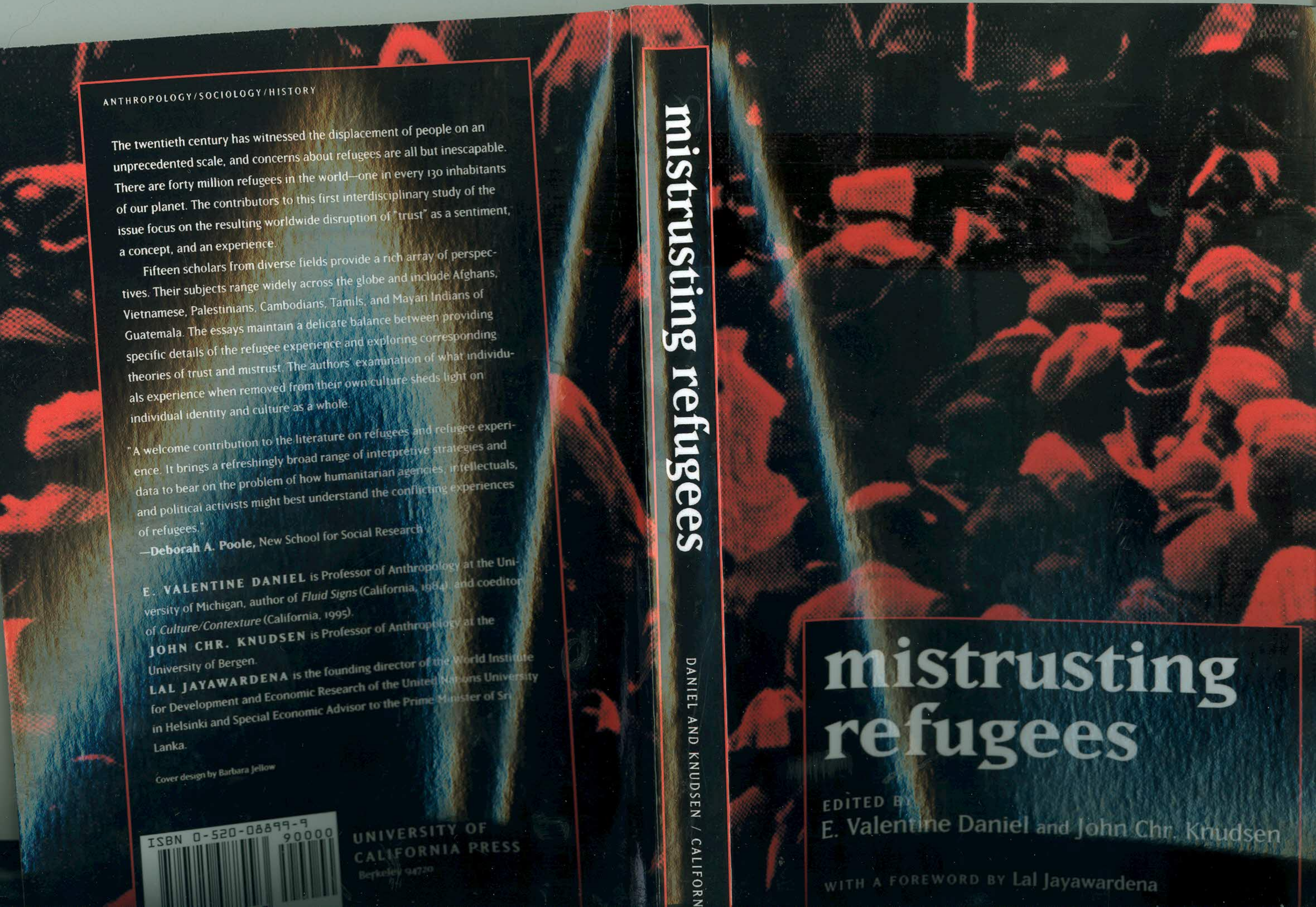

ANTHROPOLOGY/SOCIOLOGY/HISTORY

The twentieth century has witnessed the displacement of people on an unprecedented scale, and concerns about refugees are all but inescapable. There are forty million refugees in the world—one in every 130 inhabitants of our planet. The contributors to this first interdisciplinary study of the issue focus on the resulting worldwide disruption of "trust" as a sentiment, a concept, and an experience.

Fifteen scholars from diverse fields provide a rich array of perspectives. Their subjects range widely across the globe and include Afghans, Vietnamese, Palestinians, Cambodians, Tamils, and Mayan Indians of Guatemala. The essays maintain a delicate balance between providing specific details of the refugee experience and exploring corresponding theories of trust and mistrust. The authors' examination of what individuals experience when removed from their own culture sheds light on individual identity and culture as a whole.

"A welcome contribution to the literature on refugees and refugee experience. It brings a refreshingly broad range of interpretive strategies and data to bear on the problem of how humanitarian agencies, intellectuals, and political activists might best understand the conflicting experiences of refugees."
—**Deborah A. Poole,** New School for Social Research

**E. VALENTINE DANIEL** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, author of *Fluid Signs* (California, 1984), and coeditor of *Culture/Contexture* (California, 1995).
**JOHN CHR. KNUDSEN** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Bergen.
**LAL JAYAWARDENA** is the founding director of the World Institute for Development and Economic Research of the United Nations University in Helsinki and Special Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.

