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The Invisible Refugee Camp: Durable Solutions for Boreah ‘Residuals’ in Guinea

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Abstract

What happens when refugees do not repatriate post-conflict? For those who remain in refugee camps, the remaining, durable solutions of resettlement and local integration may be neither feasible nor desirable. This study of Boreah camp in Guinea illustrates how refugees and refugee camps become invisible from the perspective of the host government and non-governmental organizations once assistance is rescinded and refugees refuse to avail themselves of the durable solutions offered. While refugees may cease to exist at the institutional level, ethnographic research reveals that those who continue to reside in defunct camps and/or continue to claim refugee status have eminently visible challenges. This article examines durable solutions—local integration in particular—from the perspective of refugees as well as the perspective of humanitarian actors.

Keywords

Guinea; Sierra Leone; durable solutions; local integration; repatriation; cessation clause; transnational; Fula; home; identity

Introduction

The West African nations of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia have been either embroiled in civil war or have hosted refugees produced by war since the early 1990s. When the needs of refugees began to overwhelm the capacity of their hosts, UNHCR, in agreement with the hosting governments, coordinated refugee camp construction, food assistance, and human services in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Boreah Camp was established in the Kissidougou region of Guinea in 2001, following a series of seemingly coordinated cross-border incursions from Sierra Leone and Liberia which displaced thousands of refugees and Guineans and destroyed long-standing refugee camps along the border regions. Boreah was populated primarily by Sierra Leoneans who initially had access to basic humanitarian services. However, with the fundamental change of circumstances in Sierra Leone, donor support quickly shifted from refugee ‘maintenance’ in Guinea to reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction programmes in Sierra Leone. This redirection of support

was evidenced in Guinea by the closure of Boreah Camp and the UNHCR regional Kissidougou office in 2006. As well, the upcoming invocation of the cessation clause for Sierra Leonean refugees in December 2008 will likely result in only a small proportion retaining refugee status: those who can establish a continuing fear of persecution or compelling reasons not to return to Sierra Leone, such as previous horrific treatment (Alistair Boulton pers. comm. 2008).

The estimated 1,803 Sierra Leoneans who remain in the defunct Boreah refugee camp, refusing to repatriate or locally integrate, are only a small proportion of the total number of Sierra Leoneans who have resided in Guinea as refugees since 1991.¹ However, their situation highlights the inadequacy of durable solutions in contexts where refugees perceive the hosting state to be unwilling or unable to provide secure legal status and where the cultural and historical backgrounds of the refugees challenge the model of single citizenship. From the perspective of governments, the United Nations, and humanitarian actors there are three durable solutions for refugees at the end of the refugee cycle: resettle in a third country, remain in the country of refuge and integrate with the local population, or repatriate. The full repatriation of refugees is considered to be a measure of consolidated peace and as such, 100 per cent repatriation is promoted by the Sierra Leonean government. According to UNHCR, resettlement is no longer an option, with the exception of a few individual cases. For the same reasons that cessation will be invoked—the Sierra Leonean government is now generally able and willing to extend protection so international protection is no longer required—most Sierra Leonean refugees would no longer meet resettlement country definitions of refugee (Alistair Boulton pers. comm. 2008).

Although they remain in Boreah, residents have been rendered invisible by the closure of the camp as well as by recent UNHCR statistics and budgetary planning. Assistance in the form of food, health care, shelter, education, and psycho-social interventions is no longer provided. Statistics publicly available on UNHCR's website lump Boreah residents together with Sierra Leonean urban refugees, effectively masking the particular challenges of living in an isolated environment far from UNHCR's central office in the capital. They are not legally visible, as their refugee identification documents are no longer valid and their residence status in Guinea is not clear. Residence status for long-term refugees remains a topic of debate for West African states, as evidenced by the Equality of Treatment for Refugees memorandum drafted by the committee of Trade, Customs, and Integration of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in September 2007. This memorandum underscored that refugees remain entitled to the benefits of community citizenship, including residence and work rights (Adepoju *et al.* 2007: 6). However, the Government of Guinea (GoG) has yet to pass and implement legal standards regarding durable solutions that would detail provisions on residence, naturalization, and the free movement of ECOWAS citizens.

¹The estimate comes from UNHCR Guinea internal statistics dated March 2008. According to my research assistants, who conducted an informal survey in the camp, the number is closer to 1,000. Many of these refugees live in between Boreah camp and other locations in Guinea, depending on trading and wage labour opportunities.

