



# Refugee Coloniality

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An Afrocentric  
analysis of prolonged  
encampment in Kenya

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*I dedicate this book to the millions of refugees and asylum  
seekers across the world.*

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## CHAPTER 1

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# My Refugee Journey

I begin this book by narrating my refugee journey as a lead into the broader theoretical and conceptual analysis of the camp. The ontological examination of my experience, the experience of war, exile, destitution, disillusionment, abandonment and rejection are my *raison d'être* for this book. Three key themes drove this inquiry. First, I wanted to share my refugee story as a way of shading light into the daily struggle of refugees in the camp space. Noting that the daily life of the refugee is difficult to ascertain solely from written materials, I need to go behind the scene by chronicling my life story which by default captures the unheard voices of millions of refugees. This methodological approach counters the inherent refugees' voicelessness in mainstream refugee literature. I then move beyond telling my story by exploring the link between colonial camp and refugee camp through an extensive examination of the literature. It is not enough to just explain the origin and structure of the camp, but I also want to explore how the camp fits into the global neo-colonial project in Africa. Throughout this book, I took an Afrocentric approach to deconstruct the camp's 'mystical humanitarianism'. I use this term deliberately to argue that Western humanitarianism in Africa is a wolf in sheep clothing. By default, this humanitarian gateway gives the donors an absolute right to intervention in Africa. This humanitarianism is mystical and unreal as it is used to camouflage the symbolic violence being reproduced through exclusionary refugee laws and policies. Suffice to state that it is through



the camp's humanitarianism that colonial legacies of oppression, control, and subjugation persist in this continent. As a former refugee with a decade's long experience in the camp, I argue for phasing out the camp so that refugees and asylum seekers are afforded the right to free movement in a borderless Africa.

My refugee journey inspired me to write this book, so it sits alongside my scholarly work. I am a South Sudanese-Australian and third-generation refugee. My grandparents and parents were once refugees in the 1960s and 1980s respectively. My refugee journey began in 1992, when I was initially displaced within South Sudan. Eventually, I fled the devastating civil war and sought asylum in Kenya where I lived in Kakuma camp for about a decade. I will never forget my sojourning which included navigating armed personnel at numerous border checkpoints along the way to the camp. Although there was no official policy restricting entry into Kenya, the right to entry is never guaranteed as the Kenya-South Sudan border was often closed during mass exoduses. For a very good reason, I bypassed Kakuma refugee camp which is located some 120 miles from the Kenya-South Sudan border. My destination was Dadaab refugee camp near the Kenya-Somalia border, about a thousand kilometres away. Established in 1991, Dadaab camp is home to over four hundred thousand refugees, the majority from Somalia with only a handful from South Sudan. I had followed my twin sister whom I got separated from for over five years at the time. After a long search among the crowd in the camp, I did not find her. I feared she was dead. A few years later, I learnt that she had already been resettled in the USA. A big relief.

When I arrived in Dadaab camp, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had already ceased registration for new refugees from South Sudan for fear of pull factor. In this context, pull factors refer to issues that drive the South Sudanese refugees to bypass Kakuma camp and seek refuge in Dadaab camp some 12,000 kilometres away. This camp was initially designated only for Somali refugees. I had nowhere else to go, but had to stay put. I continued living in this camp for over three years. During this entire period, the UNHCR did not recognise my presence, although I met all the requirements to be recognised as a refugee. I was among about 3000 South Sudanese refugees who were part of a 'prima facie' case load.<sup>1</sup> For context, prima facie refugee status is often granted to

<sup>1</sup> Prima facie is a procedural mechanism used by the UNHCR and the government to grant refugee status to often large influx of asylum seekers where individual assessment of refugee claims is impracticable.

refugees in recognition of the objective circumstances that prompted their flights from country of origin, and to ensure their safe and speedy admission, protection from refoulement and entitlement to basic humanitarian needs. Prima facie status determination is different from Refugee Status Determination as the latter refers to the process of determining whether an asylum seeker is a bona fide refugee or not. More significantly, prima facie is a procedural mechanism used to grant refugee status to often large influx of asylum seekers where individual assessment of refugee claims is impracticable. Unfortunately, we were never granted refugee status at the time.

