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## Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity

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This essay examines how and with what consequences people become labelled as refugees within the context of public policy practices. Conceptual and operational limitations to the existing definition of refugees are noted. These, the paper contends, derive from the absence of a systematic study of labelling processes in the donative policy discourse associated with refugees.

The paper outlines the conceptual tools of bureaucratic labelling – stereotyping, conformity, designation, identity disaggregation and political/power relationships. These tools are then deployed to analyse empirical data collected from a large refugee population in Cyprus, supplemented by selective secondary research data on various African refugee populations. The analysis proceeds in three parts. First the formation of the label is considered in which stereotyped identities are translated into bureaucratically assumed needs. The label thus takes on a selective, materialist meaning. Alienating distinctions emerge by the creation of different categories of refugee deemed necessary to prioritize need. Next, reformation of the label is considered. The evidence shows how latent and manifest processes of institutional action and programme delivery, reinforce a disaggregated model of identity; in this case disturbing distinctions are made between refugee and non-refugee. Third, the paper considers how labels assume, often conflicting, politicized meanings, for both labelled and labellers.

The paper concludes by emphasizing: the extreme vulnerability of refugees to imposed labels; the importance of symbolic meaning; the dynamic nature of the identity; and, most fundamentally of all, the non-participatory nature and powerlessness of refugees in these processes.

*'You don't feel a second class citizen except with other people – then the housing is a label' – Greek-Cypriot Refugee*

### Introduction

Within the repertoire of humanitarian concern, refugee now constitutes one of the most powerful labels. From the first procedures of status determination – who is a refugee? – to the structural determinants of life chances which this identity then engenders, labels infuse the world of refugees.

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This paper is concerned with labels as a conceptual metaphor. It considers as a general aim, the conceptual language of labelling in the context of refugee studies. Then, using empirical data mainly from Cyprus but also from research literature on refugees in Africa, the specific tasks are to explore how and with what consequences people become labelled as refugees – how an identity is formed, transformed and manipulated within the context of public policy and especially, bureaucratic practices.

A popular conceptualization of the refugee is readily to hand. To the extent that some 14 million or so forced migrants are categorized – labelled – as refugees with an internationally recognised legal status, given credibility by an international agency specifically charged to safeguard their interests, endorsed most powerfully of all by spontaneous philanthropy – the meaning of the label seems self evident. Refugees are, like the places described in Waugh's first travel book, 'fully labelled' in people's minds (Waugh 1930).

Despite a widely recognised universal condition it remains the case that there is great difficulty in agreeing an acceptable definition of the label refugee. This is more than a taxonomic problem because, far from clarifying an identity, the label conveys, instead, an extremely complex set of values, and judgements which are more than just definitional (Zetter 1988:1).

There are a number of major difficulties in sustaining the popular assumptions. First, the interventionary and definitional practices of states, and their political interests, illustrate that the apparent simplicity of a *de minimis* legal label very quickly evaporates. (Montes 1988; Loescher and Scanlon 1986; Zolberg et al. 1989; Zucker and Zucker 1987). In practice there are many interpretations of the definition and, like currencies, they have fluctuating values and exchange rates.

These operational considerations co-exist with a second set of difficulties. There is extensive empirical evidence to illustrate that refugees conceive their identity in very different terms from those bestowing the label (Harrell-Bond 1986; Mazur 1986; Waldron 1988).

Third, there are severe conceptual difficulties in establishing a normative meaning to a label which is a malleable and dynamic as refugee. It is contingent upon notions of persecution, and sovereignty (Adelman 1988; Shaknove 1985) about which there is little consensus, a situation clearly recognised by the OAU Convention of 1969, for example, with its much broader conceptualization of refugee status (Kibreab 1985). Then there are internally displaced people, enduring physical and social trauma equal to that of refugees (Gersony 1988); but they are not officially labelled as refugees. More generally sociological distinctions between concepts of refugeehood and concepts of migration remain lacking in precision (Mazur 1988: 44–5).

Any conceptualization of the label refugee must contend with a fourth problematic area; it is this which forms the specific concern of this paper. Refugees inhabit an institutionalized world of NGOs, intergovernmental

agencies and governments, in which a highly developed framework of public policy exists to provide emergency and developmental assistance. Given this conjuncture, there remains, in my view, an important lacuna in any attempt to define the label. There exists the need to establish more precisely the extent to which bureaucratic interests and procedures are themselves crucial determinants in the definition of labels like refugee. The challenge is a significant one because our concern is fundamental – processes by which refugees are socialized with certain identities and the structural impacts (control, regulation, opportunities) of these identities (Wood 1985:5).

There is a substantial literature on managerialism and patron-client relationships to which this concern relates. Yet within public policy discourse there has been little systematic development of a theoretical framework of labelling which might help to explore in more detail how bureaucratic labels are formed. It was to address this concern that together with colleagues (Wood 1985), we attempted to construct a language and a framework of conceptual tools of labelling target groups in public (especially development) policy. These theoretical developments, it is contended, offer a potentially rich vein of exploration of the refugee phenomenon. It is this framework which I deploy to examine the interaction between bureaucratic policy and procedures on the one hand and refugees' reactions on the other. The conceptual tools of labelling allow us to explore this interplay of interests at their 'point of organizational connection' (Schaffer 1975:7). Simultaneous examination of both the meaning of the institutional label and the reactions of the labelled, sheds new light on the ambivalent and disjunctive responses which refugees frequently display towards assistance programmes. This is the forming and transforming of a bureaucratic identity.

