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**Remittances as unforeseen burdens:
the livelihoods and social obligations of Sudanese refugees**

Stephanie Riak Akuei

Department of Anthropology
University College London
United Kingdom

s.riakakuei@ucl.ac.uk

Global Commission on International Migration
1, Rue Richard Wagner
CH:1202 Geneva
Switzerland

Phone: +41:22:748:48:50
E:mail: info@gcim.org
Web: <http://www.gcim.org>

Global Commission on International Migration

In his report on the 'Strengthening of the United Nations - an agenda for further change', UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified migration as a priority issue for the international community.

Wishing to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and global response to migration issues, and acting on the encouragement of the UN Secretary-General, Sweden and Switzerland, together with the governments of Brazil, Morocco, and the Philippines, decided to establish a Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM). Many additional countries subsequently supported this initiative and an open-ended Core Group of Governments established itself to support and follow the work of the Commission.

The Global Commission on International Migration was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General and a number of governments on December 9, 2003 in Geneva. It is comprised of 19 Commissioners.

The mandate of the Commission is to place the issue of international migration on the global policy agenda, to analyze gaps in current approaches to migration, to examine the inter-linkages between migration and other global issues, and to present appropriate recommendations to the Secretary-General and other stakeholders.

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Introduction

Economic remittances have become an important area of study in the literature on migrant populations. Of particular concern has been remittances arising from labour migration, the scale of these transactions and their impact on local and national development in the country of origin. Alternatively, in spite of the dramatic increase over the last few decades in the number of persons seeking refuge across national borders from civil conflict, persecution and other turmoil - a population currently estimated at more than 17 million (UNHCR 2004) - much less is known about the remittance activities of these migrants.

One explanation is simply that refugees have not been readily seen as a population thought to produce remittances (Diaz Briquets & Perez-Lopez 1997). The paucity of studies on refugee remittances has also been attributed to problems with collecting data in countries that continue to be characterised by a high degree of instability. In addition, there is the difficulty of distinguishing 'refugee'-generated remittances from those of other migrants in a given population (Sorensen 2004; Koser & Van Hear 2003).

For one, migrant status is known to change over time depending upon where a person is in the integration process. Also, on the ground refugees have different reasons for migrating that crosscut official migrant categories (Crisp 2003). Compelling circumstances (e.g. fear of persecution) often coincide with aspirations towards opportunities (e.g. employment, education, social services, etc.) believed to be available in the main destination as in the industrialised Western states.

In spite of the limited data available, ongoing observations show that refugees in these regions are actively engaged in money transfers and demonstrate a propensity to remit funds to kin and community members and to the home country for various purposes (Ahmed 2000; Eckstein 2003; Horst & Van Hear 2002). Yet, with few exceptions the focus as with labour migration tends to be on the scale and impact of remittances on the receiving country (Van Hear 2003), in other words, on the perspective of the recipient.

There is no doubt as to the importance of this exploration, especially regards the development potential of migrant transfers (Sorensen 2004) and the extent to which their remittances can be deployed towards community and national reconstruction efforts in countries where political conditions may allow for the rebuilding of society in the wake of extreme disruption.

However, it is argued that to take these economic and social links to their fullest understanding one must look at the breadth of refugees' remittances and the capacity of individuals and families to make these gestures. For the current generation of Western-domiciled refugees their remittance activities, for instance, have widened to encompass places beyond the home region to neighbouring countries where their family members are in some stage of the asylum-seeking process and rely on their support.

What this paper seeks to address which seems to be largely absent from the scope of work on refugee remittances and an understanding of refugee adaptation generally is the experience borne by the sending population, notably the extent of their economic obligations, their capacity to remit funds and the ways in which refugees resettled to Western countries cope with these outward obligations while trying to meet other responsibilities and fulfil their own aspirations in the local setting following uprooting and prolonged displacement.¹ Utilising data collected among

¹ Horst (2003, 2004) has addressed similar questions, for example, in the context of Somali migrants and their social relations. Al-Ali et al. (2001) also explore factors associated with Bosnian and Eritrean refugees' capacity and desire to remit funds to their home countries for relief and reconstruction, highlighting the role of economic status as well as political orientations influencing respectively whether refugees can or wish to contribute to these efforts.

Southern Sudanese Dinka men and women resettled to the United States (San Diego, California), it will be shown that relocation to the West presents new and unexpected challenges for refugees, not the least of which are their remittance obligations.

