Situating Migration in Wartime and Post-War Mozambique: A Critique of “Forced Migration” Research

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Introduction

This paper analyses the causes, organisation and impact of migration by people from the area of Machaze during and since Mozambique's recent civil war (1977-1992), in order to challenge theories that establish categorisations of migration based on the degree of its “forcedness”. It demonstrates how the assumptions in these theories result in reductionist theories of migration in general and specifically fail to adequately account for migratory behaviour in acute crisis contexts. These assumptions result in the ignoring or impoverishment of agency and of social and cultural factors which inform agency, in explaining the causes and organisation of migration.

This chapter demonstrates how the social and demographic organisation of “forced migration” during the war and “return migration” after it were influenced by more than the macro-political and military dynamics of the war itself but also by other processes of culturally-specific social struggle whose origin was unrelated to the war itself. Well before the war migration was already “situated” as a strategic option in an array of social struggles involving the renegotiation of the rights and obligations defining social relationships and their constitutive roles within households, extended kinship networks and the local community. This study examines how the meanings and experiences that already characterised migration as a strategy before the war influenced possibilities for, and meanings of, wartime migration in socially specific ways that ultimately resulted in a highly gendered wartime demographic distribution. In particular this work examines how struggles over the gendered configuration of power relations within marriage affected wartime and post-war Machazian migration. Evidence of the influence of these struggles in the organisation of wartime migration challenges theoretical models of so-called “forced migration” that exclusively privilege analysis of macro-political struggle in explaining the causes and organisation of wartime movement. This paper proposes steps towards developing alternative theoretical approaches to the study of migration in general and in crisis contexts in particular.

Kinetic Models: The Erasure of Agency in Explanation

Both explicit models of so-called “forced migration” and implicit approaches used to explain its organisation may be broadly characterised as having a “kinetic” structure. In “kinetically-structured” explanations, the behaviour of populations subjected to war or crisis conditions (and wartime migration decision-making behaviour in particular) is explained in terms of forces
that are analytically conceptualised as external to and beyond the influence of the actors themselves.

The term “kinetics” was formally articulated in the rather abstract models produced by Kunz (1973,1981) in his creation of a formal typology of refugee flows. Kunz contrasts “kinetic” with “dynamic” models of behaviour. In a “kinetic” model forces external to the migrants themselves are seen as determining the actors’ migration behaviour entirely apart from their own internal motivations, whereas in “dynamic” models the internal motivation of the migrant is seen as influencing migration behaviour and outcomes. Kunz made his understanding of forced migration behaviour as “kinetic” more explicit with the following analogy:

An inner self-propelling force is singularly absent from the movement of refugees. Their progress more often than not resembles the movement of the billiard ball: devoid of inner direction, their path is governed by the kinetic factors of inertia, friction, and the vectors of outside forces applied on them. (Kunz, 1973).

Kinetic models eliminate the need to investigate actor agency altogether, by reducing the interest of all “forced migrants” to a singular universally generalisable “survival-utility”. In other words, in the throes of war people are seen as having no life projects other than bare survival itself. This formulation is implicitly premised on the assumption that in the face of sheer terror, violence somehow renders all “normal” concerns for engagement in ongoing, culturally defined, social life-strategies virtually insignificant in shaping behaviour. The only or singularly overriding concern of those threatened by violence is to avoid it. Since the motivational basis for migration has been operationalised a-priori in a socially undifferentiated form as the desire to avoid violence, there is implicitly no need to examine of people’s own understandings of the situations they are in or of how these understandings affect their migratory conduct in those situations.

Since forces conceptualised as external to and unaffected by the agency of migrants are seen as the determinants of behaviour, the explanations for patterns and effects of forced migration are sought through the analysis of the dynamics and variation in these larger forces. Predictions (or more often assumptions) about migration behaviour are made and differences among cases of forced migration behaviour are explained in terms of variation in these larger forces. By contrast variation among migrants themselves, in terms of their own motivations and the factors which inform those motivations, remain largely neglected. To build on Kunz’s own billiards analogy the emphasis in kinetic analysis is centred on the “cue” rather than the “ball”, i.e. on analysing ball movements by examining what types of “cues” (larger forces) are “forcing” the “balls” (migrants) to behave in particular ways, and not on how the properties of the balls and differences among them might exist and influence movement.

Political forces receive privileged attention in these analyses since they are the most visible, prominent macro-forces directly implicated in coercive violence. “Violence” is formulated as a phenomenon whose deployment is organised and directed solely by the interests and agendas of the highest organisational level at which political struggle is being carried out - typically those political actors with national political pretensions and contesting political legitimacy at that level. “Violence” is thus also implicitly conceived of as a force that is strictly external to and thus acts upon people both apart from their own understandings of that violence, and without examining their own possible involvement in the constitution of its objectives or deployment.

Within these frameworks, the organisation of wartime displacement, the demographic distribution of refugee populations, and a vast array of their behaviour is explained almost entirely in terms of military-political factors and processes operating at the macro-level. In its simplest and yet broadly (if implicitly) applied form this understanding operates in the following manner: war or the threat of war occurs in area “A” and acts as a force akin to a billiard cue as actors are reactivity driven from area “A” of violence to the nearest area “B” without violence.

This process may be replicated in a series of stages producing a variety of refugee “vintages” (Kunz, 1972), each the product of different military-political actions (Wilson & Nunes, 1992).
Investigation of possible differentiation between successive vintages is generally limited to a focus on the political affiliation of the population comprising each vintage, on the assumption that political affiliation will affect the relationship of a populace to a military force and thus their exposure to the risk of violence. As an example, in examining the successive waves of Mozambican refugees into Malawi, Wilson & Nunes (1992) describe a process by which one wave of refugees who were politically aligned or associated with FRELIMO would flee across the Malawian border in the face of a RENAMO offensive. These would be followed in turn by a wave of refugees from the same area, but who were politically aligned with RENAMO, once a FRELIMO counter offensive reversed the military fortunes in the area.

Implicit in these behavioural models is a view that the extreme threat faced by these populations has re-operationalised their “normal” concerns in terms of what are implicitly viewed as more “fundamental” and culturally undifferentiated” needs”. These models of forced migration thus betray an implicit understanding of cultural factors as a set of variables which not only stand apart and outside of political and economic ones but are also deemed less relevant (or irrelevant) in explaining migratory behaviour in crisis contexts. In conceiving of “culture” as simply another set of variables distinct from economic and political ones, yet hierarchically subordinate and without the same level of influence on behaviour, these approaches are similar in many ways to the concepts of culture often deployed by demographers in the study of a variety of demographic processes, including (but not limited to) migration (Kertzer, 1997).

Agency and the “Forced” Migration Paradox in Social Scientific Analysis

Social scientists, and anthropologists in particular, have increasingly critiqued particular aspects of kinetically structured analyses of forced migration. Anthropologists have argued for the importance of investigating “agency” and its socio-cultural basis in the shaping of forced migration processes. Gender differentiation has been the most recent focus of this critique (Indra, 1999; Colson, 1999; Koenig, 1995). Several studies have focused on the need for greater sensitivity to the differences in the needs of men and women in humanitarian practice (Cammack, 1999), the importance of culturally-defined engendered power relations in affecting the distribution and effects of humanitarian aid (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Daley, 1991; Matlou, 1999), of culturally-engendered definitions of “rights” in the assignment of political status (Giles, 1999; Gilad, 1999; Macklin, 1999), how gender affects the impact, challenges, and meaning of forced relocation (Moussa, 1993; Moussa and McSpadden, 1996; Indra,1999), and the impact of forced migration on the re-negotiation of gender roles (Daley, 1991).

Significantly however, these works tend to start with the movement itself as a fait accompli, only then proceeding to examine how the social differentiation in that experience affects gender relations and identities. There is a noticeable paucity of research on how processes of gender relation constitution and re-constitution have themselves influenced the actual decision-making and organisation of movement itself. Consequently, kinetic assumptions still tend to implicitly inform explanations of the cause and organisation of movement itself. Whereas many analysts migration in crisis contexts have challenged the distinction between (economic) “labour migrants” and (political) “refugees”, the “voluntary”/”involuntary” dichotomy has arguably been maintained and reproduced, even defining the sub-field of study itself--it is forced migration (and thus presumably not “un-forced” migration) that is the phenomenon studied. Thus Indra clearly reiterates the idea that migration in crisis can be distinguished from other forms of migration by the restricted volition migrants exercise, when she states: “a key dimension of forced migration—whether politically, economically, environmentally or developmentally driven—is just that: it is forced.” (Indra, 1999, 18).

Thus on one hand the framing of refugee movement as “involuntary” has drawn criticism for depicting refugee behaviour as a passive product of larger political processes and for
neglecting to examine how refugees shape their own outcomes as agents who draw from their own culturally specific values and frameworks and are motivated by socially-differentiated interest in creating and implementing their life strategies (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Colson, 1971; Hansen, 1992; Wilson, 1994). Yet on the other hand refugee or more generally wartime migration is still typically categorised as “involuntary” (or more recently as “forced”) in order for it to be able to be explicitly theorised (Richmond, 1988; Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989; Scudder and Colson, 1982; Rogge, 1987; Stein, 1981; Hansen and Oliver-Smith, 1982; Black and Robinson, 1993; Indra, 1999) as an analytically separate phenomenon from “voluntary” (labour) migration. This paradox broadly haunts the academic treatment of agency in forced migration.

There is clearly an implicit (and somewhat ironic) logical contradiction in arguing for the importance of agency’s influence in a process and population which has been defined a-priori precisely by its lack of ability to exercise agency. This contradiction arises out of the failure of social analysts to fully apply their critique of the premises that inform kinetic models to all aspects of crisis migration processes. Agency must be investigated not only for how it affects the impact of crisis migration but also in how it affects the causation and organisation of actual movement itself.