### The Refugees

My own entry point to this problematic analytical situation was in trying to understand the reactions of Greek-Cypriot refugees to their newly acquired identity. In 1974 after a long period of intercommunal conflict between Greek and Turkish-Cypriots, Turkey invaded and still continues to occupy northern Cyprus – approximately 40% of the land area. Some 180,000 Greek-Cypriots (from an ethnic population of about 500,000) became labelled as 'refugees', fleeing from the north to the south of the island. This was paralleled by a reverse flow of 50,000 Turkish-Cypriots from a total ethnic population of 120,000. *De facto* partition and the mass movement of people created an entirely new political and bureaucratic context for public policy. Of the many responses to this crisis, the one that is particularly significant for this paper, concerns the mobilisation of an extremely large rehousing programme for the Greek-Cypriot refugees in the southern part of the island, and the impact which this had on them.

There are three main components in this programme. First, there are comprehensively planned contractor built estates on the periphery of the three

main towns in the south of the island. About 14,000 units have been built and those eligible for these houses are the poorer and larger refugee families. Second there are self-build schemes where refugees, with concessionary government grants and loans, build their own homes to prescribed plans on serviced government land. Again these are located, by and large, on the urban periphery but in some village locations.

Popular because this method mirrors pre-1974 housing processes, nonetheless, like the estate houses, the regularity of form and layout provides a dramatic contrast to the pre-existing morphology of towns and villages. About 12,500 units have been built in this fashion. In the larger self-build and government estates, schools, shopping centres and other community facilities have been built. Third, similar assistance is available for those fortunate refugees who owned or who have been able to buy their own plots of land freehold and a further 12,000 units have been built in this way. A range of smaller scale initiatives exists: By 1990, some 150,000 Greek-Cypriot refugees had been rehoused and over 40,000 houses constructed. Progress has thus been made towards rehousing a very large number of refugees in good quality housing. The programme is detailed elsewhere (Zetter 1986:108-109; 1987:117-196).

Closely linked to the housing programme have been far reaching programmes for reconstructing and restructuring the shattered economy, from an agricultural to an urban-industrial base and to achieving virtually full employment (Zetter 1987:173-184). Disaster as development (MEED 1981; Lewis 1980; UNDRO 1987), the response to the severe economic disequilibrium created in 1974, has been remarkably successful.

By many conventional evaluative measures, this appears, therefore, to be a remarkably successful programme and indeed there is much in the experience which is relevant elsewhere. The speed, quality and volume of housing output, the number of families rehoused, the organizational capability of the public sector, the equity-based allocative mechanisms, the rapid absorption of refugees into the productive economy, the evident achievement of many programme targets – these and many other criteria highlight what in many respects is an astonishing accomplishment. Over 40% of the *total* population has been rehoused in a decade and a half.

Many enabling conditions prevailed in Cyprus which do not occur in most refugee stricken countries – capital and material resources; technological, administrative and professional capability; ethnic, religious and linguistic solidarity; monopolistic control of the reconstruction by the government, for example. Thus the refugee housing is unlike the stereotyped image in other countries similarly struggling to respond to refugee influxes.

Despite these factors the Cyprus situation displays many of the complexities of other refugee situations to suggest that this is not a limited case. For, despite the effectiveness of the programme in these terms, there remains a series of outcomes, now displayed by the refugees and arising from the programme, which cannot be satisfactorily explained or understood by utilising orthodox forms of public policy evaluation. What has meaning to the refugees cannot be

interpreted by the kinds of data which focus on programme output and normative policy assumptions. Rather, these indices, amongst others, are themselves indicative of highly instrumental, though not necessarily intentional, components of the programme which need to be more precisely revealed.

In the pre-crisis situation public sector housing scarcely existed. Now, confronted by a government-dominated programme located on easily identifiable 'refugee estates' at the urban periphery, the refugees simultaneously display a number of paradoxical responses. There is both client-group compliance yet also alienation in the refugees' reactions to the programme. They, paradoxically, appear to accept yet also to reject the label and differentiation which the housing gives to their situation. There is dependency assertively employed to maintain a separate identity. They are indifferent to, yet draw political solidarity and status from the programme. Many responses to housing, particularly in the self-help projects, seem to indicate settlement in the south; yet the refugees retain a profound belief in 'repatriation' to the north as a paramount and still achievable objective – a decade and a half since the crisis and with little immediate prospect of achievement. By and large there are few indicators now of temporariness. In part attributable to the physical characteristics of the housing, there are severe and disturbing changes in cultural norms, kinship patterns and family structure. Yet, confusingly, though widely replicated, these changes are rationalised by refugees as progressive.

From a number of complementary perspectives therefore, the dilemmas of refugee identity are now derived not so much from the legacy of exodus and the diaspora, movingly portrayed in the Cyprus case by Loizos (1977, 1981). Rather, it is differentiation and 'identity by programme' (de Voe 1981), which, through a process of incorporation, appears so clearly to label their status.

### **Labelling**

The ambivalent and apparently incongruous outcomes, like those displayed in Cyprus, are widely documented features of refugee communities. They are well established phenomena consistent with the dilemmas and tensions generated by the relief and development programmes of most governments and NGOs responding to the assumed needs of refugees (eg Shawcross 1984; Harrell-Bond 1986; Waldron 1988; Hirschon 1989).

