

Better off with or without a camp?

**The consequences of urban settlement conditions on the
livelihoods and migrations possibilities of refugees**

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Paper presented at the Resourceful Cities Conference,

RC-21, International Sociological Association, Berlin, 2013

Session Urban camps from a global perspective: resources, livelihoods and governance

24.1. Encapsulating, including, excluding: urban camps from a global perspective

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For my PhD research, I took an interest in the Liberian conflict (1989-2003) and in the exile situation of Liberians in two different urban settings: in Conakry, Guinea, where no urban refugee camp ever existed, and in Accra, Ghana, where Buduburam refugee camp was created in 1990. Liberian people lost their refugee status in June 2012, nine years after the end of the second civil war (1999-2003) and one year after the re-election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first African woman to become President of a country in 2011. However around 5 000 Liberian ex-refugees still live in Buduburam and in Conakry in 2013. During my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, UNHCR was trying to reduce the number of Liberian refugees in Guinea and in Ghana by promoting repatriation. There were then 25 000 Liberians in Buduburam and around 6 000 in Conakry, all of them registered with UNHCR. Many others, unaccounted for, also lived there, without any documentation because of their complex exile journeys through Western Africa.

Two fieldwork sites

Buduburam refugee camp is around 45 km west from Accra. Even though Ghana does not share a border with Liberia, old migration ties between these two countries and the implication of Ghana in the ECOMOG peace force led quite a few Liberians to seek refuge

there. While Krisan, another camp closer to the Ivory Coast, also hosted a small number of refugees from Liberia, Buduburam always remained the main gathering point for Liberians and is also known as Liberia camp. Officially closed in 2013, it counted around 50 000 residents in 2003 at the end of the second civil war, and 17 000 in 1997 at the end of the first one. The closure of the camp meant the withdrawal of all humanitarian assistance but did not lead to the expulsion of its remaining residents. Thanks to the proximity to the Ghanaian capital, many researchers, Ghanaians and others, have been working and writing on this urban camp since the 1990's. The latest example is Naohiko Omata's PhD thesis on the refugees' livelihoods in the camp (2011).

Relying on these sources, I chose to spend less fieldwork time on this site and only met 29 Liberian refugees living in the camp. I also did interviews with 21 Liberian refugees living in the metropolitan area of Accra that nearly counts 4 million inhabitants. My main field of research was Conakry where I talked to 200 Liberian refugees.

A minority of refugees, both Liberian and Sierra Leonean, settled in the Guinean capital in the 1990's and 2000's. Most of these refugees (almost 1 million in the mid 1990's and thus a tenth of the entire Guinean population) settled in the forest region, closer to the border with these two war-ridden countries. Guinea was with the Ivory Coast one of the main asylum countries for Liberians. The sojourn of refugees in Conakry was never forbidden, except between 2000 and 2001 when border attacks challenged the national peace and when refugees were considered a threat, imprisoned and forcibly relocated in reorganized refugee camps (McGovern 2002; Agier, 2008). Liberian refugees may have been 20 000 at the end of the 1990's and still were about 6 000 in Conakry in 2008-2009, but were nonetheless overlooked and invisible, as they were living dispersed through a big town of 2.1 million inhabitants. When the camps were closed in 2007, some "left-behind" refugees came to Conakry, while others stayed in the closed down camps - tolerated in a grey area with regards to their future status (Andrews Gale, 2008).

Site effect, livelihoods and migration opportunities

One of my main questions was to try and understand the different experiences of exile of Liberian urban refugees, between the ones hosted in a camp near Accra and those living without a camp in Conakry. I focused on two aspects: first their livelihoods in exile and second their migration opportunities. These aspects oriented my observations and my questions to the 250 refugees I met.

I am quite aware that some aspects create a bias in this comparison: one must first keep in mind that asylum situations in Ghana and in Guinea were not the same during the two decades of Liberian exile. Even if some Liberians share ethnic belongings with Guineans (being Kpelle/Guerzé, Mandingo/Malinké, Loma/Toma or Kissi), French is mainly spoken in Guinea. The English-speaking Liberians had less linguistic challenges in Ghana, but still suffered from a "language" barrier when they did not learn to speak the local Twi (an Akan language spoken around Buduburam and Accra). The political and economic contexts were quite different. In 2008, for example, elections took place in Ghana and gave way to political alternation and hopes for continued economic growth. In Guinea on the other hand, a military coup followed the death of President Conte who was in power in Guinea since the 1980's and whose liberal policies failed to improve the living conditions of the Guinean population. One must also take into account the differences in the socio-economic profile of the people I met, as well as their war and exile

experiences and the consequences of these characteristics on their livelihoods and migrations prospects.

