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Lauterbach, Karen

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# “A Refugee Pastor in a Refugee Church”

## Refugee-Refugee Hosting in a Faith-Based Context

*Karen Lauterbach*

■ **ABSTRACT:** This article discusses “refugee-refugee hosting” in a faith-based context. It looks particularly at Congolese churches in Kampala, Uganda, that play a crucial role for Congolese refugees seeking refuge and protection. The article analyzes hybrid forms of hosting in a faith-based context and discusses the implications of this for how guest and host categories are perceived. Four different patterns of refugee-refugee hosting are explored in which the relationship between host and guest as well as pastor and church member differ. The article argues that social status and hierarchies are important for how hosting is practiced. Moreover, religious ideas of gift giving, sacrifice, and reciprocity also influence hosting in this context.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Christianity, displacement, DRC, hospitality, hosting, Kampala, refugee churches, Uganda

Pastor Justin came from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Kampala, Uganda, with his family in 2012. They traveled by bus without knowing where to go or where to stay. On the bus, they met a Ugandan man who told them about Congolese churches in Kampala. Upon arrival, they asked for directions to one of these churches, where they were soon welcomed by a pastor. They spent their first night in the church itself and the following nights in the pastor’s house. After a few days, and with the pastor’s help, they found and moved into a small house with two rooms. Church members donated kitchen utensils, food, and clothes. Pastor Justin soon began to serve as a pastor within the church and became responsible for Bible teaching. He earned money to pay the rent by selling documents used for Bible teaching, and from what church members offered him. The two-room house he lived in with his family was later shared with a newly arrived family. They divided the living room into two by putting up a thick, red curtain. During our conversation, Pastor Justin talked about himself as “a refugee pastor in a church of refugees,” referring to the difficulty of establishing and expanding a church when both pastors and members are refugees. Moreover, the work of pastors—to assist and guide refugees—was difficult because they were refugees too. At the same time, he described the attitude in the church and among members as being one of “a door that is widely open” both when he and others were in need of help. (Fieldwork notes, 14 January 2013)<sup>1</sup>

This vignette of Pastor Justin is typical of many refugees who are assisted and hosted within faith-based communities and hence fall outside the formal and mainly secular humanitarian refugee programs in Uganda. This article discusses the role of Congolese churches in Uganda that assist refugees but that are also themselves refugee churches, thus the categories of dis-



placement and refugeeness both include and transgress the individual and the institutional. It illustrates the wide scope of faith-based involvement in humanitarianism, but also shows the importance of understanding the social and religious norms that guide the exchange of support, which may go beyond humanitarian norms and ethics. The forms of hosting discussed in the article are examples of what Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has termed refugee-refugee hosting and reflect the increased urbanization and the protracted nature of displacement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016). Moreover, refugee-refugee hosting represents a form of Southern-led communitarian response to displacement that has only recently been acknowledged in the literature (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2019).

The religious turn in development studies has been echoed by a similar attention to religion in literature on refugees and displacement (Ager and Ager 2015; Eghdamian 2016; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto 2019; Orji 2011). One of the more prominent arguments in both academic literature and in policy has been that religious institutions are more embedded in local communities than humanitarian organizations, and thus represent a form of localized humanitarianism. In turn, recent research has highlighted tensions in the relationship between faith-based organizations and international humanitarian actors (Wilkinson 2018). My research similarly reveals a tension between the aims and intentions of refugee churches vis-à-vis those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its implementing partners. Faith-based organizations are perceived by some as being more ideology based and hence in opposition to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto 2019). However, as Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield (2010) have argued, the link between religion and humanitarianism, including faith-based responses to displacement, is about more than the work of and assistance provided by religious institutions and religious ideology. It is also about how the act of helping and hosting is perceived and experienced in faith-based contexts and within a religious frame of understanding, and being attentive to the religious language that is applied when refugees make sense of protracted waiting and uncertainty (Gusman 2018; Lauterbach 2014a).

This article examines different forms of refugee-refugee hosting in a religious setting. I unpack the host-guest categories and argue that studying these hybrid forms of hosting in a faith-based context, and being attentive to experiences of faith, can add to our understanding of hosting. In such contexts, the meaning of host-guest categories is broadened as the guest is both a stranger and simultaneously family or insider (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018), while the host may occupy a comparatively lower social position than the guest. There is an important element of hierarchy in this, as the relationship between guest and host becomes complicated by other hierarchical relationships such as that between pastor and church member (Haynes 2015).

