Angolan refugees in South Africa: alternatives to permanent repatriation?

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Abstract

For almost twenty years, voluntary repatriation has been considered by the international community the preferable, durable and fitting solution to refugee situations. However, the numerous range of socio-economic and political factors which caused protracted refugee situations in the countries of asylum and the reluctance of refugees to return have raised doubts regarding the effectiveness of these programmes. The existing body of literature on return migration focuses on migrants' decision-making processes to return and on the challenges encountered upon their return including post-return reintegration and identity crises, but a limited number of studies address the issue of refugees facing repatriation to post-conflict areas. This article seeks to contribute to the available literature on repatriation by examining the case study of Angolan refugees in South Africa, the implementation of the cessation of refugee status and its consequences on the decision-making process. Findings revealed that the lack of options to acquire permanent residence in the country of asylum represented a major block to transnational mobility. The article addresses the urgent need to reshape the notion of return in the context of refugee repatriation towards more flexible forms of return involving periods of dual residence and back and forth movements.

Keywords Angolan refugees in South Africa, voluntary repatriation, temporary return, cessation of refugee status.

Introduction

The article discusses the process of repatriation of Angolan refugees from South Africa to Angola after the South African government's declaration of cessation of refugee status for Angolans in 2013. The purpose of the study is

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to understand the reasons why Angolan refugees in South Africa refused voluntary repatriation and the factors that influence decision-making.

The life of a refugee can be divided according into the following stages: perception of threat, decision to flee, a period of extreme danger and flight; reaching safety; camp behaviour; repatriation, and settlement or resettlement (Stein 1981: 320). The last three steps are considered 'durable solutions' to refugee problems. When compared to resettlement and local integration voluntary repatriation is presented as the most desirable of the three durable solutions for the refugees' problems and defined as the return of refugees to their country of origin, based upon a free and informed decision, in and to conditions of safety and dignity, and with the full restoration of national protection United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 1996).

In the African continent massive voluntary repatriation movements between neighbouring countries have occurred during the 1990s. It is estimated that between 1992 and 2000 over 8 million refugees have repatriated, including 236,000 refugees who returned to Liberia and 195,000 to Sierra Leone (UNHCR 2002). During the same decade, due to the resolution of protracted armed civil conflicts, the acquisition of independent statehood and the successful transition to democracy, the cessation of refugee status for *ceased circumstances*[1] was invoked five times for the following African countries: South Africa (1995), Namibia (1995), Mozambique (1996), Malawi (1996) and Ethiopia (1999) leading to the return of more refugees (Bonoan 2001). More recently, in 2012, the UNHCR recommended countries to invoke the cessation clause for all Angolan refugees[2].

Return decisions are complex and influenced by a series of structural determinants including adverse socio-economic and political conditions both in the country of asylum and in the country of origin (Rogge and Akol 1989). Structural factors such as the length of time spent in the host country, language barriers for refugee children born in exile, deteriorated living conditions, loss

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[1] Article 1C(5) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, paragraphs 6(A)(e) and (f) of the UNHCR Statute and Article I(4)(e) of the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention. The cessation of refugee status based on the 'ceased circumstances' provision was applied under UNHCR mandate on 21 occasions between 1973 and 1999.

[2] Article 4 of the *Implementation of the Comprehensive Strategy for the Angolan Refugee Situation,* including UNHCR's recommendations on the applicability of the ceased circumstances cessation clause states that: 'UNHCR recommends that States continue to implement all aspects of the cessation of refugee status during the first half of 2012'.

of income-generating activities and a politically hostile environment upon return can explain, on the one hand, why refugees are forced to remain in their country of asylum for a protracted period of time and, on the other, why they cannot return home as the causes of flight still persist.

The body of literature on the determinants of repatriation decision-making processes and likelihood to return have grown over the past fifteen years. Prior to that, very little was known about 'why refugees return home' as opposed to 'why refugees do not want to go back'. In Africa, a growing body of research on repatriation has emerged following the massive return of refugees to their home countries during the 1990s.

The article is divided into four sections. The first section explains how structural forces and migrants' agency can determine voluntary and involuntary movements and reviews the literature on refugee decision-making processes, the second section provides information on the case study, the third section explains the methodology used and the fourth section discusses the results and provides the conclusion.