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mistrusting refugees

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# mistrusting refugees

EDITED BY
E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen

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## ELEVEN

# In Search of the Locus of Trust: The Social World of the Refugee Camp

*Eftihia Voutira and Barbara E. Harrell-Bond*

This chapter begins by questioning the proposition contained in the "founding document" by E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen (1991) on which the workshop on trust and the refugee experience was based and for which the chapters of this volume were written. In that document, Daniel and Knudsen submit that "trust is the least controversial concept by means of which we can reflect upon our own experiences with and knowledge of the refugee-problem . . . [and] the even bolder claim that trust is basic to being human." This is not to suggest that Erik Erikson (1963) and others are necessarily misguided in stating that specific psychological crises in children's development are linked to the issues of trust and mistrust. Nor do we suggest that J. Anthony Marsella, George DeVos, and Francis L. K. Hsu (1985:10, quoted in Daniel and Knudsen 1991:3) are wrong when they say that the self is "continuously defined in one's experience in interaction with others, and that it is this interactional process that contains the meaning of social experience" (ibid.). We do, however, want to challenge the validity of an unqualified acceptance of the concept of "trust" as a methodological tool in the analysis of human social relations, particularly as it relates to the study of refugees. In other words, can we assume that the inability of an individual to trust others is necessarily pathological or leads to pathological consequences?

The "glue" or cement, as Emile Durkheim put it, that holds human societies together is not trust per se but trust *in a system* of normative social relations, values, hierarchies, statuses, roles, obligations, sanctions, and so on. Certainly, "societies and cultures draw lines that divide those who can be trusted from those who cannot" (Daniel and Knudsen 1991:3). No doubt some social worlds are more capricious, particularly those that are in the process of rapid change. By implication, the social world(s) of refugees, perceived from the standpoint of radical uprootment, must be the most unpredictable and capricious of all.

Research on professionals in West Africa provides ample support for the claim that relationships that people admit to trust are very much the exception rather than the rule. In fact, Sierra Leoneans will always tell you that the *only* person a man can *really* trust is the one person who will not stand to gain by his death. This person is neither his wife nor his children; it is his mother. Men have only one mother (Harrell-Bond 1975:236)! The attitudes of the professional group toward relatives outside the immediate family were, to say the least, ambivalent, and nonfamilial social relations among other professionals were marked by "extreme competition and tension" (Harrell-Bond 1975, 1978). Food symbolism, patterns of food sharing, and attitudes toward the safety of accepting proffered food and drink were articulated in terms of the fear of being poisoned. While such fears of the potential malevolence of others might be interpreted as indicating a pathological level of distrust in others, for this group, in fact, this "belief" functioned as a means for rationalizing their disengagement from confining familial obligations and as a way to structure and manage social relations they perceived to be advantageous to their upward mobility.

Many, perhaps most, societies train children to be cautious, even suspicious of others, as a means for survival. Renee Hirschon has recorded how at least some sections of Greek society use "verbal play" (1992) or "verbal irresponsibility" (1989) to produce what she describes as the "doubting Thomas syndrome," which she claims to be "a feature which extends into all aspects of Greek life. . . . 'Don't believe it until you see it' is a principle which Greeks need to employ in all their social contacts" (1992:35).

In many parts of the world young children are allocated major responsibility for the care of other children. The growing evidence of sexual abuse of children by children in Western societies suggests that normative models may have a less direct correspondence to empirical reality than has been assumed, even in the very societies in which these models have been developed.

The recognition of a certain degree of violent behavior on all levels in all cultures is one of the recent "truths" in anthropological writings. The fact that anthropologists have for a long time explained away this reality has been highlighted recently by Elizabeth Colson (1989) and John Davis (1992). In Colson's analysis, anthropologists have "downplayed the violence, cruelty and unhappiness" because of our "belief that such actions were momentary departures from cultural norms that generated long-term harmony" (1989:3). Taking the argument one step further, Davis argues that wars, violence, and famines are indeed normal features of the cultures that anthropologists study. His own proposal to deal with the methodological gap that has allowed for the entrenchment of two types of anthropology—the anthropology of maintenance and the anthropology of repair—provides a unified picture of anthropology that he calls the "anthropology of suffering" (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992).

On a different level, a similar quest for a unified approach on the level of policy and implementation rather than theory has been voiced by Robert Chambers (1986). In Chambers's latest work on refugees, the focus of criticism becomes the refugee-centric approach of researchers, which has led to the neglect of an important dimension of the political economy of aid, namely, the impact of refugee aid programs on the "poorer" host populations.

On a more personal and self-critical tone, one can use the above insights to assess progress in the field of forced migration. Most of us have tended to be concerned primarily with the "anthropology of repair" and the need to interfere, rather than with developing theoretical models of explanations of the situations we study. Thus we find ourselves guilty of a similar type of refugee-centrism that construes refugees as the passive victims in need of our help. Drawing from the above diagnosis, the aim of this chapter is to suggest a tentative outline for such a theory in which refugees are present but are neither glorified nor explained away.

## THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF REFUGEE CAMPS

We began by challenging the notion of trust as an unambiguous concept, as well as the implied assumption that all normal human relationships are predicated on trust. We did this by drawing from anthropological experience that documents the variable contexts within which trust is both assumed through its absence and acknowledged as important. As Marjorie A. Muecke's account (this volume) of the Cambodian women who survived the Khmer Rouge invasions in 1979 shows, trust, though universally experienced, varies in its signification according to culture. Her case is instructive because of its striking contrast with Western understandings. Buddhism radically divorces "truth" from "trust." Trust is identified with secular human attachments, themselves undermined by the refugee experience. This chapter differs greatly from this type of analysis, characteristic of most of the other contributions in this book, in that it does not deal with cultural constructions of trust. The substantive issue it addresses is, where is the locus of trust in the refugee situation?

Daniel and Knudsen identify the restorative process of trust as the main aim of humanitarian interference. Evidently then, to test this proposition, it is necessary to examine a situation in which refugees and their helpers interact. The ideal candidate is the refugee camp. The camp is a unique social enclave in which refugees interact and are forced to come to terms with the humanitarian aid regime. It is in this sense that survival in the camps becomes the test case for cultural adaptation. The fact that refugee camps are designed to be temporary should not be seen as weakening our argument. As Muhammad Siddiq documents in this volume, the Palestinian people perceive their cultural predicament as being a "refugee nation in camps."

The usual picture of the refugee camp organization identifies all forms of intergroup behavior in terms of a simple polarity between "us" and "them"; the former identified with the aid regime, the "helpers," and the latter with the "needy." In fact, the whole institution of the refugee camp, its raison d'être, is predicated on the existence of a population that has been defined as requiring assistance. The refugee camp tradition was invented as the most efficient method of distributing aid to a constituency that had been labeled as requiring it.

The reality, we submit, is in fact far more complicated. The population of refugee camps is essentially multicultural. This multicultural dimension exists on all levels of the organization of authority, for example, dominated-dominating/givers-recipients. To capture the complexities, a map of the variety of actors and activities is in order. For the present purposes, this map of actors is partial. It does not include those in the host country or the country of origin who may either *refoul* or attack from across the border. Such threats in many refugee situations are actual rather than imagined, as the proliferation of media reports in 1993–1994 from Kenya and the former Yugoslavia has demonstrated (see also Harrell-Bond 1986:173–175).

## AN "IDEAL TYPE" REFUGEE CAMP

In an ideal type refugee camp, one can identify the following hierarchy of authority and division of labor as regards the responsibilities of law and order and the administration of aid. Starting from the top down, a refugee camp is administered by officials assigned by the host government whose power is enforced by the presence of armed police or paramilitary personnel. Although rarely benefiting from access to the host government's legal system, most camps have a place for extrajudicial detention of refugees who have committed some act deemed by the camp authorities to be an offense.

The management and distribution of material assistance is carried out by international nongovernmental (NGO) humanitarian agencies as implementing partners of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in contractual agreements that include the host government. These agencies are assigned responsibilities for different sectors—food, health, education, agriculture, "vulnerable groups," and so on—and are all identifiable through their respective offices and their insignia on buildings, radios for communicating to their offices in the capital, and vehicles and by the differing standards of living staff members enjoy. One of these agencies is designated as the "lead" agency, responsible for coordinating the work of all the others. This is a key variable that allows for innumerable variations in the structure of possible power relations. Adding to the cultural complexity, another set of parameters of the camp includes the nations of origin; sources of funding; varieties of actual and hidden agendas of these agencies that have led them to the camp; and, finally, the contingently defined motivations of their staff.

On the receiving end are the refugees. For the majority, their residence in the camp is the result of coercion rather than choice. Not necessarily mirroring the extreme cultural variety of the administrative structure, the refugee population is nevertheless usually highly heterogeneous in terms of religion, status, class, ethnic background, and political allegiance. Refugees also differ widely in terms of the nature of the experience that led to their forced displacement and uprootment.

We have identified, even at this level of abstraction, the challenge to any unified and coherent system of communication on the inter- and intragroup level. The situation on the ground is infinitely more complex. For example, a refugee population usually includes one-parent families that may be headed by a father, mother, grandparent, or older sibling (any of which may be "fictive") and may include unaccompanied minors, guerrilla fighters, "political" activists, the handicapped, the elderly, and the mentally ill. Evidently, the only way out of this complex situation is to resort to the common link that binds the different actors together, which is the aid itself.

Although aid is the unifying principle that brings these diverse groups together, the administration of aid requires a whole machinery of power, the struggle and exercise of which defines the social reality of each refugee camp. For example, who holds the aid to be allocated and administered? Who distributes the aid? (The two do not necessarily converge.) Who owns the aid? If the aid is for the refugees, then theoretically it is their property (Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992).

## POWER GRIDS IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF AID

Such considerations necessarily require that one focus on the social organization of the administration of assistance, which entails a system of actors, roles, rules, and goals, the most important activities being the allocation, distribution, and acquisition of the material resources.

Ever since Marcel Mauss (1925*a*, 1925*b*) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), anthropologists have focused on the cultural universe of giving and receiving and the complexity of power involved in any transfer of commodities (Appadurai 1986). More recently, Annette Weiner (1992) has undertaken to explore more fully the universal principle of reciprocity. Her work shows that reciprocity as a principle of exchange is not only "giving while receiving" but a series of disguised strategies of power relations that she describes as "keeping while giving."