The article draws on empirical material gathered in Kampala in January–February 2012 and in January 2013, noting that the findings remain relevant at the time of writing, as the context of formal and informal refugee hosting in urban areas has not changed significantly over the past few years. Moreover, by deconstructing the oppositions between guest and host, material and spiritual help, and familiarity and strangerhood, this article maintains relevance beyond the particular context of urban refugees in Uganda.<sup>2</sup> Throughout my research, I employed qualitative methods consisting of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, and used a snowballing sampling method to reach a number of Congolese pastors in the city. Based on these initial conversations, I selected two churches to focus my research on and interviewed both church members and pastors. I furthermore interviewed people from international and local NGOs, as well as Congolese refugee associations based in Kampala. Together with my research assistant, we conducted a total of 88 interviews—mainly in French, but also in Luganda, Kiswahili, or Lingala—of which 13 church members and pastors were interviewed multiple times.

This permitted continuity and depth in the study of church activities, types of assistance, as well as in the lives of the refugees. In addition, I asked about access to support and the norms around practices of giving and receiving assistance.

Given the broader humanitarian context in which the fieldwork took place, the people I interviewed or interacted with often perceived me as a representative of an NGO or the UNHCR. I tried to be explicit about my position, role, and independence as a researcher. However, my easy access to these institutions meant that I was readily categorized as part of the international humanitarian system or as someone who could facilitate access to assistance (see Wagner 2018 on the boundaries between and expectations toward the role of volunteer and researcher). Some of the people I interviewed were inclined to present their cases, files, and documentation to me during the interviews. This suggests that formal visibility is central to relations between refugees and the humanitarian system, which spills over into the relationship between refugees and researchers. Consequently, the idea of the independent researcher might not have much resonance in such contexts.

## Context

Amid the increasing number of refugees in Uganda—almost 1.4 million in January 2020 (UNHCR 2020b)—there has been significant growth in the number of urban refugees. According to UNHCR’s figures, there are around 78,500 persons of concern registered in urban areas in Uganda (UNHCR 2020a). It is also estimated that more than 40,000 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers live in Kampala (Gusman 2018). The majority of the Congolese refugees and asylum seekers come from the eastern parts of DRC, which have experienced decades of ongoing protracted violence. Uganda has been praised for its open and progressive refugee policy that builds on a long history of hospitality. Nevertheless, a number of challenges and criticisms have been pointed out, including the lack of alternatives to encampment—which puts urban refugees in a particularly vulnerable situation and limits their freedom of movement—and the lack of durable solutions in situations of protracted crisis (Hovil 2018). In 1999, the country introduced its self-reliance strategy with the aim of enabling refugees to take care of their own needs. The current policy was established in the Refugees Act of 2006 and the 2010 Refugees Regulations and includes the right to work, freedom of movement, and the right to settle in both urban and rural areas (Ahimbisibwe 2018; Betts et al. 2019; Monteith and Lwasa 2017). This means that urban areas have become recognized by the Ugandan state as legitimate spaces for refugees to reside and work. However, although refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas should in principle access assistance from the same sources as the Ugandan citizens of Kampala (for instance, through the Kampala Capital City Authority) as well as from a few NGOs and other institutions<sup>3</sup> that provide limited assistance and protection to asylum seekers (Lyytinen 2015), in reality they are not entitled to the same humanitarian assistance as refugees and asylum seekers living in rural settlements.

Many of the refugees I interviewed and came to know during my fieldwork lived in the Katwe and Nsambya areas of Kampala and made a living by petty trading in the streets, by working on construction sites as day laborers, and by offering other services such as cleaning. When they had access to the necessary material, some worked as hairdressers and tailors. Among the pastors, some offered bible courses and others went to preach in the refugee camps (rural settlements) and lived from what they were offered by attendants. In general, the refugees depended on informal employment and access to informal networks for their livelihoods and shelter (Monteith et al. 2017).