Analytical Frame: Structure–Agency Impasse

One of the many questions underlying the concepts of *migration* and *return* is why individuals and households decide to move and whether their decisions are the result of individuals' rational choices or rather depend on the unavoidable constraints of social structures which disable agents' decisions. For decades, the social sciences have been grappling to better understand the relationship between structure and agency posing to migration scholars the challenge of determining how the micro and macro level of analysis interact and can be integrated. The limitation of not having a theoretical framework able to reconcile structure and agency might, in fact, not only result in the *ex-post* application of migration theories to validate the findings of the empirical research, but also prevent the formulation of 'robust concepts and hypotheses concerning the interaction of these concepts' (Bakewell 2010: 5).

The challenge to recompose this fracture has been sharpened by the migration studies' traditional dichotomy of *voluntary* (economic migrant) versus *involuntary* (refugee) movements which has placed in contrast migrants' agency of taking informed decisions, on the one hand, and the structural constraints that force people to move, on the other. This separation is misleading because decisions to move are influenced by individuals' choices as well as by external constraints.

Drawing from Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, Richmond (1988, 1993) attempted to move beyond this dual dichotomy by introducing the notion of *proactive* migrants in contrast with *reactive*. The former are migrants whose decisions are made within a 'rational choice framework', the latter are those whose decisions are constrained by socio-economic, political and environmental events. As he pointed out in explaining the differences between *proactive* migrants and *reactive* behaviours:

Under certain conditions the decision to move may be made after due consideration of all relevant information, rationally calculated to maximise net advantage, including both material and symbolic rewards. At the other extreme, the decision to move may be made in a state of panic facing a crisis situation which leaves few alternatives but escape from intolerable threats. Between these two extremes, many decisions made by both 'economic' and 'political migrants' are a response to diffuse anxiety generated by a failure of the social system to provide for the fundamental needs of individual, biological, economic and social (Richmond 1988: 17).

Richmond's approach enables blurring of the distinction between *economic migrants* and *refugees* by placing their decisions on a spatial continuum ranging from individuals' choice behaviour and structural constraints, however, its limitation lies, on one hand, in the lack of 'attempting to integrate it with a larger domain of migration theory' (Rosenblum and Tichenor 2012: 40) and, on the other, on the fact that is not fully 'capturing the interaction between agency and structure' (Bakewell 1996: 52).

Amongst the researchers who attempted to bridge the gap between refugee studies and broader migration theories, de Haas (2010) proposed a convincing theoretical framework to solve the structure–agency impasse. His migration system, applicable to different forms of migration, both voluntary and involuntary, is based on the tension between *structural forces* (i.e. socio-economic and political factors) and *migration capabilities*. The latter are defined as 'the social, human and material capital individuals are able to mobilize in order to migrate' (de Haas 2010: 16) and together with migrants' *aspirations* can determine how individuals make their choices. As he explained:

If we conceive migration as a response to spatial opportunities rather than mere economic differentials, it is possible to achieve a more inclusion migration theory covering most forms of migration instead of contending with

the current state of migration characterized by a rather artificial distinction between voluntary (economic) and forced migration. Rather than applying such dichotomous classification, it is more appropriate to conceive of a continuum running from low to high constraints, in which all migrants deal with structural constraints, although to highly varying degrees (de Haas 2010: 18).

By assuming that all individuals, including displaced people and refugees, need certain *capabilities* and access to 'positive freedoms' (de Haas 2011: 19) in the form of social, human and material capital to be able to flee their countries, this analytical model questions the boundaries between voluntary and forced migration. In essence, all different forms of migratory movements, with the exception of slavery and deportation, involve structural constraints as well as the autonomy of the agency.