Resettlement is considered a principle objective of UNHCR when safety and fundamental human rights in the country of refuge cannot be secured and where the prospect for local integration is lacking (UNHCR 1998). It is also seen as the most 'durable' permanent solution for refugees who are not able or are unwilling to return home (ibid.). For refugees, resettlement engenders above all the chance to establish a better life for themselves wherein adequate economic resources and educational and other opportunities are no longer out of reach. Incorporated in their relocation to the West are also expectations to assist those who have remained behind at home or in asylum countries. These persons invoke corresponding expectations upon learning of a relative's resettlement. This is not surprising considering that the Dinka, like many other refugees, belong to a society where a high level of cooperation between family and lineage members is necessary and assumed. During times of crises, kinship and ethnic-territorial bonds become particularly crucial.

Yet, civil conflicts can cripple traditional support networks by the losses and massive uprooting they cause. The war in Sudan between the Khartoum government and Southern rebels which reignited in 1983, has jettisoned a large portion of the country's civilian population into perpetual displacement and a tenuous existence. Meanwhile, of the many people seeking asylum only a small percentage have been given refugee status and the option of resettlement to a Western 'third' country such as the United States, Canada or Australia. Yet, it is the few who do resettle who find they are looked to for assistance by a disproportionately large number of people. This results in predicaments that are not easily resolved in light of constraints and other factors related to the local setting and the importance of meeting one's obligations and thereby being a good moral person (*raan Muonyjiang apath*).

Through presentation of a case study, the paper highlights the dynamics of refugees' social relations that extending across multiple geographical locations and examines how these competing spheres affecting refugees are managed. The role played by resettlement agencies responsible for assisting them is also discussed. Ultimately, the paper seeks to open the dialogue on this transformation affecting refugee livelihoods and well being, asking whether there is anything states or organizations can do to mitigate the resulting unforeseen burdens experienced by refugees.

Forced displacement, urban livelihoods and remittances

Sudan's civil war which only recently abated in fragile third-party peace negotiations has resulted in a profound level of uprooting, loss and suffering. Most directly affected have been Sudanese from the southern part of Sudan who, following centuries of subordination by successive Northern regimes, became the main target of the Islamic government's large-scale military offensive aimed at destabilising the South and purging resistance to its views and policies.

Aerial and ground bombardments sparked by clashes with the main southern rebel force, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, as well as rebel factional fighting, famine and other calamities, have been responsible for the enormous havoc wreaked on the lives and livelihoods of Southern civilians and their communities. The incessant raiding of cattle and burning down of villages in some Dinka areas by marauding Arab militias alongside killings and abductions (Jok 2001), has left those surviving with little on which to sustain themselves.

Most notable are the enormous geographical, social and economic disparities that the conflict has generated. The Dinka (Muonyjieng) are a Nilotic pastoralist people whose traditional lifestyle and social organisation has centred around their herds. They are considered the largest ethnic group in Sudan, prior to the war estimated to number close to two million. Without any central leadership, they comprise some 23 subgroups and further clan- and lineage-based 'sections' whose home lands occupy some 100,000 square miles across the floodplains of the main Nile channel and its many tributaries.

However, over the course of the last two decades their families and communities have become fractured and widely dispersed as a result of the violence and persecution. By the late 1980s, in addition to the many people who lost their lives during the fighting and raids, thousands of Dinka men, women and children had to flee their homes due to insecurity and lack of food. The uprooting brought people to other areas within the war zone as well as across Sudan's borders to seek sanctuary, notably into Ethiopia and Kenya where refugee camps were set up on their behalf.²

Urban areas are known to house refugees, although much less attention has been paid to the experience of these 'self-settled' forced migrants (Kibreab 1996). Dinka from areas close to Sudan's northern provinces and from other regions embarked on the risky journey northward to Sudan's capital, Khartoum, and other northern towns and cities where they believed they would be shielded from the violence and in some cases find kinfolk already in these areas.

It is estimated that by the early 1990s close to two million Southern Sudanese were living in and around Sudan's capital (Hutchinson 1996: 6). However, with the evolving mixture of indifference, coercion and oppression expressed towards Southerners in the North,³ and the stricter Islamic laws and increased insecurity under the government of Gen. Omar Hassan Al-Bashir who took over power in 1989, many people migrated further in search of asylum across Sudan's northern border to Egypt and other countries on Sudan's northern periphery.

During the 1990s, Cairo and proximal cities with a UNHCR presence (e.g. Damascus, Beirut) experienced a major influx of asylum seekers. In Cairo where fieldwork was also undertaken (Riak Akuei, in prep.), Southern Sudanese have become the largest caseload for UNHCR (UNHCR 2001). Nevertheless, although resettlement has been acknowledged as the most viable solution for this population (Boukry 1998), the application of the 1951 Convention definition in status determination proceedings for Sudanese along with other factors influencing this process, have resulted in the rejection of the majority of asylum seekers for refugee status and hence for referral for resettlement.⁴

Their plight has been made worse by their ambiguous legal status (they lack legal residence beyond the first month in the country); asylum seekers and mandate refugees also face restrictions the Egyptian government has placed on their rights to employment, education and access to

² One of the most well documented flights from this time is the story of the thousands of mostly Dinka "Lost Boys" who followed a precarious trek across Southern Sudan to Ethiopia and eventually to Kenya where UNHCR responded to their plight by setting up the Kakuma refugee camp (UNICEF/Zutt 1994). Some 3,500 of these youth were recently resettled to cities throughout the United States.