These precautions taken, I question what French sociologists and geographers have been calling “*effet de lieu*” or site effect (Bourdieu, 1993; Veschambre, 2006): what are the consequences of urban settlement conditions – the existence of a refugee camp or not – on the livelihoods and migrations possibilities of refugees? Rather than to approach place in a substantialist manner, Bourdieu and others suggest that localization and position can be analyzed and viewed as the spatial dimension of other forms of capital. Indeed, this site effect has to be articulated to a certain class effect and to social capital. As a geographer, however, I am interested in this idea that places are part of the everyday experience of exile and shape migration opportunities. The premise here would be that Accra and Conakry as asylum place, and to be more specific the absence of camp in Conakry and the existence of Buduburam camp in Accra, offer refugees different possibilities in terms of livelihoods and migration prospects. This comparison is looking at the differences between these two sites but also explores common features.

A description of two urban settlements

Buduburam refugee camp, Accra, Ghana

Buduburam is not a closed and visually delimited camp. Even if the main entrance is materialized by a Ghanaian police station, offices of UNHCR and of the Ghanaian camp manager, people can freely enter and go out of the settlement. Because of its demographic growth in the years 2001-2003, the camp expanded toward the adjacent village, which also progressively spread since the area can today be considered as a remote periurban periphery under the influence of the Accra metropolis (Anarfi, Graham, 2006). Indeed, Buduburam, a rural community in the 1990's, has seen a quick urban densification since the opening of the camp. This densification can be due to the camp's presence as well as to the Ghanaian capital's geographic expansion.

The camp was run by the Ghanaian government and UNHCR from 1990 to 2012. A few months before the arrival of people (both Ghanaian returnees and Liberian refugees) fleeing the Liberian civil war in 1990, the government preempted the premises of a religious organization settled next to Buduburam and which was then dismantled. The place was chosen in September 1990 to host the thousands of Liberians arriving in Accra. With the management experience of the Ghanaian expelled from Nigeria in 1985, the National Mobilization Program (NMP) – a service from the Ministry of Social Welfare – chose a camp manager and helped the refugees to settle. UNHCR reinforced its presence in the country and organized the humanitarian assistance to refugees, mostly involving Ghanaian organizations. This humanitarian assistance was stopped at the end of the first Liberian civil war in 2000 (Dick, 2002). It resumed in 2002-2003, because of the renewing violence in Liberia, but on a more selective level, even if the camp population went up to 50 000. This assistance was definitively withdrawn in 2012 with the end of the refugee status.

Most camp houses were built by refugees themselves, sometimes with building material given by UNHCR and its NGO partners, especially in the first three years, sometimes with their own means and skills (many refugees learnt how to make bricks). In 2009, there were around

4 500 houses in the camp. They are quite diverse, made out of mud, wood, bricks or concrete, painted in different colors, some with gardens or porches, some shared by more than one family, some partly converted into a shop... The houses' density is higher in the central part of the camp and decreases toward the north of this 1.41 acre area. The camp is edged with fields on its east side, with a small forest to the north, and with the village on the west-side, the road between Accra and Winneba closing this rectangle in the south. Camp houses do not look like the traditional mud huts of the village, but resemble the many new houses built in the outskirts of the village (west of the camp, or south of it and south of the main road), some of which were built by Liberian refugees as well, but on private lands.

There is indeed a difference, according to when people arrived and to their access to land or houses in the camp, as in many other camps in the world. Organized in 9 official zones, the camp also informally includes 3 extra zones (zones 10 to 12) that cover parts of the village where refugees settled among the local population. Land preempted by the government for the camp was free and refugees did not have to pay rents. But the first settled Liberians ended up considering themselves as the owners of their camp houses, renting them to new comers when they decided to move out of the camp or go back to Liberia... Most of the last Liberians who arrived in Buduburam actually settled on private lands or "stool lands", owned by the traditional authorities of the village. They rented rooms or built houses on free lands they leased (these lease agreements gave them an average of 4 years without rent). Liberian refugees contributed to the village growth and to its urban development but their presence is only one side of the economic phenomenon happening in this area: the growing price of agricultural land in a context of periurban sprawl (Gough, Yankson, 2011).

