NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

Returning refugees or migrating villagers? Voluntary repatriation programmes in Africa reconsidered

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Introduction

There is a sedentary bias in the concept of refugee, which implicitly suggests that people belong to a particular location as if by nature. The separation of people from their place forms one aspect of the refugee problem and the restoration of a person to their place through repatriation is often presented as the optimum solution. This simplistic narrative of refugees being able to go 'home' is too often employed without a critical analysis of what they conceive to be home and how it has changed since they were forced to leave.

Over the last decade voluntary repatriation has been widely presented as the optimum, and often the only, durable solution to refugee problems around the world. The universal desire to return is ascribed to refugees as easily as their vulnerability, powerlessness and other such stereotypes. Like most stereotypes, it reflects a commonly observed phenomenon: in this case, that people who are forced to leave their homes very often want to go back to them. However, if such stereotypes are to be relied on to predict human behaviour and to form the basis of policy, it must be asked if they can be seen to have universal validity.

This paper questions these assumptions and presents a case study of self-settled Angolan refugees in Zambia, which illustrates how repatriation programmes based on a simplistic idea of refugees returning home are likely to prove ineffective and inefficient.[1] By viewing repatriation as a form of migration, the study highlights the contrast between the discourse of external agencies, who perceive repatriation as a return to normality and an end to the refugee problem, and villagers, for whom cross-border migration is a normal part of life and a way to improve their livelihoods. In the next section the paper turns to look at the nature of refugee problems and the rising star of repatriation as the ideal solution. After introducing the background to the case study, the following two sections describe the local and external views of cross-border movement and repatriation. The penultimate section shows how the external model framed in a discourse of refugee repatriation fails to address the main concerns and needs of potential migrants. The final section suggests some policies for developing repatriation plans, which arise out of the research.

The refugee problem and its solution

In the last ten years voluntary repatriation has increased in importance as a way to deal with the increasing flows of refugees in the world. In 1992 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared a decade of voluntary repatriation and during the 1990s an estimated 12 million refugees have repatriated across the world (Koser and Black 1999) to countries including Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia and South Africa. Despite the increased numbers of returns, the total number of refugees at the end of the decade, 13 million according to UNHCR (1998), is much the same as at the beginning. New conflicts have replaced old, returning refugees have displaced new

ones (as in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia) and former refugees have returned to exile (as in Angola with the resumption of the war in 1992).

The growing difficulties of dealing with such staggering numbers of refugees have increased the impetus of the search for durable solutions to their plight. In the first paragraph of the UNHCR statute voluntary repatriation of refugees or their assimilation in new national communities are put forward as 'permanent solutions'. The latter of these has now been refined to distinguish between permanent settlement in the country of first asylum and resettlement in a third country. Together with voluntary repatriation, these make the three solutions that are seen as both desirable and durable. None of these is easily achieved but voluntary repatriation has come to be seen by governments, international organisations and many academics as the optimum solution of these three, both in terms of desirability and feasibility (Black and Koser (eds.) 1999, Rogge 1994, UNHCR 1980, 1987). The 1969 refugee convention of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) only discusses voluntary repatriation as a solution and does not include any mention of assimilation, integration or naturalisation of refugees. In Article 5 it lays obligations on both states of origin and of asylum to facilitate voluntary repatriation.

Before turning to look at voluntary repatriation in greater detail, it is worth considering the nature of the refugee problem to which it represents this ideal universal solution. There are three aspects to the refugee problem that can be clearly identified. Firstly, the presence of refugees constitutes an aberration in the modern world, which is neatly partitioned into nation states where each individual must belong to one of these states; everybody has a nationality or failing that has a country of 'habitual residence' where they belong. Movement from one country to another is governed by immigration procedures that either allow temporary residence or a change of nationality but only with the agreement of the state to which a person moves. Refugees are an exception as states which are party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees are either obliged to receive them or negotiate their acceptance in a third country; they cannot simply return them to their country of origin if they face persecution there. For this world of nation states, refugees constitute a problem because they do not belong and the international regime for dealing with refugees is concerned with temporary measures to be taken until such time as they can belong once more (Malkki 1995b, Hathaway 1997).

Secondly, at the start of any refugee emergency the most urgent aspect of the 'refugee problem' is a humanitarian one as refugees often flee their homes under the most appalling conditions, families are separated and they arrive in a neighbouring country with very few possessions, and no means of supporting themselves. Where there are mass flows of people, aid operations may be essential to help refugees through these critical times. However, once the crisis has passed and refugees have either been able to settle temporarily among local communities or in settlements, it is still assumed that there is the chronic suffering caused by exile from one's nation. In the world of nation states not only are people administratively attached to a country, but it is also assumed that they have an emotional attachment which is difficult and traumatic to adjust. There is an implicit idea that refugees have left a home which is at a fixed geographical location and to which they will continue to be drawn while they are

refugees. This is perhaps encapsulated by the quotation from Euripides (431 BC) which is used as a slogan by UNHCR: 'There is no greater sorrow on earth than the loss of one's native land.'

Thirdly, refugees are perceived as posing a threat to the society in which they settle. In Europe in the 1940s there was concern about vagrancy and crime and the impact of having large numbers of unsettled people with nowhere to go. Today in Europe although the numbers involved are much smaller, there are similar concerns and refugees are portrayed as having no means of support and as a burden on the state's welfare benefits (Hathaway 1997). In the developing world where there have been mass movements of refugees, particularly in Africa, the refugees are also often seen as threatening the local economy and environment and creating social pressures (Chambers 1979). Host countries in Africa saw refugees as a burden on their economies and at the second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in 1984 called for greater burden sharing by the industrialised countries (Hans and Suhrke 1997, Stein 1987).

Voluntary repatriation can be seen as an ideal solution to the refugee problem as it brings the refugees back under the protection of the state of origin, it restores them to their homes and it relieves the burden on the host society. This assumes that the conditions which caused them to flee have substantially changed to enable refugees to come under the protection of the state, that their idea of home remains related to a particular place even a generation or more after leaving, and that their presence has continued to be a burden to the host society. All these assumptions are open to question.

Stein et al. (1995) describe how refugees may move back into their country of origin while the conflict from which they fled continues, and before conditions have settled sufficiently for the international community to support a formal repatriation programme. Wilson and Nunes (1994) observed that many of the refugees moving from Malawi to Mozambique prior to the internationally sponsored repatriation programme did not re-establish their bond with the Mozambican state, and they question whether such movements should be considered as repatriation.

Concepts of home vary greatly between different societies, and between different individuals within societies, and it cannot be assumed that refugees will want to return to the place they were forced to flee. Although some groups may look to a particular piece of territory as their permanent homeland, as Coles (1985) points out, the concept of home usually includes more than a physical location but also the community associated with that place. The link made between home and land encourages the idea of repatriation as a means of recovering a 'home', a past which cannot be recreated and which may never have existed. The home country and its society may have changed beyond all recognition for the refugees and they themselves will have been changed during their exile (Warner 1994, Koser and Black 1999).