Because of the pre-eminence both of the government and of the post-partition housing policies, the institutional and bureaucratic characteristics of this programme, constitute an important arena for examining the reactions of the Greek-Cypriot refugees. A framework of analysis is needed, however, which allows the interrelationship between institutional action on the one hand and the apparently incongruent responses of the refugees on the other, to be more precisely observed and explored.

The literature on the general set of relationships between institutional action and refugee behaviour is now substantial; concepts of dependency and control

figure highly (Harrell-Bond 1986; Shawcross 1984). So far as conceptualizing these relationships in terms of labelling, however, the literature is tangential. That there has been little systematic treatment of the conceptual framework of labelling in this context is surprising. Labels pervade both social and development policy discourse, donative discourses to which, I contend, refugees are particularly subject.

'Labelling is a way of referring to the process by which policy agendas are established and more particularly the way in which people, conceived as objects of policy are defined in convenient images' (Wood 1985:1). This conceptualization is predicated on a series of propositions; those more relevant to this paper are now briefly summarized (see Wood 1985:5-31; Schaffer 1985:33-66).

First, to the extent that my concern is to explore how and with what effects designation takes place, then it is the *processes* of labelling as much as the labels themselves which are of significance.

Next, labelling is a process of *stereotyping* which involves disaggregation, standardization, and the formulation of clear cut categories. In the institutional setting these characteristics assume considerable power, for labelling simultaneously defines a client group and prescribes an assumed set of needs (food, shelter and protection) together with appropriate distributional apparatus. With this symmetry, especially in the context of humanitarian assistance, institutional action acquires its own legitimacy and apparent benevolence. It is, precisely through this prescriptive process that an institutional identity is being formed.

What is being exchanged . . . is the way in which people can present themselves as applicants and present their wants and needs for the items and privileges of institutional services. That is . . . a disaggregation into programme terms . . . It reduces the whole man and family into formal sets of compartmentalised data . . . a sort of individuation and alienation of a man from a large part of his being (Schaffer 1977:32).

Thus, in this separation of an individual's needs from their context, and the process of reconstruction into a programmatic identity, there is created the important distinction between 'case' and 'story' (Wood 1985:13). Delinkage takes place whereby an individual identity is replaced by a stereotyped identity with a categorical prescription of assumed needs. These categories are usually absolute not relative or comparative. Labels replicate the professional, bureaucratic and political values which create them; but a story is thus reformed into a case, a category. I examine in some detail, in the next part of this paper, how the formation of a refugee stereotype in this way took place in Cyprus.

The counterpart to stereotyping is *control*, since a considerable degree of client loyalty and conformity with the stereotype is required (Hirschman 1970), not uniqueness and individuality. Such control, though not physically enforced in Cyprus as in many refugee situations, has been nonetheless

instrumental in determining the meaning of the label refugee. These processes of categorization and differentiation have been significant factors in forming a stereotyped identity for the Greek-Cypriot refugees. Further, I argue that the need to conform to an institutionally imposed stereotype can both reinforce control and transform an identity.

Fourth, labelling is a process of *designation*, for it involves making judgements and distinctions; crucially, it is *non-participatory*. The process of labelling, by its very familiarity and ubiquitousness in bureaucratic activity, may almost go unnoticed or unquestioned. It suggests neutrality; the very conformity it produces conveys, 'a substantive objectivity . . .', (Wood 1985:7). But bureaucratic procedures, resource distribution and the underlying political interests they represent, suggest that the labelling of target groups and their needs is not neutral or precise (Rosenblat, 1984). These implicit values need more critical review. Refugee relief programmes, because of their self-evident humanitarian derivation, are particularly prone to the neutralising conformity which the label conveys about refugees' status and their situation. Labels then reveal 'the political in the apparently non-political' (Wood 1985:6) and the power displayed through administrative procedure and practice. Subsequent connections with theories of the state are considered but are not the main issue here.

Finally, and by extension, labels are not only political but also *dynamic*. A programme's goods and services acquire a status; a client group, like refugees does not necessarily remain acquiescent and 'loyal'. Accordingly, the label may not only be the consequence of, but also the cause of further policy development, institutional activity and demands by the labelled group. These may be factors in restructuring further, the political interests. I examine this characteristic in the last parts of my analysis.

Although much research into refugees, as I have indicated, makes significant contributions to my concerns with institutional labelling, the treatment is peripheral. There are in the literature, however, two rather more clearly exposed perspectives on labelling to which this paper connects.

Studies by Stein (1981), de Voe (1981), de Waal (1988) and Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont(1988) implicitly draw on the concept but do not specifically deploy it. Stein draws attention to the effects which stigma and identity have on assumptions about status and the potential success or otherwise of resettlement schemes. Although suggesting that these factors may be institutionally determined, the conceptual basis of his analysis concerns processes of assimilation. De Voe studied the way relief agencies formed Tibetan refugees as clients. Her interest in ambiguous benefactor-beneficiary relationships focuses, however, on psychological anxiety in individual adjustment to agency intervention. Finally, studies by de Waal (1988; 1989) and Centlivres (1988) are closer to my own. Both illustrate how the superimposition of institutionally determined refugee status greatly destabilizes the co-existing ethnicities of hosts and refugees. Ambiguous identities emerge which, in the former study, are disastrous.

A second conceptual reference point has a bearing on this approach. It derives from Shacknove's question – who is a refugee? (Shacknove 1985). Here the label is painted as a minimal social bond of rights and obligations between a citizen and a state 'the negation of which engenders refugees' (Shacknove 1985:275). Defining a refugee in these terms is predicated on the argument that a 'theory and policy of entitlements' (Shacknove 1985:277) is separate from and subsequent to the former, although frequently, and erroneously in his view, the concepts are reversed. I deploy this distinction in my initial evaluation of the Cyprus data in the next section. Nevertheless, much of my paper, though not proposed as an examination of Shacknove's thesis, leads me to question whether such a distinction holds.