Congolese churches constitute an important part of these informal networks. There exist somewhere between 50 and 150 Congolese churches in Kampala, the majority of which ascribe to an evangelical charismatic orientation (*Églises de Réveil*) (Gusman 2018: 798). Some are branches of churches in the DRC, whereas others were established by refugees as independent churches. They differ in size, membership, and theological orientation. Many are of a relatively small size (between 50 and 100 members) and often worship in temporary structures. Members might come from different Christian backgrounds, but generally these revival churches focus on personal transformation and the divine influence of the Holy Spirit, God, and Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. Moreover, the role of charismatic gifts (such as healing, prophesizing, and speaking in tongues) is of great importance as is knowledge of the word of God. As explained in more detail below, the churches constitute communities in which refugees can access both material and spiritual assistance.

Many of the Congolese churches were organized in what is known as the “Congolese Christian Community in Uganda” and not as part of the “Congolese Refugee Community” in which there was some internal tension at the time of my fieldwork (see also Lyytinen 2015). Churches were often approached by international organizations, such as the UNHCR and InterAid, seeking access to the Congolese community and potential collaboration with community leaders in Kampala. This collaboration was, however, viewed with some skepticism by Congolese church leaders, who felt that these organizations did not deliver what they promised and were therefore a waste of their time. This reflects a broader sense of mistrust both in their relation to government and international institutions and within the Congolese community itself (Lyytinen 2015). Moreover, personal insecurity and uncertainty of one’s legal status and future possibilities were widely experienced among Congolese refugees. Many refugees interacted on a daily basis with Ugandans, who were, for instance, their employers, proprietors, and neighbors. It has been reported that these relationships are tense (Gusman 2018: 797) and many Congolese feel discriminated against, for instance because of language barriers. These experiences were corroborated by those I interviewed, although in some cases refugees noted that their Ugandan neighbors and proprietors were helpful when they could not pay their rent or had nothing to eat.

### **Hosting, Mutuality, and the Duality of Material and Spiritual Assistance**

Congolese churches in Kampala provide an arena in which people can, and are encouraged to, help each other and establish bonds of mutuality. This is done both as part of formal church activities such as Sunday service and group meetings during the week, as well as through more private connections between church members and between church members and pastors. This echoes other studies that have pointed out that religious organizations provide more than material assistance as they also offer spiritual solace in the form of prayer and healing (Parsitau 2011; Wilkinson and Ager 2017). The provision and nature of spiritual assistance has often been neglected in the work of secular humanitarian organizations, but constitutes an important aspect of hosting. This aspect is also controversial, however, because it is seen as religious proselytization and hence compromising the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. As this article shows, criteria around providing assistance in the refugee churches in this study follows criteria other than the humanitarian principles, operating within several registers of worthiness that include emergency, loyalty, and faith.

Alongside the spiritual assistance of prayers, healing, and deliverance, material assistance in the form of accommodation, food, and clothes was also offered. Refugee churches generally met these material needs through their own means, through collections in church, or by facilitating church

members assisting each other. This duality of assistance influenced how refugees interacted with churches and pastors, and shaped their expectations to these relationships. Due to the scarcity of economic resources available for refugees, many church members valued material assistance more highly than spiritual assistance. If a church was not able to provide material assistance, people were inclined to go to a different church in search of help. This indicates that refugees perceived spiritual services on their own as a form of non-assistance. However, both pastors and church members related success regarding refugees’ successful application for resettlement to a third country to spiritual power and divine intervention. This suggests that material and spiritual forms of assistance were not perceived as clearly separated fields, but rather as related and interdependent (see Gusman 2018 for further discussion on spirituality, witchcraft, and refugee insecurity).

Pastors unable to provide material help expressed consternation and instead offered spiritual assistance through prayer and fasting—a religious action and response in light of no alternative options. In doing so, it is hoped this may yield material provisions, for example via a third party who may show appreciation for the pastor’s devoutness by donating money or goods. As one pastor explained: “We are just waiting for God to open a door and then in a week . . . some provisions happen then just like that.”<sup>4</sup>

This points to a tension between the provision of material support versus solely offering spiritual assistance, which has implications for the relationships between refugees and pastors, and guests and hosts. Another pastor spoke about a failed church project to create an NGO that could assist refugees with food, money, and training and said: “If you help one refugee by providing food or financial help this has a higher value to the refugee whom you are counseling because he is expecting much more than counseling from you. Some go away from church because we have stopped giving help. Those who remain, remain because they feel the word of God is a help to them. Those who left had come for the benefits and when the benefits stopped they left.”<sup>5</sup>

In this account, faithful or loyal church members are those who appreciate and accept spiritual help; those who come mainly for material assistance are not considered “genuine” believers. When churches and pastors provide assistance in a more formalized way (and cross over to the formalized humanitarian arena), they create a different set of relationships with their members with regard to motivations and expectations. One of the consequences of this for pastors, as alluded to in the above quote, is the fluctuating and unstable membership of their churches.