This disjuncture between policy and practice is keenly felt by Boreah residents, who remain sceptical about forfeiting refugee status for the precarious option of local integration. Refugees in Guinea are more vulnerable than ever as a result of political instability, union strikes, and the free-fall of the Guinean economy. There is striking evidence of the continued militarization of refugee hosting areas in the Forest Region of Guinea (Milner and Christoffersen-Deb 2006). As well, refugee protection in Boreah no longer exists; Sierra Leoneans must now travel to the capital, Conakry, in order to register their problems since the regional UNHCR office closed in 2006. At the same time that the Sierra Leoneans in Boreah have become invisible at the institutional level, they remain all too visible to their local hosts and have become targets for exploitation, especially since the Bureau National de Coordination de l'assistance aux Réfugiés (BNCR), the branch of the Guinean Government responsible for the protection of refugees, withdrew their forces from the camp following its 'official' closure in 2006.²

Their situation poignantly reminds us that durable solutions are premised not only on states' willingness to shoulder the practical and legal responsibilities of integrating refugees and returnees but also on refugees' willingness to avail themselves of these solutions. Their situation raises not only key legal issues related to refugee status, but also complex historical, economic, and cultural aspects of refugee identity that profoundly influence the success of post-conflict solutions to displacement. This article explores the reasons why refugees in Boreah cling to their refugee identity, and in doing so, questions the practice of rendering 'invisible' those who do not accept the options presented by the durable solutions framework. The following discussion is based on findings from ethnographic research conducted in Guinea over 15 months in 2001 and 2003 with Sierra Leonean refugees in two camps: Sembakounya and Boreah.

Background and Methods

On Saturday, 9 September, 2000, President Lansana Conté gave a speech to the Guinean nation. In the address, delivered entirely in the Soso language of his supporters, Conté described the cross-border attacks. He informed the Guinean populace that many of the rebels lived among the refugees, who were their accomplices. All the refugees should be rounded up, the President ordered, so that they could be kept under surveillance. He said:

Those who are in your neighbourhoods and whom you don't know, I've authorized your officials to stop tickling them, and to bring them together somewhere where we can keep an eye on them ...(applause). After all, no one in the world has ever taken better care of refugees than we have. Up to the present, there are rebels among them. They keep their ears to the ground and go back home frequently to tell what they have found out. Since they don't like liberty, don't let them come and go as they please any more. Nobody talks about the 400, 500 or 600 thousand refugees here. Even so, we welcomed them as brothers ...Everywhere you go, be vigilant. In town and on your farms! Some of the refugees have guns, I'm telling

²UNHCR's main national counterpart, the BNCR, was replaced by the Commission Nationale pour l'Intégration et le Suivi des Réfugiés (CNISR) by government decree in August 2007 (UNHCR 2008).

you! (Cheering) but look, listen ... if they have guns, these refugees are nowhere other than in your homes—you Guinean! So, round them up! Those who have guns, tie them up and bring them to the authorities! DO NOT SPARE ANYONE!³

Conté's speech fell on receptive ears. Guinean hospitality was stretched thin after years of hosting refugees with inadequate support from UNHCR. Particularly in the Forest Region, refugees' coping strategies were viewed as having negative effects on environmental resources and the local population (Black 1996). The host population had also been expecting Sierra Leonean refugees to repatriate in the wake of the 1999 Lome peace accords. It became abundantly clear that this was not going to occur in the short run. These domestic factors, combined with the cross-border incursions, produced a frightening exercise in anti-refugee violence. Security forces joined with civilians, as Conté had encouraged them to, in rounding up refugees. These vigilante groups attacked refugee camps, but focused primarily on self-settled refugees living in towns like Conakry and N'Zerekore (McGovern 2004: 532).

The majority of the more than 90 refugee settlements in the Languette region of the country were destroyed and tens of thousands were displaced by the fighting in other refugee-hosting regions of the country. The killing of the UNHCR head of office in Macenta and the destruction of UNHCR's regional office in Guéckédou led to the withdrawal of all but national staff 'volunteers' and eventually to the suspension of all UNHCR activities outside Conakry, leaving tens of thousands of refugees without assistance for months. Widespread human rights abuses were documented during that time: refugees were raped, beaten, robbed, expelled from their lodgings, and in some cases killed (Human Rights Watch 2001; Amnesty International 2001). As well, refugees were subjected to harassment and forced recruitment both as combatants and as porters to ferry looted goods back into Sierra Leone. Many also experienced physical and sexual abuse, arbitrary detention and direct attacks by all sides in the conflict (Milner and Christoffersen-Deb 2006: 63).

