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The Problem of Family Break-up Among Refugees in Eastern and Central Africa

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Introduction

The social, economic, and demographic functions of the family all over the world are well-known. However, in eastern and central Africa, the family is particularly important because institutions of the state and civil society are weak. We do not have here, for example, a welfare system that guarantees basic education, shelter, food, and medical care. The state cannot provide these necessities of life when one's basic or extended family fail to do so. In other societies, like Western Europe, the state is able to intervene effectively and provide these necessities of life when the family fails to do so. Some African states did adopt welfarist philosophies and policies but economic reality dictated otherwise.

When the individual is separated from his nuclear and extended families in this part of the world, it is obvious that there are serious consequences. Family break-up is common among refugees especially when large numbers of people are on the move in a short period of time, as is the case with Rwandese and Burundi refugees. Recently, a Rwandan national told me of the case of a young Rwandan boy who was found in Nairobi, and when international organizations tried to locate his family an older brother was found in Cameroon, and the parents were found somewhere in Rwanda. The Rwandan national (name withheld) further said that there were thousands of cases of members of basic and extended families losing contact, and even getting lost from each other for good in the Rwandan and Burundian refugee crisis.

The Family

The family is the oldest human institution. The advantages of the family especially the nuclear family are many and important especially in socializing and formally educating children. For some people, the family

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is sacred. One of the reasons some feminists became unpopular, and earned feminism a bad name among scholars and ordinary people was due to their attack on the family as an institution that facilitates women's oppression. The family as an institution has its dysfunctions, but the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, and this is especially the case where other state and civil institutions are weak. Even the founders of the social sciences theorized that "...the true social unit is certainly the family, reduced, if necessary to the elementary couple which forms its basis" (Comte, 1896: 116).

Reliance on group living for survival is a basic characteristic. Among monkeys and apes, group living requires the participation of adults of both sexes. Human beings have developed their own distinctively human ways. The father, and grown-up sons or other adult male relatives provide defence. Even in some very advanced societies like the USA in some areas it helps to have your adult male relatives near you to offer protection. For those species that like human beings have taken up life on the ground, and for those species that are most closely related to us, adult males are normally much larger and stronger than females, and their teeth are usually more efficient for fighting. They are thus essential for group defence. Infants of human beings and other animals cannot survive without close and prolonged relationships with their mothers. This renders the adult primate female less well suited than the male to handle defence (Haviland, 1991: 459).

Nurturing of children features as a very important function of the family. Taking care of young humans is primarily the job of adult females. In humans the sexual division of labour has been developed beyond that of other primates (Haviland, 1991: 459-460). Even with the discovery of synthetic infant formulas, human females have more often than not occupied much of their adult lives with child rearing. This is especially so in eastern and central African and in the whole region of Sub-Saharan Africa where fertility is higher than in other parts of the world.

'Mothering' of children does not have to be provided by the infant's biological mother. And not only may other women provide children with much of the attention they need, but so may men. In many societies children may be handled and fondled as much by men as by women, and in some societies men are more nurturant to children than women (Haviland, 1991: 458-461.)

In eastern and central Africa, many refugee children have lost the care of both parents. The fathers could be fighting or dead from tribal/ethnic wars like in the case of Rwanda and Burundi. In Mozambique, many men also died in the liberation war. Women also die in these conflicts but perhaps not at as a high rate as men. The psychological and physical torture to children whose families are broken when they become refugees are immense. Even though adults also go through mental and physical anguish when they are separated from their families, children are likely to suffer more. The very old are also likely to undergo stress and even short-term and long-term neurosis when they lose family care after becoming refugees.

