Factors Influencing the Policy Responses of Host Governments to Mass Refugee Influxes[1]

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The policy responses of asylum governments to mass influxes of refugees have varied considerably. Focusing on less developed countries, this article explores why some host governments respond in relatively generous ways, while other governments act more restrictively. The policy alternatives available to receiving governments are classified, and a set of factors influencing refugee policy formation is explored. These factors include: the costs and benefits of accepting international assistance, relations with the sending country, political calculations about the local community's absorption capacity, and national security considerations. However, the end result is not a neat solution yielding a rationally evolved refugee policy. Host governments also struggle with bureaucratic politics, the position of refugees in domestic politics, power struggles between government ministries and among decisionmakers, paucity of information, bureaucratic inertia, and other complications that must be teased out at the empirical level.

In the past 30 years, millions of people have crossed international borders to escape conflict and disorder in their home countries, and with them they have brought problems for their asylum countries. The responses of host countries to these mass influxes have varied greatly, both between states and, for single governments, over time and by refugee group. Some governments have received refugees with generosity, providing them with assistance and guaranteeing their safety. Others have tried to prevent refugees from entering, or have treated them harshly, restricting their movements and even endangering their safety. In some cases, where a host government has had to respond simultaneously to different refugee groups, its response has varied for each group. For example, within the same time period, the Costa Rican Government responded differently to inflows of Nicaraguan and Salvadorean refugees (Basok, 1990). Why is it that host governments respond sometimes in relatively generous ways and other times not? This article classifies the policy alternatives available to receiving governments, and identifies some of the factors influencing their responses.

The study focuses on the experiences of less developed host countries (LDCs) in Africa, Asia, and Central America, where the bulk of refugee movements has occurred since 1960. The approaches to asylum practiced by LDC governments are arguably different from those of Western industrialized host governments because different economic, political and military factors shape their respective policy responses (Kibreab, 1991; Salomon, 1991; Pitterman, 1987).[2] Also, although all host countries experience similar types of problems from a refugee influx, the scale and intensity of these differ for less developed and Western countries. For example, environmental and security-related problems are greater for LDCs than for Western countries.

Despite a growing body of refugee theory and research, much of the refugee literature on less developed countries tends to be what Robert Chambers (1986) has called "refugee-centric," that is, it focuses on the refugees themselves, rather than the effects of refugee movements on host countries and communities. Of the empirical studies conducted in Africa, Asia, and Central America (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Kuhlman, 1990; Kok, 1989; Leach, 1992; Poole, 1970; Robinson, 1989), relatively few focus specifically on host government responses (Kibreab, 1991; Basok, 1990; Preston, 1992), and there are even fewer comparative refugee policy studies (Jacobsen, 1992; Pitterman, 1987). Much more work has been done on refugee policies in Western industrialized countries (Adelman, 1991; Dowty, 1987; Loescher and Scanalan, 1986, 1985; Marrus, 1985; Salomon, 1991; Teitelbaum, 1984; Zucker and Zucker, 1987). This article draws on these case studies as well as existing literature on migration theory, comparative policy, and international relations to explore some of the factors influencing refugee policymaking in LDCs.

This study focuses on the host government as the agent primarily responsible for refugee policies (see, for example, Jackson, 1987). The government is viewed as a single actor with some autonomy from transnational forces. It is assumed that the government can and does make decisions about refugees that may be against the wishes or recommendations of donor countries or international refugee organizations. It is also assumed that the government is capable of implementing its policies. For example, should the government decide it does not want refugees on its territory, it is able either to prevent entry or to expel them forcibly from its territory. It should be noted, however, that the state can choose its response only if it has the capacity to control its borders. The borders of most receiving countries are porous, vaguely delineated, and inadequately policed, and the crossing of thousands of people within a short period can seldom be prevented. In sea crossings, however, asylum seekers approaching receiving countries by boat can more easily be interdicted.

[2]For example, resettlement policies in the West during the 1980s were strongly influenced by cold war considerations (Salomon, 1991), but these were less of a policy factor for host governments in LDCs. Western host countries and LDCs also differ in their need for international assistance.

Three sources of pressure on the government are emphasized in the article. The first consists of those institutions and individuals in the international community which are concerned with the welfare of refugees – a grouping frequently referred to as the international refugee regime. The primary organization is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); other entities include international relief and refugee organizations, donor countries, voluntary agencies, the media, and individuals such as lawyers and academics involved in refugee work. The international refugee regime is the primary source of assistance in the event of a mass influx, and it can influence the government through negative publicity, diplomatic pressure, and so forth. The second source of pressure is the local community which first receives refugees and which is most affected by the influx. The local community's response potentially influences the government for political and security reasons, as discussed below. A third source of pressure comes from the refugees themselves. Depending on their situations and resources, refugees can both directly influence host governments, or they can affect other factors that play a role in policymaking.

In this paper, the term "refugee influx" refers to people who flee their country *en masse*. A mass influx of refugees is defined as that which occurs when, within a relatively short period (a few years), large numbers (thousands) of people flee their places of residence for the asylum country. There are many possible causes of mass flight, including civil war and insurgency, ethnic or religious persecution, environmental disaster, and famine. In cases such as civil war and environmental disaster, refugees do not flee their governments but rather the violence, disorder, and lack of resources created by the crisis. Between 1960 and 1990, most mass influxes have occurred in Africa, Asia, and Central America, where, by the author's count, there were more than 50 mass outpourings of refugees.