It is beyond the scope of this article to critically review all theoretical approaches which have tried to mitigate the existing fracture between agency and structure. Here the aim is rather twofold: firstly to present refugee repatriation as one form of return migration by overcoming the nuanced distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements and secondly, to 'analyse refugees' return decisions alongside other migratory decisions (Harpviken 2014: 58). For the purpose of this article refugee repatriation is placed along the same side as other forms of return migration which are the result of both structural forces and individual choices and are subject to the theoretical scrutiny of migrations studies. From a conceptual perspective, blurring the dichotomy between voluntary and involuntary movements will allow the exploration of the implications of migration theories such as transnationalism to the case of refugees (Al-Ali et al. 2001: 616) making irrelevant the separation between refugee and migration studies.

Refugee Repatriation and the Decision-Making Process

The concept of voluntary repatriation moves from the belief that all refugees intend to return to their home country, an externally conceived assumption 'which has not been subjected to independent examination' (Harrell-Bond 1989: 43). The belief that refugees will return home when conditions in their countries of origin have changed and the cause of flight is no longer in place is the core of the mantra of voluntary repatriation. As Bakewell pointed out:

Repatriation is often seen as the optimum outcome for refugee situations as if by definition and the obvious thing for refugees to do. The fact of their wanting

to return is taken for granted so their motivation for repatriating does not necessarily arise as a question (1996: 15-16).

Scholars (Harrell-Bond 1989; Rogge & Akol 1989) have widely debated the principle of voluntary repatriation and in particular 'the suggestion that refugees should be encouraged to go back to countries from which they were once forced to escape has inevitably aroused passionate disagreement and discussion' (Crisp 1986: 163). There are, in fact, circumstances when return is impossible and not desirable (Long and Crisp 2010: 56) and even when conditions are conducive for refugees to repatriate, problems might arise due to the challenges of reintegration in the country of origin (Bascom 2005; Cornish et al. 1999; Omata 2013; Setrana & Tonah 2014). In this regard, Harrell-Bond (1989) argued that there are no empirical evidences to support the idea that reintegration into the sending countries would be more successful than into the host community.

Other studies (Harrell-Bond 1989; Hathaway 2006; Zieck 2004) pointed out how voluntary repatriation has been deliberately used by host governments and refugee agencies to terminate refugeehood situations by promoting repatriation when durable and fundamental changes of conditions in the country of origin have not occurred. Stein (1997:4) referred to 'premature repatriation' as a particular form of return under duress and the resulting 'lack of asylum which comes when both the country of origin and the refugees are not ready for the return'. A number of empirical studies (Bascom 1994; Koser 1997; Rutinwa 1996) suggested that refugees repatriate spontaneously and without any assistance when conditions in their home countries improve, but also that self-repatriation movements might be caused by hostile socio-economic and environmental conditions in the country of asylum (Ighodaro 2006) and by deliberate pressure on refugees from 'host governments, local communities, militia forces and other actors with the specific intention of inducing refugees to go back to their homeland' (Crisp 2000: 17).

Safety in the country of origin is also considered to be a pivotal determinant of the decision-making process as returnees are more likely to return to their country of origin when they perceive that safety and security are fully restored (Kifleyesus 2010: 55). Even when conditions in the country of origin have changed and peace is restored, refugees may still be reluctant to return. There are numerous reasons why return is not a desirable option for refugees including: the lack of access to reliable information on the conditions in the country of origin (Koser 1997), the presence of social networks in the country

of asylum (Karooma 2014), the notions of 'home' and 'identity' (Chowdhory 2012; Malkki 1995) which are subjected to a reconceptualization during exile and the lack of economic opportunities in the country of origin (Kunz 1981). Continued insecurity was mentioned by Crisp amongst the main reasons for Ugandan refugees resisting repatriation from Sudan. As he analysed:

Given the various forms of violence and intimidation that returnees could expect in West Nile, it was hardly surprising that few decided to go home. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that many of those who did choose to return had a false impression of the security they would enjoy (Crisp 1986: 172).

Kibreab (2003) argued that what makes return an interesting option is not only the conditions in the country of origin but rather a combination of factors occurring both in the country of asylum and in the country of origin. His theory challenges the simplistic assumption that refugees should return to their actual homes and communities from which they were uprooted. While in exile, in fact, 'refugees go through a process of transformation which enable them to create new social networks transcending ethnic and religious boundaries and weakening their attachment to the place of origin' (Kibreab 2003: 33). The geographical context also plays a pivotal role as refugees originating from the same country and living in different places react differently to repatriation. Refugees who are hosted in the 'global north' can access a wide range of civil, social and economic rights and have the opportunity to conduct employment and self-employment activities and this has a strong influence on their decision to return. Those who are living in less developed countries generally enjoy fewer socio-economic rights and are more inclined to repatriate. This leads to the conclusion that foremost are 'the conditions in countries of asylum that influence the decision of refugees to stay put or return' (Kibreab 2003: 45).