³ This information was gathered from a number of personal testimonies collected in Cairo, Egypt during 2001. Jok (2001) has also discussed this, noting how the estimations of those who ventured to the capital amounted to 'a miscalculation.' Burr and Collins (1995: 119) also reported how the apathy and ill treatment the arrivals received was 'a source of bewilderment' to them.

⁴ As low as twenty-eight percent (28%) (UNHCR 2001) within the last few years but recently approximately forty-one percent (41%) (UNHCR 2003) of Sudanese asylum seekers cases were given a positive determination outcome in their claim for refugee status. This means that less than half of the people seeking asylum in Egypt come under the protection and assistance umbrella of UNHCR.

mainstream social and other services. The few NGOs in Egypt are extremely limited in the support they are able to provide to Southern Sudanese and other Africans.⁵

In these circumstances, the Dinka have turned to those who are residing in Western countries for assistance to meet the costs of basic survival and related expenses. Unlike the rural setting, urban areas indeed have the advantage of providing migrants with access to better communication technologies that enable them to make contact with family members abroad. Moreover, in Cairo and many other cities money transfer services are available from companies such as Western Union, American Express and Thomas Cook.⁶ This explains to some extent why urban households appear to receive more remittances than those in rural areas (Sorensen 2004: 15). While case studying Cairo, Sperl (2001) in his field evaluation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas indeed found that remittances from refugees abroad have become an important source of support for local households.

In Cairo, the acuteness of requests was readily apparent in the many public places where transactions are established; namely, in the city's small phone shops as well as the many Internet 'cafes' that have sprouted up around the city. Overseas calls are a luxury for the local budget, but on any day I found these places brimming with people trying to reach relatives in Virginia, Missouri, Calgary, Sydney, London and other common resettlement locations. Western Union facilities were alight with activity generated by the refugee-based transactions. Southerners are frequently in the majority among those waiting to pick up the wired currency. Some migrants lacking a valid passport required to collect the money, however, must rely on close kin or trusted friends to be the 'official' receivers of funds (Agao 2000).⁷

For the Dinka, the problem that they are forced to remain in asylum regions much longer than they expect—often for years—without adequate local support structures, has contributed to their ever-expanding reliance on remittances. However, underlying this support are assumptions embedded in their social relations and the moral and cultural understandings within which they operate.

Cultural prerogatives and the displacement experience

In Cairo, when Dinka refugees depart for resettlement, they are sent off with heavy 'cultural' reminders and directives (Riak Akuei 2001). Next to prayers to usher them on their new journey, songs, speeches and tributes are conducted that relay messages intended to remind people leaving how in the forthcoming sea of opportunities and options that await them, they should not forget who they are ('Yin e Muonyjiang!') and what it means to be a Dinka. Among other morsels of advice ('Marry a Dinka! – Have children, teach them the language – don't let them go astray!'), expectations are conveyed to those taking leave that they should not forget their responsibilities and obligations - To help your people back home and elsewhere who are suffering. Yet, as one Dinka Bor elder said thoughtfully on the occasion of one of his young nephews departing for Australia: 'Don't worry about us here. We all know our situation in these places. Try to help those people back home. They are the ones really suffering and you are our future.'

⁵ In 1981 Egypt acceded to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees but made reservations to refugees' rights to employment and other services. These changes have impacted upon Southern Sudanese and other African migrant populations, asylum applicants as well as mandate refugees, residing in Egypt.

⁶ With the growth of the Somali diaspora, other establishments have become available such as *xawilaad* transfer services and other indigenous agencies. Thus far these have been classified as part of informal transfer systems (Blackwell & Seddon 2004). Their advantage is that they are located in cities of developing countries not well served by the other firms. The Dinka have not used these on any regular basis in Cairo, Nairobi and other cities due to risks of robbery experienced after collecting their money from the Somali offices (Riak Akuei 2004).

⁷ The use of third parties for transfer is not uncommon due problems many people have with renewing their expired passports.