An important question after the closure of the camp, and which is not yet settled, at least to my knowledge, relates to the houses on government territories. The Ghanaian government announced that the camp premises will be given back to their traditional owners. Will the ex-refugees be asked to pay rents to stay on in the houses they built themselves or will they be considered as land owners even though they did not pay for the land? In the context of a true land pressure in this area, the evolution of Buduburam from an urban camp to a village or city neighborhood is a prospective subject of research in itself. With the UNHCR withdrawal, all camp facilities were handed over to the Ghanaian local authorities. The public bathrooms, the sanitation organization task, or the water distribution system, partly managed by the refugees, are meant to be managed by the village and the district authorities. This transition needs to be watched closely. For example, the camp clinic was being included in the Ghanaian health system in 2009 and Ghanaian medical personnel were expected to be sent to replace the Liberian workers.

These aspects of camp management during and after the refugee crisis did not exist in Conakry where Liberians were dispersed among the local population.

Liberian refugees dispersed in Conakry, Guinea

One of the methodological difficulties on the field in Conakry was to identify refugees in the city in the absence of any urban camp and of any well-known concentration area of Liberian refugees. I used a snowball sampling approach and discovered that although Liberian refugees were living all across the peninsula of Conakry, they mainly settled in the outlying districts. They

contributed in their own way to the city's expansion and demographic growth. Indeed, these neighborhoods were less built and populated in the 1990's and Liberians could find houses or rooms to rent there, without relying on any connections with locals. Some of them actually had connections with locals, whom they had met back in Liberia where many Guineans settled in the 1970's and 1980's. Some shared the same ethnic background as Guineans and some married to Guineans or found Guinean protectors, which helped them to be less visible in the city, especially during the 2000 crisis where refugees were scapegoated and imprisoned.

Apart from these Liberians with connections to Guineans, who could benefit from free housing, most refugees were renting houses or rooms from Guinean landlords. Like Liberian refugees who settled outside Buduburam camp in Accra, they were facing difficulties to find a place and stay there because of unpaid or increasing rents, or because of bad relationships with their landlords or neighbors. They were confronted to the advance rent system too, which implies that tenants need to pay a few months of rent in advance and are subjects to pressure from their landlords (Arku *et alii*, 2012). Some refugees were living in houses under construction in these outlying areas, paying smaller rents and guarding the house for their landlords, a phenomenon linked to the urban sprawl and also observed by researchers in Accra in the case of internal and international migrants (Gough, Yankson, 2011).

An exception to this insertion of refugees in the real estate economy of Conakry was the Liberian residence, a small squatter camp in the district of Camayenne. This house and yard were belonging to the Liberian state. The Liberian Ambassador used to live there and it was then transformed into a sort of informal urban camp in the 1990's. It was still managed by refugees themselves in 2008-2009, with the silent agreement of the overwhelmed Liberian embassy. I would like to underline the paradox of these refugees: they were legally out of their state of origin's protection and placed under the international (through UNHCR) and Guinean ones. But they were living on the ground of their state of origin's Ambassador's residence. No rents were requested in this house that was considered as a transition housing solution for Liberian refugees arriving in the Guinean capital. Some of them, arriving from the camps in *Guinée forestière*, lived there a few weeks or months before they could find a place to rent. It represented a gateway to the city for these refugees, in the same way other migrants would use specific places to settle in a new urban environment (Antoine *et alii*, 1995). For others, this place was a transit point: these residents were either planning to go back to Liberia (mostly true in the 1990's) or, as I observed in 2008-2009, waiting for their departure to a Western country (the US, Canada, Australia) through family reunification processes.

In the absence of refugee camp, urban refugees were not meant to receive any humanitarian assistance in Conakry. There were actually punctual food distributions and ephemeral transit or housing centers in the 1990's. Medical attention was given to specific cases by UNHCR and its NGO partners, both to urban refugees and refugees sent to Conakry from the camps (who sometimes stayed on in the Guinean capital after treatment). But the main rule in Guinea was that humanitarian assistance was restricted to *Guinée forestière* and to the refugee camps. Whereas the end of the refugee status for Liberians creates a potential change in refugees' livelihoods in Conakry, the end of this humanitarian assistance did not change anything for them since they already had to fend for themselves.