As Richmond (1988) has pointed out, kinetic models of “forced migration” cannot explain the fact that a variety of different (migratory) behaviours occur among people who are exposed to the same macro-political conditions. In the absence of political differences, kinetic models have difficulty accounting for why some people move and others do not. After all if the migration is “compelled” by larger external forces how can some people not move? Even when a narrow political basis for agency is introduced, kinetic models cannot explain social and demographic differences among stayers and movers (or among movers in different directions) when these differences do not co-vary with political alignment. Such models cannot adequately explain social and demographic variation in specific direction, scale and socio-demographic composition of particular flows, or the existence of a variety of simultaneous flows.

The most fundamental consequence of classifying migration behaviour in terms of “degrees of freedom of volition” is that it precludes an investigation of whether people in those migratory processes pre-classified as “forced” actually do influence their own movement and the contexts in which they are interacting. In fact it reconstitutes these contexts as non-interactive, since the influence among forces is assumed (rather than investigated) as going in only one direction between more powerful and less powerful agents. Yet as Foucault (1972) has argued, power is pervasive and multi-dimensional in its forms, rather than a matter of simple dichotomously opposed alternatives of “having” or “not having” it. Furthermore, subversive power is a critical element in the constitution of both social process and the exercise of dominating modes of power as well.

As Richmond himself (1988,14) and others have noted, migration is not the only choice which so called “forced migrants” face when confronted by forms of crisis with economic, environmental, political, or (more likely) an interrelated combination of these aspects. Other options may include those of staying and actively fighting, of passively resisting, or of accommodating to new regimes (Hansen, 1982). Richmond is therefore correct in arguing that:

...migratory decisions, even those taken under conditions of extreme stress, do not differ from other kinds of decision governing social behaviour. The same sociological model of motivation is applicable... the distinction between ‘free’ and forced, or ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ is a misleading one. (Richmond, 1988, 17).

Yet despite noting that a classification or typology of behaviour in terms of a dichotomy between freedom and a lack-of-freedom in the exercise of volition (“voluntary” and “involuntary”) is fallacious, Richmond fails to understand that the crux of the fallacy does not
primarily lie in the fact that this classification is constituted as a dichotomy. The more fundamental and problematic aspect of the fallacy is that “degrees-of-perceived-freedom-in-the-exercise-of-volition” is used as the criterion for distinguishing between different motive forces for behaviour and thus for constituting a classification of behaviour.

Richmond reproduces this more fundamental assumption in constitute his own alternative theory of migration when he argues for conceptualising all migration along a continuum: “at one end of which individuals and collectives are proactive and at the other end reactive.” (1988, 17) This continuum is defined precisely as a matter of varying “degrees of freedom... (since) ...individual and group autonomy and potency are situationally determined” (Richmond, 1988, 17). Richmond’s formulation simply converts the differentiation from a dichotomy into a continuum. However, the quality of differentiation is of exactly the same order.

Richmond reproduces this aspect of kinetic models, precisely when he derives from the fact that “all human behaviour is constrained” the conclusion that “choices are not unlimited but are determined by the structuration process” (1988, 17) (emphasis added). When we speak of the range of options being “constrained” it is actually the consequences of those chosen options that are largely “constrained” rather than the choosing per se. By “constraint” I refer to the fact that outcomes may be determined by factors largely outside of the power of the agent making the choices to influence, and despite their explicit intentions. It is these consequences rather than the array of choices themselves which are constrained in this sense.

Thus as Colson (1971, 1999) has described in her study of the “forced resettlement” of the Gwembe Tonga in Zambia, the action of larger and more powerful forces such as the central state may place local people into a situation where they face an array of choices with consequences not of their own choosing. The consequences they face (as a result of their decision about how to react) may include social and economic disruption through a choice of compliance with state directives to relocate, or conversely drastic forms of repression as a result of a choice to resist relocation against a much stronger force with greater coercive power.

It is the dramatic difference in power and the drastic nature of the consequences that are dictated as a result, that make choices that avoid such consequences seem “involuntary”. As Fischer, Martin, and Staubhaar note: “we perceive what one may call ‘involuntary’ migration as extreme situations where the decision to go is ‘self-evident’.” (1997, 50). However, the theoretical point is precisely that such decisions are not so ‘self-evident’ but must rather be problematised in light of the multi-dimensional concerns of socially and culturally situated actors. Colson’s study is often considered as one of the ‘purest’ examples of the ‘forcedness’ of “forced migration”. Yet in reviewing this study Colson points out that there were those among the Gwembe Tonga who resisted resettlement and died as a consequence of the Zambian state’s coercive reaction to their resistance (Colson, 1999). She thus empirically establishes that the relationship between a choice and the degree of drastic consequences related to that choice do not establish that choice as self-evident.

So-called “forced” or “involuntary” migration is not the result of a constrained capacity to exercise one’s own volition, such that behaviour is the inevitable or self-evident result of the decision-maker being unable to perceive any choice other than flight being perceived by the decision-maker. Rather it is the result of a weighing of multiple options and the exercise of the decision-maker’s full volition, albeit in circumstances in which the consequences of the exercise of volition have often become drastically radicalised or reduced to options which the chooser/s would rather not have to face.

The highlighting of agency in all aspects of the migration process including the causes and organisation of movement itself, permits the investigation of culturally-specific social interests and how these shape the motivations and organisation of actual movement (and non-movement). This is the only analytical route that can place migratory choice and behaviour in crisis into a proper comparative context that encompasses decisions to engage crisis through
Developing Alternative Approaches to Understanding Migration in Crisis Contexts

In order to understand the way in which so-called “forced-migration” decisions are made analysis must attempt to “situate” migration (Greenhalgh, 1995). Migration must be situated in a first sense that refers to its position as a particular option among an array of other options for responding to a complex and multi-dimensional environment as experienced by culturally and socially differentiated actors. Understanding the meaning and causes of wartime migration as an option requires that it be studied relative to its alternatives, including therefore the study of non-migration options. The array of options perceived and weighed by actors must be examined in light of the social roles and cultural understandings relevant to the particular social categories of actors involved in making these decisions.

Such an approach precludes the classification of migration “types” in terms of criteria of relative freedom in the exercise of agency (i.e. in terms of the possibility of exercising volition). It is thus able to empirically examine the full range of options within which migration is situated and to make sense of that option in terms of its alternatives that the actors themselves perceive. Rather than assuming that the actors involved in decision-making perceive no other options other than migration it empirically investigates which options they do perceive. It must thus investigate a population which includes non-migrants and that is thus larger than those which have been typically studied in the analysis of so-called “forced migration”. It also demands a historical perspective that involves analysing the course of social process prior to the migratory and non-migratory processes of most specific interest.

The analytical focus shifts from how the environment constrains actor volition (“forced” migration) to how actor agency is exercised in an environment with a changing quality for that actor. Quality is defined in terms of the consequences actors perceive for the actions they undertake and their evaluation of those consequences. It is the change of multiple aspects of that context that modifies the attractiveness of the migration option relative to other options for specific categories of social actor (rather than the constraining of their agency) and ultimately results in migration or (or non-migration) decisions.

A sense of crisis itself must thus be defined in socially specific ways. What movement or non-movement itself implies in terms of the life-strategies and strategies for engaging in multiple forms of social struggle is differentiated among categories as social actors. As the Machazian case demonstrates women may perceive aspects of the environment as deteriorating while men perceive them as stable or as improvements. For young men migratory responses might imply changes which they view as favourable, while for old men migration might imply changes seen as bearing negatively on their life-strategies. Non-migration may be more attractive to those with higher socio-economic status or local political power, while the opposite may be true of those with lower socio-economic status. Furthermore the multi-dimensionality of life-strategies and of social roles implies that an individual’s own interests may be contradictory and ambiguous. Migration and non-migration decisions are analysed as the result of culturally and socially situated actors’ attempts to negotiate, use and react to forces impinging on their lives with categories meaningful to them in formulating action. It is thus necessary to examine the whole array of concerns of socially specific categories of actors and their interrelationships.

Migration must also be understood as “situated” in a second sense—from both an individual and a structural perspective in terms of how it is implicated simultaneously as an option among other strategies other than migration. Within such an approach, alternative options such as “staying” and social differentiation in migration can be fully examined. From an analytical perspective, it is clear that classifications of behaviour based on degrees of perceived freedom in the exercise of volition fail to place migratory behaviour in its appropriate comparative contexts with such alternative behaviours.
other options in a specific array of different social struggles. From an individual perspective migration's significance can only be determined by understanding which array of social struggles it is implicated in for that category of individual. As this case study shows migration may serve simultaneously as a tactic employed by one individual in struggles against state authority, for subsistence, in intergenerational contests for power within kinship networks, and in struggles over the rights and responsibilities that different marriage partners have towards each other. While highlighting the issue of power differences in determining outcomes (as Richmond and others have pointed out is crucial in the analysis of ‘forced migration’), this reformulation relocates the place where power differences are constituted and analysed. It examines power as it is constituted as a matter of difference between agents in their ability to influence the effects of their actions and others' reactions on interactional outcomes, rather than as a matter of difference within individuals in the degree of their control over their ability to exercise their own will in making choices among options.

At a structural level migration's significance must be determined in light of an understanding of the full array of processes of social contestation in which it is implicated within a society. Throughout the century migration in Machaze became a multivalent technique, useful and used in a growing variety of forms of simultaneous social struggle including intergenerational and gendered struggles (Lubkemann, 2000). Under the Portuguese colonial regime, migration developed as both a strategy for social reproduction and as a form of resistance against the colonial state’s pursuit of particular interests at odds with those of the population. The structure of migration and the relationship between local and national-level institutions were influenced by the very contradictions of a colonial rule not unlike that in other settings. The colony’s internal need for labour (which frowned upon migrant labour to South Africa) was pitted against its needs for tax revenue (which migrant labour provided) and for maintaining political order with a skeleton bureaucratic apparatus. These circumstances required forms of indirect rule and moderation in state attempts to contest local norms. In this context migration developed as a particularly powerful “weapon of the weak” (Scott, 1985) in resisting forced labour practices, and consequently as a particularly central force in the organisation of local social institutions and identities (Lubkemann, 2000).