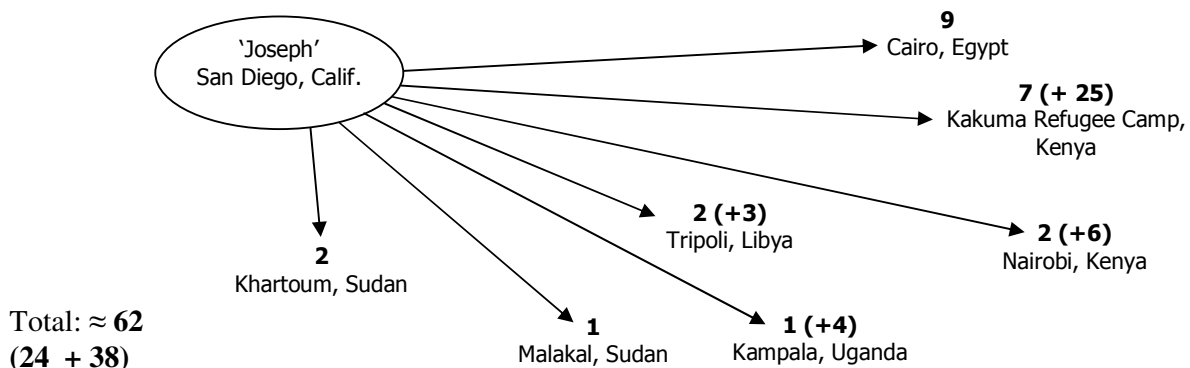
For resettlement to the United States, refugees are required to take part in another type of “cultural orientation.” They participate in intensive workshops designed to impart basic information about America (e.g. history, symbols, cultural norms) and to orient them as to what will be expected of them in their new home. In these sessions organised by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) administered over a series of days, the aim is also to interject some reality into common misconceptions refugees have regards access to opportunities that will enable them to move ahead economically. Among other practical issues, they are told of the need to establish self-sufficiency in the shortest time possible, specifically, about seeking steady employment and how to manage their money. Some of the topics covered are: typical earnings, budgeting and what proportion of their monthly income will have to go towards rent, subsistence and for paying bills. When they arrive, local resettlement agencies in their destination are responsible for providing a similar orientation, although these occur irregularly and are not always carried out.

Refugees express being nervous about this new phase in their lives. At the same time, the challenges before them seem surmountable given what they are leaving behind. My informants though were not deterred from the common assumption harboured by many migrants and reinforced through the media that the streets upon which they will be travelling in ‘America’ will be “paved in gold.”⁸ It is not surprising, then, that in their current frame of reference and their awareness that their departure represents a marked loss of support for the household, refugees make promises to send money back once they arrive wherever they are going.⁹

Upon reaching their destination, what they soon find they are unprepared for is the sheer magnitude of financial responsibilities they are expected to shoulder and the pressures placed upon them to support an ever-increasing number of kin afar. This phenomenon affecting refugees is best illustrated through the presentation of a case study, of Joseph and his family who resettled to San Diego, California in 1998.¹⁰

Remittances as unforeseen burdens

Within the first two years of resettlement to San Diego, Joseph became directly responsible for 24 male and female extended family members and indirectly 62 persons displaced across a number of locations:



[‘+’ indicates additionally supported children]

⁸ Some of those giving speeches during send-off celebrations used the word ‘America’ as a metaphor for the West, even when the person(s) departing was leaving for Australia or another country.

⁹ Though severely underpaid, for the few who have found work in the city’s informal economy their earnings represent an important contribution to household and family survival.

¹⁰ I have presented this case in much more detailed form in a talk for the Medical Anthropology Seminar Series in the Department of Anthropology, University College London (see Riak Akuei 2002).

Apart from the relatives listed above, Joseph also cited four unrelated friends in Egypt whom he helps out periodically, as he says, because they are good friends and they helped me in the past when I needed it.'

It is possible to see that the majority of the burden emanates from asylum host countries. The cost of housing, in addition to other daily living expenses, makes up a significant portion of remittances to urban areas like Cairo where asylum seekers and refugees are expected to pay the same premium rents demanded from other non-migrant foreigners in the city. Food, clothing and medical treatment are also important expenses met by remittances. Six of Joseph's kin noted above (in Cairo and Tripoli), including two brothers, require ongoing support totalling approximately US\$400 per month to cover these costs. Among the other people listed, money is sent on a bi-monthly or more sporadic basis depending on when funds are available.

According to Dinka tradition, in relation to a person members of the immediate three generations of one's lineage in the father's line (mac thok) are collectively responsible for contributing to the cost of bridewealth and marriages occurring at this level, as well as paying compensation to victims' families for crimes (e.g. adultery) committed by a member. These are obligations that are expected to continue in resettlement. Joseph thus has also had to remit money at various times for these purposes.