The Angolan Case

Angola was devastated by a long civil war which began in 1975 after the country's declaration of independence in 1961 and was fought between two strongly opposed political factions; on one side the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and, on the other side, a rebel movement known as the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA[3]).

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[3] UNITA was a pro-Western organization in Angola formed in 1966 by Jonas Savimbi. Together with Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), it opposed the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) under Agostinho Neto in the Angolan

The war ended after the killing of UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, when a Peace Agreement was signed in Luena in April 2002.

Almost thirty years of brutal war destroyed most of the country's infrastructures and left an estimated one million people dead and four million internally displaced (IRIN 2005). Since the end of the civil war the UN's refugee agency has been involved in the repatriation of Angolan refugees residing in neighbouring countries such as Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). During the first phase of repatriation, between 2002 and 2007, an estimated 400,000 refugees of a total of 600,000 have returned to their area of origin, as the majority of the 4 million displaced did (UNHCR 2007).

At present, Angola is experiencing a period of peace and tranquillity after the suffering and destruction which was inflicted on the population during the civil war and the government has made efforts to rebuild the country through massive development projects. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached 4.1% in 2013 (World Bank 2013) and political elections were held peacefully under the new constitution. Despite the remarkable improvements, a large number of the 24 million inhabitants are still living in abject poverty (Carciotto 2014).

Although the government of Angola has expressed a desire and a strong commitment to support the return of all individuals in exile, research (Kaun 2008) highlighted that the reintegration process which followed the first phase of repatriation was challenged by the lack of available resources, investment and commitment offered by government in addition to the valuable but insufficient efforts made by aid agencies and international donors. During the second phase of repatriation the Angolan government's made valuable efforts to provide returnees with *bilhete de identidade* (identity and birth registration documents) as well as passports for those who applied for local integration in the former asylum countries.[4]

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civil war of the 1970s. South Africa supported UNITA and the FNLA by sending SADF* troops into Angola in the hope of decreasing the danger of Marxist infiltration into South Africa and maintaining a hold over the administration of South West Africa. But Russian support of the MPLA, including Cuban troops and sophisticated weaponry, meant that South Africa had to back off and the MPLA took over the government of Angola in 1975. Thereafter the SADF continued its support of UNITA, launching a number of offensives against the MPLA and SWAPO* on both sides of the Angolan/Namibian border in the 1980s until 1988 and the independence of Namibia two years later http://bit.ly/1G2MQu1 Accessed 20 March 2015.

[4] A UNHCR staff member (personal communication, 28 May 2015).

Since 2002, the UNHCR has entered into tripartite agreements with representatives from a number of African states including the DRC, Congo Brazzaville, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. This facilitated the process of repatriation which took place spontaneously and through programmes of assisted repatriation. Nonetheless in 2011, according to the UNHCR (2012), more than 100,000 Angolans still remained in exile in several countries, including the DRC (74,500), Zambia (23,000), South Africa (5700) and Namibia (1700).

Following the declaration of the cessation[5] of Angolan refugees in 2012 more Angolans have returned home. In 2013, 1,666[6] former Angolan refugees, of whom 35[7] from South Africa, and the remaining from Zambia (1,161), Botswana (429) and Namibia (40) were repatriated through voluntary repatriation programmes.[8] During the last phase of voluntary repatriation (VOLREP) which resumed in August 2014, 17,027 individuals were repatriated to Angola. Of these, 15,224 (4,719 households) from the DRC, 1,620 (478 households) from Zambia and 182 (79 households) from the Republic of Congo.[9]

In May 2013, following a Cabinet decision, the South African government formally declared the cessation of refugee status for all Angolan refugees;[10] this announcement came in the wake of the 2011 UNHCR declaration (UNHCR 2012) that conditions in Angola had improved and that it was safe for refugees to return and followed the political and economic stabilization of Angola as well as improvements in peace and security in the country over the last few years. As declared by the South African Minister of Home Affairs:

Angola is a country that has decisively put its past behind it and is notching up some impressive developmental statistics. It is one of the fastest growing economies on the continent. It is a country attracting a good deal of foreign investment. The human development index in regard to health, education and

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[5] Article 1C(5) and (6) of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states that 'refugee status may cease due to fundamental changes in the objective circumstances in the country of origin upon which refugee status was based'.