The following description by Ruth Camara, a Sierra Leonean refugee, gives a chilling sense of what it was like to be a refugee in Conakry at that time:

Within that week, the president of Guinea said that all refugees should leave the country. That they are not good. They are rebels. All the NGOS and UNHCR pulled and people left in camps with the militia and the police surrounding them with helicopter gunship. Some refugees in the camps ran. They were trying to get to someplace safe, but Conakry wasn't safe either. I was caught with my mother and my son in Conakry. We were arrested, beaten up, our property taken. The police were harassing us and the army people. At this time everything was box up, mix up! During that time the refugees were suffering-oh! They carry us to the *permanence*. [The *permanence* is the local community place which functions as meeting place, court house, and mediation locale.] There were so many people – more than 200-300. If you see us! Throughout the room no place to lay your head! We were there almost for a week ... When people were let out from there and they went back to the houses where they live all their stuff was taken and people said

³Translated by Assan Abraham Keita from Sosso into French in *Le Lynx*, December 11, 2000.

they don't want rebels in our country. They didn't say *refugees*, they said *rebels*! No matter how good you be, they treat you in that way because the President has given his own word on television and radio. It was not easy at that time (November 2003).

In this interview, Ruth speaks to the fear and xenophobia that permeated all levels of Guinean society. The identification and rounding up of refugees in urban centres and at checkpoints was enacted primarily by the local population, not the police; in particular by the refugees' landlords. This perversion of the traditionally honoured host-stranger relationship continues to underlie Boreah residents' reluctance to integrate locally. When the violence subsided in early 2001, UNHCR organized a massive relocation exercise to locate and transport refugees to four newly built refugee camps in the interior of the country: Sembakounya, Kountaya, Telikoro, and Boreah. I interviewed members of the Fula ethnic/linguistic group from Sierra Leone who resided in Sembakounya and subsequently transferred to Boreah when Sembakounya closed in 2003.

I began my fieldwork with a household survey of all the Fulas in Sembakounya camp, which was followed by selective life histories and in-depth interviews for those who transferred to Boreah camp, as well as numerous Fulas who repatriated to Sierra Leone or moved to Guinean towns.⁴ This longitudinal approach allowed me to trace the residential choices of Fula refugees, which represented a careful negotiation of available options. I trained a team of six fieldworkers, who were selected from among the population of Fula refugees in the camp. They became collaborators in the process of disentangling themes and digesting information; or as Schumaker describes, 'culture brokers' (2001: 13). By encouraging the fieldworkers to keep journals of their travels and to write letters, monthly reports, and 'thick descriptions' of key events, I hoped over time to elicit self-reflexive observations. Letters and emails sent since fieldwork ended in 2003 provide yet another layer of evidence, along with my own observations, interviews, and transcriptions.

These methods illuminated the composition of the camp population, household structure, and the creative presentation of family to the international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who provided services in the camps. My research into the structures of assistance came from numerous coordination meetings, archival work on past events and policies, and interviews and conversations with field workers, upper-level managers, and refugees in camps, regional offices, and headquarters. These layers of exposure offered a variety of perspectives on not only the institutional rhetoric regarding refugees and refugee policy, but the local enactment of these policies. I found that the geographic and cultural 'microclimates' of the camps had a profound effect on refugees' livelihood opportunities, social networks, and future outlook and had a more immediate influence on refugee decision-making than the formal language of durable solutions.

⁴I focused on members of the Fula ethnic/linguistic group due to my fluency in the Pular language and their particular trans-local history which illuminates larger patterns of movement and displacement common to many groups in West Africa. Fula is a term used in parts of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia for the ethnic group who speak Pular. They are known variously as Fulbe (sing. Pullo) in the Fouta Jallon region of Guinea, Fulani (in Anglophone Africa), Peul (in Francophone Africa), Woodaabe, Mbororo, Toucouleur, and HaalPularen (those who speak Pular).