A predicament for many refugee informants at the current time is that few have been joined by other members of their mac thok. The outcome is that either a member who has resettled is asked to pay the bulk of these funds for his male relative, or, if it is he who plans to marry, often he must raise these funds himself and transfer the cash to a member of his wife's family, with the money often then transferred as cattle.¹¹ While a fine for adultery may amount to a few cows, bride price (xok ruai) among the Dinka can range anywhere from 60 to 150, with the equivalent going rate being approximately US\$100 per cow (bulls are higher).

Other remittances go towards the costs of a relative attempting to seek asylum, as in Khartoum where Southern Sudanese migrating to Egypt are required to pay high fees for obtaining a visa and other travel documents and to cover additional costs associated with border crossing and travel onward to Cairo.¹²

Much remittance activity also results from unanticipated and urgent events. In addition to funding emergency medical treatment, refugees abroad are called to step in when their kin have been threatened with eviction. Contributions are particularly important in the case of the death of a relative but also members of the ethnic community to which one belongs. They are looked to for help in covering the cost of burial and for funeral proceedings, though the death of a close family member such as a sibling, parent or uncle usually means that the resettled refugee may bear the majority of these costs.

A situation affecting Southern Sudanese in Cairo and implicated in the pressures facing resettled refugees are the "surprise" round ups conducted by the city's security forces. In these seemingly arbitrary seizures people have been simply 'caught' (aacī dom) while walking down the street or while in their apartments and taken away for arrest.

¹¹ For a similar phenomenon among Nuer refugees, see Holtzman (2000: 88).

¹² Unlike Northerners, Southern Sudanese migrating to Egypt must pay a significant amount of money amounting to hundreds of dollars to Arab 'middlemen' who 'run' the business of migration to Egypt. There appears to be no way around these costs, though it has been confirmed to me that 'officially' there is no fee for Egyptian visas "for Sudanese."

No clear reasons have been given for the hundreds of people who have been detained ('officially' it is for not having valid residency documents though mandate refugees with id cards have also been arrested) (see, for example, Lindsey 2003). Their release from detention in local jails where those captured often spend days and weeks with little food and no medical attention is only guaranteed upon payment of a sum of money, known to be exacted as bribes and not fees levied officially by the state. Joseph and his wife have had to send funds to Cairo on two separate occasions, amounting respectively to US\$200 in each case, for the release of their siblings who had been held without explanation or offer of legal or other assistance.

As with the majority of the 40 families and individuals I assessed, Joseph has had to meet most of his personal remittance obligations single-handedly. In households where a partner or other family member may also be working, help is sometimes given; however, often these persons have responsibilities of their own that lie outside those of other family members. Moreover, aside from the fact that there are few other resettled kin who could be potential contributors, unlike other migrant communities the Dinka do not regularly engage in pooling funds on this level.¹³ As socially oriented as they are, they maintain humbly that: 'Everyone has their own problems in the life we live now and you cannot expect them to help you with yours.'

One area contributing to the predicaments of resettled refugees is that the amount of money they have available to them at any given time is significantly lower than the sum of their remittance obligations and other financial responsibilities. Although the only earner in his household, Joseph has been rather fortunate with respect to other refugees in that some previous higher education and training and his excellent command of English paid off to help him eventually land a fairly well-paid job in the refugee sector (ca. US\$28,000/yr).

On the other hand, his situation has not improved greatly. Ongoing and urgent requests for assistance, local unforeseen expenses (e.g. car repairs, rental/utility increases) and one more child with another on the way, have made it difficult for him to stay afloat financially. Joseph has also had responsibilities to his wife's family, notably her parents in Khartoum and two of her younger school-aged siblings, the latter first while they were in Cairo and most recently since they relocated to San Diego to join them in their home.

Refugees receive limited cash stipends during the first few months of their relocation to the US. These funds are intended to assist them during their initial period of adjustment in managing the cost of living, the time needed to search for paid employment, for acquiring or improving English language skills, and to ease the transition to economic self-sufficiency. The amount received monthly varies across the different resettlement agencies sponsoring refugees; family size is also a factor.

Stipends usually range between US\$400-\$800 per month and extend between three and six months depending upon estimations taken from self-sufficiency 'readiness' assessments for individual refugees. When refugees do find paid and steady employment, which is usually in factories or the retail or hotel industry, their starting salaries tend to approximate rates that fall within the lowest income bracket, about US\$6-7 per hour increasing to US\$9-10 per hour after a few years of service.

As we will remember, newcomers arrive rather optimistic about supporting relatives left behind. In their hopefulness and lack of knowledge about the hurdles that are to follow, many refugees I came to find devote sizeable portions of their cash allowances (ca. US\$100-300/month) received during the first few months to remittances. They also incur large, unmanageable bills resulting

¹³ Here I am referring to cases where to a Dinka man or woman it is clear that they are the person who would be most closely responsible for meeting those needs.

from the numerous long phone calls they make—unknowingly at higher rates—to relatives and friends they have been separated from and miss.