We were stateless. I felt alien and alienated. This state of alienation aligns with Qasmiyeh's assertion that 'camps exist to die or exist forever'.<sup>2</sup> As most encamped refugees would testify, one of the means of legitimising my presence was to accept my subaltern status, and my non-presence. Gayatri Spivak correctly asked the critical question: 'Can the subaltern speak?'<sup>3</sup> As refugees are historically regarded as passive recipients, this passivity is reproduced in dominant policies and programmes that continue to keep the refugees in this subaltern or marginal status. The word subaltern refers to inferior status, underclass, marginalised, subordinate or the oppressed. This means, as a subaltern, I did not have a voice because whenever I tried to speak, no one is willing to listen to me. As subalternity theory continues to be relevant in the refugee space, the irony is that the voice of the subaltern can gain legitimacy, but only through the listener, not the speaker. This is because 'marginal voices' are culturally being epistemologically othered. As 'marginality' is being constituted as an area of inquiry, this is only because power relations in the refugee space have established it as an enduring project. This is the very 'orient'<sup>4</sup> that has continued to dominate contemporary academic discourse on the marginalised. Edward Said observed that a true understanding of the marginalised will not be realised until 'a recognition is made of its dependency and predication against the orient as a contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience'.<sup>5</sup> Given the inequality in the refugee space, addressing

<sup>2</sup> Qasmiyeh, M. Y. 2021. *Writing the camp, writing the camp archive: the case of Baddawi camp in Lebanon*, UK: UCL Press.

<sup>3</sup> Spivak, G. 1994. 'Can the subaltern speak?', in William, P. & Christmas, K. L. *colonial discourse and postcolonial theory*, New York: A Reader Harvester.

<sup>4</sup> Said, E. 2003. *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Books.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

refugee voicelessness should be the key driver if refugee emancipation is to be realised.

As I experienced it, I was marginalised, silenced, controlled and became a shadow of myself. I had to be represented in all spheres of my life. Such representation dictates refugee voicelessness. Further, maintaining good discipline of 'a starving beggar' became our survival strategy to reinforce the view that we need donor aid for our survival. We had hoped that this strategy would attract attention, but to no avail. We constructed tents within the camp's thorny fence and began our 'normal' life. We were neither *refouled* nor recognised as refugees. We lacked basic services such as water, food, healthcare, and sanitation. We were not in a war zone where the delivery of humanitarian aid is often a complex undertaking. We were in the camp, and there was no justification in denying us our fundamental rights. The way in which both the Kenyan government and the UNHCR neglected us for all that period is so incomprehensible that years later, I am still trying to comprehend the experience and the logic behind it.

For our daily survival, we resorted to hunting wild animals such as pigs, antelopes, guineafowls, and quails. We took this risk knowing that this desert part of Kenya was a no man's land and notoriously known to be a breeding ground for armed bandits. One Friday morning, we went hunting as usual, but this time we ventured further afield, deeper into the semi-arid desert. We were seven hungry men. Suddenly we heard loud gunfire. A steep reminder of my country's bitter civil war. We were already in enemy territory. Ambushed. By instinct, we all went flat to the ground. Too late. We were already surrounded by armed bandits who demanded a ransom. We were held hostage. When we failed to return to the camp at sunset as usual, the entire camp was in a state of emergency. The matter was reported to the UNHCR, but there was no response. Recall that the refugee agency did not recognise us as refugees in the first place. Just a few months earlier, armed bandits kidnaped four UNHCR officials in the same area. After over ten hours of limbo, the bandits finally released us because we could not offer what they were looking for. They warned us never again to set foot into their territory. That was pure luck. On another day, it could have been a different story. After our release, we went back to the safety of the camp, but in Dadaab camp, no one is safe. As for me, that was a turning point.