[6] A UNHCR staff member (personal communication, 17 April 2015).

[7] The nationality of 1 of these 1,666 returnees in unknown.

[8] In total 38 Angolans decided to return voluntarily from South Africa; 35 were repatriated in 2013 and 3 in 2014. P. Msizi (personal communication, 26 May 2015).

[9] A UNHCR staff member (personal communication, 28 May 2015).

[10] Section 5(1)(e) of South Africa's Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998.

income shows that Angola has since 2006 performed above the regional average and, it is a rapidly growing tourist destination (PMG 2013a)

The declaration of Cabinet had two effects: 'firstly, the South African government agreed with the UNHCR recommendation that Angola was no longer a country producing genuine refugees. Secondly, this allows the Department of Home affairs to find durable solutions for those individuals whose refugee status could be reversed by the Standing Committee on Refugee Affairs'[11] (PMG 2013b).

The cessation was meant to be applicable only to Angolans 'who fled their country as a result of the war of independence and the civil war between 1961 and 2002' (UNHCR 2012: 1) and the South African government offered three options to Angolan refugees: for those who wished to voluntary return to Angola assistance was provided by the UNHCR, the South African and the Angolan governments; for those who wished to continue to stay in South Africa a 2-year temporary visa[12] was introduced upon obtaining a national passport from the Angolan diplomatic authorities in South Africa; and finally for those Angolan refugees who wanted to retain their refugee status[13] a provision was made to allow them to apply for an exemption[14] from the cessation regime. Those Angolans who opted for repatriation of local integration had their refugee status withdrawn[15].

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[11] Section 36 of South Africa's Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998.

[12] The cut-off date for the issuance of passports and visas was initially 31 August 2013 but because the Angolan government was not able to issue passports at time the cut-off date was extended to 15 December 2013.

[13] Only six Angolan refugees indicated their wish to remain under the international protection. A UNHCR staff member (personal communication, 26 May 2015).

[14] Section 5(2) of South Africa's Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998 and Para 5 of the UNHCR, *Guidelines on Exemption Procedures in Respect of Cessation Declaration* (December 2011) states that: 'the 1951 Convention envisions two categories of refugees who should be exempted from cessation. These are (1) refugees who continue to have a well-founded fear of persecution, despite the general positive changes in the country of origin, and (2) refugees who due to compelling reasons arising out of previous persecution cannot be expected to return to their country of origin.

[15] Section 5(3) of South Africa's Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998 and Regulation 17 provides that 'when Standing Committee on Refugee Affairs (SCRA) intends withdrawing status from a refugee, it must give the refugee written notice of its intention to do so, including the reasons therefore, and must invite written representations within thirty days. If no representations are received or if the representations do not persuade the SCRA otherwise, it may withdraw the

According to the Department of Home Affairs, [16] in 2012, 16,529 Angolan nationals of whom 3,100 had refugee status, were living in South Africa, mainly in the Cape Town metropolitan area (2,635). In the four centres[17] established in Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and the Tshwane Interim Reception Office, a total of 3,713 Angolans were profiled; approximately 2,200 were integrated locally under the 2002 Immigration Act and received 2-year visas,[18] while 38 were voluntary repatriated to Angola. There were also seven Angolan unaccompanied minors, of whom three were granted with permanent residency and four were issued with alternate permits,[19] which were dealt with by durable solutions beyond the cut-off time of December 2013.