Importantly, over time anxieties build when people find they lack enough money to cover their own expenses while trying to juggle these with the needs of loved ones whose circumstances they see as much worse than their own. Not an uncommon scenario, one unemployed single mother in San Diego had been using her monthly welfare checks to send remittances to a sister and brother in-law in Cairo to pay their rent. In the meantime, the electricity in her own apartment was shut off repeatedly and was threatened with final shutdown because she had not paid her mounting utility bill, hovering at US\$700 by the time she approached me nervously for help.¹⁴

In spite of the pressures they cause, remittances are important social gestures that contribute to senders' well being. They engender a sense of pride and dignity highly valued among the Dinka and provide for social continuity within a system that has become extremely fragmented and vulnerable. Refugees report hearing through others about their good deeds. Yet, the number and nature of calls received can easily compromise their good intentions. The increase in these unforeseen burdens can in fact be a major source of stress and anguish.

Emotional stress and remittance expectations

One problem relates simply to the immense volume of calls a refugee receives. Within the first few months of their arrival in San Diego, my informants were the recipients of anywhere from 5 to 15 overseas calls a week, with many occurring in the middle of the night when people are trying to sleep and have to wake early for work. Such phone calls, they noted, are attributed in part to relatives' lack of awareness of the different time zones. Still, they are a source of frustration.

What adds to the aggravation is the form of communication, which as I noted earlier relates in part to the issue that those calling cannot afford the cost of long-distance calls. Nevertheless, they can be quite insistent, demanding during the few seconds of the call that either 1) the person call back immediately or 2) that they send money immediately, at which point the line is usually cut off eliminating the chance for the person on the other end to respond.

The refugees I encountered indeed find it difficult to cope. Some complained of sleeplessness due to worries about not fulfilling their commitments and being perceived as irresponsible and a bad person (raan rac). How do refugees manage these dilemmas?

To stem the tide of calls, some people have resorted to using answering machines or they have chosen simply not to answer the phone when it rings. Others have taken more extreme measures. Some months after my return to London, I decided to call Joseph and his wife in San Diego. I had not spoken with them for a while and I wanted to know how they were doing. After dialling their home number I found that the line had been disconnected with no new forwarding number. Pursuing the matter further, I opted to call Joseph's work number which he had given me. The call finally went through. He seemed relieved to hear from me. 'Ee kedi, Stephanie?' ('How are you?'), he asked in his native Dinka Bor dialect.

After the obligatory greetings and enquiries into the health of each other's families, I ask him what happened to his home telephone. 'I had to change it,' he stated hastily. He then told me that he would give me the new number but that I should not give it out to anyone in Africa who may be asking for it. He went on to explain that he was getting so many phone calls from relatives

¹⁴ Electricity bills in San Diego for a small apartment average around \$20 per month.

asking for money that he had to change his number without telling them, the exception being his siblings in Cairo and Tripoli. As he uttered in frustration, 'It's very shameful, but it is the only thing I can do to stop all of those calls. People just don't understand what we are facing here.'

From a Dinka perspective, these are only temporary antidotes for a longer-standing problem for which they have few ready solutions. In local thought, it is perceived as distasteful and undignified to complain about one's problems. Thus, in phone calls just as expressing one's desperation and asking for money is considered shameful and should be carried out with the utmost discretion, so are Dinka refugees' dilemmas stateside kept to a minimum or not discussed at all. Especially at the end of the month when they are just getting by before the next paycheck arrives, the only option refugees have is to make promises that they will 'try' to send something soon.

Some refugees reflecting on their dilemmas have commented as to the 'unnaturalness' of their remittance activities, in other words how they represent substantial one-way transactions without any foreseeable economic return. In their normative exchange practices the Dinka have not relied on a system of 'generalised reciprocity'—giving freely without some type of equitable return (Sahlins 1972).

The protracted situation that the Dinka face is also different from other types of shorter-term crises they have been used to. Only in a few cases have I heard of promises made by people to pay back some of the money extended them. These arrangements have occurred in the context of Australia, as I shall explain shortly, where much of the relocation that has taken place has not been through sponsorship by UNHCR but through the refugees themselves who are already residing in the country. They, or rather, anyone who can, must pay the costs for family members relocating from the asylum country to Australia. As these expenses are quite high and must be paid up front, some refugees have taken out loans to manage their kin's resettlement.

Remittance demands can nevertheless grind away at people's patience and ideal codes of behaviour are not always kept in check. Also, not sending money right away or not being able to call someone back can lead to gross misunderstandings and overt criticisms on the part of those who are seeking help from their resettled kin. In laws, while commanding a special respect in the kin group, especially between a man and his wife's family, can also be pushy or derisive in their manner, especially if there have been accusations in relation to problems in the marriage (e.g. outstanding payment for bridewealth) and the level of desperation is quite acute.