In this article I have adopted the functionalist perspective of the family (and not the conflict perspective or the interactionist perspective). Functionalists argue that some form of family exists in all societies because the family performs certain basic functions that are essential to human survival and the maintenance of society (Sullivan & Thompson, 1991: 7). We have already referred to some of the functions of the family above. However, for clarity and to understand the serious consequences of family break-up we can list some of the more important contributions that the family makes to society (Sullivan & Thompson 1991: 71-73):

- (a) Regulation of sexual behaviour and reproduction
- (b) Socialization and education
- (c) Status conferral
- (d) Economic activity
- (e) Protection
- (f) Affection and companionship

Family Break-up in Refugees' Perspectives

Human beings have been uprooted by persecution, conflict and famine in all ages. However, what is unique at present is the large scale of refugee movements in eastern and central Africa. For the whole world by 1986 more than 700 people per day on average were being forced to leave their own countries to become refugees. The world refugee population was estimated to be 14,000,000 people in 1986 (ICHI, 1986: 8-9). The number of people displaced from their own countries was probably greater, according to the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian

Issues (ICHI). During this time, in Africa alone, famine forced almost 10,000,000 people to abandon their homes in search of food and water (ICHI, 1986: 9). In 1986 ICHI was correct in its opinion that the trend of refugees was not likely to be reversed in the immediate future, particularly in developing countries. The argument by ICHI was that the stage was set for a series of massive movements of populations by a combination of the burgeoning arms trade, increased militarism and intolerance, population growth, economic stagnation and ecological deterioration. Such a state of affairs was almost certainly leading to increased poverty and social tension (ICHI, 1986: 9-10).

The mass movements of refugees are not confined to eastern and central Africa. Actually the movements of refugees and migrants form a central part of the social history of most industrialized nations (Peterson 1969: 297-299; ICHI, 1986: 30-31). For example, recently European countries commemorated the 300th anniversary of the flight of Protestant Huguenots from France. The Huguenots were forced by religious persecution in Catholic France to seek a safe haven in neighbouring countries. At the beginning of the 20th century there was the persecution and flight of large numbers of Armenians (ICHI, 1986: 29-31). Later, during the Nazi period, there was a flight of hundreds of thousands of Jews. In these cases, newly established communities of exiles often turned into a source of enrichment for the commercial and cultural life of the countries that received them (ICHI, 1986: 31).

Most of these, and other European cases, have been different from the situation in eastern and central Africa; and there are indications that family life has been more disrupted here than in other mass refugees cases. For example, the New World has been enriched by refugee migrants and owes its modern development to them. The USA has long boasted of its melting pot culture that offers a new start in life to the victims of oppression and insecurity (ICHI, 1986: 31). It has been argued that in the USA, Canada, and Australia the processes of nation building and economic development were accelerated and consolidated by the constant arrival of people from other parts of the world (ICHI, 1986: 31-32). This does not seem to be the case in eastern and central Africa where, quite often, refugees are very poor people moving to a society that is equally if not more poor, and economically disorganized. This implies that family break-up and other family problems are more serious among refugees in this part of the world.

Family Break-up Among Refugees in Eastern and Central Africa

Refugee family break-up began in eastern and central Africa in the 1950s in Rwanda and Burundi, and increased after they gained independence from Belgium in the 1960s. Exact data on families that broke up in the area and in Zaire, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Somalia are not easy to collect. There are methodological problems in such an exercise, and the result is a lack of reliable data. However, the obtainable data on the number of refugees indicates that hundreds of thousands of people in the region have been affected by one kind or another of family break-up. The magnitude of the affected people is even greater when we consider the fact that even people who are not refugees may experience family break-up when members of their nuclear or extended families become refugees.

The average urban household in Tanzania and the surrounding countries like Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, and Somalia has 4.3 persons. Rural households are larger than urban households, and the mean size is 5.1 (TDHS, 1996: 10-11). This data can help us to estimate the number of families affected by the refugee problem. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the basic family or household consists of father, mother and children; but the extended family includes more people, and thus the break-up of one family has a bearing on many people who are not members of the immediate household. The explanation of the problem below, and the number of refugees mentioned, will help us perceive the number of families involved in the break-up and the magnitude of the problem.