The consequences of a mass influx for a receiving country include strains on economic resources and physical infrastructure, security risks, and threats to government authority – especially if a government is unable to control the flow across its borders. The appearance of large numbers of asylum seekers can be rather sudden, creating emergency problems and forcing governments to act quickly – something most governments are reluctant to do (*see* Clark, 1986). In this article, "government response" refers to actions (or inactions) taken by the government and other state institutions that include specific refugee policies, military responses, unofficial actions, and policy implementation. In the following sections, the policy choices available to host governments are identified, and four broad categories of factors affecting host government responses are discussed.

REFUGEE POLICY CHOICES

Mass influxes are characterized by a series of events beginning with the appearance of displaced people at the receiving country's borders and ending

with the dimunition or cessation of the flow. The host government is faced with a threefold choice in its response to each event: it can do nothing, it can respond negatively towards the refugees, or it can respond positively. When the government does nothing, this suggests that it either lacks the capacity for action, is unwilling to act, or does not consider the appearance of refugees as a significant matter for its agenda (Gordenker, 1987). The government will probably react if the number of refugees threatens to overwhelm local capacities, or if refugees threaten security by encouraging local conflict or incurring the military interest of sending countries.

Three sets of policy choices concerning the treatment and protection of refugees are set out in Table 1. Such a framework is useful because it facilitates policy evaluation and comparison across countries. Refugee policy choices can be evaluated by means of a yardstick derived from United Nations protocols and recommendations concerning refugees. This yardstick represents a policy spectrum: on the positive end are positive refugee policies, "perfectly" compliant with international recommendations; the other end represents perfect noncompliance, manifest in negative or restrictive refugee policies. Most receiving countries fall toward the middle of the spectrum, with refugee policies characterized by both positive and negative elements.

Policy Set I concerns the admission and treatment of refugees. With the appearance of displaced people at its border, the government must decide whether to respond negatively by denying them entry (with or without armed force) or positively by admitting them into the country. A positive response leads to another decision - should the entrants be screened? If so, under what conditions should those determined not to be "genuine" be turned back? As the number of refugees grows, the government must decide whether to confine the refugees in camps or to assist them in other ways. In international refugee parlance there are three "durable solutions": repatriation, local integration in the asylum country, and resettlement in a third country. But these solutions are problematic. Repatriation can be difficult to bring about; the conflicts leading to refugee outflows are often protracted, it is difficult to negotiate with the agencies responsible for the refugee outflow, and the safety of returnees cannot be assured (Harrell-Bond, 1989). Local integration is frequently resisted by both receiving communities and the host government. Resettlement can be resisted both by the refugees, who wish to return to their homes, and by the resettlement countries, for whom the numbers involved are too large.

Decisions must also be made concerning the rights of and restrictions imposed on refugees, the degree of protection to be accorded to them, and who is to be responsible for this protection. Eventually the government must decide when and how strongly to encourage the return of refugees and what to do about those who cannot return to their homes or be resettled elsewhere.

TABLE 1

U.N. POLICY YARDSTICK: REFUGEE POLICY DECISIONS AND POSSIBLE STATE RESPONSES

Policy Type	Positive Response	Negative Response
	(United Nations Recommendations)	
I. Legal-Bureaucratic response		
Accede to international instruments, conventions, etc?	Yes, or accession equivalent	No accession
Define asylum seekers as refugees?	Yes	No; define asylum seekers as 'aliens,' etc.
Create separate bureaucratic authority responsible for refugees?	Yes	No, refugee affairs handled by army
Procedures for determination of refugee status?	Yes, proper procedures including legislation, appeal, etc	No proper procedures
II. International Refugee Organizations (IROs)		
Grant IROs permission to assist refugees?	IROs permitted into country	IROs excluded
Cooperate with or restrict IROs?	UNHCR permitted access to affected areas; cooperation	Restricted or no access; poor cooperation
III. Admission and Treatment of Refugees.		
Admit asylum seekers appearing at border?	Yes	No
Screen refugees?	No; or yes, in accordance with UNHCR regulations	Yes, but not in accordance with UNHCR
Location of refugees?	Refugees allowed to choose camps or self-settlement	Refugees forced to live in camps
Rights of and restrictions on refugees?	More rights (including freedom of movement, employment), no discrimination	More restrictions (on movement, employment) and discrimination
Refugee protection?	Emphasize physical safety; camps at safe distance from border; civilian nature of camps is maintained	Protection of camps frequently violated; combatants in camps; military recruitment of refugees
Repatriation?	Voluntary, according to UNHCR recommendations	Involuntary or forced; violations of UNHCR recommendations
Treatment of long-term refugees?	Potential for local settlement or permanent residence	No such local potential; refugees remain in camps

Policy Set II concerns the government response to international refugee organizations, including UNHCR and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with refugees. In the early stages of a mass influx many organizations apply to the government for permission to enter the country (if they are not already there) and assist refugees. The government must decide how to respond to these requests and how much to cooperate with or restrict the organizations. Host governments sometimes discourage the involvement of international assistance agencies, in the hope that the absence of assistance will encourage refugees to return to their homes, as may have been the case in Papua New Guinea with respect to asylum seekers from Irian Jaya (Preston, 1992).