At the same time that migration allowed Machazians to resist the power of the coercive power of colonial state, it also became implicated in strategies of local socio-economic differentiation, inter-generational struggle, and in the struggle over the definition of gendered power distribution, and rights and obligations definition within marriage. Throughout the first half of the century migration became an increasingly important way for younger men to attain greater independence for senior kin through wage earnings that afforded them the ability to pay brideprice without relying on their fathers. This line of intergenerational struggle resulted in the increased nuclearisation of what had at one time been far larger extended households (Lubkemann, 2000).

In looking at gender differentiation and gender struggle, migration became at the same time increasingly a “tool for the strong” in Machaze’s patriarchal society. The reorganisation of co-residence, the shift in power relations between senior and junior kinsmen, the higher rate of migrant earnings, and the heightened consumerism of migrant men from Machaze had a profound effect on the meaning of marriage in Machaze, and consequently on the status and power of Machazian women. In accelerating fashion throughout the last two decades of colonial rule marriage became an increasingly important way for younger men to attain greater independence for senior kin through wage earnings that afforded them the ability to pay brideprice without relying on their fathers. This line of intergenerational struggle resulted in the increased nuclearisation of what had at one time been far larger extended households (Lubkemann, 2000).

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Migration’s historical development as a strategy used for “multiple purposes” shaped the changing structure and meanings of migration itself in Machaze in critical ways throughout the
century. As the following case study will illustrate, it is only by understanding migration’s “situation” in this second sense, not only as one option among many in any particular form of social struggle, but as an option that was deployed in and had multiple implications in many social struggles, that the fullest range of factors that influenced wartime migration decision-making and migration’s socially-differentiated outcomes can be assessed.

The historical developments in the structure of migration and the intensification and transformation of transnational aspects of Machazian social life radically transformed the distribution of power within primary social networks, particularly at the domestic and community levels. Already prior to the war critical changes in migration structure had begun to negatively affect the claims of women on their husbands and of elders on junior kin, and to result in experimentation by men with new forms of transnational conjugality. As this case study will show, it is these developments that explain the particular array of options men faced and developed during the war itself, rather than any particular feature of the actual civil war in its own right. Historical perspective is thus of critical importance to the understanding of the local meaning of conflict and violence, the socially differentiated meanings, possibilities, and impacts of wartime migration, and the understanding of how pre-war forms of gendered social struggle influenced wartime migration and continued to develop throughout the war.

The Machazian Case Study

The following analysis demonstrates how gendered struggle over the definition of rights and obligations within households, and most specifically between spouses within marriage, influenced migratory dynamics and demographic distribution outcomes during (and after) the war in central Mozambique. More than simply investigating the gender-differentiated impact of the war and of wartime migration, this study investigates how the process of “engenderation”—i.e. the ongoing struggle over how relationships and power between and among men and women in Machaze should be defined—influenced the organisation of wartime migration and population distribution, and post-wartime patterns of “return migration”. The objectives of different categories of social actors engaged in the process of “engenderation” were ones largely generated prior to and apart from, those of the larger political conflict.

This case thus demonstrates how wartime migration decision-making, organisation and socio-demographic outcomes can be shaped by social struggles other than those operating at a macro-political level and that larger political-economic forces are not determinative of migratory behaviour. Rather, the influence of larger political-economic forces on migration can be better understood by examining how larger changes affected the re-distribution of power in the culturally-specific social struggles in which migration was implicated as a strategy of engagement.

Case Study Field Site and Methods

This case is based on approximately two years of research among Mozambicans, loosely definable as ethnically Ndau (a subgroup of Shona speakers), all originally from an area in the south central part of that country, the Machaze district. This is an area in which labour migration to South Africa and present-day Zimbabwe has been engaged in since at least the last quarter of the 19th century. Under the Portuguese colonial regime, migration developed as both a strategy for social reproduction and as a form of resistance against the colonial state’s pursuit of particular interests at odds with those of the population (such as forced labour). In this context migration developed as a powerful “weapon of the weak” (Scott, 1985), and consequently as a particularly central force in the organisation of local social institutions and identities. At the same time that migration allowed Machazians to resist the coercive power of the colonial state, it also became implicated in strategies of local socio-economic differentiation, inter-generational struggle and in the struggle over gendered power distribution.
and the definition of rights and obligations within marriage. Migration has thus been continuously “re-situated” as a strategy in multiple simultaneous forms of social struggle.

Within three years of its independence in 1975, Mozambique began to experience a civil war, largely spurred on by aggression on the part of the hostile neighbouring Rhodesian and South African apartheid regimes. The Machaze area was one of the first districts in the country to become fully engaged in this conflict. By late 1979 it was fully embroiled in the war between the Rhodesian (and later South African) supported anti-government faction RENAMO and the government forces of FRELIMO. During the conflict (that lasted until the end of 1992) somewhere between 40-70% of the population is estimated to have left the district, many to South Africa and Zimbabwe, some to internal destinations elsewhere within Mozambique (GTZ, 1993; 1995; 1996; CARE, 1994). Even if remaining within the district, almost everyone was dislocated to a new area: either to the communal villages under the government’s control or else deeper into the “bush” areas under RENAMO’s influence.

This research was conducted with people all whom originally came from Machaze district prior to the war. Some of those interviewed and surveyed were present in the Machaze district in 1997, having either stayed there during the war or returned to it afterwards. I also interviewed others residing in two destinations discovered through research as target areas of refugee and historical outmigration from Machaze: the town of Chimoio in Mozambique, and two township areas south of Johannesburg in South Africa. The methods employed in researching these questions included informal interviews and forms of participant observation along with extensive oral life history interviews, life-history matrix and other forms of surveys, and review of quarterly and annual historical documentation (primarily from colonial administration) on a district level dating back to 1898.

**Explaining Engendered Patterns of Initial Outmigration from Machaze**

As the armed conflict developed and intensified in Machaze district during 1979-1982, some form of migratory response was engaged in by virtually the entire population of the district. These movements were patterned in highly gender-specific ways. Machazian women were far more likely than men to either remain in the district, to move to adjacent areas within Mozambique, or finally to move to Zimbabwe in either self-settled or refugee camp contexts. Men on the other hand, particularly if they had migratory experience in South Africa and had not yet retired from their careers as labour migrants, were likely to migrate first and foremost to South Africa. A very small percentage of women ever went to South Africa. In Zimbabwe, men were less likely than women to be found in refugee camps and more likely to be found illegally self-settled outside of the camps. The explanation for this pattern of gendered wartime migration can be found in: 1) gender-differentiated experiences and expectations regarding migration and the organisation of socio-economic life; and 2) the struggles over power distribution and gender role definitions and relations.

**Engendered Senses of Order and Wartime Migration**

One of the factors conducive to the gender-selectivity of out-of-district migration involved the very different ways in which women and men were targeted by the military forces involved in the conflict. When women and children were located by either RENAMO or FRELIMO troops in the opponents’ territory, they were generally forced by the troops that found them to relocate into the area under those troops’ control. Men on the other hand tended to either be forcibly conscripted into military service or often were simply killed on the spot. The fact that men were targeted both for forced recruitment and for more pervasive and intense forms of violence at the hands of military forces factored into the Machazian population’s early form of engendered
re-distribution. However, this pattern also reflected an attempt by both men and women to engage in long-established strategies of economic and social reproduction in a new environment.

International migration has been implicated in the organisation of social life in Machaze for demonstrably over a century. The pre-war experience of subsistence involved a social division of labour between female non-migratory agricultural subsistence labour and male migratory cash-earning labour. Male migration was virtually universal and incorporated as an informal and yet strongly socially marked rite of male passage. Male participation in economic life was embodied first and foremost in the form of migration based wage-labour, and only secondarily and peripherally in very specific and sporadic tasks in the subsistence agriculture arena (mostly clearing new fields). The vast majority of men spent most of their migratory careers in South Africa. Female non-migration in Machaze was virtually universal (unlike the experience in other areas of Mozambique) and economic activity was relatively rigidly circumscribed to non-cash subsistence agriculture.

If in the wake of highly disruptive and disorganising circumstances people must imagine a new order at some level it must eventually be conceived of in terms and with objectives that have made sense to them before, drawn from their socially-positioned experience. It is important to analyse what different experiential perspectives on a social order exist, and how those experiences affect what people are trying to do and the ‘order’ they are striving to reconstitute.

The total range of experiences that together constituted “Machazian life” extended beyond the ability of any one given category of social actor to experience directly themselves. Machazian men and women were attentive to very different aspects of this total range of experiences, as they reacted to the challenges to their lives that wartime violence presented. They consequently had significantly different objectives that had an important effect on migration decision-making and ultimately on the engendering of population re-distribution.

Options that focused on the specifics of subsistence agriculture were readily provided to women by their own experience. Conversely, women related to migration as a male experience rather than as an experience they had directly. The alternative of a personal experience of migration involving non-agricultural activity was much harder for women to conceptualise since their own experience could not provide the same type of specific terms for this option to them. Consequently, inasmuch as their own personally and viscerally lived experience privileged subsistence agriculture, women’s reactions to the war focused on the objective of reproducing that aspect of their lives. Machazian women thus tended to migrate initially within the district and later to other areas in nearby districts, where the wartime conditions were such that they believed would allow them to continue to engage in subsistence agriculture.