Different livelihoods strategies

Buduburam: the camp and its visibility as a resource

I argue that Buduburam refugee camp offered a world-wide visibility to Liberian refugees in Ghana that urban refugees in Conakry never had. This place and its social organization helped them create or get access to specific livelihoods, which is one of the site effects I observed and analyzed. It created dynamics that refugees could use as resources for their livelihoods. The first kind of dynamic is an external one and concerns both humanitarian help and remittances. The second one relies on internal phenomena, that is to say on the refugee camp's life itself and on exile solidarity.

The camp structure first gave them access to humanitarian assistance, even if it was on a selective basis, both in terms of periods of time, or refugee waves, and in terms of profiles (Dick, 2002; Omata, 2011). One of the purposes of refugee camps for humanitarian organizations is indeed to facilitate the distribution of food and other forms of assistance, even if it is not the only spatial response to this necessity (Kuhlman, 1994; Black, 1998). After the emergency phase, this assistance was progressively withdrawn but the high quality of Buduburam equipment in terms of housing and access to public services, like schools or health care, was still emphasized by UNHCR in 2008. The UN agency frequently presented this camp as a model.

The camp secondly gave them a higher visibility to receive remittances from family members settled abroad. These remittances partly took over the humanitarian assistance's disappearance. Describing Buduburam, N. Omata talks about a "remittance-reliant economy" (Omata, 2011, p. 4). Close to Accra and in a country where remittances are common from Ghanaian migrants living abroad, banks and money transfers agencies like Western Union or MoneyGram opened around the camp quite early in the 1990's. In contrast, this kind of service appeared almost 10 years later in *Guinée forestière* and not directly in the vicinity of refugee camps but in the main cities of this region, like N'Zérékoré.

Among the refugees I met, 28 of 50 in Accra (and 24 of 29 in Buduburam) received remittances against only 35 of 200 in Conakry. According to N. Omata (2011), almost 50% of the camp residents were receiving money from abroad. My hypothesis is that there is a site effect with two dimensions here: Accra may be a city with higher international connections than Conakry, but I should also insist on the profile of Liberians who took refuge in each city. As research in other contexts showed (Van Hear, 2004) Ghana attracted wealthier Liberians, notably from the social elite of "Americo-Liberians" and "Congo" people who had old ties with the US, whereas many Liberians from lower social backgrounds – or as some Liberians I met said indigenous Liberians – chose a closer refuge in Guinea. Nevertheless, I should nuance this importance of remittances by adding that only 5 to 10% of Buduburam residents received regular, automatic, reliable and high level remittances (Omata, 2011).

Thanks to these links abroad and these remittances, Buduburam refugee camp acquired a visibility and a notoriety that pushed some Liberians of the diaspora to invest in economic or social activities in the camp. In his book about Liberians in New York, Johnny Steinberg (2011) talks about a Liberian refugee resettled in the US who came to Buduburam on a visit and decided to help a local football club. This kind of external help was both encouraged and sought after by

camp residents themselves who organized the camp visibility. They were quite active to create projects and ask for external support from their compatriots abroad, from NGOs as well as from white tourists or students visiting Ghana, as I observed. For example, they designed many projects involving women, using the criteria of the international humanitarian and development discourses. They are also quite visible on the internet with web pages dedicated to the camp or facebook groups to let the world know about their living conditions.

Living without humanitarian assistance in this camp at the end of the 1990's, Liberians developed strategies to survive (Dick, 2002). The high number and diversity of what Shelly Dick called Camp-based or Community-based Organisations (CBOs) that still existed in 2008-2009 reflects the dynamism of the camp inhabitants. They created churches, private schools and vocational programs. These social structures provided services to the community and income possibilities to the people who initiated them. Even with limited economic opportunities in Ghana, refugees opened many businesses in the camp and sustained a dynamic market shared with the villagers. However, most of these businesses were small, informal activities which barely provided the refugees with enough means for daily meals: people sold water in the streets of the camp or basic food, women braided hair, men sold phone cards. Some businesses were more successful, especially the ones related to telecommunications: phone booth in the beginning of the 2000's before the democratization of mobile phones, internet cafés at the end of the decade.