Our starting point is a concern with policy shortfall expressed in disjunctive outcomes of the kind found in the Cypriot refugee population. These outcomes – misconceived identities – we take as evidence of institutional failure. Although our explanations of this evidence are complementary, there are important differences of emphasis. These studies argue that the problem is attributable to the preconceived objectives and assumptions which institutions hold about their tasks and clients and an unwillingness to observe and enlist the resources, capabilities and views of the refugees. These factors, in some senses, I take as given: the attributes of institutional ideology. My emphasis is on what happens *within* the institutional arena. More specially, I contend that what is crucial to an understanding of how institutions (mis)conceive a refugee label, is an examination of the bureaucratic practices which are intrinsic to any public institution concerned with resource distribution. It is through the apparently normal, routine, apolitical, conventional procedures of programme design and delivery that identity is determined. For the instrumentality of these procedures lies in the conformity they demand from refugee clients to gain access to the resources and label. This is the 'political significance of organizational analysis' (Batley 1983:5).

### Who Is a Refugee? — Forming an Identity

Many aspects of the situation in Cyprus were consistent with what the label, in conventional usage, implied. Ethnic conflict and persecution which were widely documented, accompanied the forcible removal of the Greek-Cypriots. Substantial UNHCR assistance, although not mandated, conferred added legitimacy. Contained within a small island, with a short migratory time period, easily controlled 'borders' and with sophisticated data collection, these factors eliminated the difficulties that have occurred elsewhere of documenting who was a refugee.

The label appears clear cut. But who was a refugee? Whilst conforming to some aspects of what Vincent (1989) terms the 'narrow band' of convention refugees (persecution was undoubtedly a well founded fear) they were not outside their country of origin. They were protected by their (albeit emasculated)



*de facto* government. In these terms they constituted the rather less evocative category of displaced people. These contradictions and their precise consequences constitute an interesting subject for political and legal analysis. My concern, however, is not that of legal norms and sovereignty – who was a refugee? Rather, it was an issue of entitlements, in particular housing, and the institutionalization of those entitlements – who was a refugee for housing purposes? In this rather different formulation, two sets of principles can be seen in operation, often confusingly together. First there was a general set of equity-based assumptions designed to provide most for those in greatest need – families considered to be under greatest threat of destitution or breakdown. These substantive considerations – difficult enough to determine in themselves – then became translated into managerial requirements. Given the extreme scarcities that accompany most refugee crises, queues form, needs have to be prioritized and managed in relation to the general principles. Accordingly, access and allocation criteria were established, some categorical, some discretionary, based, in the first instance on family size and income thresholds.

To conform to the label refugee defined in these terms, putative beneficiaries adopted different strategies often simultaneously. Some, the reconstructors, altered their family circumstances to fit the criteria; reticulists sought assistance from contacts; optimisers who clearly understood rather more about bureaucratic procedures, judiciously sought to exercise some choice. Whilst different levels of pragmatism underpin these strategies, two conclusions are relevant to the general argument. Whether a strategist or a compliant client the objective was to be included. Because of the symbolic importance of housing (discussed in the next sections) exit or self settlement were not perceived as options. Second, and more fundamentally, inclusion, being labelled a refugee, required conformity; circumstances of ‘story’ had to be relinquished to the bureaucratic dictates of ‘case’.

By and large, though, the criteria have ensured that it was the rural farming families and the urban poor who were suddenly unwaged in the diaspora, and those with larger dependent (though, significantly, not extended) families who were thus housed in the early phases – since their economic status was highly location specific to the north of Cyprus. Civil servants, salaried income earners, and wealthier families with perhaps more spatially diffuse land holdings and varied income sources were, initially, excluded although all were refugees. To this extent the criteria determining access to the tangible physical identity of the refugee label, a house, have been remarkably progressive, although even the first category families may have waited four or five years for an estate house. But in Cyprus, as elsewhere there is evidence of paradoxical outcomes from the distributional features of the policy. The label refugee now conveys a disturbing identity.

It may indeed have been advantageous, early on, to be labelled a poor refugee with a large family. In this way, with a rent free house and perhaps then a job in the rapidly reconstructed economy, these refugees became, in the short term at least, materially better placed than many of those originally

excluded by higher income and smaller family status. The latter category have endured many difficult years perhaps in shared accommodation, almost certainly in unsatisfactory temporary shelter.

Yet, the equity intentions embodied in the label, have engendered unwanted and disturbing outcomes within the refugee community. Those who had least have become incorporated most by initial opportunities. Restricted mobility constrains the choices now available from the much more sophisticated range of housing options which currently exists. More disturbingly, it is the housing estates built in the early phases which are perceived as problem or 'ghetto' estates. They are inhabited by a population of uniform demographic and socio-economic characteristics (larger families and poorer means). This image is underpinned by physical characteristics as well, since the oldest estates are, generally, much larger, housing designs are more monotonous, maintenance problems with the then new technology are greater. But these outcomes are of course the precise image of the definitional criteria applied to the label refugee. Obviously unintended, these outcomes derive from more than one's self-perceived status as a refugee. It is the stereotyping of an identity; it is imposed not elective, and the more stigmatizing and alienating as a result.