Some sources indicate that there are approximately 50 million uprooted people (refugees) around the world (UNHCR, 2001: 7). These are people who have been displaced from their own country and sought safety in another country and people. The extent of family break-up can be measured by the fact that around half of this displaced population are children under the age of eighteen (UNHCR, 2001: 6-7). Further indication of the seriousness of the problem is revealed by the fact that the majority of these people flee their homes because of war. It is estimated that more than two million children were killed in conflict in the last decade; another six million are believed to have been wounded, and one million orphaned (UNHCR, 2001: 7).

The displacement and death of children adds stress to families that are already traumatized by loss of homes, land, jobs, and friends and local community

bonds and networks. Further family disruption is caused by the recruitment of children to serve as combatants in armed conflict. More than 300,000 youths, including young girls, are currently serving as child soldiers around the world. Many are less than ten years old and many girl soldiers are forced into different forms of sexual slavery (UNHCR, 2001: 7-8). Children, whether on their own or accompanied by parents, account for as many as half of all asylum seekers in the industrialized world (UNHCR, 2001: 7).

In Mozambique the anti-FRELIMO/anti-communist war in the 1980s caused an extensive stream of refugees. Around 10% of the refugees searched for social security in neighbouring countries including Tanzania. Some 30% of the refugees (4,500,000 people) sought refuge in urban areas, mostly in Maputo, Beira, and Nampula (Abrahamsson & Nilsson, 1995: 207-268). In 1994 over 6,000,000 Mozambicans who were internal refugees and demobilized soldiers still needed to return to their home areas (Abrahamsson & Nilsson, 1995: 209). This entailed heavy costs, and demanded coordination between short-term disaster aid and more long-term programmes for national construction. There were too many internal refugees in Mozambique and the enormous inputs needed to reintegrate the country's internal refugees means that the process is not yet completed. Large-scale re-allocation of people may actually result in further and fresh family break-ups when different families claim old and newly settled areas and houses. This problem is likely to be more serious in Rwanda where too many people moved in and out of the country from April 1994 to the present. Rwanda (and Burundi) has a much higher population density than Mozambique that has large land resources, and this makes the problem more intricate.

Some governments and other organizations, including non-governmental organizations, recognize the importance of family life. Such governments and other organizations have helped in the repatriation and resettlement of refugees. They have also helped refugees to lead "normal" lives in the countries they have run to. For example, the 18,000 Mozambican refugees in Likuyu settlement in Tanzania were repatriated in July-October 1994. A non-governmental organization, the Tanzania Mozambique Friendship Association (TAMOF A), carried out the task with the cooperation of the governments of Tanzania and Mozambique. TAMOF A receives some financial support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). TAMOF A also helped in the "Mine Awareness

Campaign" in Likuyu settlement. According to TAMOF A, the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were also involved in the repatriation of Mozambican refugees (TAMOF A, 1994: I-V).

TAMOF A has also helped to create an atmosphere conducive to family life in Mkuyu settlement in Handeni, which is settled by Somali refugees. Creating such an atmosphere may help reduce secondary family break-up among refugees after the initial break-up at home, and during fleeing. TAMOF A support in the settlement includes health, education, community development, income generation, crop production, food distribution, water supply, and counselling. Those who qualify for refugee status are given Tsh 2,500 per day for adults and Tsh 650 for children to help them gain food and accommodation (TAMOF A, 1996: 1-3).

The Somalia refugee settlement in Mkuyu is an interesting case. Most of the refugees in Mkuyu are members of the Wazigua tribe who are believed to have migrated to Somalia from somewhere in or near what is now Handeni district about 400 year ago. The Mkuyu settlement was opened in 1992 as a response to the influx of Somali refugees into Tanzania (TAMOF A, 1996: 1). As in Rwanda and Burundi, in Somalia the process of national integration failed and inter-clan battles have ravaged the country up to the present.