Policy Set III concerns institutional or legal-bureaucratic matters related to refugees. One decision concerns accession to international refugee agreements and conventions. Ghassan Maarouf Arnaout (1987:45) points out that constitutions of most of the Arab countries contain provisions guaranteeing the right of asylum, and some Arab countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan) promulgate laws granting asylum to foreigners. However, not all the Arab countries have acceded to international refugee conventions. The government must also decide on legal definitions: "asylum seekers," "refugees," "illegal aliens," etc., and what procedures will be instituted to implement this definition. An important decision concerns the allocation of responsibility for refugees, that is, whether there should be a separate civilian bureaucracy whose sole function is the care of refugees, or whether simply to assign this responsibility to an existing ministry or the army. Since many legal-bureaucratic decisions affect subsequent refugee policy decisions, legal-bureaucratic policy is itself an independent variable.

FACTORS INFLUENCING REFUGEE POLICY CHOICES

Four broad categories of factors affecting refugee policies are: 1) bureaucratic choices made by the government; 2) international relations; 3) the absorption capacity of the local host community; and 4) national security considerations.

Bureaucratic Choices

The inputs-outputs approach of systems theory envisions public policy as the response of the political system to inputs, or forces brought to bear upon it from the societal environment (Dye, 1972). Other models of policymaking, including interest group theory, institutional and organizational approaches, and the "bureaucratic politics" model, all emphasize the importance of the political system itself (Dye, 1972; Allison, 1971). In refugee policymaking, prior legal-bureaucratic decisions affect subsequent refugee policy decisions, that is, earlier policy outputs become subsequent inputs. One important

legal-bureaucratic decision is the decision to allocate responsibility for refugees to a civilian state agency, usually located within the Ministry of the Interior or Social Welfare or some equivalent. The creation of such an agency is particularly important in countries where refugee policy is not "high" policy, that is, part of national security or foreign policy agenda. In cases where refugee policy is "low," the refugee agency itself sets policy and is often answerable to higher-level departments only at intervals, if at all. Since refugees are the means to bureaucratic survival and career advancement, the personnel in these agencies have a vested interest in refugee matters. These personnel are likely to set more positive refugee policies, such as allotting greater resources to refugee camps. By contrast, when refugees are the responsibility of the army, or a department with other responsibilities and priorities, few officials have any self-interest in refugees' welfare. Refugees then are more likely to be seen as an extra burden on existing resources and workloads or, in the case of the army, as a potential threat to security. As a result, more negative refugee policies are likely to be pursued.

Two cases illustrate what happens when responsibility for refugees is allocated to different agencies. In Thailand, responsibility for the Cambodian refugees entering after 1975 was assigned to the Thai Defense Force. The Thai Defense Force associated the refugees with a variety of security threats, and they sought to control strictly the refugees' movements and location. Refugees were obliged to remain in camps close to the Thai-Cambodian border; they were not permitted to work and could only leave the camps when they were to be resettled in third countries. In addition, there were a number of cases of refoulement, that is, refugees returned to their home country against their will, and there were general complaints about poor treatment of refugees by the army (Jacobsen, 1992; Robinson, 1989).

By contrast, the Zimbabwean government's bureaucratic response to the influx of Mozambican refugees during the 1980s was to place them under the care of the Social Welfare department. Although the Mozambican refugees, like the Cambodian refugees, were obliged to live in camps near the border, they were under the care of social workers and they experienced more flexible, more humane conditions with greater freedom to leave the camps and fewer cases of refoulement and harsh treatment (Jacobsen, 1992).

Whether refugees are under the care of the army or social workers may thus make a significant difference in their treatment.

International Relations

The systems model can also be modified by expanding the scope of the societal environment as normally envisioned in comparative policy research so as to include international variables. Gary Freeman notes that most comparative

policy approaches explain domestic policies with domestic variables that measure nationally specific characteristics such as ethnic and class cleavages, political parties, political culture, economic development, institutional arrangements, and so forth. Recent research has attempted to correct this "bias toward endogenous explanations" by suggesting that "[i]nternational events, structures, and processes may have direct effects on policy outcomes or they may shape them indirectly through their impact on domestic structures" (Freeman, n.d.:1–2; *see also* Gourevitch, 1978 and Almond, 1989).

Few other domestic policy issues are as transnational in their subject matter as refugee policies. Refugees are manifestations of the problems of another country which suddenly become the problems of one's own. The extralegal crossing of people from one country to another usually affects international relations between those governments, thereby drawing the attention of other governments with interests in the region. International organizations also become involved, both with the refugees and in relations between the concerned governments. In the following discussion, international influence on a host government's policymaking is seen to come most strongly from two sources – the international refugee regime and the sending countries.

The International Refugee Regime. The international refugee regime influences host governments for both practical and normative reasons. Practically, international assistance increases a country's ability to accept refugees by providing financial assistance, stimulating domestic markets and creating infrastructure (wells, clinics, roads) when refugee camps are constructed. The cost of refugee relief to Pakistan in the mid-1980s was about 1 million dollars a day, all of which was financed by contributions from foreign governments (channeled through UNHCR) and private voluntary organizations. Donor countries encourage favorable treatment of refugees by promising or threatening to withhold bilateral aid or "earmarked" contributions to UNHCR. The provision of assistance (and the threat of reducing it) means UNHCR carries some influence with the host government. On receiving a host government's request for assistance, UNHCR sets standards for the operation and assumes a watchdog role. This is intended to ensure that UNHCR will influence decisions made by those executing the relief programs (Gordenker, 1987).