Methodology

The data was collected applying a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Information was gathered using a structured questionnaire administered to 131 individuals over a period of three weeks in February 2015. Due to the lack of reliable information about the total number of Angolan households in South Africa, a purposive non-probabilistic method, in which sample units shared similar characteristics, including language, nationality and socio-economic background was applied to the present study. Statistical analysis was used to examine the connection, sequence and tendencies of various variables involved. The synopsis of the data was conducted using statistical software (STATA) in order to quantify the details and figures gathered. Descriptive statistics were applied to interpret, conceptualize and condense the data set. Members of the Angolan community (9) were selected and interviewed with the assistance of the Scalabrini Centre, a local non-governmental organization, using a snowball sampling technique which took into consideration their different socio-economic backgrounds. Two focus group discussions were also conducted with twenty selected Angolan nationals. In addition, semi

refugee's status. The SCRA bears the burden of proof in respect of the grounds upon which it seeks to withdraw refugee status' (Harvey 2012: 6).

[16] Information was released during a meeting held with the Angolan community in Cape Town on 16 June, 2012.

[17] On 29 May 2013 the South African Department of Home Affairs established so-called 'one stop' services which were staffed by South African and Angolan government officials and UNHCR staff.

[18] Two-year temporary visas for *study, work, business, elderly person or spousal/dependent* were issued relaxing the conditions prescribed by the *2002 Immigration Act* and its *Regulations;* these visas will only be renewable as per regular conditions prescribed by the 2002 *Immigration Act* and its *Regulations*

[19]A UNHCR staff member (personal communication, 26 May 2015).

structures interviews with representatives from Non-governmental organisations, members of international organizations and civil society were conducted in Cape Town between January and May 2015. Although the small sample cannot be representative of the general population, the mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods of research allowed the development of some relevant considerations around the experience of Angolan refugees in South Africa and their attitude and response to repatriation.

Analysis of Results

a) Reluctance to Return

In the case of Angolans, repatriation from South Africa did not produce the same numeric results of other voluntary repatriation programmes which took place in the region and a low number of individuals, only 38, opted for voluntary repatriation while the majority preferred to remain in South Africa and were given 2-year temporary visas. Before the declaration of the cessation, between 2004 and 2011, a small number of Angolans (104) were repatriated from South Africa[20] with the assistance of the UNHCR, while others were estimated to have returned spontaneously.

The survey asked a series of questions to determine nationality and place of birth of the respondents. All the 131 respondents were of Angolan nationality; 93 respondents (71%) were males and females (29%). The majority of respondents (49.6%) were married, 13% were living with partners, 3.1% were widows/ widowers, 7.6% were divorced or separated and 26.7% never married. In addition, the findings indicated that 46.6% of those interviewed fell within the 36-45 age category, 13.7% were between 26-35, 27.5% were between 46-55, and 9.2% and 3.1% fell in the 10-25 and over 56 age group respectively. A large number of respondents (30.5%) were born in Luanda, while the rest were born in other provinces and outside Angola. Out of the total surveyed, 28.2% were born in Uige, 1.5% were born in Benguela, Cabinda (3.1%), Bie (1.5%), Cuanza Norte (1.5%), Huambo (1.5%), Huila (3.8%), Malange (3.8%), Bengo (0.8%), Cuanza Sul (0.8%), while 17.6% were born in the then Zaire and 5.3% were born in other countries.

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[20] Stakeholders' meeting notes (held in Cape Town on 22 May 2012).

Despite the lack of opportunity for many Angolans to obtain permanent residence[21] and to secure their legal status in South Africa, of those who were interviewed, none expressed the intention to return permanently to Angola. The reasons for their reluctance to return are complex and determined by a number of factors which refer both to the conditions in their home country as well as in the country of asylum. A large number of respondents have mentioned the lack of adequate healthcare structures and poor service provision amongst the reasons to refuse repatriation. Other explanations that frequently recurred during the interviews were concerns about the lack of democracy, human rights and civil liberties in Angola. These reasons were backed by several statements: 'I was born there [in Angola] but there are no opportunities in the country, hospitals are not good and education is expensive' (P75).[22] 'With the current government in power I cannot return, they are dictators and infrastructures are poor' (P77). 'The main reason not to return is the healthcare system, the second is the education system. People don't have sanitation and medication; they are not working and don't have a house' (P1).