In the refugee camp (see Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992), borrowing from Mauss's idea of the gift, the transfer of goods from the donors to the recipients creates a whole chain of hands and networks of power. The point we wish to emphasize here is that refugees are bound to their helpers in terms of the existence of these lateral and vertical chains of hands that "handle" the aid, which originates from afar. The overall pattern of distribution of aid to refugees constitutes an inverse relationship, specifically, between distance and power.

Distance becomes a factor in the accumulation of power. That is, the closer the material assistance moves toward its recipients, the greater the power of the handler over its allocation. For example, the ultimate authority in the chain of distribution lies with the person, whether a foreign aid worker or a refugee, who performs the penultimate act in the chain of handlers, "tipping" the grain into the sack of the kneeling beneficiary. This inverse relationship, which holds for givers and recipients, embodied in the act of kneeling to receive the grain, is dramatically represented in the fund-raising literature of many humanitarian agencies. It does not, however, exhaust the power structures relevant in the administration of assistance.

## DONORS AND GIVERS—PATRONS AND CLIENTS

As the ideal type of the refugee camp that we have described shows, the multicultural nature of the aid regime leaves a wide space for competition as regards the administration of the allocation of resources. Resources have to be given away. The question is not simply who gets it, but who gets to give it away? The two issues are normally confounded. Introducing this dimension of conflict among the helpers themselves enables us to understand the sense in which the notion of trust is highly problematic. The sources of this problem, the role and seat of trust, may be identified analytically on at least seven levels:

1. Donors and host governments;
2. Donors and intermediaries (UNHCR and NGOs);
3. Relationships among the intermediaries (UNHCR and its nongovernmental implementing partners);
4. Relationships between the intermediaries (international agencies) and the host government in the camp;
5. Relationships between the intermediaries and the recipients in the camp situation;
6. Host population and refugees; and
7. Inter- and intragroup relationships among the refugees themselves.

In each one of these visible "segmentary groups," one can identify different sets of interests and sources of competition and conflict. Unlike the segmentary system of the Nuer, described by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), the aid regime lacks an overall principle of "fusion" and "fission" that could provide the framework of cohesion on which different layers of trust could be built.

### *Donors and Host Governments: Competition for Sovereignty*

Happy is the host government that is able to stretch its resources to accommodate the material needs of refugees and, in the process, to engage its own people in actively supporting the incorporation of refugees into its social and economic life. Such governments have the luxury of mobilizing public opinion, planning, deciding priorities, and implementing their own policies. However, most refugee situations today occur in the poorest parts of the world, where it is assumed by both the host government and the international humanitarian regime that the local infrastructure cannot cope without external aid. (Even where such absolute poverty cannot be claimed as justification for soliciting international assistance, some governments still use the presence of refugees as leverage.)

In Africa, up to the late 1970s, it was normal donor practice to channel aid bilaterally so as to support programs implemented by host governments as well as to fund humanitarian activities through multilateral sources, that is, UNHCR. Since that time, most humanitarian aid is channeled through multilateral institutions and nongovernmental agencies. Although probably having more to do with the domestic politics and the foreign relations of the donor, the justification for this change in policy is the lack of trust in host government institutions. Host governments are regularly accused of exaggerating numbers to justify more external aid and of being corrupt (Harrell-Bond 1986:13–15; Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992).

Once a host government accepts external aid, it is forced into a position of economic dependence that dilutes the exercise of sovereignty in the development of state policy and decisions about priorities. In the day-to-day implementation of programs, host governments and the host populations tend to be marginalized as observers. This, as will be discussed below, undermines relationships among refugees, their host government, and the ordinary local people.[1]

### *Donors and Intermediaries (UNHCR and NGOs): Competition for Funds*

For each new refugee crisis, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees must mount a special fund-raising appeal (UNHCR 1982:16–17). These funds are given to donor governments from funds set aside for humanitarian emergencies. Given the increasing numbers of humanitarian crises around the world, donor governments have been increasing the amounts of funds available for dealing with them at the expense of "development" budgets (Randel and German 1993; Smillie and Helmich 1993). At the same time, depending on foreign policy priorities, donors may be more generous to particular refugee emergencies.

Traditionally, ever since it became involved in assistance programs for refugees, UNHCR was the main conduit for international aid. However, during the early 1980s, many donor governments began to express their lack of confidence in UN organizations by diverting funds to support the activities of their own national NGOs. Consequently, in any refugee emergency, UNHCR must also rely on NGOs for resources. Thus, at the international level in competition for funding and at the field level in the exercise of authority, UNHCR and NGOs find themselves competing.

NGOs, which depend on government sources for the majority of their funding, may compromise their independent "nongovernmental" status (Smillie and Helmich 1993:27). (Could one say the same for NGOs that rely for funding on the European Union?) Others seek to maintain their independence by only implementing projects for which the majority of the funds come from private sector donations.