Conversely the newer estates are smaller and more attractively laid out; the houses are better finished. Self build opportunities – replicating the traditional cultural processes – came later and increasingly generous grant/loan packages together with rising prosperity, have permitted much higher quality to be achieved. Paradoxically the queue for the label has thus been beneficial. Those towards the end of the queue; those in the pending category because of smaller families or higher levels of disposable income; those initially excluded from the label as less deserving by the stringently progressive criteria; these categories now have access to the label as the programme reaches its goal of housing all the refugee families from 1974. But unintentionally, of course, they are better housed in the popular image. Reflecting, then, on the spatially heterogeneous structure of pre-1974 towns and villages, a new form of social stratification is evident in the refugee housing estates.

A second set of data reinforces this evidence of disjunctive and alienating outcomes which derive from the bureaucratic response. For rehousing purposes, refugees were classified according to marital status pre- and post- 1974 and their locational preference. Families which were constituted before 1974 (so called first generation) have had unconstrained access to housing. For the latter group (so called second generation), access was at first resisted. It was however conceded, though severely circumscribed, some years later. Dowry house provision was the reason for this concession since refugees no longer had land or finance available which would have been used in their past to carry out this cultural obligation. Only women (second generation) refugees were eligible and at first their spouses too had to be refugees although this was later relaxed. In addition to this major change, the general access criteria (income and family size) were also relaxed, to a small degree, in some districts. So, additional and more precisely defined categories obtained. At issue though is not

just a response to changing needs. Compartmentalizing the refugees into these categories, was also, I contend, a bureaucratic way of fulfilling a set of managerial objectives. Widening eligibility helped to diversify the demographic and social character of the estates. It helped also in tackling the lumpiness of the construction process, since leads and lags were endemic in Cyprus as elsewhere. In any case, fluctuating refugee preferences accentuated shortfalls and overruns.

In much the same way as the primary criteria, these additional categories too, have reinforced a bureaucratically formed meaning for the label. In the government's terms, income, birthplace, marital status and family size, generation and age of children would, understandably, have appeared to be equitable, uncontentious and above all practicable criteria for defining refugee housing needs. But they embody concepts of time, family status and organizational structure rooted in a bureaucratic language quite unfamiliar to the refugees. From their point of view, they were refugees having fled the invasion in which the politico-historical antecedents to their situation were much more significant. Their identity was not, in their perception, predetermined by thoughts of housing programmes, eligibility and access rules. Rather it was constructed with a social language drawing on past norms - community, village, extended family, dowry house provision for daughter upon marriage. This point is well documented in African refugee studies (Harrell-Bond 1986; Christensen 1982, 1985).

These familiar kinds of attachments - re-establishing the pre-existing identity one might say - have been replaced by a bureaucratically imposed identity, often with perverse consequences. The state now provides dowry housing for a substantial proportion of the Greek-Cypriot population.

Most disturbing for all the refugees is the breakup of the pre-1974 village groupings, made fragile anyway in the diaspora. Many villages fled as entities, initially retained their cohesion in temporary accommodation and aspired to sustain their village communities intact in the rehousing programme. Re-establishing 'community', as noted above, is widely documented in refugee populations. By disaggregating the label in order to form it into bureaucratically manageable individual cases, the criteria have thereby prevented village re-formation. If practicable, a programme which rehoused them comprehensively village by village, might have removed the most profound consequences of their social trauma. Village fragmentation more than many outcomes, now dramatizes for the refugees the ambiguity of their changed identity. On balance, though, they paradoxically rationalise that the fragmentation of village life has consolidated their new identity of displacement, temporariness and abnormality. Ambiguity of the kind displayed here demonstrates, as Goffman observed, how even with a reformed identity, individuals seek to balance the complementary parts of the 'normal-deviant' drama (Goffman 1963:158).

Who is a refugee therefore, especially since housing is the most dramatic indicator of the label has assumed a socially divisive meaning. In being relabelled by bureaucratic requirements, refugee is differentiated from refugee - hence

the continuing sense of alienation and anomie. This 'spoilt identity' is not how the group would choose to perceive itself. But they deploy the co-existing yet contradictory languages to pursue their own agendas and interests – the need for shelter at one level; pressure for repatriation at another.

A review of several recent studies of the situation of African refugees endorses both the evidence and utility of these findings. Reference is now made to three studies with a thematic focus on food aid.

De Waal's study (1988; 1989) reminds us of the dangers of reacting to involuntary migration with stereotyped categories. He presents a disturbing explanation of how 'conceptual blunders' of this kind (1988:128) led to a famine disaster in Western Sudan (Dar-el-Masalit) in 1984/5. The disaster was preventable but for the crude categories by which the refugees were designated. Based on the false belief that the 120,000 Chadian refugees were drought migrants, assistance was withheld. Having precipitated the famine the error was reversed but compounded by a food distribution programme contingent upon a very prescriptive categorization of the refugees. Largely ignorant of indigenous and subtle cultural and ethnic resonances, the agencies created conflict between hosts and refugees thereby accentuating the crises. As in Cyprus so too here, who was a refugee was crucial. The extent to which bureaucratic needs create too simple a conceptualization of identity and the consequential and often traumatic results are the crucial points here.

Waldron too (1988) adds to this evidence in his work amongst encamped Somali and Oromo refugees from Ethiopia in Somalia. Three problematic situations – a severe firewood shortage, a food provisioning crisis and cyclical patterns of supplementary feeding programmes – are discussed. There were rather obvious explanations for what, superficially, appeared to be perverse patterns of behaviour in which aid, imposed for survival, was rejected. Necessarily summarising the detail, all three issues illustrate how a failure to look beyond inappropriate, stereotypical categories, led to misrepresentation or even non-recognition of the three problems and thus misconceived programmes. The bureaucratic label failed to articulate the salient factors which made up the refugee identity.