That same week, I relocated to Nairobi, the capital city, where I lived clandestinely as an undocumented refugee. On several occasions, I approached the UNHCR office in Nairobi for assistance. I was told the UNHCR provides assistance, but only to encamped refugees. I had just

returned from the camp where I had lived for over three years and received no assistance. I found myself abandoned without statutory rights which put me in a very precarious position. Due to constant harassment and threat of arrest by the Kenyan police, I had no other option, but to relocate to Kakuma camp situated about 450 kilometres from the capital city of Nairobi, and some 120 kilometres from the Kenya-South Sudan border. Recall that I initially resisted seeking registration in Kakuma camp for fear of being forcefully repatriated at the time when the civil war back home was at its peak. As refugee registration does not take place outside the camp, Kakuma camp would become my home for unforeseeable future. Repatriation refers to the process whereby a refugee is voluntarily or forcefully returned to their country of origin. The difficulty was that I had no document to show that I was a refugee in Kenya. This meant, I had to navigate my way through many police roadblocks to the camp. I did. On arrival, the immediate boomerang view of Kakuma camp are the large billboards pitched along the highway with the names of the donor countries such as the United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and their representative agencies such as Christian Relief Services, World Food Program, Lutheran World Federation, Cooperative for American Remittances Everywhere, signifying who wields power in this camp. Having lived in active armed conflict situation before, a police post located at the entry of the camp drew my attention. The police patrolled the camp day and night sometimes with armoured vehicles; reminiscent of a colonial camp. This meant that the camp as I experienced it was locked in a constant state of emergency.

The camp space is demarcated into fenced blocks of about three hectares lined up in clusters, to allow free passage for the police and healthcare workers' vehicles. The policing of emergency, the here and now of the camp, means that Kakuma assumes no past and no future, but a constant present. Each block strictly hosts specific ethnic groups with 150–200 refugees crammed into a shantytown-like setting. It is the UNHCR policy to canton the refugees according to their ethnicity. The ethnicisation of the camp is a double-edge sword. It promotes ethnic equality as in the case of minority Somalis Bantus (*Jareerweyne, Jareer, Gosha and mushunguli*), descendants of the Bantu ethnic group, who were historically marginalised by mainstream Somalis of Cushite descent.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it

<sup>6</sup>Eno, M. A. 2008. *The Bantu Jareer Somalis: unearthing apartheid in the horn of Africa*, London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers Ltd.

also encourages ethnic separatism, which is the very foundation of the camp. I had to find out where I belonged. Luckily within a month, the UNHCR registered me as a refugee and provided me with food ration card which entitled me to receive food items distributed fortnightly. Nothing else. I built a mud house and Kakuma camp became my home for about a decade. During this entire period, the UNHCR did not provide me with any official document which could identify me as a refugee. Idleness dominated my life in the camp. This idleness was directly related to my pre-exilic experience, the experience of war and abandonment which affects every refugee. I use the term idleness to refer to the fact that encamped refugees are stripped off their rights to free movement or formal employment even within the camp space. I could not leave the camp space to mind my own business unless authorised by the camp authority.

One of my unforgettable experiences is the refugee census which is conducted periodically. When it was time to be counted, we were given very short notice, less than 12 hours. Whoever was not present in the camp without prior consent from the UNHCR misses out and by default, forfeits their refugee entitlements. As numbers are essential for donor support, the UNHCR often took extreme measures during this exercise. The headcount was often carried out from midnight and by dawn, it was over. The process involves herding refugees into an enclosed shelter, fenced with barbed wires and cordoned off by armed police and sometimes the army—an exercise predicated on colonial camp. Although refugee camps are not punitive by design, they are typically underpinned by carceral micro-geographies of jails, militarised policing, permit regimes and checkpoints.<sup>7</sup> Through this violent incarceration, my mobility was inhibited, and my mind too debilitated. I was periodically head-counted as a means of revalidating my physical presence. The UNHCR is more interested in numbers than humans; since physical presence enables funding. Through the headcount, I was dehistoricised, removed from the past and fast tracked to the present and rendered voiceless. Silence took hold of me and trauma kicked in. Despite its longevity now extending over three decades, Kakuma camp remains in a state of temporary permanency. As carceral humanitarianism is exercised through the left arm of aid and the right arm of institutional containment, such compassion is perfected in Kakuma camp. This humanitarianism was carefully designed so I constantly

<sup>7</sup>Brankamp, H. 2019. “Occupied enclave” policing and the underbelly of humanitarian governance in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, *Political Geography*, vol. 71: 67–77.

remained a victim and locate myself within this state of legal limbo, of non-existence. After several attempts, I eventually migrated to Australia in 2003 through refugee and humanitarian settlement programme. This is the story that informs my scholarly work and the drive in seeking a pathway that may lead to camp abolition. It is this historical injustice, structural and institutional violence, the legal limbo and the inequality in the refugee space that this book addresses. As refugee camp remains largely peripheral from the wider abolitionist agenda, this book deploys the frameworks of *Ujamaa* as a distinctively suitable emancipatory agenda in a borderless Africa. As a nationalist project, *Ujamaa* has become one of Africa's successful indigenous projects and a significant landmark in post-colonial Africa.