The Somali Ziguas have preserved their cultural identity, most notably through language. They can communicate with the Zigua in Handeni using the Kizigua language. At the beginning, the Mkuyu settlement was run by the TCRS. On 30th June 1995, TAMOF A took over the management of the settlement after signing an agreement with the UNHCR and the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Tanzanian Government. Currently 4571 Somali-Zigua refugees reside in the settlement: 2008 of these arrived in 1992/93, and 2563 in 1994-96 (TAMOF A, 1996: 1-2).

When we considered the contributions that the family makes to society, socialization and education come out as important contributions. Functionalists have always cited this as an important function of the family in all societies. Some functionalists, like Talcott Parsons, have even argued that there are basic and irreducible functions of the family (Haralambos & Mead, 1980: 330-333; Parsons, 1955). Refugee children are not likely to receive proper education and socialization at school or at home. Refugees, therefore, suffer the many tragedies of homelessness.

Children, 90 percent of them girls, head an estimated 45,000 families in Rwanda today (UNHCR, 2001: 7). This indicates the seriousness of family break-up in the area of the great lakes that has produced many refugees.

Governments realize the implications of family break-up and the stress this causes people, notably women and children. Nevertheless, we can argue that selfish social, political and economic ambitions have made many leaders in many countries (e.g., Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Afghanistan and, former Yugoslavia) to "betray the family". Their leaders have not appreciated the problems associated with family break-up when pursuing their ambitions. It is also common knowledge that at least some of their leaders hide their families far from the conflict areas in other countries they consider peaceful.

International humanitarian organizations have participated in attempts to reunite families. More than 67,000 children were reunited with their families in Africa's Great Lakes region between 1994-2000 (UNHCR, 2001: 7). However, as data shows, the problem is far from over as hundreds of thousands of families remain broken in their home countries and in other countries where they seek refuge.

Recent Increases of the Problem of Family Break-up

Traditionally, Tanzania has received refugees from many countries, even before independence. Nevertheless the very large inflow of refugees in Tanzania is a recent phenomenon. This started in April 1994 when the number of refugees crossing borders into Tanzania reached six figures in one month. This also indicates that Tanzania is home to many of the most serious cases of family break-up among refugees in eastern and central Africa. Most of these occurred among refugees from Rwanda, and to a lesser extent Burundi, and Uganda. Sudan also has millions of displaced families in the southern part of the country, and in neighbouring countries. In the past five years, millions of families have been misplaced in eastern Congo following the overthrow of General Mobutu, the civil war, and invasion by Ugandan and Rwandese troops.

As indicated earlier, there is no data on the exact number of families that have broken up because of seeking refuge internally or abroad. However, as indicated earlier, the magnitude of the problem can be perceived. For example, after 6th April 1994 (when the president Juvenal Habyrimana of

Rwanda and president Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi were killed) about 3,500,000 people out of a population of 7,500,00 fled Rwanda to Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Tanzania. By August 1994 there were also 10,500 Rwandan refugees living in Uganda, and 200,000 living in Burundi (*Newsweek*, 1st August 1994; *Times*: 25th July 1994, 1st August 1994, 22nd August 1994).

The examination of family break-up has so far focused on refugee families. Nevertheless, we can extend the examination to include local families in the areas where refugees settled. No studies have been done in Tanzania to detail family problems caused by the refugee problem in the western part of the country. However, the data on the inflow of refugees can again help us gauge the effect of refugees on local families in the struggle for resources like land, firewood, water; and building materials like wood, sand, and stones.

The inflow of refugees in Tanzania was highest from April, 1994, when 350,000 refugees entered Ngara district. More refugees followed and settled in Karagwe, Ngara and Muleba districts, in Kagera region. By mid-May 1994, Kagera region was receiving 4,000 refugees per day (Lwahabura *et. al.*, 1995: 2). The large number of refugees of this period caused the focus to be mostly turned to the problems found in the recent groups of arrivals. This focus tended to underestimate or overlook a problem which has existed since the 1950s and the continuous effort by the Tanzanian government to assist refugees to lead normal family life in exile and at home. The brief history of the refugee problem below will further help us comprehend the seriousness of family break-up among refugees.