Another source of international leverage on host governments is the promise of resettlement in third countries. Resettlement increases the ability of a host country to cope with an influx by transferring part of the refugee population. Resettlement programs had a considerable effect on Thailand's refugee policies: Thailand was less willing to admit Cambodian asylum seekers when U.S. resettlement quotas were reduced after 1979. Resettlement has been an important solution to the refugee problem in Southeast Asian countries, but it has

not been vigorously pursued as a solution for African countries largely because third country resettlement is not a preferred option for most African refugees.

At the normative level, the threat of bad international publicity is used by refugee organizations to pressure host governments towards more positive refugee policies. Most governments desire to be in good international standing and do not wish to appear inhumane, so the publicity given to refugee abuses is a political consideration shaping their responses. In the Thai case, there were several occasions where the government approved refugee programs or stopped refoulement practices only after extensive publicity in Western media.

However, the influence of the international refugee regime should not be overestimated. As Leon Gordenker (1976:6–7) points out, "the reaction of governments to the efforts of international organizations to set behavioral patterns through recommendations, urgings, demands, and rewards is [not] well understood." One reason why pressure from the international refugee regime does not necessarily translate into policy action stems from sensitivities about national sovereignty. By demonstrating that borders cannot be controlled, a mass influx challenges and undermines the government's sovereign right to determine who enters its territory. The influx also creates a situation of dependence for the host government by forcing it to seek international assistance to cope with the refugee burden. Sometimes governments must compromise their preferred policy directions so as to accommodate recommendations by international organizations to incorporate long-term refugee assistance into national development programs. Such pressure can be viewed by the government as a threat to its control over policymaking, and it is particularly resented by those who advocate independence from imperialism and neocolonialism.

The problem is aggravated when officials from international organizations or NGOs either do not recognize or ignore these dependency sensitivities. Many refugee programs run by voluntary agencies have expatriate administrators who view government officials as inefficient, indifferent, corrupt, and inadequate. This "expatriate peer group ideology" leads administrators to adopt highhanded approaches to field operations, creating friction with local officials (Cromwell, 1988:299–300). Relations between UNHCR, the host government, and voluntary agencies can become conflictual, resulting in an "environment of separatism" in which government officials are left out of meetings and their resources and timing needs ignored. Government officials may react by asserting their independence with obstructive tactics. During the refugee crisis in Sudan in the mid-1980s, government officials refused to recognize voluntary agency staff and obstructed visa and work permit procedures. This antagonistic or obstructive policymaking can lead to negative outcomes for refugees.

Another reason why international influence should not be overestimated is that host governments have their own form of leverage over international organizations. In order for refugee organizations to work in host countries, the

host government must grant permission for them to do so, and at any time it can order the organizations out. Their presence is therefore always at the mercy of the government whose wishes they must take into account. Similarly, UNHCR's use of publicity as a form of leverage is constrained by the fact that its presence in the host country is at the discretion of the government.

The resettlement linkage between host and resettlement countries also can be turned to the host government's advantage. Host governments can pressure resettlement countries to increase their offtake by threatening to refuse admission to refugees, as the Thai government tried to do in 1979. In agreeing to give asylum to refugees in exchange for increased resettlement quotas or financial reimbursement, host governments manipulate the situation to their own advantage. By increasing the price of their patience with refugees and calling upon donors to finance refugee programs, governments like Pakistan and Ethiopia have benefited from the presence of refugees. Although the influence of UNHCR is limited by these and other political and financial constraints, in most cases the UNHCR Office in a particular host country is more capable of financing and managing a response to a mass influx than is the host government. Faced with a refugee influx, the capacity of many host governments to "make and execute decisions, to frame objections and requests . . . and to bring expert knowledge to bear" is limited (Gordenker, 1983:70). This is particularly the case in large African countries, where the writ of the central government does not always extend to far-flung border regions and where poor roads and communication networks make the implementation and coordination of refugee policies and programs difficult. This institutional weakness gives the better-financed and more experienced UNHCR and other refugee organizations an advantage at the initial stages of the influx and limits the host government's ability to resist their pressure.

In sum, the need for assistance, the avoidance of negative publicity, and institutional weakness all move the host government toward interaction with the international refugee regime which, in turn, pressures the government towards more positive refugee policies and practices. However, as noted, this relationship is not a straightforward one; interaction is accompanied by countervailing tendencies such as host government leverage over international organizations and sensitivities about sovereignty which may offset the positive influence of the international refugee regime.

The Sending Countries. That relations with the sending country influence the host government refugee policy decisions is demonstrated by the fact that most countries accord asylum to applicants depending on their countries of origin. Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo, (1989:273) refer to this as the "Haitian-Cuban syndrome." During the 1980s, Cuban asylum seekers were leaving an unfriendly communist country, and the United States was willing to define them

as refugees, even though they could not prove individual persecution. Asylum seekers from Haiti, in a similar situation but not from a communist country, were not eligible for refugee status (Loescher and Scanlan, 1986, 1985; Bach, 1987; Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989). The situation, by no means unique to the United States, reflects the role of geopolitical and ideological considerations in refugee policymaking. Pakistan has treated Iranian refugees more negatively than Afghan refugees. During the 1980s, the opposition of the Costa Rican government to the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua resulted in Nicaraguan refugees receiving generous treatment compared to that accorded Salvadorans (Basok, 1990).