### *Relationships Among the Intermediaries (UNHCR and Its Nongovernmental Implementing Partners): Competition for Power*

Although UNHCR's mandate was initially restricted to the protection of refugees, over the past three decades it has assumed the major responsibility for coordinating material assistance to refugees. For the *implementation* of aid programs, with the exception of its programs in Bosnia in the early 1990s, it relies on nongovernmental agencies, usually northern based. Although theoretically UNHCR has the mandate to "coordinate," at the field level it usually designates one NGO as the lead agency. The use of the common term "NGO," referring to all nongovernmental organizations, conceals an enormous variety of agents, structures, distinct agendas (religious, secular, political), and levels of competence.

Tripartite contracts are drawn up between UNHCR, the host government, and the NGO. (On occasion, a special office of the host government or a local NGO may be included as an implementing partner.) UNHCR's funding sources include donor governments (and the European Community), who may earmark monies for specific projects and/or agencies; these may be supplemented by the funds obtained by the NGOs directly from their own governments (and the EC) or raised from the public. Normally, the NGOs that sign tripartite contracts as implementing partners with UNHCR are also dependent on it for the majority of their funding.

As noted, the degree to which NGOs are successful in raising their own funds determines the level of autonomy vis-à-vis UNHCR with which they can operate in the field situation. However, the relative autonomy of both UNHCR and NGOs may be limited by the host government, which has veto power over who may operate within its borders. But because most host governments view themselves as dependent on international aid as a matter of course (India being a major exception), UNHCR maintains enormous leverage over governments in the development of their refugee assistance policy (Harrell-Bond 1986:chap. 2; Karadawi 1983).[2] Thus the deck is stacked against any NGO wishing to continue operating in a country while not conforming to UNHCR policy.

Occasionally similar limitations run in the other direction as well: UNHCR's power over an NGO may be undermined if that NGO stands in a privileged position with respect to its own government if the latter is a major donor. In that event, this government's donations to UNHCR would be earmarked for exclusive use by that NGO. To make matters worse, some northern-based NGOs, funded by their governments, are able to establish an office in a host country and act as local donors to other NGOs and even to UNHCR. The factional scenarios that can be visualized in this cooperative and competitive administrative structure, where it is evident that each member has a different interest in the refugees, do not require any further elaboration. What needs to be stressed, however, is that every negotiation among and between these organizations entails different possibilities of conflict, and even when some type of resolution is achieved, there are still legitimate reasons for the actors to distrust rather than to trust each other.

### *Relationships between the Intermediaries (International Agencies) and the Host Government in the Camps: Competition for Authority*

If we recall our ideal type of the refugee camp, the symbolic representation of the different insignia allows us to discern another set of levels of struggle for power over the refugees. In principle, the camp is administered by a representative of the host government that has established its own office. In many cases, some of the costs for maintaining this office are borne by UNHCR.[3]

The role of such offices in the camps often turns out to be primarily decorative since most of the executive powers are held by the lead agency. In symbolic, representational terms, this division of labor is often exemplified by the different "uniforms" encountered within the distinct spatial arrangement of each camp. At the gate, refugees usually meet armed, uniformed police or paramilitary personnel, representing the maintenance of the government's sovereignty, often more in word than in deed. Registration of the refugees takes place in the government's administrative office—the navel of the camp, given the priority that both the UNHCR and the host government assign to statistical records and accurate numerical representation.[4]

Yet the real centers for the exercise of authority within the camp may be isolated in the agencies' offices where the decisions concerning the modes of distribution and the final allocation of aid are executed. Again, this picture is partial because it does not expose the actual arenas of the decision-making processes, which are neither exclusively "Geneva," the offices in the host or donor government capitals, nor the region of the camp itself. In each one of these places, a different set of negotiations occurs and different, often hidden, agendas are being promoted. The resulting complexity of agencies and agents pursuing their individual private as well as relevant political interests that result from specific collaborations among the relevant parties defies any tragic denouement.[5] Again, in this context, issues of *mistrust* become highly relevant given that deliberation on an individual and group level is structured in terms of competition and suspicion concerning the hidden agendas and underlying motives of the interlocutors.

### *Relationships between the Intermediaries and the Recipients in the Camp Situation: Competing Agendas*

The next step, which is the actual distribution of aid to the refugees, is then determined by another layer of competition and mistrust. From the point of view of the humanitarians, this presupposes a polarity between "us" and "them," which construes the refugees as individuals who are out to get the most for themselves, given that their behavior finds them not adhering to the principles of fairness and equity to all, which is the norm for the humanitarian regime (Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992; Harrell-Bond and Wilson 1990; Waldron 1987). Refugees are thus perceived as fundamentally untrustworthy—and with good reason.

When a group of refugees were asked to describe how they behaved when they were hungry, a variety of coping strategies were described. As the quotations (Harrell-Bond 1986:328) below illustrate, all involved some form of deception or manipulation of others.

> The constant starvation led to theft, which I thought by that time was a good activity, but it is not. Anyway, it saved me during that time.
>
> One of the easiest tricks . . . was . . . [to introduce] myself as the son of a famous man. As he [watchman of a hospital] was an old man, he simply accepted my word. After which I was given a great deal of food to eat.
>
> It was [also] high time for girls and women to go for prostitution which helped a lot in feeding us [of course, those (of us who) . . . had sisters . . .]. We very well knew it was wrong, but it was beyond human control.