The initial shock of violent separation from one's homeland is always traumatic, but the maintenance of the trauma of exile over time is socially constructed and cannot be taken for granted. Perhaps this is best illustrated by Malkki's (1995a) study of Burundi

refugees in Tanzania, which found that refugees in the official camps built up a myth of the Hutu nation in exile and awaited their return to their land, whereas those who stayed in the Tanzanian border town integrated with Tanzanian nationals and many denied their Burundi origins. Other refugees have constructed an image of their homeland as a 'promised land' as described by both Powles (1993), writing about Angolans in Zambia, and Bascom (1994), writing about Eritreans in Sudan. Refugees' understanding of repatriation and their responses to the prospect of returning are inextricably linked with their idea of home, embedded in the particular culture, history and circumstances of the refugee community.

However, as Zetter's study of Greek-Cypriot refugees shows (1994), even when refugees have resisted absorption in the host society and maintained a strong intention to repatriate, they may pragmatically adapt to exile and establish new roots. Some Cypriot refugees appear to be establishing permanent settlements and there is now a real question as to what is 'home' for them. Should the practical possibility of repatriation arise in Cyprus, the responses to it are likely to vary widely among different sections of the refugee population. Many other authors describe the adaptations that other refugees have made to life in exile, including dramatic transformations in social and economic relationships (Bascom 1994, Rogge 1994, Kibreab 1996). The picture that Zetter paints of Cyprus highlights the dangers of assuming that all refugees will necessarily want to return to their country of origin once the cause of their flight has been removed. The dreams of going home may be based on nostalgia for a past that cannot be recreated, and when return is practical it is not necessarily desirable.

Finally, there is the widespread assumption that the arrival of refugees necessarily creates a chronic burden for the host population which can only be relieved by repatriation. There is a Malthusian view that an increase in population will cause increased poverty and hardship in the long term, even when it occurs in areas of extremely low population density (Boserup 1990, Tiffen 1994). A clear counter example is the experience of post war North America, which has received thousands of refugees who settled permanently, received citizenship and have contributed greatly to its dominant position in the world today.[2] In Sudan refugees were seen as the labour force for mechanised farms to increase agricultural production (Kibreab 1987, Bascom 1993). As Chambers pointed out the impact of a refugee influx on any society will vary between different sectors of the host population (Chambers 1986, also Whitaker 1999), but it is too inaccurate to say that refugees necessarily constitute a net burden.

A large-scale movement of refugees (or any other rapid, mass migration) will cause enormous problems for all those involved, both refugees and hosts. The appalling circumstances of refugees' flight and the abuses they suffer at the hands of governments and individuals have generated an international humanitarian response through UNHCR, which aims to offer legal and physical protection to alleviate their hardships. This mechanism provides vital support that has almost certainly saved

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[2] Between 1946 and the late 1980s the USA received over two million refugees who are now permanently resident there (Castles and Miller 1993).

hundreds of thousands of lives, especially in the immediate crisis of large influxes. However, as the above examples illustrate, the strategies that people adopt to cope with their new circumstances vary greatly and there is no common set of problems which can be safely assumed to persist after the initial emergency.

However, describing a person as a refugee is rarely simply a statement concerning their personal history and legal status, but brings with it a package of problems faced *because* he or she is a refugee. In such circumstances the label 'refugee' becomes a description of the whole person leaving no room for other identities (mother, farmer, headman, etc.) rather than one aspect of their lives. This reductionist process of labelling and categorising refugees as a temporary aberration in the 'national order of things' has the result that the 'refugee experience' can be viewed as having a beginning – flight, a middle – temporary asylum and an end – ideally repatriation (Malkki 1995b). Rather than being part of a wider process of history that results in permanent, irreversible changes, in some sense refugees are viewed as outside history, as their return marks the end of exile and the resumption of 'normal' life, rejoining the mainstream where history happens. From this perspective, repatriation becomes the final event in the refugee cycle (Black and Koser 1999), which can be the subject of intervention to manage it and hasten it to a conclusion. At times repatriation is presented as a technical operation of transporting people and giving them the resources to rebuild livelihoods, rather than as a long-term process of rehabilitation of an area and the movement of people that may result in a very different population distribution and social structure from that seen before the conflict started.

Rather than casting voluntary repatriation as a universal most durable solution to the refugee problem, in any particular situation it is open to question what problems it sets out to solve, whose problems are they and how it addresses them. In this decade of repatriation there has been a massive increase in research on the topic and there have been a number of major studies of refugee repatriation in Africa. Some focus on various elements of the repatriation process such as preparation by refugees (Makanya 1994, Bascom 1994, Kibreab 1996), governments and international agencies (Huffman 1992, Habte-Selassie 1992, Koser 1993, Zeager 1998, McSpadden 1999), experiences of moving (Kabera and Muyanja 1994, Simon and Preston 1993) and the problems of resettlement and reintegration (Preston 1994, Jackson 1994, Allen 1996, Black and Koser 1999). Others consider particular localities in depth (Wilson and Nunes 1994) or follow particular groups of refugees as they move (Wilson 1994, James 1996). Cuny et al. (1992) have carried out a major study of the repatriation during conflict in Africa. Zieck (1997) and Quick et al. (1995) have looked at the way international refugee law has been applied to repatriation.

These studies highlight the factors that influence the results of repatriation more than their role in determining whether it happens at all. For example, the issue of livelihoods and employment has frequently been raised as a critical problem for those who have returned from exile, but more rarely as a factor which determines whether the refugees return at all. The underlying question seems to be 'how do refugees return home?' rather than 'why do refugees return home?'. More recent studies, such as Kibreab (1996), Dolan (1999) and Hammond (1999), are now raising these questions. Repatriation is often seen as the optimum outcome for refugee situations as if by

definition and the 'obvious' thing for refugees to do. The fact of their wanting to return is taken for granted so their motivation for repatriating does not necessarily arise as a question. It is assumed that
once the root causes that prompt population movements are eliminated the affected populations 'vote with their feet' homewards in order to re-establish themselves in their former areas of origin or habitual residence. Thus, since repatriation is expected to happen automatically in response to changed political and social conditions in countries of origin, research into the factors that influence refugees' decisions concerning repatriation has not been considered worthwhile (Kibreab 1996: 6).

If return is voluntary, at least to the degree that refugees have some other options available, then asking if they want to go home, and why, is crucial to understanding repatriation and developing policies to deal with it. In many cases it seems clear that refugees are keen to return to their homes as soon as possible, but the fact that the majority make their own way, regardless of assistance offered by governments or international agencies, suggests that such policies have been developed with too little regard for the refugees' motivations (for example see discussion on Mozambique, Wilson and Nunes 1994: 173). In other cases where there is little enthusiasm for repatriation, such as for many Eritreans in Sudan (Bascom 1994), it seems the options for refugees are likely to be blocked off until repatriation is the only path open to them. Studying the motivations for repatriation may either highlight policies that could make it desirable for refugees, or at least expose the eventual repatriation as forced.

Enquiring after the reasons for voluntary migration has been the subject of countless studies over many years in many disciplines including anthropology, sociology, economics and geography. Much of this research into migration has focused on urbanisation and labour migration to cities (for example, Ravenstein 1885, Harris and Todaro 1970, Amin 1974, Gilbert and Gugler 1992). There has been less work on migration between rural areas (Hill 1986, Mollett 1991), or the links between city dwellers and their rural origins (van Velsen 1960, Pottier 1988). Much of the debate in migration theory has centred on the extent to which different actors have room to manoeuvre in decisions about migration. At one extreme, neo-classical models present the migration decision as resting with the individual based on their analysis of the costs and benefits of moving. At the other, structuralist models suggest that labour migration systems were established to serve the interests of capitalism and the individual has little choice in the matter.