A third study concerns declining nutritional status of refugees. This formed the stimulus for a detailed assessment of food provisioning (commissioned by WPF) to the 850,000 Mozambican refugees in Malawi (Wilson 1989). A rather different reading of this consultancy shows it to be a significant reappraisal of refugee food aid concepts, which has direct relevance to my own concerns. Wilson contends that the singleminded emphasis on sustaining the basic ration is not so much wrong as misplaced and defective. It ignores context. He demonstrates that a proper understanding of feeding strategies and needs can only derive from a study of the livelihood strategies of the refugees themselves; this embraces matters as diverse as commodification of wild resources, family feeding patterns, wage and bartered labour, ecological impacts and so on. In short, as with housing, so with food aid: conventional bureaucratic practice disaggregates one identity and replaces it with a designated stereotype, shorn

of variety and individuality. If we return to our original question – who is a refugee? – it is one who conforms to institutional requirements.

Labels, like refugee, appear benign in their attempt to embrace many potential beneficiaries. But being labelled a refugee can come to mean a number of things over time, as we saw in the Cyprus data for example. These meanings are more than a simple materialistic eligibility for a house, a plot, food and so on. These examples show that in the institutional setting, labels assume a much more powerful significance. They serve as a linguistic shorthand for policies, programmes and bureaucratic requirements – practices which are instrumental in categorizing and differentiating between facets of an identity. Labelled with an identity in one conceptual language, refugees in all these cases have had imposed on them a radically different language. Whether deliberately or in ignorance, this imposition dominates the behaviour of refugee societies.

### **Transforming an Identity**

Identities are not only formed by bureaucratic action, they are also transformed by it. Programmes develop their own momentum, rationality and continuing legitimacy in servicing perceived needs. It is these attributes of bureaucratic practice, frequently remaining unexplored, which need to be tested. By distinguishing between what the label implies is needed and what is actually provided through institutional action, we can highlight how contrasting images of identity are reinforced, and explain how alienation and ambivalence are the outcomes.

In Cyprus, two kinds of evidence from the housing programme sustain the significance of this distinction between manifest and latent intentions – economic reconstruction and housing morphology.

Post-disaster studies frequently emphasize the destructive costs and the aggravation of development constraints. A different conceptualization is relevant in examining the economic impact of the 1974 invasion in Cyprus. Here, by no means entirely pragmatically, the disaster has been engaged as a developmental disequilibrium to which the response has been a restructuring of the economy both sectorally and spatially away from its rural agrarian base. In the decade and a half post-invasion, the economy demonstrated strong yet stable growth; virtually full employment was restored and GNP far exceeded pre-1974 levels. The pursuit of these goals stands, in part, by itself; but these outcomes also have a direct bearing upon the phenomenon of refugee labelling. A reconstructed economy, as the emergency development plans make clear, was a central component in government policy for the 'reactivation and reintegration of the refugees' (Republic of Cyprus 1977:5). To this end, these remarkable achievements have been contingent on the housing programme as the leading sector and government-led investment as the dynamic force, certainly in the first decade after the invasion. In so far as this set of relationships holds, the configuration can equally well be reversed. Reconstruction of the

economy could only have been achieved by deploying the refugees as a structural and spatial resource. They were a structural resource as producers and consumers. On the supply side they provided the wage labour essential for the housing construction programme and for rebuilding and extending the manufacturing and service base of the economy. On the demand side they have provided the market for light industrial/consumer goods which predominate in the relatively small economy. This structural reconstruction has been underpinned by spatial determinants. An economy dominated by the urban sector depended on mass urban housing to attract labour – exactly what the refugee housing programme has provided. Far from a burden, the refugees have literally and metaphorically rebuilt the economy.

What was being provided though, was not simply good quality housing for refugees, although the humanitarian objectives and achievements are undeniable. Simultaneously the housing programme was formulated to achieve an effective model of economic reconstruction and development. In short, one conceptualization of the label – housing need – legitimised the assertion of a rather different one, incongruent with the refugees' own perceptions. Incorporated from a rural setting into an urban economy and in a form of housing which reflected pragmatic interpretations of need – not individual requirements family by family – the meanings and outcomes of the label refugee assume distinctive yet divergent characteristics.

Evident in the physical design and location of the housing, is a second set of ambiguities. Large scale housing estates were a radical departure from the pre-1974 urban morphology – characterized by a piecemeal and incremental process of plot by plot development by individual owners. Motivated by the desire to provide material compensation, perceiving the overriding priority to be shelter provision and assuming total responsibility, these requirements became translated, by the government, into bureaucratized mass-housing solutions – functional designs, uniform styles, standardized layouts. These acknowledge nothing of the preceding cultural and vernacular characteristics. Designed for small nuclear families, they fail especially to reflect the prevailing requirements of the extended family. They are incapable of extension or adaptation to changing needs. Moreover programmes mean leads and lags and thus sub-optimal allocation – a wrong sized house, a less preferred estate, a longer wait in the pending category. The resulting discontinuities, between expectation and outcomes – an accentuated sense of alienation and deprivation, overcrowding, loss of privacy – are a clear and sharp reflection of an institutionalized definition embodied in the label refugee. Needs and aspirations became structured into technocratically manageable programmes with unwanted effects on the lives of the refugees

Underlying these perceptions, it is the location of the estates which is more significant. Effectively a predominantly rural population (60% of the refugees) has been urbanised. Located adjacent to, but not contiguous with, urban areas and with easily identifiable characteristics (layout, form, size of schemes), the housing estates give a distinctive physical identity to the label.