Durable Solutions: The Humanitarian Version

Of the three official durable solutions, voluntary repatriation has come to be seen by governments, international organizations and many academics as the optimum solution, both in terms of desirability and feasibility (Black and Koser 1999; Rogge 1994). Refugees are brought back under the protection of the state of origin, they are restored to their 'homes', and the burden is lifted from the host society. In many cases, refugees are keen to return to their homes as soon as possible. The fact that the majority make their own way (Sierra Leonean repatriation being a case in point) regardless of assistance offered by governments or international agencies, suggests that durable solutions have been developed with little regard for the refugees' motivations (Wilson and Nuñez 1994: 173). Resettlement to a third country is an option for only a small fraction of refugees who meet the stringent criteria.

Repatriation to Sierra Leone has been cast by UNHCR as a success story: over 271,000 Sierra Leoneans repatriated between the emergency returns in late 2000 and the end of the organized repatriation programme in July 2004; of these returns, 92,000 were repatriated with UNHCR assistance.⁵ Resettlement was an option for those Sierra Leoneans who met resettlement criteria up until the time that repatriation was 'promoted' by UNHCR in 2003.

At that point, UNHCR wanted to avoid processing new resettlement cases while conducting a mass repatriation programme, seeing these as conflicting goals. As other researchers have noted, where there is little enthusiasm for durable solutions, the options for refugees are likely to be blocked off (Bascom 1994). Large-scale resettlement as a durable solution ceased and only resettlement cases already in the pipeline and dire medical situations were to be pursued. Following the cessation of official repatriation programmes in 2004, local integration was portrayed by UNHCR and the GoG as the only solution for residual Sierra Leoneans (UNHCR 2007). UNHCR believed this to be a rational and straightforward approach.

Integration through 'naturalization' is enshrined in the Refugee Convention of 1951, Article 34. However, the problem historically has been a lack of receptivity to this solution on the part of local hosts. In practice, local integration is often negotiated informally by refugees themselves and is much more common than state-assisted programmes. Jeff Crisp, head of UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service, defines local integration primarily as reflecting the 'assumption that refugees will remain indefinitely in their country of asylum and find a solution to their plight in that state' (2004: 3). Some authors view 'local integration' in terms of a final state of similarity to (although not necessarily assimilation with) local populations. Jacobsen describes what she terms *de facto* integration: '... the lived, everyday experience of refugees is that of being part of the local community' (2001: 9).

This everyday experience includes: lack of physical danger; freedom of movement in the host country and freedom to return to the country of origin; access to sustainable livelihoods;

⁵In a UNHCR-commissioned review of the repatriation and reintegration programme in Sierra Leone, the figure of 271,000 is used to describe the 'cumulative total figure of returnees' (Sperl and De Vriese 2005: 13). The figure of 92,000 is used by Milner and Christoffersen-Deb to describe refugees who were assisted by UNHCR to repatriate (2006: 72).

access to government services like education, health and housing; social inclusion through intermarriage and social interactions with the host community; and a standard of living comparable to that of the host community (Jacobsen 2001: 9). Urban refugees in Guinea enjoy some aspects of this *de facto* integration. For refugees who never resided in refugee camps in Guinea and instead settled directly in local communities, 'local integration' was a *de facto* strategy long before UNHCR began to promote local integration as a durable solution. While individually-negotiated integration may be predominant, Jacobsen emphasizes the importance of formal legal status, ideally permanent residence or citizenship in the host country, as the final step to full integration, since without it, *de facto* integrated refugees remain vulnerable (see also Kibreab 1989).

In light of the coming cessation of their refugee status, Sierra Leoneans in Guinea and elsewhere in West Africa are now being encouraged to choose either local integration or voluntary repatriation. Those who choose repatriation will be given the cost of transportation and a cash grant by UNHCR. According to Alistair Boulton, UNHCR Senior Regional Legal Advisor for West Africa, Guinea is one of seven countries participating in a multi-year, multi-agency local integration initiative. The multi-year aspect of the programme is meant specifically to address the situation of those residuals who continue to hold out for third country resettlement. Those who opt for local integration are to be offered 'secure alternative legal status under domestic or regional legal instruments together with community-based socioeconomic support' (pers. comm. 2008).