A well-established non-refugee pastor talked about this phenomenon as a form of exploitation. He and the church leadership would rather reserve church funds for loyal and long-term members in need of assistance. The pastor explained: “they are the passersby; they only come to collect, to use you and to exploit you. In that case, the church gets nothing, because we also get something when people stay in church. So we look into that also.”<sup>6</sup> The pastor would not decline assistance to newly arrived refugees, but referred to that as being provided “uniquely by the grace of God,” meaning as a voluntary act and not as a formalized activity of the church—something that comes from the heart and not something that one has a right to demand (see Pitt-Rivers 1992). Pastors see the stability and growth of their churches as depending on a stable membership with resources, and if these are not available (for instance in a displacement context where church members lack resources), the spiritual economy in which spiritual services and material goods are exchanged is destabilized.

### **Faith-Based Hybrid Hosting**

The recent literature on hybrid and overlapping forms of hosting stresses the limitations of “guest” and “host” categories because they presume hosts are citizens and guests are outsiders

(Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016). Moreover, hosting in displacement contexts is often associated with an institutionalized social practice implying that it is part of a broader policy or humanitarian setting. This is also the case when discussing the role of faith-based organizations in accommodating refugees. Ben Jones and Marie Juul Petersen (2011) have argued that religion has been approached in a normative, instrumental, and narrow way in the development studies literature. The same criticism is valid for much of the literature that focuses on the role of religion in studies of displacement and refugees, which has had a strong institutional focus. The different forms and practices of hosting that I discuss here are, however, not an integrated part of a well-established institutional humanitarian setting. These refugee-to-refugee hosting arrangements have an ad hoc, informal, and temporary character. This is in line with Jonathan Darling's (2014) focus on the anonymous and informal urban life and how hospitality is practiced in such informal spaces. In this way, I study hosting and hospitality not at the national level, as something nation-states offer to those who seek refuge and asylum in their territory, but as practices that take place and shape within informal urban communities and outside the frames of formalized and regularized hospitality.

Recent work on displacement and hospitality draws on Jacques Derrida's concepts of absolute and conditional hospitality as the ethical and political aspects of hospitality, as well as the concept of *hostipitality* as a way to recognize that hostility is closely linked to hospitality (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018; Brun 2010; Darling 2014; Derrida 2000; Wilkinson 2018). This is useful as a way to acknowledge the co-existence of inclusion and exclusion in processes of hosting refugees. In addition to this, anthropological approaches to the study of hospitality touch upon aspects such as exchange, identity, belonging, authority, and politics (Candea and Da Col 2012) and highlight the ambivalence of guest-host relationships (Pitt-Rivers [1977] 2012: 513). Bringing in this literature allows us to go beyond the hospitality-hostility ambivalence and expose the broader tensions between "spontaneity and calculation, generosity and parasitism, friendship and enmity, improvisation and rule" (Candea and Da Col 2012: S1). Moreover, taking an anthropological approach to hospitality permits us to gain insight into how host-guest categories and relationships are shaped in everyday encounters and practices and not mainly informed by broader policy frameworks. The focus on ambivalence is helpful when studying such relationships in a context where the guest and host roles are not fixed and pre-established, but overlap and adapt according to the specific relationships within which they exist. At the same time, as Julian Pitt-Rivers and others have pointed out, a certain order is established in hospitality relationships when the stranger is perceived as sacred, when the unknown becomes knowable, and when reciprocal honor between host and stranger is favored over conflict (Pitt-Rivers [1977] 2012: 513). This further implies that the guest-host relationships are inherently distinct, reciprocal, and unequal. The host is the one who bestows and the guest is bestowed upon. Being a host requires authority over a particular space to which the guest is welcomed as well as over the resources given to the guest (Darling 2014; Pitt-Rivers [1977] 2012). As we will see, another way order can be created is by making reference to the divine and by drawing on pre-existing social hierarchies.