Conversely, different types of behaviour (namely migration) and destinations made more sense to men. The aspects of Machazian life that men and women prioritised in their attempts to reconstitute order, first and foremost reflected their own socially specific experience of the Machazian “experiential totality”. Wartime population redistribution patterns and migratory decision-making processes reflect the attempts by different categories of social actors to reconstitute those aspects of social life most directly crucial and relevant to their own experience of it.

Engendered Social Struggle and Control of Female Migration: Men Protecting Established Life Strategies

Early Machazian migratory and non-migratory reactions can thus be seen as primarily attempts to reproduce ongoing strategies of social and economic reproduction in a novel environment rather than as attempts to reconfigure those life-strategies themselves. The initial gendered pattern of the Machazian population’s wartime demographic distribution reflected an attempt to
adjust pre-war socio-economic strategies to the heightened dangers and new problems of a wartime environment. If male migration to South Africa intensified, this did not mean that these men initially had any plans of establishing a more permanent alternative to their lives in Machaze in the peri-urban townships of South African. Similarly, if Machazian women were forced to relocate within the district, few if any of them contemplated moving entirely out of the district, or the possibility of pursuing strategies of economic survival organised around activities other than subsistence agriculture.

Ultimately however, migratory patterns and population distribution outcomes were not only the result of socially situated attempts to reproduce economic and social aspects of culturally defined “order”. They also reflected the ongoing development of those senses of “order” as a result of continuing struggles over the meaning of relationships and the configuration of social interaction. These struggles had already characterised Machazian social process prior to the war and neither they nor the ongoing process of social organisation's reconfiguration were either suspended or eclipsed by the civil war.

By 1984 when the war was aggressively spreading into other areas of the country for the first time (such as Cabo Delgado and parts of Zambezia and Niassa provinces) it had already raged in Machaze for half a decade. As the war dragged on year after year it became less and less possible for people to treat the war, and the new problems and opportunities that it presented, as temporary factors in the calculation, imagination, and implementation of their life-strategies.

The interrelated problems of safety, successive displacement, and drought in Mozambique increasingly made immediate subsistence strategies less and less tenable for more and more of those remaining in Mozambique. Early in the war, many men attempted to continue to provide assistance in the form of remittances to family members who remained in Mozambique. With the intensification of the war, the polarisation of population concentrations, and the collapse of regular access to the district, remittances became more and more problematic. Money sent with migrants who attempted to make their way back into the district increasingly was lost as those individuals were killed and/or robbed.

Consequently, many Machazian men abroad either sent instructions or else personally returned to help family members move either into safer areas within Mozambique. In particular men were concerned with their mothers and with those of their wives who already had children. From approximately 1984 on, one of the major strategies was for men to place their spouses and other “dependent” family members in UNHCR organised refugee camps in Zimbabwe and then proceed back to their areas of employment and residence in South Africa. These men often maintained support and communication channels with their families in these “surrogate home bases”.

Despite the attempts by some Machazian men to assist their spouses and other dependent family members, the one option which was systematically avoided by these men was that of having these family members, and spouses in particular, join them in South Africa. In fact, husbands quite actively discouraged their spouses from coming to join them in South Africa even if they expressed a desire to do so.

Keeping dependants, and in particular wives, in the UNHCR camps allowed men to continue to pursue long established life-course strategies in important ways that would have been far more difficult if their wives had joined them in South Africa. The humanitarian aid provided in these camps reduced the cost that these men had in maintaining their families, in a manner analogous to that in which subsistence production had done back in Machaze. Subsistence cultivation in the township areas in which most Machazian migrants lived in South Africa was impossible. The townships in the Vaal consist of small houses and shacks, with tiny yards generally less than ten square meters in area, sprawled often from horizon to horizon. Even small garden plots and animals such as chickens are rarely seen since these are often stolen. Many men whom I interviewed argued that having a Machazian wife move to South Africa would drain their earnings because she would become a dependent herself:
M: What could she (my Machazian wife) do here except ‘eat my money”? There is nowhere to plant a *maachamba*. She could not sell fruit because she does not know the language or the Rand (currency) and these South African women are very clever and would deceive her so she would lose everything. Even to cook here you must have money to buy charcoal. It is not like Machaze where she can go and find firewood snap...she would not want to eat *sadza* only anymore because the South African women also want to eat (corn)flakes and cakes and this would eat my money because she would stay at home all day sitting.

The claim that Machazian women would become an economic burden on their husbands in South Africa is highly questionable in light of both the little research done on that subject during my South African fieldwork and the larger body of research on women’s participation in the informal economy of the South African townships. Migrant women to South African township areas have been shown by a considerable body of research to be quite successful participants in the flourishing informal economy in these areas (Bozzoli, 1991a, 1991b; Preston-Whyte, 1991). In my own fieldwork in these townships, those few Machaze women who actually had been joined their husbands in South Africa were generally quite successful entrepreneurs. In two cases Machazian wives provided the sole income for their entire households and supported Mozambican husbands. In 1997 I conducted a somewhat rough and admittedly small survey-based review of the economic situation of 31 households with male migrants from Machaze residing in South African townships whom had wives from Machaze living there with them. I collected data on reported monthly household expense, on women’s earnings, and on the type of activity they engaged in to generate those earnings. As a very preliminary and crude measure of women’s impact on household expenses I measured their income as a percentage of the reported monthly total household expenses. The results show that on average these women earned at least 44% of the total reported monthly household budget. All of these households included more than members than just the husband and wife. Furthermore thirty percent of these households contained one or more adult men who were being supported at the time as dependants since they were unemployed and contributed nothing to the household expenses (Lubkemann, 2000, 417-419). Probably far more economically important for men in South Africa, was the effect that a wife’s services to other dependent family members, such as small children and aged parents (who might also be in Mozambique or in the UNHCR camps) had on keeping those members from coming to South Africa. These other categories of social actors would most probably have been economically unproductive in South Africa and represented a drain on income.

As my fieldwork in South Africa progressed “non-economic” reasons also surfaced as playing an important role in Machazian men’s efforts to prevent their spouses from joining them in South Africa. Machazian men in South Africa frequently express longing for aspects of their life in Machaze which they miss in South Africa—the fact that in Machaze they do not need to pay for cooking or heating fuel, that most food is produced rather than paid for, that one can live with little money. The ability of men to pursue these life-strategies was (and even today remains) dependent on two factors—control over the labour of wives which provide all these services free of cash, and on women’s willingness to accept the culturally-sanctioned gendered division of labour, power, and authority which define social roles within marriage and the family.

Women historically have and still do provide virtually all of the labour for the practice of subsistence agriculture in Machaze. In Machaze, poor land quality and acute water scarcity which make domestic and agricultural tasks highly labour intensive. Women perform most of these labour intensive tasks. For example, the average woman walks over 8 kilometres per day to get water. Although men may participate in all parts of the agricultural cycle, they are often only expected to participate in the initial clearing of fields—a labour intensive but fairly short exercise that may occur every 2-5 years. The rest of the agricultural activities are culturally prescribed as primarily “women’s work”.
Throughout the twentieth century Machazian men’s life strategies have depended on rather acute culturally prescribed asymmetries in gender relations that allow them to exploit women’s labour for their own benefit. Keeping women in Machaze and preventing their outmigration has served as a major mechanism for preserving this asymmetry. The virtually complete restriction on female migration has thus served other purposes besides those of colonial governance and capitalist accumulation. The asymmetry of power that men achieved through their gendered monopoly on (migration-based) sources of cash has played an important role in their ability to control women’s labour and foster relationships of female dependence on men. The recognition by Machazian men of the importance of controlling female migration in order to reproduce this social order played a significant role in shaping wartime migration in and from Machaze, and ultimately in the demographic distribution of Machazian refugee populations.

Most men from Machaze whom I interviewed expressed a need to keep Machazian women unaware of ways of life that would put in question women’s willingness to engage in the labour or level of deference which men’s ease of life back in Machaze depends on. One of the most straightforward expressions of this sentiment came from an interview conducted with a Machazian man in Vereeniging, South Africa:

D: In Machaze there must always be suffering to live. Women must always suffer. If the women from Machaze come to South Africa, they will become corrupt like the South African women are. They will always spend money. Once you feed a dog from a plate it will never again eat off the floor.

Although not always the case, most Machazian men felt that a sojourn in Zimbabwe would not have the same negative effect on Machazian women that time spent in South Africa would. They frequently alluded to the similarity between customs in Machaze and across the border in Zimbabwe, in contrast to the much larger differences between women’s ways of life in South African townships and in Machaze:

J: In Tongogara (the largest UNHCR camp in Zimbabwe), it was different from Machaze but not so much as here (in South Africa). If they (the women) worked outside the camps it was in the maachambas (farms)...The others in the camp were also mostly from Machaze and knew the right way to behave.

The labour of a wife was not something that only the husband personally or exclusively benefited from. Wives also contributed substantial labour to their husband’s parents and in particular to their mothers-in-law. As discussed extensively in my larger work (Lubkemann, 2000) a man’s relationship with his mother gained importance for sons during the post-World War II period as homesteads tended towards greater nuclearisation. Mothers increasingly became involved in the practical long-term oversight of the affairs of a son and of his wives, and in the safeguarding of his interests in his absence. This management role gave considerable influence and power to older women whose sons were married and migrating. The importance of this relationship for sons is still reflected in local ideologies surrounding witchcraft: pleasing senior kin (and mothers in particular) is considered important to avoid troubles with ancestral spirits.