The study confirmed that decisions to return for refugees were determined by a comparison between conditions in the country of asylum and in the home country (Koser 1997: 2) as reinforced by the statements of two respondents: 'Human rights and living conditions are not good; there is no one who can tell me that those conditions can be better than here [in South Africa]' (P7). 'The idea of returning makes me feel bad because my family is here and conditions are bad compared to South Africa' (P114).

b) *Life in South Africa*

Having lived in South Africa for an average period of eighteen years, Angolans have integrated into South African society. More than 50% of those interviewed were married, with 25% of them either married to or living with a South African spouse. A significant number of interviewees had their family members in the country of asylum and children enrolled in South African schools. For those Angolans who are either married to South African spouses or have children in South African schools, the challenge of integration into

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[21] Section 26(a) of the 2002 Immigration Act states that: 'the Department shall issue a permanent residence permit to a foreigner who has been the holder of a work permit [...] in terms of this Act for five years and has received an offer for permanent employment'.
[22] All open-ended survey questions were coded; 'P' refers to Participant.

Angolan society was much greater because of cultural and linguistic differences. As one of the respondents pointed out: 'My kids are born here and they are receiving an education in South Africa' (P27). Whereas the majority of interviewees still consider themselves as Angolans, almost 25% of the respondents consider themselves as South Africans and 13.7% view themselves as both South African and Angolan. The adoption of a South African national identity was particularly strong amongst the younger generation of former Angolan refugees, especially those who came to South Africa young or were born in South Africa. For all these reasons, and due to the presence of strong social networks in South Africa, respondents have expressed a low interest in repatriation, in line with the affinity hypothesis which states that the higher the density of networks of friends, children and family members in the country of asylum, the lower the probability of repatriation (Boyd 1989; Gurak & Caces 1992). As stated by one the respondents during a focus group discussion:

I have got three kids that were born in South Africa and this is what makes me stay here; they were born here and they are all in school and spent their life here. Even myself I came in South Africa when I was very young, I was 19, and I spent here more than 18 years. Last year I even went to Angola to see if we can get adapted but is very difficult to adapt in that country. My work is here and my children do not know how to write Portuguese as they study in English. Imagine if I take them to Angola how are they going to adapt? Especially to the education system which is very different from the one we have here in South Africa. These are the things that have been keeping me in South Africa for all these years, especially my kids' education. (Focus group interview, February 2015).

c) Is Angola still 'home'?

A large majority of respondents (84%) declared to be in contact with a least one member of his immediate or extended family, while only 16% reported not having any family member left in Angola. The research sought to determine the percentage of participants who have visited Angola after their arrival in South Africa. The frequency of travel to Angola was low and the research data revealed that only 35% of the participants have since visited Angola, whilst 65% never returned to Angola. Out of the 35% who have visited Angola, 59 % have visited at least once and moreover, 31 respondents indicated that they were last in Angola in 2014. This fact, was not only a confirmation that sourcing information on the socio-economic and political

conditions at home played a fundamental role in the decision-making process of repatriation (Koser 1997) but also that some of the interviewed Angolans returned to Angola after the cessation was declared to assess whether permanent repatriation was a viable option and to validate information acquired in South Africa through the media, relatives and friends. As reported by two of the respondents:

Yes, I went [to Angola] to go and check by myself; I don't want others to come and tell me this and that; that's why I went there and I checked by myself and I saw what is better there and what is not better (Personal interview, 15 March, 2015).

I was in Angola in June and again in December 2014 and because of the things I saw I wasn't happy. Most of the people were asking me: 'are you coming back here for good?' I told them: 'no I'm not'. I can come here to visit but not to live (Personal interview, 16 March, 2015).

Some of the respondents expressed their interest in returning to Angola for a short period of time, both for work and to visit but without the intention to resettle, as confirmed by these statements: 'I would consider working in Angola but not staying there' (P14). 'I would only visit Angola, Cape Town is my home' (P11).