Moreover, being hospitable is a way of gaining honor and is therefore not a unidirectional form of giving. Although the stranger has no status and represents the unknown, the stranger is, according to Pitt-Rivers, associated with the divine, with the world of mystery and the extraordinary. In the process of becoming a guest, the stranger is socialized and honored and "from being last, he must be first" (Pitt-Rivers [1977] 2012: 508). Although the case discussed in this article transgresses these ordinary guest-host categories, we can draw on these conceptual insights because the ambivalence Pitt-Rivers points to gives room for analyzing inverted relationships. This is a way to shed light on the flexibility, invertedness, and movement in guest-host

relationships (see also Wagner 2018 on hospitality and scale shifting between refugee hosts and NGO guests).

In this study, hospitality unfolds in informal religious settings in which the formal policies of the Ugandan state are not guiding the practices of hosting. Moreover, because the churches are constituted by Congolese living in Uganda, they represent host-guest relations that do not resonate with classical host-guest relationships in which the host is either the state or someone with rights and property acknowledged by the state, and the guest is a stranger. These refugee churches comprise several layers of host-guest relationships that transgress categories and boundaries based on nationality and insider-outsider categories. Consequently, it is important to map out and explore how such relationships are established in a displacement context as well as how faith plays a role in how guest and host categories are construed.

Along the same lines, Cathrine Brun (2010) discusses both formal policy categories and everyday informal categories of hospitality and how these interact with each other. Brun emphasizes in particular how forced migration creates a situation of "throwntogetherness" in which people are grouped together and forced to engage with each other. In such a situation "individuals and groups transform into 'hosts' and 'guests'" (Brun 2010: 338). This situation is in several ways different from the general reception and treatment of refugees by nation-states and is more about "the manner in which we relate to ourselves and others" (Brun 2010: 340). In the case of Congolese churches in Uganda, we can say that hospitality exists in a liminal moment because of the situation of "throwntogetherness" in which hosts are at the same time strangers/guests in Uganda. There is therefore an overlap and reversion of the host-guest relationships and the responsibilities and authority they entail. In order to bring this to light, I draw on literature that discusses the social hierarchies in which host-guest relations unfold as well as the role of faith within this. One important aspect is the hierarchies that exist within Pentecostal charismatic Christianity, which articulate a tension between egalitarianism and charismatic authority (Haynes and Hickel 2016). This is similarly relevant when discussing the host's possessions and their (re-)interpretation as gifts from God that could be re-gifted to refugee guests. Below, I discuss four patterns of refugee-to-refugee hosting that highlight the ambivalence and flexibility of host and guest categories as well as the role of the divine sphere in the establishment of guest-host relationships.<sup>7</sup>

## Refugee Churches Hosting Refugees

In the Congolese churches in Kampala, one can observe a number of different trends in how hosting is practiced. The four different patterns of refugee-to-refugee hosting that I identified unfold simultaneously, within and across religious institutional settings. The first trend, which I describe as *refugee churches hosting refugees*, is concerned with churches as well-known and defined institutional spaces welcoming and hosting refugees within the church. This implies that the church, as a community, welcomes and cares for refugees within the institutional and physical space of the church. This practice of hosting did not take place in a formalized or systematized way, but rather had a spontaneous and ad hoc character. In the cases I observed, this form of hosting occurred when a group of refugees arrived at a church, solicited and received assistance primarily in the form of accommodation, although this depended on the resources and layout of the church. Most often refugees were offered a place to sleep, with a mat and sheet, in a corner of the church. They were expected to move aside their belongings during the day and during church services and other activities. Food, medicine, and clothing were most often not provided by the church but by church members and neighbors. In one case, a church had



purchased kitchen utensils and had space to host several refugee families. This involved a more systematized form of assistance in which hosted refugees became an integral part of the church community, but this practice was later abandoned when the church was forced to move to different premises where capacity was limited. Some refugees were accommodated within church premises for a few days whereas others stayed for many months.

This form of refugee-to-refugee hosting depended largely on the physical infrastructure of the churches, the resources at their disposal, their reputation within the larger urban refugee community, as well as the connections refugees were able to establish prior to arrival. One example was a Congolese man who had come from Kinshasa via Kisangani with one of his children. A Ugandan man assisted them with crossing the border and took them to Kampala. The Ugandan man was not able to host them and instead said, “I know a Congolese church, and I am going to take you there, where you will find your brothers who will accept you.”<sup>8</sup> This clearly indicates there was a shared perception by both Ugandans and Congolese that Congolese churches in Kampala were places where refugees could seek assistance, and because they had a shared nationality (“your brothers”) they would be more easily accepted and hosted. The Congolese man in this case did indeed find refuge within the church and was subsequently invited to share a room with a male pastor. Although this trend most resembles the classical institutional form of helping and hosting, it is also clear that this happened in a fluctuating and precarious manner due to the lack of material and spatial resources. Mutuality is therefore an important element when the church takes the role of host. Moreover, new refugees are welcomed not only because they are strangers in need of help and protection, but also because they are fellow Congolese citizens and hosting is seen as a Christian obligation.