In several cases, I encountered men who had been in South Africa for many years while rarely if ever returning to Machaze. Their marriages in Machaze had either dissolved or their wives had moved out from their mother-in-law’s homestead in order to establish their own homesteads with their children. As these men’s mothers had grown older their need for assistance had increased and they began to grumble about the long absence of their sons and the fact that no one was caring for them. At least three men I interviewed admitted returning to Mozambique to procure a wife and leave her with their mother with no other purpose other than the aversion of problems with ancestral spirits. One man described his own situation as follows:
When I first heard that my mother was complaining I was worried. I went to the profeta (prophet) who gave me this ‘charm’ so that the mudzimu (family spirits) would not trouble me after I sent her money. After a year I was getting very very ill and the profeta said that no, I must go back to visit. When I returned I saw that my mother could not get water... I paid the lobola (brideprice) for a woman so my mother could ‘lean on her’ and then (after three months) I came back to South Africa...most of my life is here now…

Engendered Social Struggle and the Control of Female Migration: Men Protecting New Opportunities

Whereas preventing Machazian women from joining them in South Africa played a role in protecting already long established life-strategies for many Machazian men, it also allowed them to take advantage of developments in South Africa that presented these men with new social opportunities. Prior to the civil war a whole series of important regulatory, labour-market, social and demographic changes in South Africa had established new possibilities and motives for migrant Machazian men to establish more involved conjugal relations and more permanent residential and legal status in South Africa itself. The most important of these changes involved the shift from legal and regulated mine labour participation to illegal and secondary or tertiary sector labour participation starting in the decade following World War II. Whereas seventy-six percent of migrants surveyed were involved in mine labour in the migrant labour trips undertaken prior to 1950, and only thirty-six percent in the secondary or tertiary sector, by 1977 sixty-two percent of migrant labourers were now involved in the secondary/tertiary sector and only forty-four percent in mine labour. (Lubkemann, 2000, 118-119). Mine labour involved deferred payment and obligatory return home after eighteen months for six-month (minimum) leaves. Other forms of non-mine employment do not have these time restrictions, nor do they have deferred pay schemes—everything is received in South Africa. Furthermore, the requirement of a South African id document encouraged most participants in this type of labour to obtain either forged documents or bribe officials for legal ones. These individuals could then “pass” as “legal” South African citizens. Their ability to lead a more “total social life” in South Africa was thus rendered less problematic (Lubkemann, 2000).

The widespread emergence of township and township-based (hostel) housing as a replacement for compounds for migrant men during the 1960’s and 1970’s also created new opportunities in South Africa for Machazian men. During the 1970s and into the 1980s these township areas experienced a massive explosion of illegal squatter settlement which overwhelmed any official attempts to thwart or check it (Schlemmer, 1985). Another critical factor was the growth of (South African) female migration to these peri-urban areas which vastly improved the “conjugal market” for men in these urban areas between 1960 and the early 1980s (Smit, 1980, 116-117). These changes opened up new social possibilities and widened the array of possible relational aspects that could be pursued particularly with reference to conjugal unions. The move to the hostels in the 1960’s opened up new sexual, domestic, and economic relationship possibilities for Mozambican men with South African women.

The economic downturn and resulting employment crisis in South Africa during the late 1970’s gave employers considerably more power over employees that they did not hesitate to exercise to their advantage (Crush, Yudelman and Jeeves, 1991, 127-130). Up to the time of Mozambican independence Machazian men reported that they often overstay official leave times, or even left employment in one company in order to seek employment elsewhere without having a definite alternative already established. As unemployment rose, Machazian men began to comply with these stricter requirement in order to maintain their jobs. The average leave time of 2 weeks granted by employers and its stricter enforcement, strongly
discouraged these men from being able to easily or as frequently visit their families and homes back in Machaze while further encouraging the establishment stronger residential ties in South Africa (Lübkmann, 2000).

After 1979, the war intensified male outmigration from Machaze district to South Africa. It also encouraged Machazian men who were still miners to seek employment in the secondary sector and residence in township areas rather than face mandatory repatriation after their contract terms were up. This became an even more attractive alternative in 1986 when the South African government decided to arbitrarily return all Mozambican miners back to Mozambique as a way of exerting pressure on the Mozambican government to stop supporting ANC actions (De Vletter, 1987). As the war continued and intensified, more and more Machazian men began to consider the possibility that they might never be able to reconstitute their lives back in Mozambique:

L: At first I did not think about the war so much. I did not visit Machaze because it was too “hot” there. Some went back but never returned so I was afraid to go because I could be killed. Later I heard that my father had been killed but I did not hear about my mother or my wife so I thought they were dead too. I started to think that the situation in Mozambique would be too hot because FRELIMO and RENAMO never wanted to stop fighting even after President Samora was killed. So I said this war will not stop-I must stay in this place.”

For some the war had partially or thoroughly disrupted their contact with some or all family members back in Mozambique. To many men the possibility of developing alternative ways of realising their own life-course strategies in South Africa itself through the development of more involved conjugal relationships with South African women proved an increasingly attractive option.

Whereas among those Machazians surveyed who had been employed in non-mine migration from 1970-1978, thirty percent reported being engaged during that time in a conjugal relationship with South African women in an additional survey of over two-hundred Machazian men living in the townships in 1997 (in non-mine employment or unemployed) fifty-two percent reported being engaged in such an ongoing relationship. Perhaps more importantly among a subsample of 24 men who reported not presently being in such a relationship with a South African woman, nineteen (seventy-nine percent!) reported having been in one (or more) such relationship during the previous decade.

The possibility of pursuing conjugal options with South African women was regarded as largely dependent on keeping South African partners unaware of other marriage partners elsewhere. South African women were not receptive to the idea of polygyny in general and adamantly opposed in particular to the presence of a Mozambican wife in their homes in South Africa. Men also feared that Machazian women would become discontent at the discovery of South African counterparts and of their lack of authority over these wives whom they considered junior because they were not Machazian. This discontent was felt to increase the likelihood of the husband being exposed to uloi (witchcraft). The physical proximity of the Machazian woman was believed to amplify the effect of that uloi:

J: If she (a Machazian wife) comes here (to South Africa) then there can be big problems with uloi because the (South African) woman does not want her to be in her house. Everyone will suffer then.

Interviewer: “do you mean that the South African woman will cause uloi that will harm the Machazian woman?”

J: “No, that is not the case. The South African woman cannot cause the uloi. But she will suffer because the Machazian woman will cause uloi. Then the husband can suffer too. This is what happened with M.
N. The two children died and then his (South African) wife went to the police and reported him because she did not want more of her children to die. So he had to take his (Machazian) wife (to another township)."

The presence of a Machazian wife in South Africa could also threaten to expose the Mozambican identity of these men themselves, subjecting them to greater risks of deportation. Many of these men actually endeavoured to manage their own identity vis-à-vis their South African partners so as to even prevent them from knowing they were Mozambicans to avoid such problems. They would present themselves to South African women as Shangaanas from the Giyani area in South Africa.

Machazian men used both active and passive strategies of non-assistance to minimise the possibilities for Machazian women to engage in migration to South Africa, and to circumscribe and control their migratory-based reactions to conflict in general. Some men refused to respond to letters from spouses who requested to join their husbands in South Africa, sometimes under the pretext that they had never received these letters in the first place. Others provided dubious and misleading reasons why spouses should not come to South Africa, or else promised what eventually became indefinitely delayed decisions-a more passive and yet nevertheless effective form of preventing women from coming to South Africa:

A: Initially I wrote back (to his wife in the UNHCR camp) that it was not possible for her to come here because I was living in a hostel and women were not allowed. After I bought this house, I continued to say I was living in the hostel so she would not come.

Some exceptional women made their way to South Africa of their own initiative and found their spouses despite lacking or misleading information. These women had managed to make their way to South Africa by availing themselves of the services of hoomuchas—a “profession” that experienced spectacular growth during the war. Hoomuchas were paid professionals who specialised in smuggling people, messages and sometimes things back and forth across international borders for a fee. Sometimes they would be paid by a Machazian in South Africa to bring back a specific family member to South Africa--most often a male relative. However, at times these hoomuchas would drum up business in the UNHCR camps, or among self-settled Machazians in Zimbabwe or Mozambique, by claiming to know where a person’s family members were in South Africa (sometimes truthfully and sometimes not) and offering for a fee to take the person back to that family member even if the relative in South Africa had not solicited this service. These cases are very few but they are illustrative because of the response that these initiatives produced. In some cases, wives were actually sent back by their husbands to the camps in Zimbabwe and in two interview cases back into the war-zone in Mozambique itself!

The gendered demographic distribution among residents from Machaze largely resulted from the way in which men manipulated information and guarded historically-gendered “experience capital” (related to migration) in order to further their own agendas. The politicisation of information in terms of socially specific strategies and gendered power relationships is clearly evident in these cases. “Gender politics” thus clearly played a significant role, entirely apart from the macro-political agenda of the war, in shaping the organisation of Machazian wartime migration.

Problematizng “Return” Migration: “Kinetic” Versus “Situating” Approaches

The last section of this paper demonstrates the contrasting analytical outcomes between “kinetic” approaches and an approach that “situates migration” in understanding post-wartime Machazian migration from South Africa to Mozambique. It examines what such an approach
implies for time-honoured dichotomies in migration research, and most particularly for the
distinction drawn between “return” and “non-return” among wartime migrant populations.

The Humanitarian Community’s Understanding of “Return” Migration

In 1993-1995, the UNHCR in conjunction with various humanitarian relief and assistance
organisations carried out in Mozambique what has been widely regarded as one of its most
successful repatriation efforts ever. Over 1.6 million Mozambican refugees were estimated to
have returned either spontaneously or through the organised efforts of the humanitarian
community, from Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. UNHCR estimated
that it had assisted in the organised return of approximately 320,000 people (UNHCR, 1995a).
The repatriation effort was generally assessed as a successful realisation of the humanitarian
community’s estimation, planning and implementation efforts in all of these countries with the
exception of the repatriation from South Africa. The repatriation of Mozambicans from South
Africa was considered to be a rather frustrating case in which results fell far short of
expectations. UNHCR originally estimated that over 200,000 (of an estimated total of 250,000)
self-settled Mozambicans in South Africa would return during 1994-1995. However, only a
fraction of the total number of returnees expected (31,589 to be exact) ever actually returned,
at least with the assistance of official humanitarian efforts (UNHCR, 1996).