### 1.1 REFUGEE VOICELESSNESS

I began this book by introducing my refugee journey as a factor that prompted this scholarly work. This subsection is very important because refugee voice is either missing or dramatically under-represented in mainstream refugee literature. Furthermore, refugees are historically regarded as passive recipients and this passivity is reproduced in dominant policies and programmes that continue to keep the refugees in this subaltern or marginal status. Embedding refugee voice in the literature is necessary to reveal the shortcoming in the current approaches to the camp phenomenon. Most importantly, reading refugee literature through the lens of a former refugee enriches scholarly understanding of how the camp has become a permanent and globally legalised institution for the concentration of millions of refugees.

Refugee voice as an instrument of change was the original approach when the League of Nations was founded in the 1920s. This was the period when refugees were regarded as drivers of change. For example, Paul Weis, a former refugee from Austria, served on the committee that drafted the 1951 Convention. However, over the years, refugee scholarship has been dominated by voices either without lived refugee experience or work that is inadequately attentive to such knowledge. Furthermore, a significant number of today's refugees are found either in detention or reception camps in the Global North or in prolonged encampment in the Global South, and whose voices are largely under-represented in mainstream refugee literature. The former are even more subjected to silencing as their voice is censored especially if their asylum status is still subject to

deportation. While the concept of refugee has a history which needs to be understood, refugee voice and lived experience which are central to this history, are being neglected. It is in this context that this book explores the humanist dimension of the refugee.

Refugee voices are commonly deployed in refugee literature and academia, but they take diverse shapes and forms just as their messages. Equally, refugee voicelessness and invisibility are being propagated by the society and the institutions that look after them as a strategic choice. In this context, voicelessness and passivity render the refugees docile as they have to be taken care of as the *raison d'être* of humanitarianism. In my own experience, there was a desire in me to hide my identity so that I live a clandestine lifestyle—of having no identity and no voice. Being invisible was my personal choice to protect my identity. Nonetheless, there were situations where I had to be visible when prompted by circumstances beyond my control. As trust is assumed through its absence, ‘refugee mistrusts the state and the state too mistrust refugees’<sup>8</sup> and this practice is inherent in the asylum system. Due to this institutional labelling, most refugees have by default trained themselves to be cautious on who to trust. This experience dictates the way many refugees choose to engage with the wider society.

There are numerous avenues through which refugee voices are being promoted. For example, the UNHCR and partner agencies have dedicated a number of platforms for refugees to tell their stories. These include, but not limited to, documentaries, films, artistic expressions, surveys, poetry, exhibitions, museums and speeches at conferences, and publication on websites. Great. However, refugeehood is predicated on the condition of voicelessness. This voicelessness occurs on a multiplicity of levels. Put differently, ‘there are a thousand multifarious refugee experiences and figures whose meanings and identities are negotiated in the process of displacement in time and place’.<sup>9</sup> This voicelessness results into marginalisation as refugees are always regarded as victims who need to be represented in almost all spheres of their life. For example, access to some of the largest refugee camps such as Kakuma camp in Kenya where I was a resident for a decade is severely restricted or sometimes completely denied to

<sup>8</sup>Daniel, E.V. & Knudsen, J.C. 1995. *Mistrusting refugees*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

<sup>9</sup>Soguk, N. 1999. *States and strangers: refugees and displacements of statecraft*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

outsiders. The victim discourse and the pathologisation of refugees through humanitarianism make refugee ‘experts’, the only trustworthy voice to speak for the refugees.<sup>10</sup> Addressing this representation entails more than just engaging with the causes and consequences of forced displacement, but also with discourses and the elevation of refugees’ own voice.<sup>11</sup> This voice must not only be listened to, but it must also be answered and led out of lonely monologue. However, there are the two options available to anyone in any human grouping who are not satisfied with their situation—‘exit’ and ‘voice’.<sup>12</sup> As I experienced it, going into exile is itself an expressive act of exit after I lost my voice. Whereas most refugees continue to engage with their new custodian in exile, their voicelessness and invisibility meant they are bootstrap in this limbo-ism. As such, the inclusion of refugee voice in mainstream refugee literature is not only the right thing to do, but it will improve the effectiveness of refugee policy response to prolonged encampment.