Constant rumours and the occasional successful resettlement case have caused great suspicion on the part of refugees, who believe if they remain in the camp they will have a stronger case for resettlement. Many refugees who relocated to Boreah had already been living in Guinean camps for over 10 years. Why not stay longer and see if resettlement will again become an option once repatriation and local integration programmes finish? There is also general disenchantment with local integration after fellow Boreah residents shared the outcomes of their local integration experience at the hands of Guinean officials. In the following section, Boreah residents describe the disconnect between the rhetoric and reality of durable solutions.

Durable Solutions: The Local Version

The life histories of Sierra Leonean refugees reveal multiple 'homes' over the course of a lifetime that connect kin across the borders of the Mano River Union countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia (Gale 2006). Most refugees interviewed as part of this research project viewed relationships as the crucial component of reconstituting 'home'. They continued to nurture pre-displacement social and kin connections through visits, arranged marriages, and fostering children, despite considerable cost and hardship (see Gale 2006, 2007), in the hopes of ensuring future financial, emotional, and social support. The continuation of movement as a livelihood strategy is not unique to West African refugees; Stigter and Monsutti describe similar findings among Afghan refugees:

For many, migration has become a way of life: it is now highly organized, and the transnational networks that have developed to support it are now a major, even constitutive, element in the social, cultural, and economic life of Afghans (2005: 3).

Like Afghans, the Fula have been 'between' states all their lives. The Fula were persecuted under President Sékou Touré's regime in Guinea, denied citizenship in Sierra Leone post-flight, and marginalized upon return to Guinea. For such historically trans-local refugees, the protection of a state is less important in daily life than local connections and livelihood opportunities, aspects of refugees' experience that are not reflected in the definition of refugee. In general, citizenship in Sierra Leone and Guinea is of limited value and does not guarantee protection *by* or—perhaps more importantly for Fula refugees—*from* the state.

For Sierra Leonean refugees who were born in Guinea or whose parents were born in Guinea, their continued visits back and forth problematize state-based definitions of identity and belonging. As has been described in conflicts in other African arenas, the cross-border ties and historical relationships of trade, kinship, and marriage confound neat boundaries and are at odds with the finite solutions presented by the international community. Fresia describes this phenomenon among the refugees living in the northern border region of Senegal since the border skirmishes between Senegal and Mauritania in 1989:

In order to fall under the protection of UNHCR, one must fit into the classic stereotype of a refugee: a passive victim in need of assistance, cut off from all ties of culture and place. One cannot integrate among the local people nor return to one's place of origin when one would like to without renouncing refugee status. In fact, UNHCR assumes that those refugees who are officially under their protection should stay in the camps while waiting for eventual repatriation, maintaining themselves exclusively on the basic assistance offered (Fresia 2004: 46).

Mobility and multiple national identities have long been part of the life course for Fula men and women and complicate the a-cultural, a-historical perspective presented by the durable solution rhetoric. Rather than seeing displacement as clearly bounded in space and time, Fula people do not identify a clear beginning or end to the conflict that led to their residence in a refugee camp in Guinea. For the Fula, conflict and migration have become durable aspects of the social landscape. As Davis describes, 'the experience of war, famine and plague is continuous with ordinary social experience; people place it in social memory and incorporate it with their accumulated culture' (1992: 152).

The Fula have been negotiating mobility and crisis not only over the course of a single life span, but over generations; beginning in the seventeenth century as 'voluntary' migrants (cattle herders, traders, Islamic teachers) and then 'involuntary' migrants in the 1970s and 1980s during the repressive Touré regime in Guinea. It is estimated that by the end of Sékou Touré's rule, up to two million Guineans, predominantly Fula, had fled to neighbouring countries. In 1970, the 'Portuguese invasion'—a supposed Fula-led plot to topple Touré—was regarded as the climax of the Guinean Fula exodus to neighbouring African states. Those individuals who fled to Sierra Leone were never officially recognized as refugees nor did the Sierra Leone government make an effort to incorporate them into the country as citizens.

In the 1990s, this tide reversed as Fulas fled to Guinea in waves depending on factors such as region of residence in Sierra Leone, gender, occupation, and relative access to resources. Often women and children were sent to Guinea to live with relatives or in refugee camps, while the men and older sons would remain to tend to what property, businesses, or cattle were left. A refugee family registered in the camp would have some members present while others dispersed among Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea in order to best capitalize on camp resources (food, shelter, education) as well as resources elsewhere (trade, religious education, family members).