Sending and receiving countries can manipulate refugee flows so as to embarrass or pressure each other. Sending countries create or condone refugee flows for a number of reasons: to destabilize the receiving country, to force recognition of the sending country, or to stop interference by the receiving country in a sending country's affairs. Peter Poole's (1970) study of the Dien Bien Phu Vietnamese refugees in Thailand found that changing relations between the Thai government and the two Vietnamese governments influenced Thai policies towards Vietnamese refugees. In the early 1980s, Southeast Asian receiving countries accused Vietnam of sanctioning mass departures in order to embarrass countries in the region.

In turn, host governments can adopt policies toward refugees that are intended to embarrass or pressure unfriendly sending countries or prevent embarrassment to friendly sending countries. The bestowal of refugee status upon asylum seekers implies that the sending government persecutes its people, and a host government may not wish to implicate an ally in this way.[3] In Zimbabwe, the government provided assistance to displaced Mozambicans, but delayed defining them as refugees for several years because it did not wish to implicate the Mozambican government with whom the Zimbabwean government had good relations (Jacobsen, 1992).

However, relations between sending and receiving countries do not always predict the treatment of refugees once they are admitted. Refugees fleeing a country which has traditionally been an enemy of the receiving country may be treated with the hostility directed towards all natives of that country. The treatment of Vietnamese refugees by many Southeast Asian countries is an example of a case where "my enemy's enemy is not my friend." A host country at war with the sending country may admit refugees (a positive policy step), only to use them in its conflict with the sending country (a clear violation of

[3]In an attempt to prevent the moral implications for the sending country government when neighboring countries grant refugee status, the OAU 1969 Convention on Refugee Problems in Africa (Art. II, para. 2) states explicitly that "the grant of asylum to refugees is a peaceful and humanitarian act and shall not be regarded as an unfriendly act by any Member State." However this injunction is seldom taken into account by African governments.

U.N. recommendations). For example, Somalia's irredentist stance towards parts of Ethiopia meant the government viewed some Ethiopian refugees as Somalian citizens and therefore adopted an informal "law of return" towards them (Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989:115). However this positive treatment was contradicted when the Somalian government also expected the refugees to do military service and sent them back into the Ogaden to fight the Ethiopian army.

The remaining propositions about refugee policymaking concern a host country's internal or domestic context and fall into two categories. The first, local absorption capacity, refers to the social, economic and cultural factors which affect the local receiving community's response to refugees. It is argued that this response will in turn influence the government's policy choices. The second category, national security, examines how security considerations, both independent of and with respect to refugees, affect policymaking. In examining absorption capacity and security threats it is important to focus on the local receiving community rather than the aggregate national economy. In many cases most refugees do not move beyond their initial receiving communities. Assistance programs and camps are set up here, and it is these areas rather than the whole country which are primarily affected.

Local Absorption Capacity

A receiving community's absorption capacity is defined here as the extent to which the community is willing and able to absorb an influx of refugees. Ability is distinct from willingness – a community may be structurally able to absorb a refugee influx, but it may not be willing to do so. Structural ability is determined by such variables as economic capacity and international assistance. Willingness is influenced by beliefs and attitudes about refugees, by the community's historical experience with (and as) refugees, by the perceived permanence of the refugees, and so forth (Kunz, 1981). The community's perception of its ability to absorb refugees is also important since this will affect willingness. For example, a community's perception that refugees drive down wages may not be accurate, but it will nevertheless diminish the community's willingness to absorb refugees. Local absorption capacity is largely determined by two variables: economic capacity and social receptiveness. Both of these variables change over time, so a community's absorption capacity is never static.

Economic Capacity. Research on international migration emphasizes economic conditions as the major determinant of a receiving country's migration policies (for a review of this research, *see* Borjas, 1989). Some refugee policy analysts argue that negative policy responses have coincided with periods of economic decline, and in many Western countries during the past century, economic

considerations have affected government decisions about resettlement and the definition of refugees (Scheinman, 1983; Cuenod, 1989). Recently, Patricia Daley (1993) has argued that labor market considerations influenced the Tanzanian government's decision to incorporate Barundi refugees in western Tanzania.

The economic capacity of the host country to absorb refugees is determined by such factors as land availability, the carrying capacity of the land, employment patterns, and infrastructure. A refugee influx affects both land availability and the quality of the land by creating or aggravating shortages of land, water, and firewood and by straining the ecosystem (Jacobsen, 1994). Heavily populated regions are unlikely to have the land to support large numbers of newcomers; sparsely populated areas often have low population-carrying capacity because of lack of water, poor soil, etc. Land availability also decreases when the government appropriates it for refugee camps. Where refugees are self-settled, i.e., they are not restricted to camps, they can impose strains on medical, educational and municipal facilities, on housing capacity, and on job availability. These strains frequently result in service breakdowns, increased hardship for local people, and local resentment towards refugees (Kok, 1989; Kuhlman, 1990; Chambers, 1986; Harrell-Bond, 1986).

High economic capacity enables a community to cope with the resource demands imposed by refugees. Local people are then less likely to be threatened when refugees bring resources such as agricultural skills, labor, and capital. However the entire community seldom benefits from these contributions. Those who are more affluent and visible are more likely to benefit from an influx than those who are poorer, more dispersed, and more vulnerable to displacement by refugees. The case of the Afghan truckers in Pakistan illustrates this. Many Afghan refugees brought trucks with them to Pakistan, which the Pakistani authorities registered because of the national shortage of commercial vehicles. However, while the aggregate Pakistani economy may have benefited from the trucks, local Pakistani truckers became resentful of Afghan truckers, who charged lower rates, were exempt from normal licensing fees, and whose larger trucks tore up the roads.