### **Refugee Pastors as Hosts**

The second pattern, *refugee pastors as hosts*, includes cases where refugee pastors accommodate refugees either by sharing their own accommodation or by facilitating access to accommodation. Here pastors act as hosts in their capacity as individuals or through their private connections and resources rather than through the church as an institution. This implies that refugees rely on their social relationships to pastors when seeking assistance. Access to such a relationship could depend on area of origin, gender, age, and family status. In other instances, ethnicity and area of origin play a role in community building among Congolese refugees in Kampala (Lyytinen 2015). This was to some extent also the case within refugee churches, especially when pastors assisted church members directly. Unity was, however, also a value that was promoted in church as a way to avoid tensions due to ethnic differences. There was some variation in how this form of hosting was practiced. In one church, this kind of hosting only took place to a limited extent and only if it involved close personal connections, although this church did not self-identify as a refugee church. In another church, this pattern of hosting was more widely practiced and was in continuation with the first pattern of hosting discussed above, as pastors and other church members took over when the church could no longer continue hosting. In some cases, pastors offered to share, hand over their own accommodation, or facilitate access to accommodation by paying the first month's rent; whereas in other cases refugees had to find accommodation with other church members or were advised to go to the refugee settlements run by the Ugandan government and the UNHCR. Pastors moreover served as counselors and as contact points between refugee communities and the formal refugee system; this helped refugees navigate the formal system and enabled program officers to disseminate relevant information to the refugee community.

Helping refugees was understood to be a Christian duty and a special obligation of pastors. Some pastors discussed their assistance as a form of sacrifice because they themselves were refugees—despite their own precarity and vulnerability, they sacrificed all they had, hence a “refugee pastor in a refugee church.” By framing hosting as a sacrificial duty, it was implied they would later be rewarded by God. In this way, what was initially a host-guest relationship between a pastor and a church member transformed into a more extended form of reciprocal exchange between pastors, church members, and God. In these relationships of reciprocity, pastors were seen as giving to God at the same time. Moreover, when church members donated food or money to their pastor, this was also perceived as a blessing from God. By giving help and by perceiving these acts as a form of sacrifice, pastors placed themselves in a position separate from church members—a position of moral superiority through actions of altruism and love, and thus closer to God (Jackson 2011).

The practice of pastors hosting refugees on a more individual basis reinforces the critical role of personal relationships when institutional support cannot or can no longer provide the most basic and necessary assistance (such as shelter and food). It is therefore imperative to examine overlapping forms of refugee hosting and not only approach it from an institutional perspective.

### Refugee Church Members as Hosts

A third pattern, which I will describe only briefly here, concerns the practice *refugee church members hosting newly arrived refugees*. Within this form of hosting, the church is perceived as a broader community or family within which members provide assistance, such as the provision of accommodation and help with food, clothing, and other necessities. This form of hosting is similar to refugee pastors as hosts as it is an extension of the practice of churches assisting refugees. However, the relationship between host and guest can in some instances be more restrained and less familial, as the guest is not seen and treated as a fellow church or community member, but rather as a stranger. Although they may belong to the same broad religious community and likely share citizenship, there is a simultaneous sense of strangerhood that emerges when the host-guest relationship moves further outside the realm of the church and into a more private and less community-guided sphere. These relationships would often be shaped by other social and hierarchical markers such as gender and age, and there was an understanding that accommodation is not free. Feelings of distrust were more commonplace, which could be expressed as loneliness or a sense of abandonment by one’s community. For example, one young man ascribed his feelings of abandonment to hypocrisy within the Congolese church community, explaining that people would only receive help if they had a certain social status. In this way, the familiarity and sense of belonging to the same ethnic group or religious community facilitates access to assistance, but also reproduces mechanisms of exclusion related to social status.