The following case study traces the path of one family currently residing in Boreah and in doing so illuminates the historical, cultural, and livelihood issues that complicate the implementation of durable solutions in Guinea.

The Path to Boreah Camp

Abdu, Mariama, and their extended family have been ‘official’ refugees for the last 14 years, spending the majority of their time in UNHCR-sponsored camps. From 2001 to 2003 they lived in Sembakounya camp, located in the Dabola region of Guinea, and since that time they have been living in Boreah. Like many fellow camp dwellers, they lived in a variety of locations over time: camps, Guinean towns, and even periodically Sierra Leone in order to test out the possibility of return. When Sembakounya camp closed in July 2003 due to the large outflow of repatriating refugees, the fact that Sierra Leone was considered peaceful and safe by the international community after 12 years of civil war and that UNHCR-sponsored repatriation was in full force for Sierra Leonean refugees did not necessarily convince all Fula people that it was time to go home. The concept of home itself was in question.

For months prior to the closing of Sembakounya camp, people in the camp (both refugee and non-refugee camp residents) had been using the UNHCR-funded truck convoys to repatriate permanently to Sierra Leone as well as to ‘go and see’ about possibilities in Sierra Leone and then return to the camp. Some camp inhabitants went to investigate livelihood opportunities and housing, as well as to assess their current family situations. They were not intending to repatriate permanently to Sierra Leone at that time, contrary to the intended purpose of the UNHCR-funded convoys. Instead, people bought refugee identification/ration cards from a broker in the camp who had dozens of them. People would buy these cards so as not to forfeit their legitimate card, which was their source of benefits and eventual repatriation assistance, particularly for family heads with many dependents who were traveling solo on their ‘go and see’ visit. In Sembakounya, the official word was that the camp was going to close.

Yet there were contradictory indications: building permanent structures for UNHCR and representatives of the BNCR in the camp; repairing the road; continuing third country resettlement; and constant rumours of the transfer of all urban refugees to Sembakounya following the 2003 anti-UNHCR riots in Conakry. The official word was that if the population of the camp fell below 5,000 people, it would have to close in accordance with United Nations World Food Programme’s (WFP) food aid policy. From Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) estimates, it was clear that the number of cards in circulation did not

match the resident population.⁶ Another piece of evidence of the inflated population was the blatant and well-organized sale of food items, transported by trucks that left Sembakounya camp full of oil, sugar, and beans.

For Abdu and his family, it had become increasingly difficult to assess their options. They consider themselves to be simultaneously refugees, Guinean, and Sierra Leonean as he and his wife were born in Guinea and then moved to Sierra Leone as children. From their family history one could assume that Abdu and Mariama are Guinean citizens by birth and their children are Sierra Leonean citizens by birth. However, they are at home culturally and linguistically in both countries and, like many other Fula refugees, were actively negotiating possibilities of return to Guinean family by visiting relatives outside the camp while in Sembakounya. The imminent closing of the camp forced them to choose from among the different options: repatriate to Sierra Leone, stay in the Dabola region without assistance with Abdu's family, or transfer to Boreah camp. They finally decided to transfer to Boreah, and remain there as of June 2008. Why did they choose to become 'invisible' refugees in Boreah?

Abdu participated in a 'go and see' visit and returned from the Koidu area in Sierra Leone quite discouraged and convinced that repatriation was not a possibility. Contrary to what he had been told by repatriation promoters in Sembakounya camp, primary education was not free. The Sierra Leone government had not yet begun to pay teachers and the parents therefore were 'volunteering' to subsidize the teachers' salaries. As well, there was no affordable space big enough for Abdu and his family. If there were fewer people in the family, they could have moved in with his uncle or built a small structure before the rains began. But in addition to their three sons, he and Mariama have two foster children and are also caring for their Guinean niece from the nearby town and her sickly child. Therefore, they would have been obliged to pay rent for two or three rooms as well as covering school fees for the children. As an Imam, a well-respected Islamic religious leader, with little money put aside and no immediate prospects of employment, Abdu did not see how it would be possible to support his family if they returned to Sierra Leone.