In 2006, UNHCR described Buduburam as a “bustling camp” and as a “small town”, a metaphor commonly used for refugee camps (Agier, 2008)¹. Even if a small minority of refugees were farming on the camp, most of the residents were living from tertiary activities and had an urban way of life. They had created a “social world” (Marx, 1990), associating with their compatriots in the camp but also with Ghanaians living around the camp. Some refugees even settled in the neighboring villages, in the next town, Kasoa, or even in Accra and its surrounding districts. Inter-marriages between Liberians and Ghanaians occurred. The refugees I met, who were living out of the camp, had lived in the camp for a while and still had connections with the place and its inhabitants. They would regularly go to the camp for a visit, a church service or a special community event, like the Liberian Independence Day on the 26th of July. The camp still was a polarity and a social landmark for them.

The majority of refugees had their life centered on the camp, a place that was providing them with the psychological and material help they would need. As N. Omata (2011) showed, solidarity chains allowed the poorest members of the community to find help or work thanks to their family, friends, co-ethnics or neighbors. All recipients of remittances would redistribute some part of their received income to the other inhabitants of the camp, either directly by handouts, or indirectly since they would invest in the camp economy or purchase from its businesses. As far as I observed, and with the confirmation of Omata's work, one can say that not all camp residents benefited from remittances but that this redistribution through these social links between residents made up for the unequal access to this kind of resources. This diversity between the refugees' standards of living in the camp, partly linked to social differences existing prior to the war, also had consequences on their migration prospects. Nevertheless, the spatial

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/44c7783e4.html>

and social concentration of refugees in Buduburam created specific livelihoods opportunities that I did not observe in Conakry.

Conakry's refugees' invisibility and their *de facto* integration

As already underlined above, Conakry's refugees, or at least the 200 people I met, were receiving far less remittances than the Liberians living in Buduburam or in Accra. It is partly linked to their dispersion in the Guinean capital, where they are less visible than their compatriots in Buduburam but it is also in relation with their weaker connection to the Liberian diaspora. Conakry's Liberians were mainly with rural origins, less educated and few had already travelled out of Liberia before entering exile. Few had family members who had migrated or were resettled abroad while these family links are proven to be the most reliable to enhance refugees' livelihoods (Van Hear, 2004). Most of them had to fend for themselves without this extra-help possibility.

The dispersion of Liberian refugees in Conakry did not produce the effects of a tight social world and strong links of solidarity such as observed in Buduburam. These effects existed on smaller scales, in houses that Liberians would rent together (a strategy to pay lower rents and share income) or in districts where they would be more numerous. In Petit Symbaya, for example, where many Krahn Liberians were living and where a refugee school existed since 1993, refugees could rely on their social networks with their compatriots to enhance their livelihoods. One Liberian, Victor, explained: *"I am with my people that I know, in the community. When you saw me last Thursday, I was going out. We have to touch two or three of our friends to help us for our rentage. How can we pay them? Most of the time, we talk to friends, we talk to community members, to help..."* According to the spatial dispersion of refugees in the city, some solidarity networks did not follow proximity logics but relied on common exile experiences. Aicha, for example, who spent many years as a refugee in Sierra Leone, knew that she could go and visit the Liberian friends she had met there and ask for their help. Even if they did not live in the same vicinity – which meant that she had to walk or take public transports to visit them – she would maintain these relationships as a safety net.

But my impression was that there was a higher number of Liberians who were quite isolated from their compatriots in Conakry than in Buduburam where social activities helped include the camp residents and create a unity and a solidarity that was weaker in Conakry. On the contrary, these Liberians in Conakry had stronger and more frequent interactions with their Guinean neighbors, even if they were not without tension and discrimination. When I first met the Liberians I interviewed, they would usually explained that they did not speak French or any Guinean local language and that they suffered from this "language barrier", preventing them from accessing to jobs or from getting fair prices at the market. However, as I could observe some respondents when I met them again and again, I discovered that most of them interacted with their neighbors and knew how to get along with them. As Adam confessed in one of our discussions: *"Looking at the interval of the stay in Guinea, there are individual differences. Some are fast learning dialects and languages... There are people who speak small small French, like me, and there are some people who speak small Sousou. After 10 or 15 years in the country, you are able to communicate..."* Some Liberians even shared ethnic origins with Guineans, which facilitated their daily life in exile.

