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A NEW BOOK ON INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL DISPLACEMENT

Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp: Gender, Violence, and Coping in Uganda by Ulrike Krause. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, Pp. 302. ISBN 978-1-108-830008-9 (hardback)

*Veronica Fynn Bruey**

Abstract

*In May 2022, an exam copy of Ulrike Krause's book *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp: Gender, Violence, and Coping in Uganda* was received after an initial hesitation from Cambridge University Press. Their concern was that a request for an exam copy is subject to an instructor teaching a course wherein students taking their course will guarantee purchase of the book and hence an accumulation of capital and extraction of profit on author's intellectual property. I first heard about *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* prior to requesting an examination copy from Cambridge University Press. From 2021-2022 Professor Ulrike Krause and I served on the executive committee of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration – an international organisation that brings together academics, practitioners and decision-makers working on forced migration issues.*

Keywords

Refugee camp, Uganda, gender, violence, displacement, coping

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In May 2022, an exam copy of Ulrike Krause's book *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp: Gender, Violence, and Coping in Uganda* was received after an initial hesitation from Cambridge University Press. Their concern was that a request for an exam copy is subject to an instructor teaching a course wherein students taking their course will guarantee purchase of the book and hence an accumulation of capital and extraction of profit on author's intellectual property. I first heard about *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* prior to requesting an examination copy from Cambridge University Press. From 2021-2022 Professor Ulrike Krause and I served on the executive committee of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration – an international organisation that brings together academics, practitioners and decision-makers working on forced migration issues.

As a scholar with a lived experience of being a refugee who live on a refugee camp for nearly a decade, and a survivor of war, which includes an experience of gender-based violence, and all kinds of human rights abuses; I have a genuine interest in *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* for three reasons: 1) why are (Western) scholars without lived experience of being displaced interested in refugee issues? 2) How do non-refugee (Western) scholars write *about* refugee experiences? 3) what impact(s) (if any) does non-refugee (Western) scholars' work have on refugees? 4) Is the end-product of non-refugee (Western) scholars' work (e.g., a book published by Cambridge University Press) ever accessible to the refugee community from which such research data are extracted?

It is not certain (and it may not be possible) for a simple review of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* to provide meaningful responses to these questions. Albeit it is instructive to critically examine the text through the subjective lens of a scholar with a lived experience of been displaced as an honest attempt of understanding the driving force behind writing about refugees.

1. Why are (Western) scholars without lived experience of being displaced interested in refugee issues?

The author's page in *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* and a review of a number of online profiles indicate that Professor Krause is a German-based scholar who was formerly a Junior Professor of Forced Migration and Refugee Studies at the University of Osnabrück's Institute for Social Sciences. Currently, she is Professor of Social Work in the Migration Society at Münster University of Applied Sciences. Her research and teaching focus on gender, forced migration, conflict, violence, and humanitarianism, inequality relations, (non)knowledge production, (post)colonial approaches, and research ethics with regional concentration on Africa (Uganda) and global developments.

Professor Krause's extensive research track record and work in Uganda for at least four years demonstrate passion, compassion, and commitment to refugee studies and advocacy. In collaboration with two Ugandan women and 12 refugee peer-researchers' fieldwork data obtained

for *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* span over a period of three-months (p. 16), that is, in addition to previously completing three years of doctoral work in Uganda, as well as being employed by various humanitarian/development agencies (p. 15) while conducting studies for her PhD in Uganda. The acknowledgements in *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* (pp viii-xi) expressed profound gratitude for being:

...able to meet, speak with, and, most of all, listen to many women and men in Uganda's refugee camp Kyaka II who shared their often very personal experiences of war, violence, and life in encampments; (...) learn about the hardships and cruelties they had faced but also the strengths they continued to possess not only to endure but to move from their manifold challenges and create better lives (...) I sadly cannot address individually by name due to confidentiality and security reasons. They greatly supported our data collection, and I am extremely grateful for our inspiring discussions, constructive cooperation, and personal connections formed. Sadly, I was unable to continue the collaboration through a data analysis, an aspect that I have promoted and hope to continue promoting with great vigor in future research.