Tanzania is a signatory to the Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951 and its protocol, as well as the OAU convention of 1969. Both conventions provide for the rights and protection of refugees. Tanzania has provided asylum to millions of refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Kenya, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Comoro, Sychelles, Ethiopia, Cape Verde, Somalia, Mozambique, Sudan, Uganda, Malawi, South Africa, Namibia, Angola, and Serbia (Lwehabura *et. al.*, 1995: 1-2). The country has been tolerant of refugees and illegal immigrants. It has also given refugees and illegal immigrants chances for naturalization (Lwehabura *et. al.*, 1995: 1). Allowing naturalization can be viewed as a positive step towards helping broken refugee families to settle, re-unite and lead normal family life.

Tribal or ethnic conflict and massacres in Rwanda and Burundi particularly in 1959, 1961, 1974, 1990, 1993, and 1994 were the causes of the refugee problem. It is the refugee problem that has led to the break-up of hundreds of thousands of families in Rwanda, Burundi and other countries. It is common knowledge that some refugees have fathered or mothered children with Tanzanian men or women. For example in Morogoro there are children (number not known) who are called "ANC children" whose fathers were ANC combatants who went back to South Africa in the 1990s. It is obvious that refugees children left with single parents in Tanzania have special family problems. Some refugees who fled the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi were given the same treatment as Tanzania's own citizens in both rural and urban areas. From independence in 1961 some 26,810 refugees were naturalized as Tanzania citizens (Lwehabura, *et. al.*, 1995: 1-3). When we consider that most of them have managed to bring their families to Tanzania, we can see that hundreds of thousands of refugees have been naturalized.

Tanganyika, and later Tanzania, hosted a total of 1,524,605 (recorded) refugees between 1954 and 1995. In the same period 86,807 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to their countries of origin (Lwehabura *et. al.*, 1995: 1).

In 1995 Tanzania was hosting three major groups of refugees. The first group consisted of 712,790 refugees who fled Rwanda and Burundi after the assassination of the two presidents and the massacres that followed. These refugees were housed in pathetic temporary camps in Kagera and Kigoma regions. The largest camp, Benaco in Ngara district, had 211,370 refugees; and the smallest, Mkugwa in Kibondo district, had 744 refugees (Lwehabura *et. al.*, 1995: 2). By May 1995 Tanzania received 800,000 refugees in Bukoba and Kigoma regions, according to Radio Tanzania (May 11th 1997).

The second group (137,148 refugees) has been in the country for a longer period of time and was settled in permanent settlements in Mishamo and Katumba in Rukwa region, Mkuyu in Tanga region, and Ulyankulu and Kigwa in Tabora region (Lwehabura *et. al.*, 1995: 2).

The third group are refugees who more or less gained access to the country surreptitiously and settled with the local populations in villages. It is

estimated that there could be more than 600,000 refugees living this way in Tanzania. By August 1995 Tanzania was hosting 1,437,798 refugees apart from these who quietly settled on their own in rural and urban areas (Lwehabura *et. al.*, 1995: 2-3).

It is clear from the above historical briefing that the problem of refugees in eastern and central Africa is big and complicated. If the data for all those who have run from any eastern and central African country to another was available, we would be counting several million people. Quite often members of the same family will run to different countries or different parts of the same country. The problem of family break-up is as serious as the overall problem of refugees.

Conclusion

The family is the basic human institution. In eastern and central Africa, both the basic and the extended families provide many important functions to the individual and family break-up due to refugee status causes mental and physical suffering to hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions of people. All human beings must learn the values, norms and language of their culture, and develop skills that are necessary to be useful to oneself and to society. Parents and other family members usually have the primary responsibility of ensuring that children are properly socialized. The family is the major agency of socialisation, and its break-up among refugees has serious consequences on the individual because care and socialisation cannot be properly provided by non-family members.