### Refugee Pastors as Guests

The fourth and final category consists of *refugee pastors as guests hosted by church members*. This form of hosting is closely related to the status of pastors, the work of pastors, and the relationship they have with church members. Providing assistance and accommodation in this kind of relationship is different from the patterns described above, as the hierarchy between host and guest is significantly different. Whereas the other hosting relationships were established between the church or pastors as providers and church members as receivers, the categories of

host and guest are here inverted and boundaries consequently less distinct. Pastors who arrived as refugees were treated as guests because they were in need of assistance, but they were simultaneously seen as occupying a higher social position related to their religious performance and status.

One pastor interviewed in this study stayed with his family in a church for the first month they spent in Kampala. Shortly after his arrival, he resumed his activities as pastor, which included organizing and teaching Bible courses. The pastor explained that “one day there was a person who was touched by my message. He had enough [financial] means; it is he who paid for here [the house he stayed in] . . . He asked ‘Where do you live? Under what conditions are you living?’ And it is him who paid for this house.”<sup>9</sup> The pastor furthermore referred to his status when he talked about how other people decided to assist him: “They said ‘as a Server [of God] you are living very badly. Although you live very badly you were after all someone in Congo.’” This pastor also received money for preaching in churches, which he used to buy food and water.

This practice reflects a widespread engagement in a spiritual economy in which both pastors and church members could exchange spiritual services for material goods or money (Lauterbach 2014b). In addition to being a livelihood strategy, these relationships of exchange also reflect ways church members express gratitude to pastors and ultimately to God. It is noteworthy that these reciprocal relationships opened up a space in which ordinary church members could make use of a spiritual gift or talent and exchange it for material items, which could in turn promote their social standing.

### **Refugee-Refugee Hosting, Social Relationships, and Hierarchies**

Analyzing these four patterns of refugee-refugee hosting furthers our understanding of how relationships of hospitality are established and shaped in contexts where the positions of host and guest are not clear-cut. Two factors are crucial when understanding guest and host categories in a Christian faith-based context. First, hospitality and the provision of assistance are not perceived as isolated humanitarian actions. They are seen as part of a broader spiritual economy in which relationships of reciprocity exist between pastor and church members and between people and God. This implies that hosting a refugee is an act of compassion, but it is at the same time a sacrifice and something that is given to God and for which the giver will receive a return. In this way, guests (both pastors and church members) are seen as directly linked to the spiritual sphere, not because they represent the extraordinary in the sense mentioned by Pitt-Rivers, but rather because guests occupy a position within a multidirectional relationship that encompass guest, host, and the divine sphere.

Second, it appears that norms around social hierarchies play an important role when guest and host positions are established in Congolese refugee churches in Kampala. This is linked to a tension in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Africa between egalitarianism and hierarchy (Haynes 2015). This particular version of protestant Christianity draws on the perception that all believers have direct access to God as well as on an idea of personal transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, pastors provide and mediate access to God’s power, which is reflected in social hierarchies and based on charismatic authority (Lauterbach 2017). This duality of egalitarianism and hierarchy is reflected in the practices of refugee-refugee hosting in Congolese churches in Uganda. These practices, however, disrupt established social relationships and church hierarchies. On the one hand, the provision of accommodation and assistance was in principle available to anyone in an emergency situation. Similarly, refugees were not a priori categorized as refugees or strangers, but were welcomed

as fellow sisters and brothers in Christ and included in a religious community headed by pastors. On the other hand, due to a significant number of pastors being refugees themselves, they were dependent on being accommodated by ordinary church members, and their positionality within social hierarchies became less distinct. This reflects the point made by James Ferguson and others that dependency in social relations, and hence social hierarchy, is a crucially important feature in many non-Western societies (Ferguson 2013; Haynes and Hickel 2016). The relationships of dependency were expanded as both pastors and church members could take the positions as guest and host, and it was therefore less clear who was the dependent and who was the provider. At the same time, it was clear that assisting pastors was prioritized because they occupied pre-established positions of power.

Being a refugee pastor could pose a challenge of legitimacy. Due to their lack of financial means, it became difficult for pastors to uphold their legitimacy when unable to assist church members. The above observations also indicate that the support being offered is seen as more than humanitarian assistance; it is also understood as a religious gift. Giving in this particular context is therefore both giving to God and giving to the needy; it is both an act of grace and an act of sacrifice.