Economic capacity is not a static variable. Land capacity and infrastructure can be augmented as a result of the presence of refugees, either through their contribution to production (in Sudan and elsewhere refugee labor has been incorporated into development schemes) or as a result of international assistance. Assistance programs bring in scarce resources (food, medical supplies), create infrastructure, and provide economic opportunities. Local markets are stimulated when food is purchased for refugees by international agencies. As described by Kibreab (1991:18), one host community in eastern Sudan believed that the repatriation of Eritrean refugees after Eritrean independence would result in the impoverishment and neglect of the area. Refugees can thus

be seen to contribute to a community's economic capacity by virtue of the international assistance that accompanies them.

However, there is a downside to international assistance. Local resentment is often aroused when refugees are perceived to receive special treatment. Pakistani migrants returning from the Gulf after the drop in oil prices found themselves competing with Afghan refugees for their old jobs. As surplus labor drove down wages, the standard of living dropped for both Pakistani and Afghan workers. But whereas the Afghans had refugee aid to fall back on, Pakistanis did not, and local resentment resulted. Local perceptions can thus affect a community's absorption capacity in much the same way that inflows of actual resources do.

Social Receptiveness. Whether or not the community comes to resent refugees because of the economic strains they impose depends on the social receptiveness of the community. It is likely that a community's social receptiveness will change over time, particularly when the refugees' stay is prolonged. But communities that welcome refugees initially are less likely (or will take longer) to resent and protest the refugees' presence when hardships result. For example, the outflow of Liberians into Sierra Leone and other neighboring countries in 1990 created severe strains on food, firewood, and housing, but local villagers (initially) welcomed the refugees and shared their resources with them (Leach, 1992). The main factors that appear to influence the social receptiveness of the host community towards refugees are now briefly discussed.

The Cultural Meaning of Refugees

The way in which the receiving community perceives refugees, and therefore the way in which it responds to them, is influenced by the meaning it ascribes to the term "refugees." This meaning is influenced by cultural, historical and religious factors. Islam in particular has strong positive traditions concerning the offering of temporary refuge or asylum from political persecution. Arnaout (1987) argues that despite the considerable burden represented by refugees to the Arab-Islamic countries, refugees continue to be accepted because the foundations of Arab-Islamic civilization – the tribal traditions of hospitality shared by the desert Arabs – are based on the principle of hospitality and assistance to others. In fundamentalist countries like Iran and Sudan, or in countries like Pakistan where Islamic political parties have emerged, the religious element in the meaning of refugees is particularly important for a community's receptiveness. In his analysis of Afghan Pushtun refugees' conception of refugee status, David Busby Edwards (1986) shows how cultural and religious connotations of asylum are important for refugees' ability to settle in the asylum country. Both Islam and Pushtun culture view the seeking of

asylum as an appropriate and acceptable avenue to escape the depredations of the state. Such cultural and religious connotations of seeking asylum positively influence the receptivity of the receiving community.

Ethnicity and Kinship

Research on the acceptance or rejection of migrants suggests that ethnic affinity appears to be a strong predictor of acceptance (Kunz, 1981). Many border communities share ethnic and kinship ties, increasing the likelihood that refugees from the other side of the border will be welcomed and assisted. Ethnic variation within a group of refugees sometimes explains variations in the response of a host government. For example, in the late 1970s, the Somalian government generally responded very generously towards the influx of refugees from Ethiopia (Waldron and Hasci, 1995). However, the small group (about 500) of Amharic refugees among the Ethiopians were treated less favorably because both local Somalians and the government identified them with the Ethiopian regime (USCR, 1987). But ethnic affinity does not always explain variance in the responses of receiving communities. Nor does ethnic affinity explain variant responses within the same ethnically defined area. For example, in Pakistan, some Pushtun tribes like the Mohmand rejected any settlement of Afghan Pushtun refugees, while in other Pushtun-dominated areas Afghan Pushtuns were allowed to settle.

Historical Experience

A community's historical experience both with earlier refugee influxes and as refugees themselves is likely to influence its receptiveness. Where earlier influxes have caused problems there can be lingering resentment. For example, many of the 6 million Moslems who left India for Pakistan in 1949 settled in the Sind, where they (the Mohajirs) eventually dominated the poorer Sindis. The situation led to tensions between the two groups which persist today. Those Sindis who resented the Mohajirs did not welcome the later influx of Afghans, and they are violently opposed to the resettlement of the "stranded Biharis."

On the other hand, a community which has itself had to flee violence or persecution is more likely to be sympathetic to refugees, especially if the receiving community was itself once welcomed and helped by the incoming refugees. Many border communities, particularly those in Africa and Asia, have had refugee experiences, and it is not uncommon for reciprocal help to be offered. Examples include communities in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, Ethiopia and Sudan, Uganda and Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi, and Iran and Iraq.

Beliefs about Refugees

Beliefs about the motivations of refugees influence the community's receptiveness in the same way that in industrialized societies the notion of the "deserving poor" creates support for welfare policies. Where refugees are believed to have behaved opportunistically, that is, they left their homes for economic reasons rather than because their lives were in danger, the community is less likely to sympathize with them. Conversely, "deserving refugees," who are believed to be in real danger in their home countries, are more likely to be welcomed and assisted.

