interview, Burundian migrant, Didier, Nyarugusu camp, 14 August 2019.

19. Interview, Burundian migrant, Pascal, Nyarugusu camp, 26 October 2019.

When Victor arrived in Nyarugusu, he had no access to capital to start a business, nor did he have the human capital or skills to be employed by international organizations or other refugees. At 56, he felt he was too old and in too poor health to take the risk of leaving the camp to be an agricultural labourer, as many with no access to capital do (Boeyink, 2020). His solution was simply to ask for a job from a Congolese camp dalali in a similar position to Dalia: ‘I found I did not have enough money for business, so without even knowing her, I asked for help’. The dalali would advance him TZS 50,000 (US\$ 21.72) each food distribution to buy as many food rations from his neighbours as he could and then sell back to her. Whatever he earned above the original cash advance he kept as profit, which he says ranged from TZS 3,000 to 80,000 (US\$ 1.30 to 34.74). Victor describes his relationship with the dalali financier: ‘I depend on this woman for my business, but each time I sell to her she is easy to negotiate with. I trust her even though she is Congolese, and I am Burundian’.<sup>20</sup>

This notion of trust within madalali employment networks is an important and recurring theme among madalali. Whereas most people sell to any of the innumerable madalali seeking food, to find a decent price, others have relationships with friends and neighbours to whom they sell exclusively. Often there is a patron–client relationship as these madalali can loan cash to their sellers as reward for their loyalty. Sarah, a Congolese woman, is trusted to such a degree that customers go directly to her home with their products, rather than shopping around. She is in a less precarious position than Victor because she has multiple businesses, so she is not dependent on others’ capital. Once she has gathered food, she sells it to four Congolese bosses.<sup>21</sup> Victor and Sarah represent varied ranges of success among madalali, which is also true of refugee bosses.

### **Refugee Bosses**

Bosses are the vital link between refugees and markets outside the camp. Beyond just bringing needed cash liquidity to the camp, they also function as employers for people like Victor. Like madalali, bosses are an amorphous and relational category with businesses of varying size and scale, which blur together the different chains in the system. Refugee bosses like Dalia, Baraka and Paul, introduced in this section, have differential levels of wealth and power relative to each other, yet they are all labelled bosses by madalali and the camp community. However, refugee bosses do not have the resources of Tanzanian bosses, who instead call them madalali, denoting their position as suppliers on a rung lower on the pyramid.

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20. Interviews, Burundian dalali, Victor, Nyarugusu camp 25 July 2017; 22 August 2017; 13 October 2017.

21. Interviews, Congolese dalali, Sarah, Nyarugusu camp 4 November 2017.

Dalia, the most successful of all the financial diary households, first began as a dalali like Victor and Sarah. She used to sell *maandazi* (small fried doughnuts) in exchange for food rations until one of her customers, a prominent boss, 'got used to me and he saw that I was trustworthy, so he started giving me some money to buy food for him', according to Dalia. As she was successful, he entrusted her with larger cash advances. In 2016, Dalia's boss was resettled to Canada. Before leaving, 'he connected me with Tanzanian and Burundian bosses', which raised her rank from dalali to boss. Now she employs six madalali. While some bosses take advances from larger bosses, Dalia usually spends her own money to purchase food: 'It is better to use your own capital than take an order because once you have someone else's money, anytime the boss can show up for the food you have collected, even if you're not ready'.<sup>22</sup>

One of these larger bosses, Baraka, a 'campwise' Congolese man, started his business upon arrival in Nyarugusu in 1996: 'when we arrived, Tanzanians came to the camp looking for businesses, so we made acquaintances with them'. Now he works at all three WFP distribution centres in Nyarugusu and employs many Congolese and Burundian madalali. 'Because we are famous, people can come to give us their products. I am known to most people'. Baraka has become so successful that he purchased Tanzanian land in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, the two largest cities in the country, and reported being in the process of resettlement to the United States when interviewed in 2017.<sup>23</sup>

### Scale and Logistics

The scale of the food redistribution system is staggering. Baraka claims there are around ten Congolese and 15 Burundian bosses in Nyarugusu.<sup>24</sup> Dalia estimates that camp-wide 1,000–1,500 tonnes of food rations are sold and leave Nyarugusu monthly.<sup>25</sup> The process of procuring these items is heavily layered with profits being gleaned at each level. For example, a dalali may buy a bowl of split peas for TZS 800 (US\$ 0.34) or a bucket (15 bowls) for TZS 12,000 (US\$ 5.17). They can sell a sack (six buckets) to a boss for around TZS 78,000 (US\$ 33.89). A refugee boss sells to a Tanzanian boss by the sack, which is typically sold to other Tanzanian bosses in nearby villages for TZS 10,000 (US\$ 4.34) above the price paid to the dalali. When enough sacks have been accumulated by the bosses, they will pay a cyclist a fee of TZS 2,400–3,000 (US\$ 1.04–1.30) to transport them and, if