In recent years, some promising middle ground has been opened up with the application of Gidden's concept of structuration to migration (Wright 1995, Richmond 1993, Giddens 1984). This suggests that migrants should be viewed as social actors working with some room for manoeuvre while constrained by the wider social context in which they exist. From this perspective, refugees can be seen as migrants who have particular constraints placed upon them (for example, limited access to jobs) but use their own social skills and resources to subvert these constraints and bring about their preferred outcome.

Case study background

This paper presents the results of a study undertaken to analyse repatriation through this lens of migration (Bakewell 1999), using the case of the anticipated return of Angolan refugees in Zambia. As a result of the war of independence in Angola from 1961 and the subsequent civil war after independence in 1975, an estimated 220,000 refugees are still in neighbouring countries, the majority in the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) and Zambia (United States Committee for Refugees 1998). In Zambia only about 30,000 Angolan refugees live in the official government settlements of Meheba and Mayukwayukwa and the majority live in villages near the Angolan border. Since the first refugees came in 1966, most of the self-settled refugees have had very little contact with the authorities and estimates of their numbers are little more than educated guesses. Throughout the 1990s UNHCR has been using the figure of 100,000 Angolan refugees in Zambia, of which 70,000 are self-settled.

In 1996-1997, when field work for this study was carried out, the Angolan government and the South African backed National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels were still slowly implementing the terms of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol to bring a lasting peace to the country. With the onset of each dry season from 1996 to 1998 there were hopes that the conditions in Angola would improve sufficiently to enable UNHCR to promote the repatriation of refugees, in particular by providing transport for those in official settlements and re-integration packages for returned refugees in Angola. In June 1998 these plans were abandoned as Angola slipped back into full-scale war.

An earlier study in 1989 by Hansen (1990) suggested that those refugees who had remained in the border villages had completely integrated and would have no interest in returning to Angola. However, between 1995 and 1997 there were widespread expectations that once a stable peace was established the majority of refugees staying on the border would go back to Angola and UNHCR repatriation plans were based on this assumption. There had been attempts at counting the refugees and assessing their interest in repatriation but they remained uncompleted and there was no reliable data on the situation.

Rather than attempting to replicate such surveys, the more recent study put to one side the term repatriation, loaded as it is with connotations of return and resumption of normality. In order to question the assumptions about repatriation it was important to avoid embedding them in the research methods. To try to identify refugees and then ask them about their interest in moving to Angola or not, would presuppose firstly, that it is possible to differentiate a refugee from others; and secondly, that they would have a special interest in moving compared to others who may fall outside the initial refugee category. It was important to see the whole process of movement to Angola set in the context of the historical, social and economic change in the area, rather than necessarily as a special event to occur once the war ends. Thus, the study became concerned with the wider impact on cross border movement from Zambia of the improving situation in Angola. It would include those who might be thought of as refugees by others but it would not impose that label on people.

Fieldwork for this study was carried out between November 1996 and October 1997, mainly in Mwinilunga district of North-Western Province in Zambia, and it focused on a group of villages, or vicinage (Turner 1957), under one headman within the area of the Lunda senior chief Kanongesha. A range of methods was used including: semi-structured interviews with key informants gathering life histories, accounts of movements, and other data; a structured interview with all adults in the villages; participant observation; and methods drawn from participatory rural appraisal. A peripheral vision was maintained by using similar methods less intensively in surrounding villages outside the area of focus, as well as at two other border sites (Nyakasaya and Chavuma). In addition visits were made to the official government-sponsored Meheba Refugee Settlement and the offices of government officials, UNHCR and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with refugees. The actual practice of repatriation was observed during a short visit to Cazombo in UNITA-held territory in Angola.

Local views of cross-border movement

The arrival of Angolan refugees in North-Western Zambia followed a pattern of migration which had been established in earlier centuries. Among the Lunda, Luvale, Chokwe, Mbunda and Luchazi people of the upper Zambezi there has been a long history of movement from the north and west into present day Zambia. All these groups trace their origins to the similarly named central Luunda kingdom of Mwanta Yavwa in DRC and recount their migration through Angola into Zambia. In the last century there was further migration to the east as people tried to escape the reach of the Atlantic slave traders and later in search of the ivory, beeswax and rubber in the remoter forests of Zambia (von Oppen 1995). With the extension of colonial administration at the beginning of this century, a new class of movements was introduced as people fled to Angola to avoid British taxes and then to Zambia to avoid the harshness of the Portuguese regime and its forced labour. Further stimulation to migrate was provided by the labour needs of the mines of Katanga in DRC and the Zambian Copperbelt from the 1930s. How far such labour migration should be considered as voluntary is open to debate (Amin (ed.) 1974, Peil and Sada 1984).

The Angolan independence war started in 1961 and in 1966 a new eastern front was opened from Zambia (independent since 1964) which caused an estimated 4,000 Angolan refugees to flee to Zambia's Western and North-Western provinces by the end of the year. The numbers of people taking refuge in Zambia steadily rose with a large increase in the mid 1980s as the war between the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA – supported by Cuba) and UNITA escalated. The extreme violence, scale and speed of this migration may have been new but the idea of moving to escape violence was certainly not. People followed the patterns of migration laid in earlier generations and many came into Zambia and joined their kin who had arrived before. The majority of refugees settled in border villages and resisted government efforts to move them to refugee settlements at Meheba and Mayukwayukwa far from the border (Hansen 1979a, 1979b, 1990).

Not only is there a long history of migration among the people of the upper Zambezi but mobility is an essential element of the local society (White 1960, von Oppen 1995). Although by no means nomads, the Lunda people are always on the move at every level. In the past chieftainships were fluid institutions and the extent of a chief's power was constantly changing. Migration was a strategy to escape the influence of one chief, either by coming into the sphere of influence of another or by establishing a new chieftainship. Under colonial rule the system has been petrified into a much more rigid structure with borders drawn on maps and incorporated into administrative areas. Today the old fluidity is retained at the lower level of headmanships which may still be created, move or dissolve.

Lunda villages may remain in place for a number of generations but they are not permanent. In the past when a headman dies, or if there are a number of other deaths or illnesses, the whole village would move and be rebuilt at another site (Turner 1957). This practice seems to be less common today but many villages were established at their present location due to the death of a headman. Disputes between families and neighbours' feuds may also cause villages to shift. During 1997 in Kanongesha, many people moved out of the large villages to go to less populated areas near the border with Angola and during the dry season new villages appeared in the bush. These moves were in order to get access to better land and to cultivate fields close to their houses, free from the destruction caused by neighbours' goats.

Residential mobility is also an intrinsic part of individual's lives, especially for women and children. The matrilineal family is the strongest unit of society in the area and marriage does not seem to break the stronger bonds with the wider family of origin. On marriage a woman will move to join her husband in his village and on the death of the husband or divorce, which is very common, she will move back to her mother's village. The children of the marriage 'belong' to the mother's side and often they will go to spend long periods with their maternal uncles as they grow up. Children are also sent away to the district town or further afield if they have relatives who can help with their education. The economic opportunities in the border areas are limited and it is still common for young men to move to the provincial town, Solwezi, or the Copperbelt in search of work. With the rapid contraction in employment in the mines, job opportunities are few, but those who leave go with the hope of some piecework or trading in the informal sector.