Beliefs about the motivations of refugees are influenced by the community's understanding and perception of the causes of the outflow. Where there is widespread knowledge about the conditions in the sending country, and if those conditions are perceived to be an appropriate cause for flight, community sympathy will be higher than if the sending causes are unknown or misunderstood.

Negative beliefs about refugees may be motivated by psychological fears. Scheinman (1983) links negative beliefs about refugees with the sense of loss of control and fear of being overwhelmed that results from mass influxes. When refugees are believed to be responsible for social problems, antagonism towards them may override the welcome stemming from ethnic or religious attitudes. Many receiving communities associate refugees with increased crime and violence. In Pakistan, many people held the Afghan refugees responsible for the increased availability of arms and for the burgeoning drug trade. This blame led to tensions between refugees and locals despite ethnic and religious compatibility.

Attitudes and beliefs are not immutable, they can change in a negative or positive direction depending on the costs and benefits incurred by the community. Refugee lobbies or voluntary organizations actively seek to change attitudes. Attitudes towards refugees are also affected by developments in the sending country: if peace comes, the host community may believe that the refugees should return home, and prior positive beliefs about the validity of the refugees' claim to asylum can change.

The response of local communities to refugees is important both because the community can assist refugees directly and because the community's response is likely to influence the government's refugee policies. Where social receptiveness is high there is less likely to be political resistance to policies that assist refugees. However, a community's response by no means guarantees a matching government one. In a situation where the local community has low economic capacity or is unreceptive toward refugees, the government will not necessarily implement negative refugee policies. This was the case, for example, in Costa Rica, where the government paid little attention to the public backlash against Nicaraguan refugees and stated that it was important both to protect refugees and fight against the xenophobia of Costa Ricans (Basok, 1990).

In most cases the receiving community's problems with refugees only become relevant for the government if they result in political disturbances and if there are linkages between the community and the government. In systems theory terms, it is necessary to show how the societal environment and the political system are connected. Dankwart Rustow's (1970:344) advice about theories of democracy is relevant: "Wherever social or economic background conditions enter the theory, it must seek to specify the mechanisms, presumably in part political, by which these [conditions] penetrate to the democratic foreground."

One way of understanding these linkages is through the concept of state autonomy, or the openness of the government's decisionmaking to outside pressures (Herbst, 1988). In military or personalistic regimes, the linkages between the state and civil society are weak; the state is less accountable and more likely to make policy decisions based on other considerations. In countries characterized by democratic rule, governments are constrained by greater public accountability and will be more influenced by civil society in their policymaking. In the United States, the negative public perception of the Cuban-Haitian influx cast public doubt on the wisdom of President Carter's generous asylum policy. Those doubts were partly responsible for the more restrictionist policy environment during the Reagan administration (Loescher and Scanlan, 1985).

In the refugees context, linkages between the local community and the government take the form of protests, strikes, and demonstrations against refugees or refugee policies which force a response from the government. The government is also likely to respond when local resentment is exploited for political purposes by opposition parties. In several Pakistani cities, refugees became an explosive political issue after riots broke out over declining resources. The political opposition used the refugee issue to challenge the Zia government, which came to place a high priority on a settlement of the Afghan conflict and return of the Afghan refugees. Similarly in Sudan, during the elections in 1985, refugees were used as a campaign issue by the opposition.

Even where government-community linkages are strong, the refugee policies of a government will not necessarily match the receiving community's desires. Governments can pursue positive refugee policies in the face of mounting domestic tensions and controversy, as was the case with the Zia government in Pakistan, because domestic political considerations are outweighed by other factors, particularly security threats.

Security Threats

The conventional understanding of national security is based on the concept of military threats arising either externally or internally (Nye and Lynn-Jones, 1988). Revisionist views (Ullman, 1983) have departed from this militaristic conception of national security to incorporate environmental and socioeco-

nomic factors such as events that degrade the quality of life for a state's inhabitants or that narrow the range of policy choices available to a government. Such events include resource scarcities or natural catastrophes which threaten the stability of the government by disrupting supplies of essential commodities to citizens. These types of threats are particularly relevant for regimes in low-income countries. For example, one consequence of the hurricane that struck Bangladesh in April 1991 was the destabilization of the government following its inability to cope with the disaster.

A third conception of national security integrates the traditional and revisionist views by seeing national security in terms of three dimensions. The strategic dimension incorporates the traditional view of security, *i.e.*, the ability of the state to defend itself militarily from external aggression. The regime dimension is the capacity of the government to protect itself from internal threats arising from domestic disorder and conflict. The structural dimension addresses the balance between a state's population and its resource endowments (food, water, living space). This balance is upset when population demands on resources become too great and the government is unable to manage or contain them. Decreased structural security leads to a "crumbling" of the state and threats to regime security.

A refugee influx potentially threatens all three security dimensions of host countries, either by creating new security threats or by aggravating existing ones (Jacobsen and Wilkenson, 1993). Refugee camps frequently harbor guerrillas – either by assisting them directly or by assisting their families so that the guerrillas are free to fight. The camps are then viewed as havens for the enemy by hostile forces who engage in "hot pursuit" raids into the host country. The situation can become especially fraught with threat when there is a power imbalance between the sending and receiving country. In southern African countries during the 1980s, the homes and camps of South African refugees were subject to repeated attacks by the South African military. The South African government justified these attacks on the grounds of self-defense or hot pursuit, arguing that the refugees were involved in subversive activities against South Africa. In Thailand and Pakistan, refugee camps were also attacked because guerilla fighters lived among the refugees from Cambodia and Afghanistan. Armed attacks against refugees are also perpetrated by surrogate militia or political groups within the asylum country, as in the attacks in Lebanon on Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila camps in 1983. Thus the presence of refugees can lead to escalated conflict in the receiving region.