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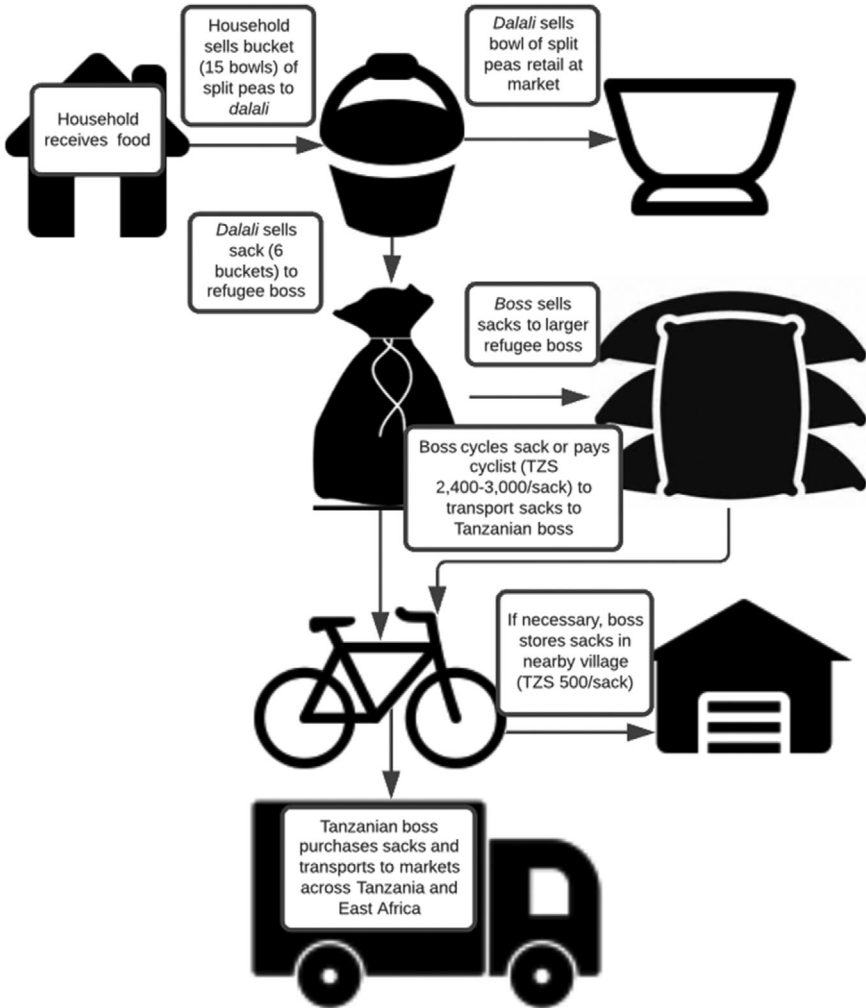
22. Interviews, Congolese boss, Dalia, Nyarugusu camp, 15 August 2017; 18 October 2017; 7 November 2018.

23. Interview, Congolese boss, Baraka, Nyarugusu camp, 25 July 2017.

24. Interview, Congolese boss, Baraka, Nyarugusu camp, 25 July 2017.

25. Interview, Congolese boss, Dalia, Nyarugusu camp, 25 July 2017.

Figure 2. Food Aid Resale Value Chain



Source: author's own design

necessary, a warehouse fee of TZS 500 (US\$ 0.22) per sack to store them in the neighbouring village. The cyclist will likely be part of a transportation collective and will be required to pay a transport manager a fee of TZS 800 (US\$ 0.34) for organizing the trip.<sup>26</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the value chain of these networks in diagram form.

26. Ibid.



Paul, who is an even more prominent refugee boss than Baraka, claims to sell around 350 sacks (weighing 150–250 kg) each distribution cycle. After paying transport and warehousing fees, he makes profits of around TZS 6,000 (US\$ 2.59) for each sack, which amounts to TZS 2,100,000 (US\$ 905) in monthly profit. At each food distribution in the camp, Paul gives out advances to around 10 other bosses like Baraka and Dalia: ‘I give them little by little, TZS 2,000,000 [US\$ 868] sometimes TZS 3,000,000 [US\$ 1,302], other times more. This money can be finished in one or two days. When they are finished, I give more. Each distribution I can give TZS 8,000,000 (US\$ 3,474)’.<sup>27</sup> Paul says there is another Burundian collector in the camp who is even more successful than him, whom we were unable to interview. Despite these massive amounts of wealth relative to the average camp resident, however, Tanzanian bosses extract even more.