It was not only the failure of totals to materialise that plagued the South African repatriation
operation. Throughout 1994 and into 1995 the problem of distinguishing between “economic”
migrants and “genuine refugees” came to be seen as one of the other major problems faced
by UNHCR in the organisation of Mozambican return from South Africa. Numerous reports
surfaced throughout 1994, noting that the vast majority of those Mozambicans whose return
was being assisted by UNHCR and its implementing partners were in fact single males. These
single males were suspected of being “labour migrants”, rather than “genuine refugees”, who
were taking advantage of the opportunity for a free trip home for themselves and for their
luggage. In two convoys from South Africa in November of 1994, consisting of a combined
total of 183 returnees, 78.6% of all returnees were single males (UNHCR, 1994d)!

Furthermore, the returnee population from South Africa was attempting to bring back a volume
of luggage far unlike that of the other Mozambican refugee populations being assisted by
UNHCR, such as those returning from the camps in Zimbabwe. In a UNHCR mission report to
South Africa dated from January 17, 1994 the following point was made:

There was considerable discussion on how to deal with ‘economic migrants’
compared to the more deserving ‘refugees’ in South Africa. It was suggested that
these two groups can be separated based on their stated reason for leaving, what
they did in the RSA, and where they lived in the RSA. It seems unlikely that
anyone will say they went to the RSA for work once the benefits of being a
‘refugee’ are known (UNHCR, 1994a).

Throughout 1994 and into 1995 UNHCR, its implementing partners, and its Mozambican
counterpart NAR (Nucleo de Apoio ao Refugiado) continuously attempted to seek ways to
distinguish between “economic” migrants and “genuine refugees” in order to focus assistance
on the latter. These efforts generally met with limited success. It was believed that most of
these economic migrants returned to South Africa after receiving transportation for themselves
and their baggage home, and that often this was a procedure repeated by the same individuals
more than once. This so-called “revolving-door syndrome” was seen as challenging UNHCR’s
attempt to channel its assistance to those who were regarded as “really needing it”. This
problem also became a concern which increasingly implicated the UNHCR’s own public image
in the media. In late 1994 the following observations were made in a UNHCR-RSA report on
Migrant Labour and the UNHCR Repatriation Operation (RSA/MOZ):
...measures to tackle the revolving door syndrome are being taken...However, and despite our best efforts, it has become evident during the last few months, that the revolving door is close to spinning! Our own observations at the transit facilities, through field-level contact with the local ‘network’ of community knowledge and from comments and questions directed to us by organisations, agencies and general observers; suggest that the number of single young males travelling with convoys across the border has increased significantly. (UNHCR, 1994b)

A barrage of reports and assessments ultimately produced an array of different and sometimes contradictory answers and explanations for the unexpected problems and unfulfilled expectations regarding Mozambican repatriation from South Africa. These explanations tended to focus on three different types of factors -- organisational, economic and political.

In one mid-1995 UNHCR-RSA report on “lessons learnt” the general explanation for the low rates of return was listed as the “much stronger socio-economic situation in South Africa. Why leave a country where there are plenty of job opportunities, health care and schools?” Secondary issues of importance were interrelated political and organisational ones, namely: the fact that UNHCR had been denied a presence in South Africa until 1991 and had only created a field presence in refugee areas as late as 1994, and the weakness and inexperience of (South African-based) implementing partners. Nevertheless, and in a somewhat contradictory vein, the same report also commented that “the operation contained strong elements of information campaign and well-functioning logistics structure, in reality door-to-door service...” (UNHCR, 1995c).

Another report prepared on the basis of informal fieldwork by a UNHCR official in South Africa in mid-1994 concluded that the low rate of Mozambican participation in UNHCR repatriation efforts was in large part a matter of timing. Mozambicans were reported as struggling, under the adversity of their illegal status, to earn enough in South Africa in order to be able to re-establish their homesteads when they finally did return to Mozambique. Those who returned before being “fully prepared” in terms of having sufficient resources for fully re-establishing their homesteads reportedly returned to South Africa highly discouraged. These individuals in turn influenced others to delay or forgo their own plans to return. The same report listed other reasons for non-return as uncertainty over the political climate, fear of corruption and landmines, and the extreme degree of trauma that some had suffered in Mozambique leading them to desire a total cut-off with their past (Rodgers, 1994).

Other reports produced other explanations such as a lack of knowledge about how to go about registering for repatriation assistance or even of the existence of these services (UNHCR-1994e). One reported stated that South African farmers and industries had organised misinformation campaigns about the state of political and economic affairs back in order to protect their source of inexpensive Mozambican labour (UNHCR, 1994f). These reports called for better public education and information. However only a few months later (2/95) another mission dismissed this factor as irrelevant to the low rate of Mozambican participation in organised return from South Africa, stating that:

the refugee communities are 100% fully aware of the end date for the repatriation operation...it was interesting to note that throughout the whole mission none of the old reasons (emphasis in the original) (political uncertainty in Mozambique, physical security, mines, banditry, food security, elections in the RSA and in Mozambique, the planting season and harvest etc. etc.) were presented by the refugees as to why they couldn’t return to their places of origin. (UNHCR, 1995b)

The overall degree of confusion and uncertainty over “what went wrong” in the South African repatriation effort was perhaps most revealingly articulated in the final report on the Reintegration Programme’s Evaluation Mission for the Mozambique’s Southern region:
The operation in the South was geared for an expected high number of refugees returning from South Africa. This did not happen. However, the reasons for the ‘no show’ of an estimated 200,000 plus Mozambicans expected to return from the RSA have been well documented and debated long into the night! The question that comes out in the end is, how did the UNHCR get its estimates so wrong? Perhaps not a question for this evaluation team? (UNHCR, 1996)

The one striking commonality in the structure of all of the explanations was their implicit kinetic structure. All of the factors which were analysed—organisational, political, and economic—were treated as aspects of the environment which were seen as acting upon refugees. Expectations that refugees would return to Mozambique from South Africa after the war were generated from an analysis that focused on changes in the political climate and the negotiation of a military settlement. When people did not “react” to “peace” by returning as expected explanations were sought in other macro-environmental differences such as those in the organisational structure of intervening institutions, or the larger economic settings within which migration took place.

There was never however, any examination of differences that in a heuristic sense might be seen as ‘internal’ to the refugees themselves - for example those aspects of social organisation that might differentiate these refugees from others and affect their movement choices. Culturally defined differences in gender relations, socio-economic organisation and the division of labour, household and co-residence structure, and the interrelationships among these factors that might inform the agency of these particular refugees remained virtually unexamined. Certainly, no investigation was made of whether transformations in pre-war baselines of social and economic organisation might have played a role in shaping patterns of return.

The humanitarian community’s framing of the very problem of “return” itself was structured by assumptions that critically misled their analysis, at least as it applied to the Machazian population. In particular the options of “return” and “non-return” were implicitly structured as mutually exclusive options. This understanding informed their concern with the “revolving door” syndrome and their attempts to define “refugees” and “economic migrants” as separate categories.

Machazian Men’s Understandings of “Return”

The ideas about “return” to Mozambique that shaped the behaviour of most Machazian men stood in stark contrast to the understandings of their return which shaped the humanitarian relief community’s efforts. To most Machazian men living in the peri-urban townships in South Africa returning to Machaze was generally not seen as an option that was mutually exclusive of the option of remaining in South Africa. The fact that these men established new “total social life” options in South Africa during the war did not mean that they had abdicated from their relationships with their Machazian wives (and especially their rights in those relationships). The support sent by some of these men or the occasional visits to wives in Mozambique and in Zimbabwe expressed this view. Men were particularly assertive concerning their rights in cases where the “legal” obligation of lobola had already been fulfilled, and where the wife had children.

Retaining these claims on their Machazian marriages represented a largely cost-free investment in the possibility of a Mozambican social option for these men. These rights could only be negated through the negotiated repayment of lobola itself, a process that implicated not only the interests of the wife but the interests of those of her family members who had received (and quite possibly subsequently used) this payment. Once a substantial portion of lobola had been paid it allowed these men to preserve their claims in the marriage despite their own passivity in or outright failure to fulfil the reciprocal obligations to their spouses that lobola was also supposed to signify.
Maintaining what was a relatively “cost-free” social option outside of South Africa clearly served men’s interests. It allowed them to hedge against specific risks they faced in implementing their life-strategies in South Africa. The cash-dependence and high cost-of-living in the South African townships continued to make the possibility of an eventual option of re-establishment in Mozambique well worth preserving. A concern with rising violence in the townships throughout the 1980’s and, after 1990, the increased targeting of foreigners in township crime, heightened Machazian men’s interest in the eventual re-establishment of a Mozambican residential option. The illegality of their status in South Africa made Machazian men vulnerable to crime, given that it was known they would not report it to authorities. It also made them vulnerable to extortion on the part of corrupt officials. Thus whereas intensified conjugality in South Africa became a growing interest for Machazian men, at the same time many Machazian men continued to be interested in maintaining their relationships with Machazian women in Zimbabwe or in Mozambique itself.