The refugees themselves may constitute real or perceived threats to the host government. During the cold war, refugees fleeing communist countries were frequently suspected by host authorities of being a "fifth column." When refugees bring arms with them they create a potentially dangerous armed community. Refugee camps often become violent places with high rates of

crime, especially those where long-term tenure has increased frustration levels, and since refugee camps are rarely secure these problems spill over into surrounding communities. Long-term refugee populations, particularly those that are forced to reside in camps or areas away from the mainstream, may develop resentment towards their hosts. This had serious implications for the Kuwaitis during the Iraqi invasion in 1990, when many Palestinian refugees collaborated with the invaders.

A host government's regime security is threatened when refugees enter regions characterized by actual or potential ethnic conflict and change the ethnic proportions in these areas. This occurred with the movement of Hutus into Burundi, of Irian Jayans into Papua New Guinea, of Laotians into the Thai-Lao areas of Thailand, and of Palestinians into Jordan. Even if refugees do not actually engage in the domestic quarrels of their hosts, governments often perceive them to be a threat and act to avoid or reduce political repercussions by imposing greater controls on refugees. One widely-practiced strategy is to separate refugees from the local population by housing refugees in camps rather than allowing them to be self-settled. Even when there are no potential ethnic problems, governments may prefer to house refugees in camps because doing so reduces their political saliency within the local community. Refugees in camps are more easily monitored, controlled, and registered, all of which also facilitate eventual repatriation. Regime threats also arise through refugees' effect on structural security. As discussed earlier, refugees create or aggravate discontent among local host communities by straining available resources or increasing competition for jobs and land. These strains often give rise to demonstrations, strikes, and riots that threaten the government's legitimacy.

Security threats affect refugee policies negatively for several reasons. First, with increased security threats the army becomes more influential in national affairs. The army is less constrained by public accountability than are other institutions, and army personnel tend to be more concerned with containing security threats than with the welfare of refugees. Containment frequently means controlling refugees – by denying admission, restricting them to camps, or practicing refoulement. The practice of exchanging refugees with the sending country has also occurred. In several southern African countries where refugee settlements were attacked by the South African army, host governments sought to placate their attackers either by returning refugees to South Africa or obliging them to seek asylum elsewhere. Security threats also make authorities like police and immigration officials less likely to admit asylum seekers and more likely to expel those admitted. In addition, limits are more likely to be imposed on the activities of international refugee agencies with refugees.

Negative policy responses to security threats are not ineluctable. Policies that offset threats without endangering refugees include relocating refugees away from dangerous border areas and ensuring that refugee camps and settlements

are exclusively civilian, not havens for guerilla fighters. Some host countries have refused to permit refugees to use their territories as staging grounds for attacks against sending countries, although doing so does not always prevent attacks by sending country forces.

CONCLUSION

In examining African host government refugees policies, Gaim Kibreab (1991:24) argues that because these governments' "overriding concern" is to minimize costs and maximize benefits to themselves and their citizens, policies are formulated so as to minimize the burden of refugees on social and economic infrastructure and enable their own citizens to gain access to international refugee support systems. For this reason, Kibreab says, African governments prefer to place refugees in organized settlements where they do not burden local infrastructure and their needs can be met by international donor agencies. But are African (or other Third World) governments motivated by a single overriding concern? This article has argued that a host government's policy-making process is influenced by a range of domestic and international considerations. At various points in the policymaking process, the government weighs the costs and benefits of accepting international assistance, assesses relations with the sending country, makes political calculations about the local community's absorption capacity and factors in national security considerations. As with all governments, the end result is not a neat solution yielding a rationally evolved refugee policy. Mixed in with these considerations are a range of other factors not considered in this paper. These include bureaucratic politics, such as power struggles between government ministries and among decisionmakers, paucity of information, bureaucratic inertia, and other complications that must be teased out at the empirical level.

All these factors create countervailing policy pressures which lead to clashes between different political actors. Whereas the army's security concerns create pressure for restrictive refugee policies, the interests of powerful commercial farmers may lie in more open policies because they see refugees as a source of cheap labor. International organizations push for more open refugee policies, whereas local host communities seek to protect scarce resources and push for restrictions. The relative weights of these political actors must be empirically determined. In many low-income host countries, the army has much more authority than other political forces, and poor receiving communities have none at all.

Refugee policymaking encourages the researcher both to narrow and expand the analytical focus. Changes taking place in both the local community and the international arena will affect policymaking, as do the shifting linkages between the government, the local community, and international organiza-

tions. The political marginality of refugees and asylum seekers often means that governments can implement rapid changes in policy (in either positive or negative directions) with impugnity. This study has tried to sketch out some of these issues; further empirical and theoretical research is needed.

The problems looming in the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the as yet unresolved issues of the Middle East, and the recurrent ethnic and territorial conflicts in Africa promise unremitting refugee flows. Added to these are potential mass displacements of people as a result of environmental catastrophe and ecological change. It is important that social scientists try to understand the responses of host countries to these movements. In providing some insights we can possibly assist international organizations and national policymakers in coping with the refugee burden.

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