### **Tanzanian Bosses**

Baraka summed up the centrality of Tanzanian bosses: ‘if bosses don’t give money, the camp is in a bad mood. All the money given to us spreads through the camp’.<sup>28</sup> Tanzanian bosses are simultaneously the primary financiers of the food ration trade and its largest beneficiaries. These traders sit atop the WFP resale pyramid and embody the most morally ambivalent position of all the brokers in this system. They gain the most from the system because they do not live in the camp and therefore do not share the costs and risks of the refugees’ precarious legal and economic position. They do not hold social loyalties to certain bosses but follow a market-based logic to seek out the best price they can get. Moreover, given that Kigoma has the highest rates of poverty in the country, they are far wealthier than the vast majority of their Tanzanian neighbours.

Julia has been capitalizing on the trade since the creation of Nyarugusu in 1996. Already established as a farmer and financier of Tanzanian madalali, she began exchanging her grains for WFP rations. Today, she has expanded operations to all three Kigoma refugee camps. In Nyarugusu alone, she finances 10 bosses with TZS 2,000,000–5,000,000 (US\$ 868–2,171) for each distribution. Refugee bosses whom Julia finances use the Swahili expression ‘*ana hela ndefu*’, which translates to ‘she has long money’ to describe the financial clout she wields.<sup>29</sup> Ernest does not have the same amount of capital but is still a significant player in Nyarugusu’s resale economy. His most important link to this livelihood was through his aunt — herself a boss — who had mentored him as a farmer and trader since 2009. In 2012, he was employed with the NGO that was subcontracted by WFP to unload and

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27. Interview, Burundian boss, Paul, Nyarugusu camp, 9 November 2017.

28. Interview, Congolese boss, Baraka, Nyarugusu camp, 7 November 2017.

29. Interview, Tanzanian boss, Julia, Makere village, 11 October 2019.

distribute food shipments in Nyarugusu where he was able to network with madalali in the camp. With these contacts and his aunt's support, he used money saved from farming and his camp job to become a boss when Burundian refugees began arriving in 2015.<sup>30</sup>

Bosses set the prices at which they buy, based on the prices at the destination markets in Tanzanian cities such as Kahama, Mwanza, Dar es Salaam and further across East Africa, including Uganda.<sup>31</sup> Advancing financing options to refugee bosses gives them leverage to demand faster and more favourable returns: Ernest explains this process:

When there is a high soaring price, my dalali can change his mind and say that he has no product for you. You can wait until next time. Meanwhile, he will have sold it to another boss who rose the price higher than the money advance you gave him. You [can] either be patient until the dalali gets your other products or ask for your money back. Usually, I am patient. In 2018, it happened to me and I asked for my money back.<sup>32</sup>

Julia is more explicit about her power over price setting: 'We set the price of buying a sack after considering the profit I will make in the market. There are no negotiations. I buy the product on the price I set because it all depends on me and the place where I will bring my products like in Uganda or where the market is available'.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, the refugee bosses I spoke with all recognize that they do not get a fair rate for selling their rations, but they do not feel preyed on by Tanzanian bosses as Tanzanian farmers do vis-à-vis brokers in their villages. Baraka describes this sentiment: 'I know we are getting a small, small rate for our products, and we have no room to negotiate, but I am grateful to the bosses. What would I do without them? The food we collect would rot. I would have to struggle with a different business. These bosses let me and my fellow refugees eat. I say, thank you!'.<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting, however, that this sentiment is not shared by most of the financial diary households who are exploited by this system.

Tanzanians also have a freedom of movement that Burundian traders and refugees do not enjoy due to encampment policies. Julia uses her own vehicles to transport the food to markets or shares lorries with other bosses. They are also insulated from arrest and exorbitant bribes because they have licences to operate their business. Refugees and undocumented Burundian migrants must operate clandestinely. Julia acknowledges this imbalance: 'We don't usually meet the police. Our madalali meet them and defend their causes relative to their hard life and starvation in the camp when they are collecting the food for us'.<sup>35</sup> The police act as gatekeepers and at times

30. Interview, Tanzanian boss, Ernest, Makere village, 12 October 2019.

31. I was unable to access the traders and markets beyond Kigoma, a subject which would benefit from further research.

32. Interview, Tanzanian boss, Ernest, Makere village, 12 October 2019.

33. Interview, Tanzanian boss, Julia, Makere village, 11 October 2019.

34. Interview, Congolese boss, Baraka, Nyarugusu camp, 25 July 2017.

35. Interview, Tanzanian boss, Julia, Makere village, 11 October 2019.

‘muscle’ for the cartels of the WFP food resale system. They hold the power to shut down the lucrative networks or to allow and profit from these markets.