The very possibility of men’s pursuing their life-strategies in Machaze had been premised for decades on the possibility of working in South Africa. The wartime devastation of Mozambique and these men’s continuing uncertainties about the post-war political situation in the country only reinforced the importance of links to economic options in South Africa after the war. However, in contrast to the time period preceding the war, many of these men no longer saw South Africa as necessarily merely a place of employment, nor Machaze as the only place in which to constitute families and long-term or even permanent forms of residence. For Machazian men South Africa is now considered a location in which to potentially pursue a “total social life” that parallels and complements, rather than simply contributes to, their social lives back in Machaze. Consequently, their return behaviour must be investigated in light of the new role which they see South Africa and Machaze playing in reconfigured life-course models, and migration’s role in the realisation of these models.

The most important factor in reconfiguring Machazian men’s understandings of the meaning of “return” is that increasingly Machazian men are engaging in conjugal options in South Africa including a variety of forms of transnational polygyny. In a survey of over two-hundred Machazian men engaged in non-mine employment and resident in the South African townships, twenty-three percent were involved in conjugal relations only in Mozambique, twenty-six percent were involved in conjugal relations only in South Africa, thirty-seven percent were involved in conjugal relations in both South Africa and Mozambique, three percent were involved in conjugal relations only in Zimbabwe, and finally two percent were involved in conjugal relations in three countries (South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe). Nine percent of those surveyed reported they were involved in no conjugal relations whatsoever (Lubkemann, 2000, 448-449).

The relationships that these men have with the South African women with whom they are involved also experienced a qualitative change in the rights and responsibilities involved. Perhaps one of the most telling signs of the intensification of these relationships is the fact that in a subsample of 30 of these unions, 12 (40%) had involved lobola payment and/or an official church ceremony. Such type of social sanctioning was virtually unheard about in the unions between Machazian men and South African women before the war (Lubkemann, 2000, 449).

The transnationalisation of polygynous marriage has radically transformed the meaning of marriage for Machazian men (and women). Pre-war polygynous marriage entirely within Machaze was used by men to ensure the quality and success of those aspects of their life-strategies which were exclusively carried out in Machaze. These aspects included their concerns with reproduction, labour in Machaze, comfort and security in old age and eventual retirement, and the struggle with other men for social status in the local community. In this sense, “marriage” (polygynous or otherwise) dealt with men’s “Machaze-specific” problems.

Transnationalised, polygyny is now used by men to ensure that all aspects of their life-strategies, including those which they used to pursue exclusively in Machaze, can now also be pursued in South Africa. The scope of risks and life challenges which men now are deploying
polygyny to deal with has been radically expanded. Polygynous marriage is no longer merely a strategy for engaging in struggles for local social status or for ensuring economic security in light of local socio-economic systems and conditions. Through its transnationalisation, men now deploy polygyny as a strategy for also dealing with the opportunities and risks of political and economic insecurity that operates at the level of the state. By maintaining households in both South Africa and in Mozambique men engaged in transnational polygamy diversify the risks to their life-strategies.

In one extreme case, one Machazian man whom I interviewed in 1996 had four wives living in three different countries. Two of his wives lived in Machaze, another lived in South Africa and a fourth one lived in Zimbabwe. In Machaze, his wives each tended maachambas and his son engaged in trading activity with products which he brought or occasionally sent back from South Africa. He himself did odd jobs on occasion for an international humanitarian organisation that was active in Machaze district after the war. In Zimbabwe another wife (originally from Machaze) traded in the market and lived with another son who was an artisan selling his stone carvings to tourists. In South Africa, he shared his house with a Xhosa woman who had never been to Mozambique and who at the time was working as a part-time domestic worker. Two of his sons also lived in South Africa, the younger one with him tending to his small “tuck shop” (one room convenience store). Another wife who had lived in yet another location, the city of Chimoio in Mozambique, had died the previous year! Men such as this one, use transnational polygyny to ensure that their entire life-course strategies are not necessarily vulnerable to any one national context’s political or economic instability. The meaning of polygyny and of the institution of marriage has thus changed in a significant way for men. It has become the central and indispensable form of relationship that enables this risk-diversification possibility.

The transformation of the range of life-strategy options for men has also significantly transformed the meaning of migration itself for these men. In pre-war male life strategies the primary “work” that migration performed for Machazian men was to acquire resources deemed necessary for the realisation of their life-course objectives, but lacking in Machaze, from another place in which these resources were available—namely, South Africa. Over this century migration increasingly became a technique that men adapted and deployed in a variety of socio-political struggles at multiple levels: inter-generationally, against a coercive state intent on capturing their labour through forced labour, and within their conjugal relationships. However, the location of all of these struggles was clearly located in Machaze itself.

For many transnationally polygynous men, migration’s whole purpose now is to make it unnecessary for them to have any single or exclusive anchor point. From an analytical perspective, migration is the indispensable and irreplaceable mechanism of this system. It is what allows men to avoid their life-course goals from being dependent on the conditions in any one point by allowing men to pursue “total social life” options simultaneously in multiple points. A system premised on the maintenance of multiple parallel options is thoroughly dependent on the process which creates and maintains that multiplicity—i.e. migration. Therefore, migration is now technique applied as a solution to a larger set of challenges than it used to be for Machazian men. This raises the question of what we are comparing when we compare pre-war migration to present-day migration. The fact that post-war migration is being used as a tactic which addresses different problems than pre-war migration did suggests that for some purposes it is analytically useful to treat these migrations as distinct orders of phenomenon.

Among the two hundred Machazian men surveyed in South Africa, only eleven percent reported that they had no plans to return to Mozambique. However, the fact that “return” to Mozambique did not necessarily imply forsaking social and economic options in South Africa was reflected in the percentage of those respondents in a subsample of sixty-four of these men who plan to keep a house (seventy-nine percent) and a business (seventy-two percent) in South Africa after “returning” to Mozambique. Another sign of the ties these men have to South Africa is that forty-seven percent of them report that they are enrolled in a pensioner plan through their employment. These are plans in which they are enrolled as South Africa
and (unlike in mine employment) must be in South Africa to collect. Sixty-five percent of these men have legal South African identity documents which they obtained either through bribing officials or misrepresenting themselves as South Africans (including all but one of those who listed himself as eligible for a pension). Another nineteen percent have forged South African identity documents. The remainder had received legal documentation as Mozambicans through an amnesty offered by the South African government although half of them report still having a false South African identity document as well (Lubkemann, 2000, 453-454).

These men have reconfigured their lives in ways that are premised on the idea that “total social lives” in Machaze and in South Africa are not mutually exclusive options. To “return” to Machaze for these men is not necessarily (or even likely) a matter of “leaving” South Africa, even in the same way that it was for Machazian men prior to the war. One interviewee explained the difference in his own perspectives prior to and following the war in this manner:

S: Before the war I had two stores here (in South Africa) but I always was thinking of going back to Machaze...I would have taken my (South African) wife with me or else she would have stayed if she refused to come when I went... Now I must also go back (to Machaze) because that is my place of origin...I want to set up a tuck shop there. I will still have this tuck shop and house here (in South Africa) and must come back also because I must collect my pension (myself).... In Machaze, food and firewood are free. (But) my children (two sons and a daughter) are also here and they are married here and so I must have a house here too and this (South African) wife who must stay here.

The terms in which these men conceive of and enact their own lives thus defy the hegemonic pretensions of an international political system that privileges the idea that citizens “belong” to one and only one nation-state and which strives to map this exclusivity onto the residence, social lives, legal status, and often the economic activity of populations. Clearly, from the perspective of those Machazian men involved in transnationally polygynous unions, the assumptions of the humanitarian community and of regional national governments that posit “return” and “non-return” as mutually exclusive options, does not capture the reality to which they aspire. Machazian men are highly resistant to the imposition of state-level notions of “return” which threaten to “displace” them from their own pretended transnational life-strategies. This resistance is evidenced in the low rate of participation in official UNHCR return efforts, in the preference for self-organised return beyond the pale of official scrutiny, and in the “revolving door syndrome” as men continuously cross back into South Africa.

By ignoring the culturally informed agency of Machazian men and privileging macro-political factors in their explanations of migration behaviour, kinetic approaches implicitly reproduce the hegemonic socio-political pretensions of the international state system in their very terms of analysis and identification of the object of study. Consequently analysis comes to be structured in terms of a series of a-priori mutually exclusive dichotomies such as “internally-displaced”/ “refugee” (similar to “internal”/ “international” migration); “economic migrant”/”refugee” (“voluntary”/”involuntary” migration) and “returnee”/”stayee. Ranger’s deconstruction of the implications embedded in one of these dichotomies is more broadly generalisable to all of them:

The concept of ‘repatriation’ derives from the idea of a ‘patria’ and this in turn implies that an individual’s primary identity, rights and obligations derive from the membership of a ‘nation’. The nation encapsulates ‘home’ in terms of language, culture, rights to citizenship and land. Yet this is precisely what is at stake in many countries which generate refugees and returnees... Even where the idea of return to one’s ‘country’ is a national as well as a local sentiment, that idea co-exists and sometimes conflicts with many other senses of identity and entitlement...Any study of return needs, therefore, to look closely at such multiple ideas of identity and entitlement (rather than assume them). (Ranger, 1993, 289) (parenthesis added).
While these dichotomies reflect and reproduce the pretensions of a global system based on the “hegemony of the state” (Young, 1994) they clearly fail to represent the understandings to which migrants themselves are often primarily responsive in shaping their own behaviour as both others (Harrell-Bond, 1984; Daley, 1991; Allen and Turton, 1996; Holt, 1996; Indra, 1999; Bascom, 1996, 1998; Hansen, 1982, 1992) and this analysis show. These categorisations are critical ones in determining how people in and affected by migration flows, and by the contexts which produce them, are engaged by larger state and international-level political actors. These definitions affect how larger political power is formulated and exercised through policies of inclusion and exclusion, including those policies that determine: who receives assistance or conversely is targeted for coercive measures; the legality of resettlement status; the ascription of civil and even human rights; and the division and assignment of spheres of governmental and civil responsibility and of non-involvement.