In such a mobile society people's concept of 'home' and 'belonging' is concerned firstly with the location of their maternal kin, particularly maternal uncles or, for older people, their brothers. If the relatives move to a new place that can become home. However, even when separated from relatives a new area can become home simply by establishing a house and new relationships with local people. As one man who had arrived in Kanongesha as a refugee from Zambia described it:
I can make my home wherever I want to as long as no-one else is already there. Here I would make a home and stay with my parents. Some stay in town and retire there but some come home to their parents. If I want to shift villages I would have to move with my brothers and parents to make a new home. For me, my relatives are in Angola and Zaire. In Zambia, there is only my older brother, who stays at Lwawu. Therefore, here

is not home. However, since I have built my house and have got used to the people around here, I can start to view it as home.

Not only do new places become homes for people, but many described old places as no longer their home, when everybody had moved away or died. If asked about going back there, they would reject the idea making comments such as, 'who would I stay with?'

Given the villagers' flexible association with particular territory, it is not surprising that many also have a loose attachment to the state. The border between Angola and Zambia was only finalised in 1906 after which effective colonial rule was slowly extended to these remote parts of the Portuguese and British colonies (Roberts 1976). To a large extent people living in these frontier areas were free to move across the border and it only became relevant when they sought to escape colonial taxes or forced labour (the latter on the Angolan side). In North-Western Province in Zambia, the colonial border cut through a number of chieftainships, including Kanongesha, leaving parallel chieftainships and close kin on both sides. Independence in Zambia brought with it the registration of citizens and the state's attempt to engender a national identity. However, in the remote north-west, far from the centres of power and at the limits of its reach, villagers had little direct contact with the state and continued to cross the border freely using 'private roads'.

When asked about their nationality, villagers gave a range of responses. Some people would talk of it as a pragmatic issue, saying things like, 'while I am in Zambia I am a Zambian, but if I go to Angola I will be Angolan,' 'this time I am Zambian as my wealth [i.e. house, and fields] is from Zambia but I will become Angolan again'. Others talked of there being no difference between Zambians and Angolans, the important issue being that they were all Lunda or relatives. Often a person's nationality would be defined by the papers they held, 'I am a Zambian because I have a national registration card'. Such people can be described as having a 'hand-held' idea of nationality; it is something they see defined by papers or location and it is easily changed depending on the circumstances.

In the middle ground were those who described themselves as Zambian or Angolan according to where they had been born or brought up, or where their parents had come from. Their nationality was a reflection of their history, a given fact of life: neither something to be adapted to the circumstances nor revealing a sense of strong identification with their country.

At the other extreme, were those who had a 'heartfelt' idea of nationality, where a person described themself as feeling Zambian or Angolan as an attribute that they were neither able nor wanted to change easily. As evidence for such a view were those who said that they felt their nationality in the heart, '100 per cent' or 'full time', or that they felt 'pure' Zambian or Angolan. Those Zambians with such a heartfelt view could not conceive of going across the border to live in foreign Angola. Likewise, people who had come from Angola remained attached to it despite living in Zambia for a long time, and in conversation they are likely to speak of pride or shame in their nation. In particular, some said that although they were Angolan, they were ashamed

of the state of their country and its continuing war. Others maintained their national pride by considering the natural wealth and resources in Angola, speaking of the ground glistening with diamonds and forests full of game animals.

The social and historical practice of migration, combined with the remoteness of the upper Zambezi from the centre of the state, enabled the majority of refugees who fled from Angola from the 1960s onwards to make new homes in Zambia and to become completely integrated among the border villagers. In 1990 Hansen concluded 'it was *wrong* to still categorize these self-settled people as "refugees"' (1990: 35 emphasis added) and, in Kanongesha at least, it is possible to go further and say it is *impossible* today to categorise self-settled people as refugees.

Those who arrived as refugees were welcomed within Kanongesha and very rapidly built new villages, planted fields and established new livelihoods. Although many people described themselves or their neighbours as refugees in the past tense, they no longer used the term once they stopped receiving aid and refused to go the official settlements. This was strongly reinforced by the late senior chief Kanongesha, who decreed that nobody should be referred to as a refugee in his area, and that they were all simply (his) people.

The rejection of the label is reflected in the social, economic and local political context of the villages. Those who came as refugees lived completely intermingled with others and there was no refugee quarter. Inter marriage was very common and appeared to be entered into with little or no consideration of the potential spouse's background as a refugee. The same was true of social networks and friendships which did not respect any differences between refugees and non-refugees. There were no social gatherings which were exclusive to non-refugees or refugees. All ceremonies including circumcisions (*mukanda*), girls' coming of age (*nkanga*), funerals or weddings were attended by everybody regardless of their origins.

Within the villages there was no clear distinction between refugees' and non-refugees' standard of living nor their wealth. For most people the constraints to their production were the labour they had available and their access to markets. Land was abundant in Kanongesha and Zambian villagers commented that the arrival of refugees was welcome as 'they turned the bush into villages'. People could use as much land as they were able to cultivate and, using a crude measure of self-reported size of fields, those who came into the area from Angola claimed to cultivate 0.45 hectares compared to 0.35 hectares cultivated by others. The largest land user in the village on which the study focused had arrived as a refugee.

There was no major difference on the ownership of livestock in the focus vicinage, as only 17 per cent of refugees owned sheep and goats, compared to 18 per cent of non-refugees. The area was unsuitable for cattle and the only people to claim they owned them were three young Zambian women who had married into the area and left the cattle with their families elsewhere. Poultry ownership is more common and 26 per cent of refugees owned some hens compared to 30 per cent of non-refugees.
In this remote area of Zambia the major direct contact with the state is through schools, clinics and agricultural extension staff, who provide advice to farmers. These

services were available in the villages at the same (low) level for all villagers. The local school kept no figures for enrolment of refugees or Zambians but the teachers estimated that the families of about 40 per cent of the pupils in the local secondary school were from Angola. The increase in population caused by the arrival of refugees was seen locally as beneficial as it made the provision of schools and clinics viable. Any fall in population was regarded with concern as it might undermine the case for maintaining services as the Zambian government cut back its spending.

It was only when there was formal contact with the authorities which required the production of a Zambian National Registration Card (NRC) that those who came as refugees might suffer discrimination. In a government infrastructure project to rebuild roads using local labour those who could not produce a NRC were unable to get jobs. Not having a NRC could also make travelling to the provincial capital, Solwezi, or the Copperbelt difficult as there were frequent checks along the way. However, in the focus village many of those who arrived as refugees (40 per cent of those interviewed) had managed to obtain NRCs and their children received them as a matter of course at the same time as others. Only 15 per cent of those who fled Angola claimed to have a Refugee Identity Card (RIC) which was issued by the government through UNHCR when aid was being given to refugees (see below). A sizeable minority (14 per cent) of all villagers claimed to have no papers at all.