### **The Aid Resale Cartel and the Police**

The police and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) officers assigned to manage and control the camps are the personification of the country’s violent encampment policy and are responsible for enforcing the containment of people and goods. As the introductory vignette of the angry field manager suggests, secondary markets are delegitimized and criminalized. Despite this prohibition, people sell these rations openly at WFP distribution centres, at the Common Market before it was shut down, and throughout the camp. Apart from random performative harassments or scattering of sellers, the police allow this system to continue because it is lucrative for them to do so, much like the policing of illicit ‘displacement agriculture’ whereby migrants and refugees rent and work on farms near the camp (Boeyink, 2020: 71–72). Unlike patrols on nearby farms, where police are looking to extract bribes from cultivators, the secondary ration market is enabled by a coordinated system of rent collection in which the police and a group of some five to eight individuals, who call themselves ‘supervisors’, collude. Dalia explains the payoff system:

Each boss pays. I paid yesterday. There’s a supervisor who keeps names of all bosses in the camp. Each pay TZS 65,000 [US\$ 28] to the supervisor, who pays the police. The police then give us the freedom to send sacks to Makere [the nearby village on the main road]. Each sack that goes to Makere pays [TZS] 1,000 to police. Every six months we pay another TZS 65,000 [US\$ 28].<sup>36</sup>

Félicien is a teacher who earns only TZS 55,000 (US\$ 23) each month. Dissatisfied with this salary, he has tried to break into the system. He blurs the line between dalali and boss: he purchases and gathers food across the camp, but unlike most, he does not take an advance from a boss and he transports the products to Makere himself. Because Félicien circumvents selling to larger refugee bosses like Baraka or Paul, he does not pay the TZS 65,000 (US\$ 28) police rent that Dalia does. However, he is also not afforded permission to bypass the gatekeeping police with a small fee. If the cartel found out about his business, they would report him to the police. Consequently, he must transport his sacks through footpaths and under the cover of darkness to avoid police detection. Police capture would result in a loss of his products and his earnings, through a sizable bribe demanded to avoid a six-month jail term, a fine, and probable physical violence through beatings.<sup>37</sup>

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36. Interview, Congolese boss, Dalia, Nyarugusu camp, 7 November 2018.

37. Interview, Congolese dalali, Félicien, Nyarugusu camp, 10 November 2020.

Unlike drug cartels or mafia who contest or control the state's monopoly on violence, members of the WFP food cartel could be said to be leasing this violence from the state through the wealth they have extracted. As such, they are still subject to periodic police shakedowns. Dalia recalled a time in April 2016 when police followed her home after collecting food:

The police came to my home and found the children at home and asked, 'where is your mother? What is your family size? Where does she keep the food?'. The children showed the police where we keep the products. My boss gave TZS 50,000 [US\$ 21] to the police and I haven't had problems since. Any time new police arrive, we have to explain our problems to them to be able to continue.<sup>38</sup>

In a more serious breach of the financial arrangement, in February 2019 as camp restrictions were tightening, a high-ranking member of the cartel was arrested and sent to jail on the way to a resettlement interview with UNHCR. This had a chilling effect on the madalali and bosses. All WFP resale business in the camp ceased until furtive negotiations had taken place between MHA, the police and cartel supervisors. People with knowledge of this meeting said that a large fee was paid, and the madalali were directed to do their business less openly and to transport materials more discreetly. This shows that the police have the power to stop the system if desired but continued collusion with the cartel is more beneficial to them. Moreover, it was a clear reminder that the state sets the terms of engagement and holds ultimate power in the camp.

## CONCLUSION

The space of asylum in Tanzania, which already implements one of the strictest encampment policies in the world, is rapidly eroding under President Magufuli. Pressure on the camps has included assaults on the camp economy through market and cash programme shutdowns, and more recent reports of abductions, torture and forced repatriations, which are causing wealthy Burundians who have been targeted for ransom to leave the country (Boeyink and Falisse, 2021). This, paired with volatile levels of food aid, creates an environment of economic depression in which capital is hard to come by, and forces aid recipients like Lucy to go hungry and sell rations to start a business. However, it is well established in humanitarian food aid circles that people sell during both good times and bad (Pottier, 1996; Reed and Habicht, 1998; Wilson, 1992). Through 'agentive consumption' (Oka, 2014), people sell to avoid ill health effects of items like maize flour and split peas, to avoid laborious and expensive preparation and cooking, and to eat more culturally appealing foods like dagaa and cassava flour. Each household has its own logic for when and how much of its food aid

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38. Interview, Congolese boss, Dalia, Nyarugusu camp, 7 November 2018.

portion it sells. The ubiquity of these practices in camps produces a lucrative market.