A person who has been separated from his/her family may suffer from lack of-protection, affection and companionship, status conferral, education, regulation of sexual behaviour and reproduction, and economic resources. Such a person may end up not liking their country of origin even if s/he finally goes back home. Ethnic/tribal and national hatred is likely to get a good habitat in such a person and thus family break-up helps to recreate the conditions that caused it. This should be a clear message to the politicians and civil and community leaders in eastern and central Africa.

Research in the USA has shown that the experience of family disruption during childhood substantially increases the individual's odds of ending up in the lowest occupational stratum. Family disruption also weakens the association between dimensions of individuals' occupational origins and destinations. The socio-economic destinations of people from non-

intact family backgrounds bear less resemblance to their socio-economic origins than those of people from intact backgrounds (Biblarz & Raftery, 1993: 97). All refugees face a kind of family disruption, and thus even those who never underwent a direct family break-up nonetheless experience occupational and related problems. For children and young refugees, who are separated from one or both parents, the problems are likely to be more serious. People from a traditional two-parent home, exhibit a stronger pattern of intergenerational occupational inheritance than those from disrupted families (Biblarz & Raftery, 1993: 97-98).

For scholars in Tanzania and other countries in eastern and central Africa, there is a need to conduct empirical research among refugees to study the impact of family break-up. There is also need to conduct research on ways in which governments and non-governmental organization can systematically help those whose families have broken up because of becoming refugees in order to help them lead normal lives and through acquiring education, occupation, affection, and companionship. Refugees need to be socialized and educated in a way so that they do not develop a long-term fatalism which will end up producing more refugees later.

Tanzanian scholars are also faced with the task of researching on the dramatic transformation of women's lives that occurs as a direct outcome of forced displacement. Research on refugee women tends to focus on their vulnerability and their experience as victims in acts of sexual violence and other forms of abuse (Daley, 1991: 249). Sexual violence and other forms of abuse have a direct bearing on disrupting family stability and on the good upbringing of children. Daley (1991) collected some data from Burundi refugees in western Tanzania, and found out that as men and women come to terms with a redefinition of their access to resources, patriarchal tendencies within the pre-migration societies and the male bias of the refugee settlement programme combine to marginalize refugee women from the administrative structures. Even after settlement, these women are severely hindered from participating in the wider Tanzanian society. Daley further observed that gender was an important (but not all encompassing) factor in the reconstruction and control over space as refugees adjusted to their new environments. New research on refugees in Tanzania can take up some of these important themes, like the tendency for refugee families to reproduce the old gender biased division of labour after settlement.

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Changing Patterns of Governance in Tanzania: A Reflection on the Local Government Reforms Since 1990

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Introduction

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, a centralized system of governance has proved a failure in most of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (Wunsch and Olowu, 1990). Global economic and political changes in the late 1980s presented another challenge for these countries to transform their centralized systems into liberal and democratic systems of governance. In response to these challenges, Tanzania initiated a wide range of social, economic and political reforms in mid-1980s and early 1990s. Among objectives of these reforms is to change the existing patterns of governance in order to allow for democratic participation in all aspects of the societal fabric. This article reflects on this process of changing the existing patterns of governance and its prospects. It focuses on the local government reforms, which were initiated in the 1990s. Without prejudicing what has been done so far, the article argues that prospects for these reforms will depend, to a large extent, on the political commitment to implement the changed patterns of governance. It begins with a theoretical framework of local government in order to appreciate the context and content of these reforms.

What is Local Government?

There is no consensus among theorists and practitioners of local government on a single, precise and all encompassing meaning of the term "local government." Likewise, the practice of local government varies from country to country in both developed and developing world. It is assumed that the reader of this article is quite familiar with the varied interpretations and practices of local government. However, for the purpose of this discussion, there shall be a brief recap of some of the main interpretations, which apply to local government in Tanzania.

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