The study found that in the border villages it was virtually impossible reliably to distinguish those who arrived as refugees during the major influxes in the 1970s and 1980s from Zambians on the basis of any verifiable information. The level of integration was such that were no grounds for reliably distinguishing a refugee from a Zambian on the basis of any verifiable information. There were much more marked differences between the standard of living of male- and female-headed households, or that of newcomers from anywhere and longer-term residents who had established their fields and built good mud brick houses. Any exercise to identify and register refugees would have to rely only on the co-operation of the villagers which past experience suggests would be unlikely to be forthcoming (Freund and Kalumba 1983, Lifanu and Mahdi 1983). To a large extent those who wished to portray themselves as refugees could do so and others could portray themselves as Zambian. In this context registration exercises would act as a means to gather data for justifying interventions and little else.

The social category of refugee had dissolved and fallen into disuse because the problems which arose when refugees first arrived in large numbers have been solved at the local level. There were sufficient natural resources, particularly land, for refugees to settle and establish new livelihoods at the same level as the existing villagers. As described above, the local society is one for which migration is a normal part of life and many refugees described themselves as being at home in Zambia. The arrival of the refugees was regarded positively by Zambian villagers as not only did they cultivate the bush, but they also boosted the population to levels better able to draw in services such as schools and clinics. For the chiefs and headmen, the increased population also increased their prestige. The local influence on the national registration process enabled the refugees to become *de facto* Zambians and citizens of the state.

Therefore, at this local level, all three aspects of the refugee problem have been solved. For villagers there was no refugee problem nor did they even see their neighbours as refugees. In discussion about the problems which concerned people, improving livelihoods, gaining access to markets and cash in the largely subsistence economy, and maintaining their families' health and education were raised as the most pressing issues by all. The continuing war in Angola and the insecurity it brought to the border area were also frequent topics of discussion as was the occasional arrival of *new* refugees who needed support. However, those who had arrived and settled themselves in the past did not constitute a problem.

The factors which facilitated this local solution to the refugee problem are by no means unique to the upper Zambezi. Throughout Africa colonial borders have cut through ethnic groups leaving relatives on both sides and modern, often weak states which have the challenge of creating a national identity in areas far removed from the centres of power. The stories of the origins of many groups are concerned with migration and reaching new lands where they settle; the narratives look back to journeys rather than to a particular place, an ancestral promised land. Migration is a social norm and a livelihood strategy among peoples throughout the continent, ranging from hunter-gatherers and nomadic pastoralists to shifting cultivators and labour migrants.

The underpopulation of north-west Zambia and its abundance of land for cultivation and other resources such as water and wood were vital factors in enabling refugees to settle themselves. Although such conditions may be getting rarer as populations increase, there are still large areas of Africa which have very low population densities and where influxes of people can be absorbed and have a beneficial effect on the local economy.

A similar process of integration and blurring of distinctions between refugees and hosts has been observed in other areas affected by conflict which has generated refugee flows. Malkki's study (1995a) of Rwandan Hutus in Tanzania observed that those who stayed outside the refugee camps were successfully able to insert themselves into Tanzanian society and lose their refugee identity in an urban setting. The closest parallel with the Zambian case is perhaps the experience in the remote forest areas on the Liberian/Sierra Leone border. When over 100,000 Liberian refugees fled to Sierra Leone in 1991, Leach (1992:1) found that, 'in local terms, "self-settlement" and "integration" were not special, but an inevitably and well-precedented way of dealing with the events of 1990-91.' The external agencies' categories of refugees and villagers did not fit with the local view of strangers and outsiders and these local views were largely ignored in the policy decisions of external agencies.

Local perspectives on repatriation

Despite the complete integration of Angolan refugees into Zambian villages, there was considerable interest in events in Angola in the border area, and many said they would

move to Angola when a comprehensive peace was achieved. In the focus village nearly 30 per cent of adults interviewed anticipated settling in Angola and almost as many said that they would be making visits. Any movement to Angola would not be restricted to those who left because of the war, and over 20 per cent of those planning to settle there had never lived there before. At the opposite extreme, over 20 per cent of those who fled the war in Angola expressed no interest in going back there, even to visit, and wanted to remain permanently in Zambia. In other border areas people talked in the same terms and some residents expressed concern that their villages would be left empty and revert to forest. No doubt individuals' plans will change as the situation in Angola and their personal circumstances vary, but from the villages in the border area Angola is generally seen as an attractive place which has been blighted by war.

The most commonly cited reason for wanting to go to Angola, particularly among men, was its abundance of natural resources. The under-populated forests of Angola still harbour game animals which have long disappeared from the Zambian bush (outside game parks) and many men cross from Mwinilunga and other border areas to hunt. During 1997 they ran the risk of an encounter with UNITA in which they might lose everything, even their life, but still many went. The thicker forest also provides richer supplies of honey, caterpillars and mushrooms all of which were valuable supplements to the local diet. From Mwinilunga as one moves west towards the Zambezi at Cazombo, there are also numerous streams and rivers that are better for fishing than the smaller rivers near the Zambian side of the border. All these natural resources have a ready market and offer a much greater opportunity for getting cash than agricultural production based on cassava, maize and sweet potatoes.

The eastern part of Angola's Moxico Province that borders Zambia was almost completely cut off from the rest of Angola, and the only access from Luena, the provincial capital, was by air. The area was controlled by UNITA and it was very difficult for local people to move to other areas which were controlled by the government in the Angolan capital, Luanda. As a result, most of the supplies for people in the area came from Zambia and much of the trade was conducted by local villagers on foot or by bicycle. There was a steady flow of people (mostly men) going to Angola carrying large bundles of clothes, *chitenges* (large patterned cloths worn by women), soap, salt, bicycle spare parts and many other basic manufactured goods. Much of the trade was carried on a barter system and traders usually returned with meat and fish. Some purchased goods for Zambian kwacha and regular traders reported that the use of cash was increasing. However, the Angolan currency, the kwanza, was still not available and the only other form of money was US dollars which were paid to UN and NGO staff.[3]

Angola was thus seen as a place of natural resources and trade, and many people commented that since they were already getting their cash from Angola they would go there to stay if it became peaceful. Others suspected that there would be job

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[3] The conditions have worsened considerably since the resumption of hostilities in 1998 and the withdrawal of aid agencies in Cazombo on the Angolan-Zambian border. Local reports from Zambia suggest that trade is still continuing but at a lower level.

opportunities in the reconstruction of the country after the war and there could also be opportunities for qualified staff such as teachers and nurses who were in very short supply there. The interest in Angola was not limited to farmers alone.

Among women it was more common to cite contacts with relatives as a reason for going to Angola. Some married women spoke of following their husbands but others were concerned to be with their parents, uncles or brothers who were in Angola. Some explicitly said that they would go to be with their matrilineal kin with or without their husbands. Women living alone were keen to join their relatives in Angola in order to get support, particularly from male relatives for building houses or clearing fields.

Less than a third of people who wanted to move to Angola expressed their reasons in terms of going home but it was still a very significant motivation. They made comments such as 'it is my country' or 'it is where I was born from' and did not cite any other reason for moving. It is worth noting that some of them described themselves as having Zambian nationality and one man had never even lived there before.