With this dispersion pattern, Liberian refugees were confronted to the necessity of living and working nearby Guineans and one could say that they were *de facto* integrated (Jacobsen, 2001). According to their individual skills, to their ethnic profile and to their social networks, and even if they were struggling to make ends meet, Liberian refugees in Conakry had developed strategies to ensure their livelihoods. One interesting niche of activity I observed is that many women found work on a daily basis as domestic assistants for Guinean families. Most of these women would “wash clothes” for a very small amount of money. They would “go around”, offering their services in the district they were living. The money earned would however only cover their family daily expenses, which obliged them to live by the day. When married or with age-working boys, this income could be completed with other activities. Indeed, many men had found work on construction sites or in the auto mechanic business. Mandingo men easily entered this car business, thanks to their connections with the Malinke groups of Guinea: some of them were drivers; others were “mates” helping to collect money in the taxis or to fill in the cars with clients.

Their insertion in the urban informal sector is not that different from the one observed in Buduburam, except for the fact that the settlement pattern in Conakry pushed refugees to have more and stronger connections to the local population, creating tensions, but also facilitating their local integration in the intermediate term. Being dispersed, the Liberians on Conakry were less organized in front of UNHCR and their host government to ask for better living conditions and for a better protection but they shared the same hopes about resettlement as the Liberians in Buduburam.

Similar hopes about resettlement and internal tensions about migration possibilities

Meeting Liberian refugees in 2008-2009, one aspect of my research was to ask them about their future projects: if they considered going back home, staying in their asylum country or if they had other opportunities. Most of my respondents did not have any connections abroad that could allow them to join a third asylum country through family reunion process, but the majority was still hoping for resettlement, in Conakry and in Buduburam. The words ‘I want to travel’ were repeated by many of them. This “obsession of resettlement”, as one UNHCR officer called it, had some reasons, as many of these refugees actually saw some of their compatriots being chosen to be resettled to the US, Canada or Australia, or being accepted to join family members there. Indeed, in the years 2003 to 2005, many departures occurred from Guinea and Ghana, thanks to special “group resettlement” policies adopted by US and Australian governments in favor of Liberians and thanks to family reunification procedures that followed.

One difference between Conakry and Buduburam is that these resettlement programs focused on the refugee camps in Guinea and Ghana. Missions from the US or Australia visited refugee camps in *Guinée forestière* but did not interview self-settled, urban refugees in Conakry. They also went to Buduburam where they selected among these camp/urban refugees. Many Liberians interviewed in Conakry highlighted this inequality. Bob said for example: “*there were a lot of traffic and corruption about these resettlement programs. The problem is also that they were only aimed at the camp*”. Bob belonged to a group of people who lived in various refugee camps in Sierra Leone and then in Guinea but refused to join another camp after the attacks against refugee camps at the Guinean border in 2000. He then bitterly observed how his “*fellow Liberians*” in these last

camps were interviewed for resettlement, and how some were “*lucky to travel*” while he was left behind. Many refugees were hoping in 2008-2009 that new programs would target urban refugees, even if UNHCR had announced that resettlement places for Liberians were no longer open.

In Buduburam, these hopes and demands towards resettlement were one of the motivations of an important demonstration that took place in February and March 2008 (Holzer, 2012). The camp residents organized themselves to defend their migration opportunities in front of UNHCR and the Ghana government. Carried out by the women of the camp, a protest was organized in front of the camp’s entrance in the form of a sit-in. Refugees were asking for resettlement or for a better financial help for repatriation and they were refusing the possibility of local integration. They forced most activities in the camp, and especially schools, to reduce or close down, and even tried to stop the traffic on the road between Accra and Winneba. The Ghanaian government finally intervened by arresting the protestors in March 2008. After another arrest operation in the camp 16 Liberians men were condemned to be deported. These events marked a rise in tensions between Liberians and Ghanaians who were quite bitter to see the Liberians’ contempt towards their welcoming policy. After this protest, a new agreement between UNHCR, Ghana and Liberia offered better repatriation conditions to those who opted for return and many camp residents chose to go back to Liberia between March 2008 and March 2009. The Ghanaian government planned to close Buduburam or to dismantle the camp in smaller units, away from Accra, but never actually did so.