After a long separation having spent years in Kakuma refugee camp, Joseph's elderly mother was resettled to San Diego to join her son under a family reunification programme. A few months after she arrived, she and Joseph received a hand-delivered audiocassette from a paternal cousin still in Kenya. Both were anxious to listen to the taped letter that found its way through different hands from Kakuma to San Diego; yet, as soon as the cassette was running their composure changed. The recorded voice was grumbling, criticising the listeners for 'forgetting' and 'abandoning' him, his 13 children and other relatives. Joseph was also accused of not using his position as a refugee caseworker to help them resettle. His mother, devastated by what emanated from the cassette, fell into tears as she heard the words; her son sat speechless near her, nodding his head in dismay.

Not long after acquiring the cassette, Joseph received a phone call from one of his in laws, his wife's uncle who, apparently feeling very frustrated and short-changed from not having his calls returned, launched in with a series of reproaches: 'Why are you ignoring me? Do you want me to die? ('Kor bi thou?') - Do you want me to become a criminal and start stealing things? ('Kor ba cuir?'). Do you want me to become homeless and shame your family? ('Kor bi lat?'). Do you want people to insult you because you are not helping us?? You know that I have power over your

children!—do you not recognise our relations?’¹⁵ This was another hurdle for Joseph to overcome that raises the question of whether any solutions can be found to these dilemmas.

Conclusion: is there anything states and organisations can do?

Clearly, remittances are important social obligations that are difficult to evade. They remain crucial from a pragmatic standpoint; refugees are aware of what they have left behind and the needs of their kin. Also, they continue to look to their existing social networks for support and a sense of belonging and identity, though these now crosscut a wide range of locations. On the other hand, these outbound responsibilities can have the impact of limiting refugees’ ability to settle successfully in the local environment. They represent dilemmas when refugees find that there are limitations on how much they are able to afford in light of their other commitments.

The changing nature of asylum and refugee situations also makes it difficult for refugees to be sufficiently prepared for the extent of their remittance obligations. Persons previously inaccessible in the rural area or in an urban environment such as Khartoum where communication facilities are available but not very reliable may have left the country to seek asylum. In Cairo where there is a burgeoning asylum population, it is not difficult to learn about one’s relatives and through these networks make contact with them. Persons in refugee camps also receive word about their kin in the West and find ways to reach urban areas – sometimes simply to make telephone contact with them to ask for assistance.

Another issue is that whereas some migrants are very adept at sharing information and chaperoning each other through the orientation and integration process, I did not observe this to be case with Dinka refugees. One reason is that their resettlement is quite recent, and of those who began arriving in larger numbers in the US during the late 1990s, only recently have they begun to reunite with other members of their family or friends who, in principle, may have been able to assist them in this way.

Further, although social networks are very important among the Dinka, it was found that even with subsequent resettlement, the details of financial matters, job hunting, salaries, etc. are not openly discussed. In sum, at least for the Dinka the transition to ‘successful’ resettlement such as economic stability has proven to be lengthy. In fact, many of my informants were still trying to make sense of ‘the system’ and other aspects of their surroundings well beyond the first few years after relocation. The question thus remains whether there is anything states or organisations can do to improve the situation of refugees who, in addition to their own settlement issues, must bear the burden of multiple remittances?

Stepping up resettlement durable solution efforts such as filling existing resettlement quotas and reducing status determination and resettlement waiting times, may be helpful in the context of remittances going to asylum locations where the displaced have few local resources upon when they can depend. As we have seen, the majority of refugees’ remittances are directed to these regions. These measures will certainly reduce the time refugees and asylum seekers must spend in urban and camp settings in limbo not knowing of their fate and where their security, health and livelihood remain constant concerns.

The resettlement of needy family members also implies a potential lessening of the economic and emotional stresses reported by refugees. Yet, as some individuals—notably more established refugees in the US and Europe—have confided, this process has not had the stated impact for everyone. Calls for assistance continue to be received on a weekly and sometimes daily basis.

¹⁵ Here the caller is indicating that as maternal uncle he has the ability to curse their children.

Some refugees reported that the number of requests have actually increased in spite of resettlement within their immediate families. There is arguably a greater possibility that remittances of the subsistence sort will be reduced once persons who are regular recipients are resettled.