This pyramid-shaped food resale system has three somewhat amorphous layers. The bottom layer of the pyramid is comprised of madalali, which includes refugees like Victor and Sarah, Burundian undocumented migrants like Didier and Pascal, as well as neighbouring Tanzanians who sneak into the camp. Madalali take advances from or sell to refugee bosses, of which Dalia, Baraka and Paul are examples. These three have differing financial outlays, but all pay to receive protection from the police, controlled by a small committee of supervisors. This cartel structure gives rise to the threat of police violence against individuals like Félicien who attempt to bypass the rents and price fixing of the system to sell straight to Tanzanian bosses such as Ernest, Julia or other large Tanzanian or Burundian traders. Like smallholder farmers in the region surrounding the camps, refugee food sellers find little local demand for their products, because they are all selling the same things and have no access to markets where there is greater demand. This is especially true after the government's closure of the Common Market. This means the sellers at the bottom of the pyramid have no leverage over prices, enabling those higher up the value chain to set prices which are favourable to them.

Refugee studies research has uncovered a wide variety of brokers carrying out many different functions. Turner (2006) and Jansen (2018) offer a more thorough conceptualization of brokerage and argue that the authority of refugee intermediaries in Tanzanian and Kenyan camps is derived from, and simultaneously circumvents, humanitarian actors. These scholars implicitly apply a Bourdieusian theory of capital, or 'campital', to explain how these brokers disrupted and attained higher classes in exile. While Bourdieu's social capital theory is helpful in understanding how social class is *attained*, I argue that Marxian theory is productive in explaining how social class is *maintained* through exploitation in a camp setting where the majority are struggling to subsist. Marx's introduction of the concept of 'hybrid subsumption', which equates to exploitation through usury or advances by 'merchant capitalists', is applicable here (Marx, 1867/1990: 665). Refugee and Tanzanian bosses at the top of the food pyramid act in a similar manner to Marx's 'merchants', while the 'weaver and the spinner' functions are filled by camp resident ration sellers and madalali:

It is clear that the capitalist has prepared neither the raw material, nor the instrument, nor the means of subsistence for the weaver and the spinner. All that he has done is to restrict them little by little to one kind of work in which they become dependent on selling, on the *buyer*, the *merchant*, and ultimately produce only *for* and *through* him. (Marx, 1973: 510)

These camp 'merchants' give advances to financially control people like Victor who would otherwise be unable to find a livelihood as a dalali, and extract high profit margins to the detriment of all camp ration sellers.

Disruption of the system or upward mobility into the upper levels of the pyramid by camp residents like Félicien is blocked. The dependencies of the sellers on the buyers, protected by police violence or the threat thereof, can best be understood as ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2003).

Marx’s work was in part a political project to spark class consciousness amongst the working class. This begs the question, what would such an undertaking look like in Nyarugusu? Based on financial diary households’ opinions of madalali, refugee and Tanzanian bosses, there is a clear understanding of class interests in the camp. Unlike in rural Tanzanian villages where madalali were tolerated but mistrusted, people were grateful for the services of refugee madalali like Victor, who were their socio-economic peers. Despite the unfavourable prices, they appreciated the desperately needed service to liquidate food to cash. Although Baraka boasted of being ‘famous’ in the camp, refugee and Tanzanian bosses were despised for the system they had built. A Burundian man, Jean-Pierre, expressed a sentiment shared by many: ‘the bosses are profiting from our weakness to fill their families’ stomachs’.<sup>39</sup>

But a worker’s revolution, or even small gains, are unlikely in the increasingly precarious and violent camp space. In August 2017, I spoke to leaders of a movement who were planning to organize a food strike immediately following the cash programme cancellation and deep ration cuts. Before the strike even took place, the government issued threats to end resettlement programmes and rations for any participants of the strike.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, protests in nearby Nduta camp were violently put down using tear gas and arrests. This brought an immediate end to any revolutionary plans. James (2011: 336) was correct in noting that brokers are characterized by moral ambiguity and ‘are both product and producers of a new kind of society’. A Marxian view of the food aid system shines a light on an exploitative and violent society embodied by the cartel bosses.

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