Not only is the pattern of migration into Angola unlikely to be restricted to a particular group – refugees – moving to go 'home', but it is also unlikely to be restricted to a particular time. During fieldwork for this study, people were going back and forth across the border continuously. Some were described as having 'one foot in Zambia and the other in Angola' and their weight was shifting from foot to foot all the time. There was no clearly defined time when their migration would finish. It was a process with no clear beginning or end, rather than an event. For households it was even more drawn out as different members moved and others would follow in future months or years. At times the migration heralded the dissolution of the household as one partner moved (usually the husband) and the wife could choose not to leave or was not invited.

Thus, it appears that any post-war repatriation of self-settled refugees from Zambia to Angola will be mixed with and largely indistinguishable from the 'normal' movement of Lunda people across their land. Over centuries migration has been a vital strategy for the people of upper Zambezi to improve their livelihoods or to protect themselves and their families from danger, whether from slavery, conscription or immediate violence. The institutions of nationality and refugee status are very recent and are external impositions. They have yet to displace the local institutions of cross-border kin relationships, which enable refugees to integrate, and of cross-border migration, which undermines the sedentary roots of national identity.

External views of cross-border movement

In contrast to the very complex pattern of movements seen at the village level, a common theme running through the external actors' perspectives (i.e. that of governments, UNHCR and aid agencies) of cross border movement from colonial days to the present is the 'technical' approach adopted towards them. The movements of 'Africans', in the colonial discourse, or 'villagers', in today's official government

discourse, are to be controlled or encouraged by means of incentives or barriers depending on the interests of the state. Cross border movement to escape from violence has been a common phenomenon since the establishment of the frontiers but it is only since independence that the modern concept of refugee has become institutionalised both in law and through aid programmes. The new priorities of independent states to define outsiders, the development of international refugee law and the large influxes of refugees from Angola combined to encourage a formal state response to the situation. Thus the arrival of refugees from Angola as a rsult of the war there in the 1960s took place at two levels: the old social facts of people fleeing and the new bureaucratic or legal institutions.

When Angolan refugees start to arrive in Zambia in large numbers in the late 1960s, the initial Zambian government response was to try to move the people from the border to camps where they could be supplied with food and shelter and be under government observation and control. At that time Zambia was virtually surrounded by hostile states and a major concern was to move refugees away from the border to preclude the Portuguese using their presence as a pretext for attacking into Zambia. People were rounded up from the villages where they first stayed and sent to distant settlements where they were given access to land and expected to become self-sufficient in food production.

Mayukwayukwa in Western Province was one of the earliest settlements and still houses 3,000 Angolan refugees. The largest settlement is Meheba established in 1971 in North-Western Province which has a population of 26,000 Angolans refugees as well as 4,000 refugees from other countries. The government policy of forcibly moving people from the border villages to Meheba and Mayukwayukwa continued into the 1980s but it was never successful and the majority of refugees stayed in the border villages. However, after the initial emergency aid offered near the border was withdrawn in 1990, the focus of nearly all humanitarian assistance to refugees has been on the settlements.

Meheba covers 720 km^2 of what was largely unpopulated bush under the control of Zambian Kaonde chiefs. Within its borders there are no Zambian villages and as refugees arrived, and still arrive, they are assigned a plot of land of 2.5 hectares on which to build a house and cultivate.[4] The initial policy was to arrange these plots on a series of roads running off a main spine road at 1 km intervals resulting in houses set at regular intervals in long lines. More recently in order to encourage a more communal environment and to provide services more easily, any expansion has been into 'villages' where houses are grouped together surrounded by fields.

The settlement is under the overall responsibility of a Refugee Officer (RO), who is from the Commissioner for Refugees department of the Government of Zambia. and he appears to wield extensive powers over what happens within its boundaries, including effective control over the police and military forces which operate there. The Ministries of Health, Education and Agriculture also work within the settlement

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[4] When the settlement was first established each household was allocated five hectares. This was reduced in New Meheba, when the camp was extended in 1987.

and provide appropriate services. There are a number of primary schools and one secondary school, health posts and a hospital, as well as agricultural extension workers.

The government is assisted in providing these services, particularly in terms of infrastructure development, by UNHCR and international aid agencies. UNHCR provides this support through its implementing partners which were NGOs and for some years until 1997 UNHCR did not even have a field officer based in Meheba. The lead NGO has changed at least three times through the 1990s but the key staff have remained in place throughout. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was the main partner in 1997 and it played a very large role in the management of the settlement. It was responsible for the maintenance of the infrastructure, such as roads, the allocation of plots, the distribution of rations to those unable to produce sufficient food, and also provided some technical support to the health, education and agricultural sectors.

Meheba is defined by the authorities as a 'settlement', as opposed to a 'camp', the key difference being that the refugees are expected to be self sufficient in food in the former (cf. Malkki 1995a: 117). Meheba is regarded as a great success in this respect and produces sizeable surpluses of sweet potatoes, vegetables and other crops. In Solwezi, the provincial capital, many Zambians commented that the town depends on Meheba for its supplies in the market. However, those refugees who fall into the category of 'vulnerable groups', the elderly, chronically sick, disabled, malnourished children, single parents and others, who are unable to produce or otherwise do not have access to sufficient food, there is a safety net of food rations provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and distributed by LWF.

Meheba was set up under the Refugee (Control) Act (1970) and it is indeed a mechanism for the control of refugees. Except for government and agency staff, only refugees are allowed to live inside the settlement and they are subject to various restrictions on their behaviour. Refugees are only allowed to leave Meheba with permission from the refugee officer to whom they have to apply for a permit which specifies where they can go and how long they can remain away. This constraint on movement is greatly resented by refugees in Meheba and was frequently cited by people in border villages as a reason to avoid the settlement. There are also limits on their freedom of association and refugees are not supposed to hold meetings of more than ten people.

Since it was first set up Meheba has been an object of research by a continual stream of people both sponsored by academic institutions and also UN agencies and NGOs. Many visits, like the author's, have been short, and it seemed the standard response to newcomers was to describe the hardships people faced as refugees. In interviews around the settlement, a litany of suffering was presented as people complained of the lack of food, their struggle to sell their crops, or the injustice of paying school fees. This was interpreted by the agencies as an illustration of the refugees' dependency and lack of initiative, although there is evidence to suggest that over the years any efforts by refugees to have much influence over their conditions were likely to be met by resistance. For example, Congolese arriving in 1996-1997 rapidly gained a reputation as troublemakers as they made demands of the agencies.

For the most part, the hardships described in Meheba were no different from those observed in the villages of Mwinilunga, except that in the former they were associated with being refugees. Indeed compared to the border villages the physical conditions in Meheba appeared much better,[5] and in ten interviews with people who had spent time in the villages before coming to Meheba, only one person expressed any desire to return to the borders. Residents of Meheba conceded that they had better access to markets, better services such as health and education, which resulted in better livelihoods.

In exchange for these material benefits and better opportunities, particularly in education or chances of a job, recognised refugees have to accept the restrictions on their movements and meeting. Perhaps more importantly they have to accept the status of refugee and relinquish any chance of integration. They are geographically isolated from Zambians and this restricts social interaction (Mijere 1990). Their status is passed down the generations as their children will also be marked out as refugees and attend schools as refugees. As long as they remain within the settlement they have no permanent home in Zambia and when UNHCR and the government decide that repatriation should start they will move.