As a locus of modernity, international refugee law with its creed and diasporic orientation persuasively stipulates that one cannot become a refugee unless they have experienced persecution and have exited their country of origin. As victims of war or human rights abuse, this victimisation leads to hyper-invisibility of refugee voice which is embedded within the asylum paradigm. Malkki argues that refugees are misrepresented by various organisations, in ‘speechless’ or ‘powerlessness’ forms.<sup>13</sup> This has prompted Malkki to call for the ‘international order of things’ as refugees are regarded as dehistoricised category of humanity. It is within the framework of humanitarian governance that refugee scholarship ‘frequently resort to the vocabulary of trauma and vulnerability to describe the condition of refugees as victims’<sup>14</sup> who need to be represented. This ordering aligns with the observation that ‘mastery of language affords remarkable power’.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting on my personal experience on the importance of writing as a sort of *catharsis*, I often use writing as therapy for healing, as a way

<sup>10</sup>Rajaram, P. 2002. ‘Humanitarianism and representations of the refugee,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 247–64.

<sup>11</sup>Agier, M. 2008. *On the margins of the world*, Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>12</sup>Hirschman, A. O. 1970. *Exit, voice, and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organisations, and states*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>13</sup>Malkki, L. H. 1996. ‘Speechless emissaries: refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricisation,’ *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 3, 377–404.

<sup>14</sup>Malkki, L. H. 1996. Speechless emissaries.

<sup>15</sup>Fanon, F. 1963. *The wretched of the earth*.



to break my silence and the chain of voicelessness. For most refugees, the struggle to break their silence is an anchor for recognition which needs to be given a platform in mainstream refugee literature.

I also build my argument on Homi Bhabha's observation that 'migrant knowledge of the world is still most urgently needed' to fill the void in migration and refugee studies.<sup>16</sup> Migrants' knowledge production and knowledge transfer provide the underlying justification for Bhabha's concept of hybridisation as a framework to fill the void in refugee studies. This necessitates an urgent need for a closer examination of the factors that obscure marginalised voices. While refugees themselves will remain the key drivers to bring about the social change in this space, equally, refugee policy makers, practitioners and academics need to play a proactive role in facilitating this change. By and large, having a value-driven participatory approach could bring about equal and reciprocal partnership which is highly needed to promote refugee voice in refugee scholarship.

As a common phenomenon, aid workers in the advocacy world often produce and reproduce stereotype narratives to promote the notion of refugeehood at fundraising campaigns by using the story on war, violence and forced displacement, but within existing frameworks of representation. Such campaigns sometimes involve dramatically parading the refugees as victims who need to be represented. This may be necessary for the purposes of fundraising, creating public awareness, or influencing government policy. However, the preferential orientation towards the marginalised which involves speaking for subaltern subjects demonstrates how refugee voice and experience are often removed from the dominant configurations of power and knowledge production.

Furthermore, 'I was there' tendency that refugee scholars often deploy in their publications on refugees to demonstrate their 'eye-witness account' and to authenticate their authorship contributes to the exclusivity so dominant in refugee literature. Unfortunately, this practice remains the hallmark of refugee scholarship to date. While the majority of refugee scholars in their knowledge production or representation are trustworthy, there is a sharp difference between representation and lived experience. It is, therefore, critically important that care must be taken when representing the marginalised to eliminate the risk of over-representation.

That aside, refugee research involves qualitative data, participant observation, personal experiences or storytelling which are often presented as

<sup>16</sup> Bhabha, H. 1994. *The location of culture*, New York: Routledge.

forensic evidence and legitimate forms of knowledge production, but sometimes with near invisibility of the researchers themselves. In such a practice, refugee voice is commensurate with the project of advocacy even when they themselves remain partially silent or silenced as they don't fit into the epistemology of knowledge production and knowledge transfer. This representative voice tends to disempower the very people they seek to empower. In my experience, I often preserved my space of not knowing, of not having a voice which by default allowed me to retain the status of voicelessness. In Derrida's sense, representative voice is merely 'finger pointing at the moon', not the moon itself.<sup>17</sup> As such, the gap created by lack of refugee voice, when recognised and legitimated by the gatekeepers, becomes a space for new participants and a new voice. The lack of refugee voice in this space constitutes who a refugee is.