Another suggestion would be to expand IOM Cultural Orientation programmes and those offered by US resettlement agencies in a direction that demonstrates more sensitivity to cultural issues of concern to refugees. Most orientations are about instructing them on the need to adapt to the norms and standards of the environments in which they are resettling. Less attention is given to considering their contemporary dilemmas and how refugees may go about retaining what is meaningful to them. An improvement, therefore, may be to devote some time during orientations to the discussion of impending family and community obligations (now that we know what they are).

Resettlement agencies could improve their services to refugees in a number of ways. Much more emphasis could be paid to the skills refugees have already acquired, specifically, making detailed assessments of these abilities and refugees' aspirations and putting more effort into matching these with the local market. Ultimately, it is necessary to help them locate better paying jobs in a shorter period of time than is currently the case.

In other words, the "school of hard knocks" does not have to be so hard. In the United States, many Dinka refugees continue to languish in low-paid service and factory jobs with no benefits and little job security. Resettlement organisations in the US also receive funding for mental and preventive health programmes. Given the stresses accompanying remittances, further effort could be made to explore this issue with refugees, offer confidential counselling on methods that maybe helpful in dealing with their increased burdens.

America's non-profit sector is very flexible and generous. Consequently, resettlement agencies may also opt to develop and seek funding for projects that in the end could provide some supplemental financial ('hardship') support to these refugees. As it is refugees must also contend with paying back their resettlement expenses which often takes years. The International Rescue Committee is one such organisation that has taken more seriously refugees' financial situation (IRC 2004). However, their program may be limited to those who are in their caseload. Thus, similar programs by other organisations could be established for other refugees.

Though well intentioned, the introduction of more flexible sponsorship/resettlement programmes for persons in refugee-like situations such as that currently operated by Australia has had the impact of escalating the amount of stress refugees experience who are already struggling to make ends meet. Australia, for example, recently raised its quota to allow thousands of Sudanese refugees to settle within its borders.

However, only a small portion of those relocating fall under UNCHR's mandate who, by resettling through this channel, are not expected to pay their travel-related costs up front. The rest must resort to a formal yet independent application process initiated either by a relative or unrelated person already in Australia who serves as their official 'sponsor.' In following this now very common resettlement route the costs of mandatory medical examinations and travel expenses must be borne by the refugees themselves.¹⁶

In these instances, the refugees already resettled have the difficult responsibility of coming up with these funds that relative to their other remittances are quite high, especially in the case of

¹⁶ The official sponsors in Australia must also demonstrate sufficient resources to support the refugee(s) economically during their first three weeks upon their arrival.

resettlement of large families. According to my sources, medical fees for a family of four cost approximately US\$300 and flight travel between \$1,500 and \$2,500 depending upon family size.

What makes these remittances particularly arduous aside from the large sums is the strict timeframe in which the fees must be paid. Based on notification, for medical screenings refugees have about four weeks to come up with the funds. For travel arrangements (i.e. flight tickets) the time in which the cash must be remitted to meet date restrictions for resettlement to Australia is approximately two months. This pressure is all the more intense because should an asylum seeker or refugee fail to come up with the necessary amount of money in the time given, the entire sponsorship process ceases and the process of applying and seeking approval must begin all over again.

Among the Dinka, this route to the West where it is hoped one will be much better off has been used increasingly not only by bona fide refugees who for various reasons have not been given the option of resettlement by UNHCR but also by those whose cases have been rejected or remain perpetually pending. Knowing what their kin are facing in Cairo and other asylum locales, resettled refugees expressed feeling a deep responsibility to honour these obligations. As I noted earlier, in a number of cases already reported refugees have had to take out high interest-bearing loans in order to come up with the funds. Considering their low earnings and their lack of any substantial assets, it would seem that some type of charitable or state assistance for these expenses (in the least a reduction to the normal costs) might be in order.¹⁷

The Dinka in the growing 'wider' diaspora (Van Hear 2002) in the West have been referred to by their kin in the 'near' diaspora (ibid.) of camps and urban asylum locales as those who represent *lor tueng*—'the future.' Yet, with their mounting remittances and meagre resources to improve their own lives, it is the resettled refugees who now feel the poorer. As one refugee migrant expressed after receiving yet another phone call asking for money: 'It is we who have nothing now; it is they back home who can move ahead—we have nothing!' (Ring Malek 2004). This reflexive transition may be the next phase in the 'logic' of the 'the refugee cycle' (Koser & Van Hear 2003: 1).

What I have tried to show though is that life in Western countries and the impact of civil conflict pose categorically new challenges for populations. Refugees, on the other hand, are known for their creative survival skills and resilience. To do these qualities justice new assistance approaches need to be employed that address their contemporary problems. More accountability could also be shown by states that have opened their doors to persons seeking refuge.

¹⁷ Anecdotal information received specifies that there is an organisation in Australia that assists with these travel costs if refugees in the diaspora come up with the majority of the funds needed for travel.

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