Repatriation plans

UNHCR plans for the repatriation of Angolan refugees drew heavily on the experience of Mozambican repatriation, and many UNHCR and NGO staff involved had worked on the latter operation. The programme aimed to provide transport for refugees from the official settlements back to Angola. It was anticipated that self-settled refugees would make their own way across the border once the conditions were appropriate and there was no assistance planned for them on the Zambian side of the border. Once back in Angola, all returning refugees, whether self-repatriated or transported from the settlements, were to be provided with resettlement assistance including such elements as food aid, kitchen sets, seeds and tools. Another component of the programme was the general rehabilitation of the areas to which refugees would return with the implementation of quick impact projects (QIPs) re-establishing infrastructure such as clinics and schools.

The preparation for repatriation started in Meheba in 1995 and LWF carried out a survey asking people when they hoped to repatriate.[6] Departure areas were prepared in the settlement for health screening and immigration formalities and a road reconstructed from the Zambian border to the Angolan town of Cazombo which is the capital of the district from which most Angolans in Meheba originated. In October 1997, QIPs were being undertaken around Cazombo; eight schools had been repaired and the district hospital was close to being reopened with 50 beds. Distribution of resettlement packages to returning refugees had started and about 20,000 people registered for assistance as returned refugees between January and September 1997.

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[5] This is confirmed by the results of more formal studies (Hansen 1990).

[6] The survey form asked for their 'expected date of repatriation' and was widely seen as a registration exercise in which refugees had to say *when* they wanted to repatriate rather than *if* they wanted to repatriate.

In Meheba the general expectation of imminent repatriation caused great problems as people sold assets, delayed cultivation and took other measures to prepare for the move which never happened. In the border villages, news of events in Meheba was followed very closely and the official repatriation programme was seen as a barometer of the international community's faith in the Angolan peace process. When that process completely collapsed in 1998, UNHCR abandoned its preparation for repatriation.

Despite establishing QIPs as an integral part of the programme, it was the individual household assistance which was the focus of the work in eastern Angola and absorbed the most effort and funds.[7] By establishing a system of targeted food aid and individual household resettlement packs UNHCR created a rod for its own back. To target the assistance at returning refugees, it had to identify them to distinguish them from Zambian 'economic migrants' (or Angolan internally displaced people). In order to prove themselves eligible people had to show that they were Angolan, that they had returned from Zambia or Congo after 1 January 1995 and that they were establishing a house and fields in Angola. To try and establish such facts was a cumbersome process and there was no reliable way of verifying the required distinctions between Angolans and Zambians given the levels of integration described above.

Thus, in order to ration its resources, UNHCR had to spend more of those resources on establishing bureaucratic procedures to define who was eligible. When these did not reflect the realities of peoples lives, it was those who could jump through the bureaucratic hoops who got the aid, while others who may have been equally needy, or more so, were excluded. Such a programme would reach its target group in its own terms, as that group is tautologically defined as those assisted by the programme. It is effectively firing the aid at a blank wall and then painting the target around the point it reaches.

Having established who should receive assistance, the repatriation programme then had to attempt to deliver the food aid, kitchen sets and other commodities. In Angola, where road transport is virtually impossible and most goods have to be carried by air, this was very expensive and logistically complex. In October 1997 those registered were only receiving 50 per cent of the ration. Despite these shortages of food aid UNHCR and NGO staff in Cazombo had not observed any major upsurge of malnutrition and villagers who had recently moved from north-west Zambia said they were now eating better in Angola (as noted above Angola was widely regarded as a place of abundant resources including food). This suggests that people had already

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[7]   A UNHCR programme officer estimated that 60 per cent of the UNHCR budget for Angola was allocated to food distribution with the remaining 40 per cent going on QIPs. These figures did not include the purchase of food overseas and shipping it to Luanda, which came under a central WFP budget. When UNHCR appealed for more funds in Angola in 1998 it said that without additional resources '[p]riority would be given almost exclusively to the return component of the programme such as limited transport assistance when indispensable, reception of returnees and distribution of food, kitchen sets, blankets and seeds and tools.' (*1998 Programme Document for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Angolan Refugees*, http://www.unhcr.org, as accessed on 1 August 1998).

worked out their own strategy for coping in Angola rather than relying on the food aid, and the aid seemed to be marginal to people's decisions about moving.

This focus on individual household assistance contrasts strongly with the priorities of villagers in Zambia considering moving to Angola. They were concerned to see Angola as a normally functioning country with some of the basic services they see in Zambia and which some used to have in Angola. For most people, a precondition for migration is the establishment of an effective national government which controls the whole country and a comprehensive end to the war. Given that, they are then looking for a rapid rehabilitation of the country to make it habitable.

The Angolan repatriation operation seemed to have learnt little from previous studies which have investigated the process of repatriation in other situations. Writing about the aid provided for refugees moving from Malawi into the Milange area of Mozambique as it was retaken by the Mozambican Liberation Front (Frelimo) and made secure, Wilson and Nunes (1994) concluded that repatriation assistance had a much more limited impact than general reconstruction of the country and especially economic regeneration.
The local authorities were (fortunately) able to prioritize the rehabilitation and development of Milange as a whole, rather than focus upon the relief and integration of returnees. As a function of its conceptual and managerial weakness, aid provided for the returnees by UNHCR essentially acted as a supplement to these existing programmes, as well as [providing] a few vehicles and staff to ensure their more effective implementation, rather than as discrete element with its own rationale. Though this was a more appropriate and effective contribution by UNHCR than the role it was playing on the official stage at the time of carrying out 'organized repatriation', what is important here is the lesson that planning for repatriation had no relevance in practice to the refugees and repatriates concerned (Wilson and Nunes 1994: 216).

In other parts of Africa there has also been criticism of the focus on refugee programmes at the expense of general rehabilitation. Hogg (1996) argues that in the Ogaden it is necessary to understand the cultural and historical continuities that underlie the large-scale movement in the area, which has overwhelmed the local economy and society.
However, it is not through targeting aid at official categories of people that the problem will be alleviated, but through an understanding of the economic and cultural interdependence which exists in the region as whole. This requires a re-direction of assistance away from 'refugees/returnees' to the revitalization of the regional economy as a whole and the larger community of which it is part (Hogg 1996: 163).

Studies of the situation of Eritreans in Sudan reveal a much stronger sense of refugees identifying strongly with an Eritrean national identity and debate is focused on how best to facilitate their return (Kibreab 1996, Bascom 1996, Habte-Selassie 1996. Even within this context, where there is a stronger idea of moving to go 'home' and a much clearer distinction between refugees and their hosts, the role of more normal migration issues is critical in people's decision making. In particular, the very poor state of the Eritrean infrastructure and the limited opportunities for securing a livelihood have

discouraged people from leaving the precarious existence they have in Sudan. Bascom (1996) concludes that it may be better to focus on revitalising the agricultural sector rather than on an 'elaborate resettlement programme' for Eritrean refugees moving from Sudan.