In essence, 'refugee voice' should be regarded as a legitimate historical unit of analysis and an epistemic site from which to interpret the refugee world. When refugees are given the platform to express their own voice unmediated, that voice will be heard differently and very clearly with no traces of silence within the epistemic space of knowledge production. To date, refugee voice is still obscured by the language of representation, but it's something that should be heralded as the future for refugee decoloniality. Most importantly, providing a platform for refugee voice will potentially improve the institutional development of the refugee regime and productively lead to a new genre of refugee studies.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, J. 1981. *Dissemination*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.



# The Origin of the Camp

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Having introduced my refugee journey in Chapter one, chapter two examines the genealogy of the camp dating back to the Transatlantic Slave Trade era. One of these slave camps is Pikworo, a historical site and a memorial shrine located in Ghana's Upper East Region of Paga Nania.<sup>1</sup> To date, Pikworo stood as a memorial and pilgrimage destination because it is one of the final points for the redistribution of slaves before they were shipped off to America or Europe.<sup>2</sup> The colonialists also built a number of forts and castles camps as storage for the slaves.<sup>3</sup> These include the Maison d'Esclaves on Gorée Island in Senegal and Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana which have been designates as world heritage sites by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) due to their historical significance.<sup>4</sup> These fort and castle camps were the last stations for the slaves on African soil before they were loaded into boats to work in agricultural plantations owned by wealthy European aristocrats. These plantations became the centre of large-scale slave labour operation

<sup>1</sup> Scraam, K. 2011. The slaves of Pikworo local histories, transatlantic perspectives, *History and Memory*, vol. 23, no 1, Spring/Summer, 96–130.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Behrendt, J. A. 2005. *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: a history*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

<sup>4</sup> Scraam, K. 2011. The slaves of Pikworo local histories.

in the Western Hemisphere. This genealogy is critical as it lays the foundation for the rest of the chapters in defining how the camp was first used as a temporary shelter for slaves before they were shipped off to work in plantations in Europe and the Americas.

The literature on the camp is extensive, but majority of them largely focus on the crisis and emergency phase of refugee phenomenon. In both academic and public discourse, the narrative does not touch on the fundamental question: what is it about the camp itself that permits such events to occur in the first place? In no way do they come close to uncovering or even exploring the specific legal, social, historical and geopolitical factors surrounding this political space. Coles contends that there is a ‘consequential risk of seeing the refugee problem from an inadequate and even distorted perspective if history lessons are not considered’.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Hannah Arendt argued that any historical research on the camp must be augmented with an analysis of the different juridical aspects of the different types of the concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> Given that the camp was a core feature of colonial conquests, having a closer scrutiny at its genealogy could reveal how the camp space continues to be used as a political tool of exclusion.

As a distinct, but interrelated inquiry, this chapter also examines the European Union (EU) Externalisation policy in Africa. As asylum seekers are technically produced through the technique of externalisation practices, the EU externalisation policy represents an epistemological order which continues to function as a postcolonial project. The analysis in this subsection is important because refugees and asylum seekers interdicted in the high seas enroute to Europe are being refouled to Africa and put in detention camps built, funded and resourced by the EU, which resembles a return to the Transatlantic Slave Trade era.

As the concept of coloniality plays a critical role in retaining colonial-like structures such as the camp, I deploy decolonial critique to allow for an extensive engagement with contemporary canon of African decolonial scholarship. I examine critical postcolonial/decolonial theories—especially by Frantz Fanon, Quinjano Anabil, Edward Said, Kwame Nkrumah,