As one refugee summed it up, "To be a refugee means to learn to lie." Although this situation of mistrust may be taken as characteristic of the different ways in which the "us" and "them" relate, the actual situation is far more complicated as regards the relevant interests of the two groups that are at stake.

Earlier in this chapter, we identified the common kernel of interest that brings helpers and refugees into contact. Yet this does not in itself explain the actual interests that become established. As with most bureaucratic structures, the latent functions quite often diverge from the manifest aims. Indeed, the whole purpose of the bureaucracy is to maintain and perpetuate itself independently of resolving the contingent crisis situation that necessitated its formation.

Seen from the perspective of the refugees, the disparity between manifest and latent ends of the bureaucracy becomes evident and influences their behavior toward the camp authorities. From their standpoint, they have legitimate claims as regards the promotion of their interests, which include becoming sufficiently independent so as not to need the camp. Such realizations are seldom articulated because they would threaten the fragile (paternalistic) relationship on which the refugees are forced to depend (Harrell-Bond 1986:6). The familiar response from the refugee quarter often takes the form of songs sung in praise of the agencies, or metaphorical references, in a familial idiom, to describe UNHCR's relationship to them. In striking contrast to such positive reinforcement of the image of selfless humanitarian sacrifice, one woman who was being denied her rightful ration at a food distribution exercise in Malawi cried out, "Remember, you have your job because we are here."

To be sure, such utterances are primarily elicited in extreme situations and quite possibly our own presence as witnesses made it worth the risk. Yet one may still be allowed a minimal generalization as regards the competition over incompatible resources. Put differently, we can say that the helpers and the recipients are not competing over the same resources. Rather, they are competing for resources that become contingently incompatible.

For the helpers, the ultimate "good" is the maintenance of their exercise of authority; for the refugees, it is the acquisition of material goods. In the woman's terms, what legitimizes the helpers' authority is not merely the presence of the refugees but the maintenance of the exercise of their allotted function. Such maintenance is itself quite independent of the actual needs of the refugees, who could quite capably administer and distribute the aid among themselves (Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992).

### *Host Population and Refugees: Competing Perceptions*

Who really assists refugees? International aid is always late on the scene. In fact, the local people are the ones who bear the brunt of the needs of refugees in an emergency. In most cases the majority of people who have found refuge in the poorest host countries of the world are living (spontaneously settled, as UNHCR describes them) among the host population; only a minority of refugees receive official assistance. In Africa, it is estimated that not more than 25 percent are under the international "aid umbrella" (Kibreab 1989).

Once aid arrives, those refugees who become the recipients of this highly visible assistance program are confined within the circumference of the camp. From then on, a different set of relationships develops between themselves and the host population. From the local people's point of view, their meager resources and modest hospitality have been rejected in favor of the outsiders' help. In terms of their access to scarce resources, the refugee camp appears as an island of privilege. Lorries move in and out carrying food, blankets, and clothes. Foreign visitors arrive in new four-wheel-drive cars to take charge, wells are dug, schools, clinics, and office buildings are being erected, and medical services are offered.

From the point of view of the refugees, most of whom may actually be unwilling residents of the camps, their security is no longer dependent on good relations with the host but on maintaining and manipulating the existing paternalism of the aid regime. Part of this manipulation includes investing their trust in the foreign aid workers and organizations. Such identification of their security and future with the foreigners alienates them from the local population, which does not enjoy such privileges. This becomes the basis for the formulation of a series of negative stereotypes between refugees and their hosts. Later on, when anything goes wrong in the aid pipeline, and, as so often happens, food rations do not arrive on time, invariably refugees blame their hosts, especially the government. How could "Geneva" be wrong?

More recently in Europe, similar processes are at work. In the Czech Republic, for example, where the entire burden for hosting refugees falls on the state, no refugee could be found who believed that his or her standard of living was not the result of corruption in the government. In Greece, the new refugees from Abhazia have organized themselves to sue the government for embezzling European Community funds earmarked for them. In both cases, refugees are construed as living at a higher standard of living than a citizen on welfare would have been able to afford (Voutira 1994).

### *Inter- and Intragroup Relationships among the Refugees*

We have already noted the heterogenity of the refugee camp populations. Such heterogenity is not exhausted in the diversity of ethnic, class, and status backgrounds and political allegiances. An important parameter of this diversity also includes the contingent conditions that lead people to avoid or to seek inclusion in the camp. Families often strategically divide their members, allocating them so as to maximize access to different resources so as to increase the survival possibilities of the family as a whole. This finds camp populations made up of many vulnerable individuals, for example, orphans, widows, elderly, the ill, and women-headed households, alongside complete families or competent individual adults.

Despite the apparent commonality of their experience vis-à-vis their country of origin, one seldom finds a sense of political solidarity among refugee populations. More often than not, refugee populations are highly factionalized in relation to their different strategies for resolving the causes that led to their flight.