## Conclusion

In this article I have argued that religious ideas and practices of hosting are closely interlinked. Refugee-refugee hosting takes place both within the framework of a spiritual economy—in which pastors provide assistance and church members give gifts in return as a sign of gratitude and vice versa—and within a humanitarian displacement context.

The role of faith-based organizations has often been treated in instrumental terms, focusing on the services and protection they provide. Moreover, attention has mostly been paid to established and formal faith-based organizations. Instead, in this article I have drawn attention to a different layer of religious institutions—refugee churches—and their role in refugee hosting and argue that studying the practices and norms of these institutions helps deconstruct the hierarchies and relationships inherent in the oppositional yet nuanced categories of guest/host, spiritual/material assistance, and stranger/familiar.

I have analyzed this form of faith-based refugee-to-refugee assistance as more than a localized form of humanitarianism. This form of refugee hosting takes place within religious communities of displaced people that do not necessarily self-identify as part of a larger humanitarian system and context. The described mutual practices of offering and receiving help are a reflection of refugee-refugee hosting in which the roles, positions, and meanings of being host and guest are simultaneously established and inverted, due to a situation of “throwntogetherness.” Although we consider these churches, pastors, and church members refugee hosts, they might act according to different norms than alternative formal humanitarian organizations. As shown in the analysis, this could relate to the criteria church leaders are using when providing assistance in which emergency and familiarity constitute two distinct criteria that lead to different forms of assistance (both in terms of quantity and regularity). Moreover, pastors often maintain a double identity as both refugees and missionaries in which the call to care for needy refugees can be in contradiction with their efforts to establish new churches (see Lauterbach 2021). It is consequently important to understand and analyze this form of refugee hosting in its broader institutional, social, moral, and religious context in order to capture the intersecting and sometimes conflicting humanitarian and religious norms and practices.

Lastly, the use of the term “faith-based organization” presumes that religion resides within established organizational frameworks and that they are therefore comparable to other types

of organizations that operate within the humanitarian field of displacement management and refugee protection, which is often not so. As discussed in this article, the critical issue is not so much the formalized and organized nature of religion, but the normative, relational, and hierarchical aspects of a religious community and the implications of this for how assistance, both material and spiritual, is provided and regulated. My research has shown that hierarchies and relationships of power are flexible and changeable in religious communities and their practices of refugee hosting. Moreover, religious experiences matter with regard to how one's position and prospects as a refugee are perceived. This implies that refugee hosting in religious communities constitutes a broader complex of norms and practices in which humanitarian and religious (and cultural) principles overlap and compete. It is key to understand these on their own terms, as well as in relation to the formal structure of institutional support, in order to highlight the multiple ways refugee hosting in religious communities unfolds.

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■ **KAREN LAUTERBACH** is Associate Professor at the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen. Her research focuses on charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in Africa, primarily in Ghana and Uganda. She has examined displacement and religion in the context of Congolese refugee churches in Kampala, Uganda. Her research has also focused on the career trajectories of young pastors and how religious livelihoods create forms of social capital. She is the author of the monograph *Christianity, Wealth and Spiritual Power in Ghana* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and co-editor of *Faith in African Lived Christianity* (Brill, 2019). ORCID: 0000-0003-4962-3383. Email: [kjl@teol.ku.dk](mailto:kjl@teol.ku.dk)

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### ■ NOTES

1. Interview with pastor, 14 January 2013, Kampala. Fieldwork notes, 14 January 2013.
2. The fieldwork was done in collaboration with Mable Male, who assisted with establishing contact and conducting and translating interviews. During my stay in Uganda, I was affiliated with Makerere University and was granted a research permit by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. The research was financed by the Danish Council for Independent Research | Social Sciences.
3. For instance, the Refugee Law Project, UNHCR, InterAid, the Department of Refugees of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Jesuit Refugee Service, and Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID).
4. Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.
5. Interview with pastor, 14 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.
6. Interview with pastor, 5 January 2013, Kampala, Uganda.
7. Although I only deal with refugees hosted by refugees, there were also examples of refugees hosted by Ugandans. Most often, a refugee rented a room from a Ugandan proprietor, and the relationships involved would be a mixture of guest-host and proprietor-tenant. It was common that refugees were not able to pay their rent. Proprietors responded to this in different ways—sometimes with warnings

followed by eviction and other times with acceptance of lower rent or no rent, hence the resemblance to hosting.

8. Interview with Congolese man, 8 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

9. Interview with pastor, 15 January 2013, Kampala, Uganda.

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