The research project that produced *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* is a “jigsaw” piece of the “Gender Relations in Confined Space” project (pp. viii and 15) funded by the *German Foundation for Peace Research*. Rather than being a “voice for refugees,” the main purpose of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* is to use direct quotations from refugees “to reproduce their own various voices and thoughts” (p. 24). To this end, throughout the book, Professor Krause emphatically mentions “I” and “me” when referring to the data collected and insights the women and men in Kyaka II shared rather than “we” and “ours” to reflect the lack of refugee researchers’ participation in the data analysis and book publication process. Therefore, “despite the teamwork during data collection, I was unable to involve the team in the data analysis and generate findings together with them...” (p24).

There seems to be no explanation in *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* for discontinuing collaboration with the two Ugandan women and 12 refugee peer-researchers. It would be interesting to hear their thoughts on the final product, i.e., this book published by Cambridge University Press.

2) How do non-refugee (Western) scholars write about refugee experiences?

It is evident in the acknowledgements of that many (non-refugees) scholars in Europe and elsewhere supported the successful publication of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*. The extent of their contribution is difficult to assumed from a simplistic review of the book. The generous gratitude expressed presumptively indicate the need to seek approval and affirmation from non-refugee (Western) scholars (for example, from University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre, which tend to be relatively Eurocentric in representation) who have supposedly “championed” (or “hijack” for lack of a better word) *writing about refugees*.

Notwithstanding, much of the introduction chapter deals with ethics of researching and writing *about* rather than *with* refugees. Notably, Professor Krause's *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* aligns with this concept of writing *with* refugees by:

Plac[ing] emphasis on engaging with refugees as interviewed participants with sufficient space for them to voice their own issues and topics of interest. (...) reflections were highly fruitful and

constructive; [resulting] in a joint process of adapting the concept, through which these individuals directly impacted on the project and data collection (...) to avoid the portrayal of the people who shared their stories as passive and inherently vulnerable, or alternatively ‘normalizing’ the cruelties suffered through academic abstraction. (...) as a scholar, I have to have – and seek to keep – an analytical perspective on subjects matters, but I do not want to lose grip of these women’s and men’s personal views. Thus, their individual narratives are at the heart of the book. (pp 22-24).

The methodological design adopted in *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* signifies Professor Krause’s acute cognizance of the sensitivity of researching a population that is traumatised by violence/abuse and subsequently applying an ethical approach that reflects empathy, duty of care, consent, collegial respect, and dignity for refugee participants. For example, in chapter two (pp. 29-89) extremely painful recounts of “gender-based violence in the camp and beyond” is discussed extensively. Respondents’ experiences (by way of numerous direct quotations) are front and centre reflecting a sense of ownership, direction, and authority rather than elevating Professor Krause’s academic prowess.

3) What impact(s) (if any) does non-refugee (Western) scholars’ work have on refugees?

Professor Krause stated a number of occasions (pp. ix and 22) that “with vigor” she wishes to involve refugee peer-researchers in the collaborative aspect of data analysis and (maybe) co-authoring the final knowledge production project. Since, the two Ugandan women, the 12-refugee peer-researchers, and other participants were not part of the data analysis, here are two open questions for consideration: with particular regard to “willingness to leave some stones unturned...” (p. 21), what impact does the final product in the form of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* have on participants in the research project leading up to the production of this book? Could the two Ugandan women and the 12-refugee peer-researchers have met the so-called dominant Eurocentric ethical standards of being co-authors of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*?

4) Is the end-product of non-refugee (Western) scholars’ work (e.g., a book published by Cambridge University Press) ever accessible to the refugee community from which such research data are extracted?

From a modest review of the book, it is hard to know with certainty whether the entire book, aspects of it, or the unpublished manuscript of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* is/will ever be available to the research community from which the fieldwork data was extracted. If *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* is/will be available to the refugee research community, then it would be helpful to know by what means (e.g., soft or hard copies), when, and for how long? To date, the cost of *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* on Cambridge University Press’s website is USD \$24 for the paperback/ebook and USD \$110 for the hardback.

In spite of the aforementioned, *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp* is a thought-provoking six chapters, 289-page book that will attract the interest of scholars, humanitarian workers, and public sector workers in the areas of refugee, displacement, (forced) migration, gender, development, and peace-conflict research and advocacy.