This again has accentuated the development of a 'refugee consciousness' which is expressed in various contradictory ways. Solidarity and compliance are counterbalanced by pathological attempts to delabel – refusing all but the last, most isolated, house on an estate, for example – and adoption of Goffman-like metaphors to describe feelings: prisoners, foreigners.

Refugees do not necessarily complain that they did not participate in the shaping of policy. Housing is accepted with gratitude yet, ambivalently, the refugees feel stigmatised. Despite showing identical cultural norms with their hosts, they believe the housing, the obviously recognisable symbol of their status, may have encouraged enmity by non-refugees. There is continuing anomie and resentment at the control and conditionality which the housing represents. Conversely, it is recognised that policy failure is important. Were assimilation to be successfully achieved, a label would be blurred and pressure for repatriation would thus be lost. The refugees have managed to avert this marginalization of their interests, so far.

For the refugees their designation was instrumental in gaining access to important resources. In this process, their aspirations were filtered into the housing programme which became characterised by a particular formula of professional and technocratic assumptions. This lack of congruence has had dramatic consequences. Just as the access criteria have differentiated between refugee and refugee, so too, the form and location of housing, set within the context of economic reconstruction, have also tended to differentiate. In this instance though, it is a categorical distinction between refugees and non-refugees. The pattern of housing provision has created fundamental contrasts between what by other criteria would seem to be similar identities. The label has become, through powerful institutional processes, a potent tool of prescription and differentiation far removed from the initial premise that refugees need shelter.

Many of these themes are replicated in the findings of studies on refugees in Africa. In this context, perhaps the most significant demonstration of the confusing interaction between latent and manifest meanings of the label, relates to settlement schemes and self-settlement. These touch closely on issues of transitory or protracted status.

There is now, abundant evidence in the continent, documenting refugee preference for self-settlement, in so far as this exists in a pure sense (Hansen 1981, 1989; Harrell-Bond 1986;). The more obvious conditions conducive to this preference are documented in the sociological and anthropological literature (Mazur 1988; and above). And yet, it is conceded that scheme settled refugees are better provided for materially in the short term and evidently, too, in the long term (Hansen 1989). Moreover a substantial proportion of aid to African refugees is for settlement schemes (hereafter called schemes). Why therefore should only a quarter of Africa's refugees live in schemes? I contend that these paradoxical findings can, in part, be clarified by considering them in the context of labelling. The negative findings for schemes derive, I suggest, from the transformations which take place in the label's meaning.

Because schemes are established upon important misconceptions (Kibreab 1989), they tend to create, often simultaneously, false or confusing labels. On the one hand they purport to be a long term and durable solution. And in protracted refugee situations coordinated investment of this kind makes sense, as in Cyprus, to institutional 'investors' and the managerial requirements of their bureaucracies. As a solution however they are fallacious, since neither for host nor refugees can the implied meaning of the label – large scale first country asylum – be a durable solution to the African refugee crisis.

On the other hand, schemes are often validated on the again false premise that they offer potential for integration, itself often further confused with assimilation (Kibreab 1989). These terms denote important characteristics in the bureaucratic designation of a refugee. For in practice, either by accident or intention, schemes frequently marginalize refugees and undermine long term objectives. At worst they prevent integration by controlling the extent of social and economic interaction with host communities, as in Cyprus. At best they are devices to remove long term burdens by targeting assistance with the aim of attracting aid and promoting self-sustaining development. Even in the latter case the results are disillusioning. Armstrong (1988) notes in Tanzania a predilection, evident elsewhere, for physical investment as a demonstration of schemes' credibility, with little regard given to less tangible community building investment – precisely the conditions observed in Cyprus. Rogge's disturbing evidence in Sudan suggests that one objective of the label has been achieved – integration – but only at the perverse price of a local agricultural economy dependent on the extremely low wages for which refugees are prepared to sell their labour (Rogge 1985:86–98).

Karadawi (1983) cites a contingent issue in the confusion between integration and long term needs. He demonstrates how the government's long term commitments to integrate refugees in schemes (*pace* Kibreab), were undermined by UNHCR and donors' policies which were unwilling to embark upon comprehensive programmes and projects beyond emergency and rehabilitation phases. One set of labelling objectives were destabilized by another.

Most disturbing of all, schemes are mechanisms for control and, fundamentally, are a non-participatory vehicle for assisting refugees, as we saw in Cyprus. Whether it is the powerful interplay between food distribution and protection as a control mechanism in Zimbabwe (Zetter 1991) or controlling refugee food distribution in a drought (de Waal 1988) or the more pervasive processes of disaggregation and reformulation which underpin institutional management of organized schemes (Harrell-Bond 1986), or the identification of political interests of agencies and donor governments (Mazur 1989), control has a profound influence on definitions of label and identity.

From this albeit cursory evidence from the conceptual approach of labelling, what conclusions might be drawn? Clearly settlement schemes in Africa, as in Cyprus, have been vehicles for differing interests and objectives – although these have not always been coherently expressed. Schemes are



instrumental in transforming identity. Founded upon ambiguity, they impart an ambiguous status to refugees.