Questions to elicit respondents' views on the presence of socio-economic opportunities for returnees in Angola raised conflicting views. Of all Angolans surveyed, 63% did not believe that opportunities existed for them and their families in Angola, 19% were positive about it, while 18% were uncertain. Respondents reported that although some forms of economic opportunities were available due to favourable economic conditions in Angola, there were also several impediments to their return including the lack of jobs for aged and uneducated individuals, language barriers for Angolans who had lived abroad for many years, nepotism and corruption and the challenge of uprooting children from their social environment. These negative views were backed by the respondents' statements: 'There are opportunities in Angola but not for me due to my age' (P18). 'Because I have not studied it would be difficult for me to find work' (P40). 'I would feel happy to see my family again but there would be barriers for me in getting a job in terms of language' (P41). Amongst those who were positive about the presence of opportunities in Angola the main barrier to return was represented by the social conditions in the country which made repatriation difficult, in particular for those with wives and

children in South Africa. As one of the respondents declared: 'Opportunities may exist for the breadwinner but not for the family; social conditions are not good in Angola' (P17).

d) Legal Status

Questions related to legal status and its uncertainty can increase anxiety amongst refugees, hinder transnational practices and reduce their propensity to return home (Al-Ali et al. 2001: 582). The survey asked a series of questions to establish the documentation status of the respondents and findings revealed that 96% of Angolans regularised their stay in South Africa during the time of the refugee cessation, between August and December 2013. Data analysis showed that 89% of the respondents had refugee status permits (Section 24) and 11% held asylum seeker temporary permits (Section 22) prior to the declaration of cessation.[23] The study also indicated that 72% of the respondents moved from Section 22 and Section 24 permits to temporary residency work visas, while 11% did not have valid documentation and therefore remained undocumented.

Although the majority of former Angolan refugees received temporary residence visas, this did not give them any formal right to apply for permanent residence in South Africa regardless of their long stay in the country as refugees.[24]

Temporary visas under relaxed conditions were issued only for a period of two years leaving Angolans in a state of frustration and uncertainty about their future. Those Angolans who are not be able to extend their visas after the initial period of two years will have no choice but to return to Angola, or to remain undocumented in South Africa facing the risk of deportation.

Conclusion

The mantra of voluntary repatriation is based on the underlying assumption that refugees, regardless of the amount of time spent in exile, will return to

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[23] A Section 22 permit is given to a person who has fled his or her country and is seeking recognition and protection in the Republic of South Africa, and whose application is still under consideration. Refugee status is given to person who has been granted asylum status and protection in terms of Section 24 of the Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998.

[24] The Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998 Section 27(c) allows a refugee to apply for permanent residence after he or she has been recognised as a refugee for five consecutive years, but permanent residence is only granted if a refugee is deemed a refugee 'indefinitely.'

their countries of origin once the cause of their flight has ceased. However, the case of Angolan refugees in South Africa showed that few individuals accepted voluntary repatriation while the large majority opted for local integration and were given temporary visas by the South African government.

The Angolans' decision to return was influenced by a complexity of factors and entailed a cost-benefit analysis of socio-economic and political conditions in both the country of origin and asylum. For some Angolans the information acquired through personal networks, the media, international organisations and government institutions was insufficient to make a final decision and 'go-and-see' visits to Angola were spontaneously taken to assess whether conditions at home were conducive for return.

The presence of family and other social links, the length of time spent in exile and the possibility of accessing civil, social and economic rights in South Africa have determined a low interest in repatriation amongst former Angolan refugees. Those who expressed an interest in visiting Angola for a short period of time were in favour of flexible and non-permanent forms of return which would allow them to visit their families and to conduct some work but also retain the legal status acquired in the former country of asylum.

The lack of an opportunity to be granted permanent residence or citizenship has hindered Angolans' decision to return and prevented their transnational mobility. Securing a permanent legal status in South Africa would have offered Angolans a fall-back option – in case repatriation failed – and the opportunity for short visits and periods of dual residence. Moreover, those Angolans who will not meet the necessary requirements to extend their temporary visas will not be able to remain in South Africa and will have to return to Angola against their will.

In conclusion, this paper underlined that policies which facilitate transnational mobility, encourage temporary forms of return and offer long-term refugees the possibility to access permanent residence and naturalization in the former country of asylum are preferred to permanent, unwanted and often involuntary repatriation.

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