In Conakry, there never was such a demonstration but the refugee committee was quite active about resettlement. The Liberian refugees in Conakry did not have a place like the camp to organize such an event and did not have the same cohesion as Buduburam refugees. Like other urban refugees (Baujard, 2008), they sometimes used the UNHCR offices as a protest spot but mainly used other means to try and defend what they believed to be their rights. The president of the refugee committee in Conakry had been writing a lot of protest letters to UNHCR offices, both in Conakry and in Geneva, to “*denounce the absence of protection for refugees in Conakry*”. Elected in 2006, he was criticized by the UNHCR officers for his aggressiveness (some of them pretending that he was an ex-fighter and that he would oppress and blackmail the Liberian community) but also criticized by other refugees on his behavior and plan of action. Indeed, a small group of refugees considered that this leader had lost his legitimacy and were asking for new elections to have a new representation. Even if these tensions had an interesting ethnical background (the committee being trusted by the Mandingo group while other Liberians opposed them), they mainly reflected internal tensions and divisions within the community about the claims to be put forward. Whereas the actual committee president still wanted to fight for resettlement possibilities, the contesting group was more interested in negotiating better repatriation conditions or better conditions of stay in Guinea. These Liberians were progressively taken by UNHCR as the new community’s spokespeople.

These internal tensions also existed in Buduburam: the president of the Liberian Refugee Welfare committee (LRWC) was strongly contested during the 2008 demonstration because he refused to back the popular movement and never opposed the option of local integration. Feeling threatened for this position, he was helped by UNHCR to settle outside of the camp and was still living in Kasoa when I met him in 2008. Other public figures in the camp were hoping

to be nominated as his successor as head of the LWRC. For example, an important businessman I met in the camp in 2009 was campaigning and wanting to promote a more active behavior of this committee for the livelihoods and migration prospects of the camp residents. But in Buduburam camp, the refugees' spokesperson was not elected but chosen by the Ghanaian camp manager. The committee's president was finally replaced by a woman, after a violent clash between factions in February 2011.

Site effect and Liberians' perspectives in Buduburam and in Conakry

The comparison of the exile experiences of Liberian refugees in Buduburam and in Conakry shows similarities and differences. The specificities of each situation are related to two different national and urban contexts, and to different profiles among the refugee themselves. Yet, I also tried to show that the situation's differences were easier to understand taking issues of localization into account. This idea of localization has a social meaning according to Bourdieu, but it also has a strong spatial meaning. In this case, the existence of an urban refugee camp offered Liberian refugees a higher visibility and a sort of internal cohesion. Nevertheless, the urban camp also prevented some refugees to engage in integration processes, whereas these processes were easier in Conakry where Liberians were dispersed among the urban population. As T. Kuhlman (1994) showed, these are some aspects of the debates around settlement of refugees in any asylum country.

Looking at the perspectives of local integration for the Liberians who are still living in Buduburam and in Conakry when their status has been withdrawn, some common features can be put forward. In both countries, Liberians were allowed to stay as ECOWAS citizens but no specific law was adopted to give them access to nationality and citizenship. Only children or spouses of locals can be easily naturalized in Guinea and in Ghana. This narrow legal structure does not prevent Liberians to stay in their ex asylum country, and even to try and take advantage of their connections there and back in Liberia by organizing trans-border activities as some respondents already did.

Other refugees felt stranded and at a loss in Conakry or Buduburam and did not know what to do: neither willing to stay nor willing to go back. There was a main difference for these stranded Liberians who had the most reduced capabilities to be mobile. In Ghana, they could rely on their compatriots who were also staying in Buduburam. The closed camp apparently remains a kind of small Liberian town close to Accra and its residents were not thrown out of the perimeter (or not yet at least). The future evolution of this closed urban camp is worth observing to see how it will be keeping features of this specific past while being more and more absorbed in the periphery of Accra. On the other hand, in Conakry, stranded Liberians are mainly isolated and risk becoming more and more invisible and marginalized – with no real solution in sight. This social and spatial marginalization brings their experience close to the ones described by Z. Bauman (2004) in his book *Wasted lives*, since these left-behind refugees seemed to be the ones that nobody wanted, neither their country of origin, nor resettlement countries or their asylum country. However, the idea of a “site” or “place” effect invites to look at how these individuals still try to take advantage of the places they are assigned to.

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