Demographers must be attentive to how these systems of classification generally reflect and reproduce the hegemonic pretensions of an international system based on the idea of the state as the “natural” social entity, rather than the social or economic realities which forced migrants perceive they must respond to. Inasmuch as demographic processes are the result of socially and culturally situated challenges to these pretensions, demographers should reassess their use of analytical categories that derive from and reinforce them. Clearly, the a-priori application of these dichotomies ultimately fails to adequately account for the empirically observed patterns of behaviour observed on the ground.

Conclusion: Towards a Methodological Approach to Situating Migration

Richmond’s prescription for theories of international migration can be more applied more broadly to what all migration analysis should be capable of addressing:

...theories of international migration (including refugees) should be capable of explaining the scale, direction and composition of population movements that cross state boundaries, the factors which determine the decision to move and the choice of destination, the characteristic modes of integration in the receiving country and the eventual outcome, including remigration and return movement. “(Richmond, 1988, 7).

In “theories”, or “approaches” that pretend to be applicable in analysing a wide variety of refugee-producing situations and migration populations there is a tendency to focus on factors of analysis whose terms are not dependent on a high-level of context-specificity. The objective of theory-building in this mode is to identify universally applicable variables. Explanations are sought by drawing comparisons and looking for differences in factors which are assumed to operate under structurally similar principles and terms regardless of context--such as the macro-political or economic environments, or the organisational structure and procedures of humanitarian organisations or other involved institutions.

Once the analyst is familiar with the terms of analysis and relevant principles by which such factors are assumed by the theory to universally operate, he or she knows to and can selectively focus on identifying these, and only these, aspects of any particular context in constructing an explanation, while disregarding the rest of that context as irrelevant “noise”. In practice, this type of analysis involves approaching any specific context or problem with a set of pre-established variables that are assumed to be applicable to the problem at hand (as to any other problem of the same order). In other words, the analyst already assumes that he or she knows which variables are relevant.

By contrast, I have argued that migration must be studied as a process situated in culturally specific forms of social struggle. This suggests that universal theories of migration processes
are not really possible—since those processes, and thus the “work” migration is doing, differs in significant ways from case to case (Bjeren, 1997, 221). An approach that emphasises the need to consider socio-cultural factors suggests that it in some sense it is impossible to know a priori all the relevant variables which matter in shaping behaviour. The terms of some of those variables must be defined and understood at a much more context-specific level that apply only in that context itself.

The development of an approach which thoroughly integrates cultural specificity into the analysis of forced migration, suggests we devise a “theory of method” rather than a theory of universally applicable variables. In this approach the assumption that guides research and analysis is that the researcher does not know which variables (of which they are aware) are of relevance or even to a large extent what some of the types of variables that will be relevant even are - i.e. he or she does not even know what he or she does not know. In such an approach, the investigation of the specific socio-cultural configurations in any given context becomes part of the standard operating procedures for analysis. What becomes standardised is a methodological approach used to identify relevant variables, rather than merely a set of pre-defined variables themselves.

At the broadest level, such an approach involves the identification and analysis of social struggles is the central focus in the study of social process. It implies the empirical identification and privileging in analysis of “key social struggles” in specific contexts. “Key social struggles” are those that have historically served as the critical lines for defining the way in which power is distributed and social differentiation is culturally constituted in specific contexts of social interaction. It appropriates and extends Geertz’s (1973) notion of “thick description” by examining how symbols and practices are given meaning not only in terms of how they are suspended in webs of other symbols, but also in power configurations and contestations over power. In identifying the range, terms, genealogies and interrelationships among forms of social struggle, it establishes a web of power struggles in which migration can be situated as a strategy for engagement in these struggles.

Migration itself is investigated primarily in terms of how it relates to these struggles as a strategy for engaging in them. The focus is thus on migration not as an “end” but as a “means”. Too often “demographic behaviour” is studied as if it were an end in and of itself in ways which inaccurately project a discipline or researcher’s end interest in a subject (such as migration) as an end interest in and of itself to those engaging in that behaviour. This is a problem which conflates disciplinary focus with actor intentionality—such as in the idea that migration or fertility control are always conscious and discrete ends in and of themselves, instead of possible “side-effects” to, or “means” in, other (culturally) specific projects. Migration is best seen as a means to engage in other projects, making those projects the central focus for research and analysis. In this sense there is no “demographic” behaviour in the sense of behaviour directed solely at those aspects which interest demographers (anymore than there is “anthropological” or “cultural” behaviour in this same sense related to the definition of that behaviour in terms of the constitution of culture).

A “theory of method” in this vein is also critically reflexive, in that it presumes that the methods, concepts, and theories that are being used must be constantly subject to critical scrutiny, and are not only vulnerable to but should experience continuous reinterpretation and revision. It is suspicious if there are no surprises when cultural difference is investigated. Such theoretical reflexivity should operate at all levels of analysis ranging from how data are collected, to how they subject to reinterpretation after collection, to the constant consideration of our deployment of larger concepts.
References


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Endnotes

1 In privileging macro-political processes, these analyses arguably admit a narrow “political” basis for migrant agency as relevant to the analysis of migratory patterns and outcomes. Yet, this agency only influences migratory outcomes indirectly, since it is exercised with the intention of engaging in macro-political contests rather than with the intent of directing migration per se. The decision to migrate is not made as a “political act” (i.e. in order to, and as a way to, support one political faction or the other) but only as a result of a prior political act (supporting one faction or another) in which migration was not directly a considered objective.

2 While kinetically-structured analyses of forced migration focus primarily on the macro-political and military conduct of the war, other “macro-environmental” factors, albeit always ones conceptualised as external to and acting upon refugees, may also be examined--such as those in the organisational structure of intervening institutions, or the larger economic settings within which forced migration flows take place (see Lubkemann, forthcoming A).

3 Richmond explicitly draws on the concept of “agency” used by Anthony Giddens. According to Giddens “Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place (which is why agency implies power)”(1984,96); He argues that “agency refers to “doing” whether with intended or unintended consequences (1984,97), arguing that agency thus encompasses what an actor does in the sense of the fact that “what happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened”(1984, 96). Frankly this definition does not seem to separate “agency” from “action” itself, or even at times in his argument, from “outcomes”. A notion of “agency” that distinguishes it from “action” is better served by two of the meanings that Sciulli (1986) has identified as characterising Parson’s notion of “voluntaristic action”, namely: “the capacity to make choices despite constraints; and a capacity for self-initiated action whether or not this capacity is realised.”

4 By “choices” I am referring here to the courses of action that choosers are aware of and can decide to attempt to undertake for themselves. By “consequences” I am specifically referring to the reactions of collective or individual others to the choosers’ actions, and to the relative power of those others in constituting an interactional outcome through their reaction.

5 This approach thus challenges the deployment of analytical frameworks that delimit the temporal parameters of analysis in terms of a “refugee cycle” --of flight, various stages of resettlement, and finally adaptation (Stein, 1981). It suggests on one hand the dislocating of “migration” itself as the phenomenon of primary investigation, and instead a focus on a broader array of reactions to crisis in which migration is situated as one option. It also suggests that rather than being treated as an abnormality in the course of normal social process, as structural-functionalism in southern Africa was wont to do, that crisis itself be reinserted into the broader study of social process (Ranger, 1996; Bascom, 1998).

6 The exact gender distribution of the wartime population is difficult to determine because of the difficulty of reconstructing a population dispersed and decimated by over a decade of war. However, several sources of independent evidence all establish that the gender difference in population distribution was at very least dramatic. The 1980 census which took place in Machaze as the war was underway (and was actually interrupted by it) verified a female to male ration in the district of 1.6:1 (GTZ, 1995.). A 1993 survey of the population in several communal villages counted only 2,087 men in the 16-64 age group while almost twice as many women (3,839) (GTZ, 1993). In my own 1997 survey of over 200 Machazian household in South Africa I found that only 5% has a Machazian wife present Lubkemann, 2000, 432). Prior to the unfortunate disposal of most records at the UNHCR district office at the time of the organisation’s departure, I was able to obtain a sample of these records for over 5000 different returnees, from several different convoys. For purposes of this paper I drew on a subsample of 123 households from the official UNHCR return convoys from Tongogara to Machaze in early 1996. More could easily be examined at a later date. In my subsample I found that a total of 46 households were classified as female-headed along with 6 solo females - which if counted together comprise 42% of the total returnee households in these convoys. Two other studies, one conducted in Tongogara camp (of which Machazians were only a part of the total camp population) (Tandai, 1992) and one in Machaze itself (CARE, 1994) both verified high
levels of female-headed households (Tandai-20%; CARE-30%). In the CARE study only 2% of households that were not female-headed had no adult women in the household.

7 By this time, most Machazian men had already migrated out of the district.

8 It is critical to note that the Mozambican civil war spanned nearly a decade and a half. It would be naïve to assume that social process was suspended or stood still during such a long time period. Despite the fact that most major displacement-producing civil wars in Africa persisted for at least this long (Angola, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Rwanda, Eritrea,) most analysis of forced migration tends to conceptualise displacement as an ‘event’ rather than a “process”.

10 It is important to point out that this survey highlights the situation in 1997 and not necessarily throughout the 1980’s when the war was in full swing.

11 Primarily due to space limitations, I have focused in this chapter on men’s life strategies. In both my dissertation and a paper currently submitted for publication elsewhere, I deal with Machazian women’s strategies at length. Ultimately both migration organisation during the war and refashioned marital roles and relations must be analysed as the outcome of negotiations between and involving both men and women. Machazian women have by no means have remained passive towards the transnationalisation of polygyny given the generally negative implications for their own social and economic status that this development has implied. Furthermore, women have also exploited opportunities presented by wartime circumstances to innovate in the development of social relations in ways that represent bids to enhance their own position relative to men and spouses.