<sup>5</sup> Coles, G. 1988. ‘The basis and function of refugee law,’ in Institute of Public International Law and International Relations of Thessaloniki (ed.), *Refugee Problem on Universal, Regional and National Level*, vol. XIII, Institute of Public International Law and International Relations: Thessaloniki. Gervase Coles is former Assistant Legal Adviser of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, H. 1967. *The origin of totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni Sabelo, Alexander Weheliye, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Achille Mbembe, Homi Bhabha, among others to determine how they combine to offer new insights on the camp as a historical site of political contestation in Africa. Founded on colonialism, coloniality is about the denial of indigeneity, pre-colonial or non-European systems of knowing, being and creating. Centred on liberatory platform, decoloniality is a concept aimed at freeing those whose history, voice, knowledge, and power continue to be colonised. I use the phrase liberatory framework to indicate that refugee literature is dominated by scholarship from the Global South whose knowledge of the refugee phenomena is inadequate and have presented a distorted view from the Global South on refugee phenomena. I advance the concept of decoloniality as a liberation language in order to free the refugees from the bondage of the camp which is not well captured by scholarship from the Global South.

## 2.2 THE COLONIAL CAMP

The idea of the camp or ‘camp thinking’ first emerged during sixteenth century Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The European slave traders built coastal forts and castles with their dungeons as makeshift camp sites in which the slaves were kept as the point of embarkation before they were loaded into boats enroute to Europe and the Americas.<sup>7</sup> Some of the most well-known slave camps are Salaga market and Sankana cave in Ghana.<sup>8</sup> Captives were taken to these camps for a period of three to five weeks before they were shipped off.

Asante empire in Ghana is known to have played a predatory role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Africa. This is mainly because the empire provided access through which the slave traders raided villages and kidnapped the natives. Although slave trade was known to be lucrative, the price tag for a slave plummeted due to the massive increase in the supply of slaves in Salaga. In Louis Gustave Binger’s historical description, the price for a male slave during that period was the same as for a cow (and half the price of a horse).<sup>9</sup> The trading in humans remained operational

<sup>7</sup>Scraam, K. 2011. The slaves of Pikworo local histories.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Louis, G. B., 1892. From Niger to the Gulf of Guinea via the Land of Kong and the Mossi, Paris: Hachette Library, vol. 2, 87–107.

even after the official abolition of Transatlantic Slave Trade by the Britain and the Dutch in 1817.

From the 1880s, European countries raced to occupy the continent of Africa in what was called the ‘Scramble for Africa’, to seek economic and political control. It was at Berlin Conference of 1884 that colonial powers then divided Africa among themselves. During the decades the Berlin Conference, the settler colonial period, the European settlers viewed the African continent as reservoirs of raw materials, labor, and territory for future settlement. From the 1940s, from Cape Town to Cairo, the entire continent of Africa was lit up to fight the colonisers. It was during the decolonisation wars that European colonisers introduced state-sponsored encampment policy as part of a global Western territorial ordering produced by whiteness doctrine. In late eighteenth century, the Europeans adopted the same camp thinking when they began their colonial expansion across the world. Arsenio Martinez Campos, then Commander of the Spanish garrison in Cuba, first spoke of the ‘concentration camp’ in 1895.<sup>10</sup> His ultimate aim was to relocate or ‘reconcentrate’ the natives into colonial camps through imperial force. Colonial camps were camouflaged as privileged sites of protection where the natives could be civilised, protected and assimilated into whiteness. In so doing, the Cubans who were considered racially different had to be put under colonial administration. This raciality was to preserve white sovereignty and racial hygiene which was the hallmark of colonialism.

In reference to the British conquest of Australia, Aileen Moreton-Robinson argued that ‘whiteness was predicated on racial superiority and colonialism...., it is constitutive of the epistemology of the West that has become universalised’.<sup>11</sup> The desire to concentrate the Cubans in camps was necessitated by the difficulties in assimilating them into sovereign whiteness. This sovereign whiteness was a strategic term used to silence and dismiss anything non-Western. It is a Western way of describing oneself as being knowledgeable and at the same time challenging the intelligence of anyone non-Western. According to Aileen, this whiteness which wedded in colonial violence was invisible, unmarked and unnamed, but

<sup>10</sup> Lal, V. 2005. ‘The concentration camp and development: the past and future genocide,’ *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 39, no. 2, 220–228.

<sup>11</sup> Moreton-Robinson, A. 2004. ‘Whiteness, epistemology, and Indigenous representation,’ in Moreton-Robinson, A. (ed), *Whitening race: essays in social and cultural criticism*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.