Local integration did not seem to make sense either. Abdu, Mariama and their children have now been absent from Sierra Leone for over seven years and Abdu cannot offer his family in Guinea compensation for their presence. For Abdu as well as other Fula refugees who tried to return 'home' in Guinea, the disgrace of returning penniless and dependent was worse than staying in the camp. Abdu could at least retain some prestige in the camp by fostering relatives' children for religious and formal education. In 2003 they could not foresee that Boreah camp would close and that they would become entrapped by poverty and lack of options. They found that deciding where to live once aid is rescinded is a complicated process of negotiating resources and weighing the relative strengths of different social connections.

⁶Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) estimate as of August 2002, based on latrine fill time, sick visits, and their informal survey, was 4,430. At this time, UNHCR was claiming there were 6,800 people in the camp. When MSF went by UNHCR's original population figure of 7,500 in April 2001 and then added the new arrivals and births and subtracted the number of deaths and repatriates, they still had a figure that was 1,600 less than UNHCR's.

Abdu and Mariama's experiences as refugees reveal a complex social world that contrasts with the standard view of refugees as dependent and socially dislocated. Their story reveals a complex intertwining of cultural, economic, and political factors that make life in limbo more attractive than a durable solution to their predicament. From the perspective of Boreah residents such as Abdu and Mariama, the solutions offered by the GoG and UNHCR are neither transparent nor attractive.

Being a 'Residual' in Boreah

After leaving Guinea in December 2003, I continued to correspond with my research assistants, in particular Sékou Barrie, who first wrote long letters documenting events in the camp and then emails once he learned to use the internet. His messages became increasingly desperate once UNHCR and the international community began reducing aid in March 2004. The following description of events in Boreah camp is a compilation of five years of emails, calls, and letters. It is necessarily a one-sided, biased version of life in Boreah camp that is likely to have been dramatized for my benefit as a sympathetic listener and occasional remitter. However, the circumstances of life in Boreah are not made visible in human rights reports any more than they are made visible in UNHCR statistics and reports. In the absence of either corroborating or contradictory evidence, are we to discount the camp residents' version of reality? Refugees in Boreah do not have the information necessary to situate their experiences within larger agendas related to state politics, funding trends, and global humanitarian crisis and understand the shift in resources. What they know is the immediate effect of policies on the livelihoods, health, and safety of their friends and family. Given my first-hand experience of living conditions in Boreah and Guinea's recent political and economic freefall, the situation described below is altogether probable.

UNHCR-organized repatriation ended for Sierra Leoneans in July 2004, at which time 658 children were attending school in Boreah; by 2005, there was no more schooling for 'residuals'. In August 2004, UNHCR created temporary identity documents for refugees without cards. The process of promoting durable solutions was subtle; a gradual rescinding of support in the forms of dwindling food aid and the cessation of programmes such as micro-finance and other livelihood supporting initiatives.

UNHCR claims that 144 individuals or 60 families opted for local integration by December 2005. The local integration package offered by the Guinean government consisted of 135,000 FG (~US\$30) for non-food items plus six months' house rent. By Guinean law, these individuals could acquire nationality if they wanted, but Sékou became skeptical about the GoG's sincerity after hearing stories from those who chose to integrate locally:

Refugees who opted for integration were disappointed. They were told they will get a house for themselves and enough money for them to start business, but to their surprise they were presented with 50,000 FG, one bag of rice and three months rent. The rent money will be given directly to the landlord or house owner. If the one who is integrating has debts they must pay before going. These refugees do not believe that they will be given land or nationality as it is only a verbal agreement from the government ... One refugee man who integrated in Coyah went back to

Sierra Leone because he could not cope with the situation (Sékou Barrie, March 2007).

By September 2006, UNHCR officially closed Boreah, signifying that there was no longer any material assistance or UNHCR presence in the camp. One water point was retained and two BNCR officials remained to 'protect' the refugees. In November 2006, shortly after closing their regional office in Kissidougou, UNHCR called all Sierra Leonean refugees in Boreah to gather for an assessment. UNHCR explained again at that time that the only two options for Sierra Leoneans were repatriation and local integration. Refugees' sole recourse was with UNHCR in Conakry, where the extremely vulnerable might be eligible to receive limited medical assistance and support. In reality, this promised medical assistance covered only 50 per cent of expenses and required endless paperwork and office visits. Most people could not afford the transport from Boreah to Conakry, normally a 12 hour drive.