The power of the humanitarian regime over limited supplies generates inter- and intragroup conflict, as individuals seek to ingratiate themselves with the authorities in competition with their fellows. For example, from the point of view of the less well educated Ugandan refugees in southern Sudan, being able to speak English (usually the language of the aid givers) was described as "bribing" the authorities (Harrell-Bond 1986:Addendum, chap. 2). Speaking the same language (or practicing the same religion) as the foreign helpers puts individuals in a structural advantage over their fellows who do not possess such skills. As powerful middlemen, they play the role of informant for both "us" and "them." These privileges often include paid employment, or, more likely, individuals may be assigned unpaid positions in which they may act as spokespersons for sections of the camp and be invested with authority over other refugees on behalf of the aid regime. Such conditions seriously undermine any potential for unity and solidarity of the population as a whole while at the same time introducing new grounds for cleavages and factions.

Under these conditions, it would be difficult to discern any space in which trust could be fostered either in the psychological sense of reliability and meeting of mutual expectations or the sociological sense of a fully functioning normative system.[6]

## CONCLUSION

We hold, first, that trust is an ambiguous term that characterizes human relations; second, that trust is not a necessary desideratum in all forms of healthy (nonpathological) interpersonal relations; and, third, that the concept of trust as methodologically relevant in the context of a refugee crisis is questionable. Our analysis has focused on the "deconstruction" of the refugee camp as the paradigmatic case of humanitarian intervention.

The aim of the exercise has been to avoid the pitfalls of the usual monolithic research approach in refugee studies that tends to focus exclusively on the category "refugee." The analysis of the social world of refugees and their helpers in camps has challenged the notion that the encounter between refugees and their helpers has potential for the restoration of trust in any simple sense. In examining the relations between actors, situations, and established humanitarian practices, we have seen that there is no locus for nurturing "trust." What we have shown is that the whole structure of the humanitarian regime is predicated on the exercise of a type of authority, which is itself maintained and legitimized by the absence of trust between the givers and the recipients. In fact, the whole structure of the humanitarian regime is fraught with competition, suspicion, and mistrust.

In Malawi, attempts to prevent cheating include the requirement that refugees build their own houses before they are formally registered in the camp's master register and issued a ration card (Dzimbiri 1992). At each registration, the ration card holder must personally appear, whether old, handicapped, or otherwise unfit to travel the long distances required. "Collecting for two rationees, even if one card-owner is too weak to walk the distance, much less to carry the load back home, is absolutely not allowed" (Harrell-Bond 1992:32).

From the standpoint of the givers, the overall atmosphere of mutual distrust is most dramatically illustrated in OXFAM's ABC on refugee registration (Mitchell and Slim 1990). Among the techniques for managing assistance, it advises nighttime invasions for accurate census taking and daubing refugees with gentian violet so as to avoid anyone getting double rations. The authors warn their fellow humanitarians that the dye is only effective for "about 48 hours and can be removed by the determined cheater." The handbook includes a special annex entitled "Cheating," which is meant to prepare agency staff for what they will encounter in the emergency situation. Far from describing conditions directed toward engendering trust in individuals or environments, the handbook suggests and reinforces the commonly held belief that refugees are inherently untrustworthy.

One possible interpretation of such a mind-set may be the projection of the Western categories of cognition on other cultures. In our own society, the category of trust figures prominently as a value term. We choose our friends, spouses, and colleagues on its basis, taking them in "trust." If we accept the principle that a society values and promotes the things it needs most, then trust becomes a value because the conditions needed to establish social success do not guarantee the maintenance of trust. Hence a different type of leverage is required. Trust enters into human deliberations as a safety valve against risk, unpredictability, and the recalcitrance of human nature. On the institutional level, one can think of the whole political and educational system that tends to promote models of artful persuasion and successful hypocrisy rather than the pursuit of truth. In this context, the notion of trust is identified with the efficiency of the result (trusting in one's abilities), while the moral category of trustworthiness becomes an elusive concept to be pursued through art and literature (Voutira 1990).

On the societal level, the relevant interpersonal notion of trust is evident in the context of guarantees against its mistrust. Signatures are required to validate transactions and, where contractual agreements are ensured, by recourse to law. Such guarantees are meant to preserve the efficiency of the system and the rule of law and to guard against any regress to irrelevant criteria such as status and origins. Whatever the ostensible reason and justificatory processes, the crux of the matter remains that such institutions are predicated on the absence of trust; they exist to guard against interpersonal mistrust.

These insights into our society may give us a clue as to why the humanitarian regime seeks to impose ab initio similar guarantees to guard against refugee untrustworthy behavior. They also point to an interesting hypothesis as to why the aid authorities are so averse to what would appear to be the most efficient method of distributing aid, namely, the community itself. Such a solution would entail the application of the traditional criteria of allocation and distribution of goods according to "native" categories of value, which are often incommensurate with our Western criteria of equity and allocation of trust as a moral human prerogative (Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992).

Taking trust in this sense on a par with our normative system of values entails a different notion from the one that informs Daniel and Knudsen (1991). Our initial example of the Sierra Leonean notion of trust and trustworthiness demonstrates the conceptual gap and the degree of cultural dissonance that defines the challenge of the encounter between refugees and their helpers. Unless this challenge is taken seriously, any assistance provided by the humanitarian regime is likely to fail in its aims.