Conclusion

When peace eventually comes to Angola, there is a widespread expectation at every level from villages to the state that many thousands of people will move from Zambia to Angola. However, there is no common understanding of why and how this movement will take place. There are two distinct discourses at work among external actors and people living near the border. For the former their analysis seems to be framed by a discourse of 'refugees as a problem'. The latter discourse might be described with terms such as 'villagers, mobility and livelihoods'.

The state response of defining refugees and enshrining their status in law fulfilled the double role of enhancing their protection and access to aid resources, but at the same time denied them any chance of changing that status. While the situation in the villages has moved on from the initial emergency when refugees first came to a complete solution to the problem, the official view of refugees has remained static; those who entered Zambia as refugees are locked into that status until such time as they return to their country. Zambian law makes this explicit as it has no provision for refugees to become naturalised citizens of Zambia. It is also implicit in the attitude of UNHCR and aid agencies which work with an essentialist view of the refugee who, regardless of the local situation, remains someone out of place and waiting to go 'home'.

Hence the official perspective works under the premise that refugees are an identifiable group of people who will want to return to their country of origin when there is peace. Their return is a function of the political and military situation rather than individual motivations and so it is only necessary to enquire how many of these refugees there are, and when they want to move. It is presumed that when conditions are right all the refugees will want to return and UNHCR operations are necessary to help people follow that desire. From this perspective, repatriation is an event that will take place when peace is achieved in Angola, and can therefore be seen as a subject for projects and programmes that operate over a limited period. Those who moved too early (before 1995) or too late (after the end of the programmes) would not benefit from any assistance. Once the aid programmes were over the event of repatriation would be completed and it could be analysed as a success or failure.

Not only are people expected to return within a certain time but they are also expected to do so in a particular manner. At a certain time when they register people need to demonstrate that they have repatriated, that they plan to settle in Angola and they must demonstrate this by submitting their papers in order to receive aid. There is no place for refugees to move back and forth while they work out a new livelihood in Angola and make a decision about whether to stay or not.

Repatriation is thus seen as something that is done to people. It is acknowledged and assumed that most refugees repatriate of their own accord but the main emphasis of assistance is on those whom UNHCR will repatriate. It is perhaps revealing that in the second case the verb 'repatriate' can be used in transitive form and this suggests the activity is carried out by external agencies through programmes where they are the driving force and the experts. It was very striking that the repatriation procedures for refugees from the settlements were set up with no consultation with the refugees concerned. It was reduced to a technical operation to achieve an end which was assumed to be in the interests of all. Getting the transport and logistics, the calories and the tools right were the first priority and the social dimension was played down. It was remarkable how the programmes resembled those adopted in a refugee emergency.

This perspective does not recognise the local solution to the 'refugee problem' which has occurred in the border villages such that the category of refugee as a social group has virtually disappeared. Hansen's work in the 1970s and 1980s clearly described the integration of the self-settled Angolan refugees into Zambian society and cited their lack of interest in repatriation (compared to those in Meheba) as evidence for this (Hansen 1990). Rather than indicating anything about the likely flow of populations across the border when Angola is peaceful, this would seem to be an inevitable result of working within the refugee discourse, where normality is perceived as sedentary. It implicitly suggests that if people have really found a solution (integration), they will no longer have a desire to move again.

However, solving the 'refugee problem' at the local level does not entail finding a solution to the myriad other difficulties in securing livelihoods in north-west Zambia. Many people hope that peace in Angola may bring some solution to this wider difficulty as the option of migrating across the border may be reopened and the resources of the empty land become accessible. As shown above this option is not being considered only by those who arrived as refugees and it is likely to take place over a number of years. No doubt many of those who go will find it does not meet their expectations and they may return to Zambia. Peace is likely to bring an increased volume of cross border migration rather than the neat resolution of everybody going to stay in their homes.

Policy implications

This study presents one aspect of the refugee problem, the solution of repatriation, through a different discourse, that of 'normal' migration and compares it to the picture portrayed by the 'refugees as a problem' discourse. The greatest strength of this approach is that it starts with few assumptions about people's behaviour and as a result can produce a picture that gives a better idea of villagers' views and interests. In this particular case it shows that for most people their personal history of having been a refugee does not constitute nearly as much of a problem as the circumstances of living in a remote area of Zambia, which they share with everyone else there.

Repatriation programmes are by definition framed within the discourse of refugees as a problem, but neglecting the wider issues of migration can undermine their effectiveness and efficiency. Taking the optimistic view that they have a humanitarian goal of assisting people to move in safety and dignity (this is at least the rhetoric of most agencies involved), there are some policy implications arising from this study that will be relevant to any resumption of Angolan repatriation and can also be tentatively suggested as relevant to other situations.

If repatriation is to be voluntary, preparation for repatriation programmes should consider people's reasons for repatriating rather than assume that they will want to leave the country of asylum. Asking open questions about the interests people have in their country of origin and comparing these interests with those of local people, can reveal the extent to which post-war migration is a special refugee phenomenon (going home) or a strategy of interest to all (improving livelihoods). Alternatively it may reveal people's lack of interest in returning.

It is particularly important that any such investigations include self-settled refugees rather than focusing only on those based in official settlements. Those who have been able to establish themselves outside the interventions of humanitarian aid or government control cannot be assumed to have the same view of repatriation as those in settlements. If self-settled refugees have been able to negotiate an acceptable position with respect to their hosts and the local authorities and have developed satisfactory livelihoods, the option of staying where they are is open to them. In contrast, in camps and settlements which are reliant on special inputs from the state or international community, maintaining the status quo is not possible, especially if the majority of the camp population moves and services are stopped.

Any interventions to assist repatriation must be sensitive the local perception of refugees. If the social category of refugees is not locally recognised, recreating it for the purpose of targetting aid may be counterproductive and futile. Particularly in rural Africa where borders cut across ethnic groups and the reach of the state may be limited, distinguishing people by such bureaucratic means as identity papers is likely to be impossible. The result will be a costly way of targeting aid to anyone, refugee or not, who chooses to jump through the bureaucratic hoops. Perhaps more importantly, where a local solution to the refugee problem has been found, reintroducing the concept of refugees as a special group in need of aid runs the danger of undermining that local solution.

Repatriation programmes need to be moulded to the patterns of movement of the local people rather than try to shape them. Again this is particularly important for self-settled refugees and their hosts living in the border regions. Borders present opportunities as well as problems even, or especially, when a country is at war (Nugent and Asiwaju 1996). African borders are so extensive and so weakly controlled (Griffiths 1996) that informal cross-border migration is common and may be an essential component of people's livelihood strategies, as it is in the case study here. As conflict ends in an area, it must be expected that various people will move into it at their own pace and style (Hammond 1999: 243). Rather than assuming who will move, and when and how they should do it, aid programmes should be geared to

build and support the existing capacity of people to migrate and resettle. In the case of people moving from Zambia into Angola, this approach would result in programmes focusing on establishing infrastructure rather than individual household assistance.

Taking a more pessimistic view, the actual practice of repatriation is often more concerned with other factors, such as politics and funding, rather than with the voluntary desire of refugees to return (Chimni 1999). However, in as far as there is room for manoeuvre, enquiring after local people's interests and practices may inform the policies adopted and highlight the costs, both financial and social, involved in ignoring them. We are still far from seeing repatriation as an opportunity for sustainable development (Hammond 1999), but starting to see it in the wider context of migration may be a step on the way.

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