Due to the deterioration of the roads, the expense and scarcity of public transport, and the tenor of host-refugee relations, refugees prefer to travel on foot inconspicuously, using bush paths. What used to be a five hour drive to Kissidougou town, the market hub for the area, now takes four days. Few refugees are willing to make the trip for fear of being attacked along the way. Refugees have no local recourse for crimes committed against them by the citizens since the two BNCR representatives vacated the camp in April 2007. However, an accidental shooting of a child in Boreah in August 2007 brought the residents to visibility again in the eyes of the local authorities and revealed the tenuous future of this defunct camp. In a letter to me Alpha Jalloh described the shooting incident and the efforts of the camp leaders to bring justice to the parents of the dead child. Their interactions with the local authorities brought negative attention to their predicament:

On August 16th, the Governor of Guinea and a UNHCR worker went to the camp and said 'What are you waiting for? Boreah is now closed! There is no resettlement, no integration, and no repatriation. All have been closed!' They said that we should go back home. If not, they want their land immediately. They said that there will be a time where nobody will be in the camp or the surrounding villages (Alpha Jalloh, letter from Boreah Camp, September 2007).

According to phone calls, letters, and emails with my former research assistants and other Boreah refugees, the local population has long since stripped anything of value from the camp, including zinc roofs, wooden doors and furniture, and water pumps. It is not clear whether residents have been able to negotiate access to arable land or if they are solely working as wage labourers on Guinean farms. Whatever the situation may be, residents are in need of food and other basic supplies and have been engaging in a variety of risky livelihood strategies to support their families. Foraging for food in the surrounding forest puts Sierra Leoneans at the mercy of the local population, who supposedly limit refugees' freedom of movement due to their lack of protection or current legal documents. I was told that women and children are prostituting themselves in neighbouring communities to provide basic supplies for their families. Residents also relayed stories of illness, malnutrition, and death, particularly among children and elders. Boreah residents claim that they have not seen any kind of assistance since UNHCR's visit in November 2006.

Conclusion

We like to inform you about our present situation in Boreah camp. UNHCR has declared that there is no more resettlement for Sierra Leoneans. That has caused a lot of frustration of the Sierra Leoneans who have spent 10 years in the camps of Guinea ... The Guinean government wants to force UNHCR Guinea for us to be integrated into Guinea society because they are seeing the high budget proposed by the donors. But the conditions, if we the Sierra Leoneans agree to the integration (which we are not willing because our lives will not be safe in the society) are such that at any time problems occur between the hosts and the refugees (Sékou Barrie, letter from Boreah Camp, November 2004).

Sékou Barrie's letter of frustration captures the sentiments of 'residual' Sierra Leonean refugees who remain in Guinea; they see themselves as falling into the cracks between the durable solutions presented to them by UNHCR and the GoG. The prospect of coming under the protection of a state through a durable solution appears less important than economic viability, immediate personal security, and prospects for the long-term continuance of social ties and cultural norms.

Many have witnessed promises broken concerning local integration packages and fear relocating without a longer-term safety net. Others have a persistent fear of returning to Sierra Leone and may still be negotiating their options by seeking information as to the presence or absence of social rivals within the extended family, the condition of their home village, and the prospects of finding work and education for their children. There are female-headed households with many dependents who believe they have no options but to remain in the camp. They are retained by relationships created in the camp setting, destitution, and free housing. As well, Boreah refugees have learned the power of statistics and retain hope that having a critical mass of residuals may someday render them visible to the humanitarian regime.

The situation of invisible residuals in Boreah points to the need for alternative durable solutions that take into account regional post-conflict dynamics as well as dynamic aspects of identity and home. UNHCR has reiterated that it is not a migration organization, but has also recently acknowledged that refugee and migration policies should be mutually reinforcing (UNHCR 2007).

Mixed movements of refugees and other migrants have blurred the distinction between refugees and migrants in public and political opinion. In addition, refugee movements can over time become secondary, mixed or irregular movements. There has been a recognition that it would be unwise to continue to confine durable solutions to the concept that the mobility of refugees would represent a failure for local integration processes (Fielden 2008: 6).

UNHCR has supported research among Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, which has lent a more sophisticated understanding of long term livelihood and risk diversification strategies that span borders (UNHCR 2004a, b). But as of 2008, no needs assessments have been conducted beyond a census of the residuals in Boreah. As this article has demonstrated,

context is crucial for understanding why these residuals continue to refuse the durable solutions offered and for developing a workable solution in advance of the impending cessation clause.

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