## NOTES

1. Similar tensions exist between northern and southern academics. In his report of a meeting concerning research on forced migration, G. Loescher (1994:4–5) writes, "Many participants felt that most international refugee policy . . . is formulated in the North. . . . [I]t is frequently the case that researchers in the South are not included in the research done by northern refugee research organizations and are even often unaware of research taking place in their own part of the world. In most instances, northerners are the ones who initiate and control the research agenda, attract donor and foundation funds for research projects, enjoy ready access to current literature, claim privileged access to information from both governments and international organizations, and publish and disseminate the research findings, even those written by southern researchers."

2. Host governments were formerly part of this international competition. The issue was whether donors would provide aid through bilateral arrangements with host governments or through multilateral aid to inter- and nongovernmental agencies, the latter being deemed more "trustworthy." See Harrell-Bond 1986:chap. 2 and Harrell-Bond and Karadawi 1984 for a discussion of the struggle between UNHCR and the Sudanese government for control over international aid for refugees.

3. Concerning the extent to which UNHCR bears the costs of maintaining the host governments' offices, there are great variations. In some cases, salaries are topped up and vehicles and other equipment are provided; in others, the government receives no direct support from UNHCR. Where the host government insists on expanding its involvement in a program, the numbers of nationals employed may expand dramatically, as in Pakistan and Malawi. However, these people are employed on temporary contracts with funding from UNHCR. They do not receive the normal benefits provided other civil servants. The effects of their insecurity on policy and their relations with the better-paid international agency staff introduces another level of competition and conflict in the camps (Dzimbiri 1992; Harrell-Bond 1986). Government officials from five southern African countries who met together for the first time in September 1991 were extremely interested in exchanging information on these variations (Refugee Studies Programme 1991).

4. The rationale and implications of this point of congruence is further explored in Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992.

5. While holding for Africa, our model of the typology of conflict and competition between host governments and international agencies will require further expansion, elaboration, and additional refinement to apply to other situations in the world. The balance of power between UNHCR and the host government differs from place to place and depends very much on the resources of the host to assert its sovereignty claims over its need for external assistance. Sierra Leone, for example, did not allow UNHCR to establish an office and did not receive international aid to support the Fula refugees from Sekou Toure's Guinea. Similarly, Guinea did not receive international aid or allow an office of UNHCR to be established in response to the refugees from the anticolonial war against the Portuguese in Guinea Bissau. Even where a host government is highly dependent on international aid, for example, Thailand and Pakistan, the host government may be able to assert its policy over that of UNHCR because it knows that the foreign interests of donors assures funding, whatever its policy. Hong Kong may be seen as a situation where there is the least conflict and competition between the actors.

There are instances where, at the expense of diplomatic relations with the host and donor governments, an individual UNHCR representative may openly oppose a host government policy in order to protect refugees. This occurred, for example, in one country where the government was using military force to move refugees at the border into camps. The balance of power was restored through a horse trade: that host government agreed to remove a member of its staff and UNHCR withdrew its representative, who was openly objecting to the host's policy.

Where the balance of power totally favors the host government, as in the Sierra Leone and Guinea cases, refugees receive no international assistance and, at least in Sierra Leone, were completely free to move into the local economy. In Pakistan, where the donors and the host government were aligned with the overall objectives of the Mujahidin, competition and conflict over access to aid in the camps were affected by the cleavages and structure of power relations among Afghan groups.

6. Many camp situations do not fit our model, as they have existed for as long as three decades and are no longer a place where refugees and their helpers interact. For example, see Malkki's (1990) study of refugee camps in Tanzania where she found conditions favorable to the formation of a particular type of historical and political consciousness. Elsewhere we wrote, "Thus, far from contributing towards the intended policy goal of de-politicization and control, the context of camp life provides people with the opportunity to engage in the

creative activity of interpreting their flight and articulating and constructing a collective narrative concerning common past" (Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold 1992). The invasion of Rwanda by refugees from Uganda, which relied on recruitment from the camps, is an example.

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# TWELVE

# Forms, Formations, and Transformations of the Tamil Refugee

*E. Valentine Daniel and Yuvaraj Thangaraj*

In its details, this chapter is about Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. But the details chosen are intended to have a bearing on our understanding of the refugee experience more generally. Our main focus will be on the formation of refugees in a relatively underreported area of that island nation, the eastern province of Batticaloa, and their and other Tamils' attempt to resettle as refugees in Great Britain. We have chosen to enter our case studies, however, by way of a brief theoretical prolegomenon.

## SOME PRELIMINARIES

### *Trust and the Individual*

Trust, as is claimed in the introduction, is an integral part of the will and the capacity to tame chance. Obviously, the formulation needs refinement. Untamed, chance lets in surprises that can be either pleasant or unpleasant. Trust, in the context of refugee experience, has more to do with experiences that are pleasant than with those that are unpleasant. Thus an assertion such as "I trust him to hurt me" does not quite fit our understanding of trust.

Holding this in mind, let us begin somewhat abstractly. In what must have been a very enigmatic definition of a "human being" for someone in the nineteenth century (let alone the late twentieth century), the logician-philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce defined man [*sic*] as a sign (5.313).[1] What he intended to convey by this was the fact that a human being was not a thing in itself but a representation of something other than itself. Peirce might have done well to have defined (wo)man, not as a sign (in the singular) but, borrowing an expression from his friend, William James, as a "buzzing and booming" constellation of signs. Because each individual is constituted of a multitude of signs representing a multitude of