Schemes purport to offer long term autonomy; but, in effect they ambiguously create environments of control and dependency. Not necessarily intended, these are the concomitants of institutionalised distribution of assistance – food aid, building materials, income-generating start-up facilities. Moreover, with an emphasis on material provision, schemes require disaggregation of stories and conformity as cases. Transformation of an identity thus takes place.

Furthermore, proposed integration goes hand in hand with attempts, sometimes explicitly, to enforce segregation and inhibit interaction between refugees and hosts. Again these are mutually conflicting aspirations which confuse an identity. Next, whilst orientated towards developmental (and thus long term) aspirations, neither refugees nor host countries in Africa see schemes as a viable durable solution. They fear the implied permanency which long term programmes might impart to the label.

In short, the perceived advantages of settlement schemes are often illusory. They arouse hostility and rejection by refugees and uncertainty in the operational stance of governments. Schemes create a category of refugees, with an identity ostensibly based on development and integration as priorities. The reality however is a somewhat contrasting model of problem containment and management. In this alternative configuration, schemes become a vehicle for transforming an identity where refugees are marginalized into a segregated and permanently transient and dependent status. In contrast to Cyprus, exit becomes a popular option, in Africa, perversely accentuating the severe problems of self settlement which schemes are designed to alleviate.

These outcomes suggest that a labelled identity is being formed and transformed in ways unacceptable to refugees.

### **Politicizing an Identity**

Refugees, more than many target groups suffer from the dilemma of policies which seek to integrate and to create independence, yet which exclude, sustain dependency and differentiation. The labelled may not necessarily be unwilling victims of such discrimination and cooptation. A 'refugee consciousness' maintains an identity, and the enhanced solidarity may be turned to advantage as a lever on governments and agencies.

An initially bureaucratic meaning, therefore, gradually assumes a distinctive, politicized identity. It expresses the strength of the target group's influence on policy. Deployed as a tool to create marginalization, the political outcomes of the label may become dominant features in the refugees' responses, accentuating the contradictions they seek to reduce. The evidence accumulated so far to illustrate the formation and reformation of an identity, is now brought together to demonstrate some aspects of the politicized identity

In Cyprus, the stance of both the government and the refugees is a commitment to 'repatriation'. Nevertheless, as the prospects for this recede, and as the material and economic provision designed to satisfy short term needs take on the appearance of a long term permanent solution, the physical identity of the label has gradually acquired a more explicit, politicized meaning as well.

The refugees have exploited the ambiguities of the programme to enhance their political profile in a number of ways. Extracting from the government the rights to second (and eventually third?) generation housing is one example. Proposals to charge rent or to impose maintenance charges are vigorously opposed. Dependency means that the providers have to adopt new responsibilities and widen existing provision, generation by generation. These provisions may well extend beyond the initial interpretation of the refugee label – a house

Each year the progressive extension of housing support obtained by the refugees, is consistent with an extension of dependency too. These outcomes of institutionalized provision are essential features sustaining the 'refugee consciousness' vis à vis the government. Moreover, despite growing internal debate about open-ended commitments, sustaining the label is important for both the government and its dependent clients in order to sustain an international identity of an unresolved international issue. In this way the refugees resist the countervailing tendencies of the programme which are creating an emerging sense of assimilation. For, even presupposing a diplomatic solution, the mass housing provision and the substantial economic disparity between the prosperous south and poorer north consolidate *de facto* division and undermine the broader political objectives. To maintain repatriation as a central commitment, the refugees cannot exit from dependency on the refugee housing label: rather they have to use their voice to sustain a dependent and differentiated identity (Hirschman 1970). The price is heavy. Despite the identical social characteristics of hosts and refugees, the refugees feel stigmatized. Prejudice though often understated and subtle is painful. Some refugees feel that their hosts begrudge the housing provision, despite their losses. Attempts to conceal the label become, as we have seen, pathological.

These paradoxical outcomes are dramatized by what is perhaps the most tangible indication of temporariness – the refusal of the refugees to accept property title. Title would imply permanency, the *status quo* partition, manifestly a softening of the negotiating position was the Turkish Cypriots. Conversely the lack of title maintains a powerful commitment to the refugees that their situation is still temporary, that they are not, despite appearances, becoming assimilated and that they will be repatriated. Refusal to accept title maintains, again, a label and special status of dependency and it is deployed as a stratagem to legitimize a continuing commitment to their political objectives. Even, perhaps especially, in a country so firmly adhering to the precepts and status of private property ownership, refugees say they would refuse the gift of title even if their houses were gilded – 'these are not ours'. With a programme so comprehensive, this is perhaps the last clear vestige of the temporariness of

the situation. Title would remove an uncomplicated image of dependency – this would mean permanency of division. Encapsulated here are all the dilemmas of refugee identity as it has come to be expressed in the outcomes of the housing programme.

Proposals to curtail support, merely strengthen the refugees' tendency to display a politicized identity vis à vis state interests, although these interests are not articulated by a particular political party. This position is consistent with the general conclusions so far: that is the retention of specific identity but located centrally within a national political context of displacement. From the refugees' point of view this prevents marginalization into a single issue party which, though large, would be a minority.

From the state's point of view these outcomes can be interpreted rather differently. Politicization of refugee identity cannot yet be described in terms of class interests. It is too soon to conclude whether a proletarian political class has been created on the housing estates and whether this presages a state/capital, refugee/left wing class struggle. Left parties have always been strongly supported in Cyprus. The salient difference now is the spatial consolidation of a poor working class on the estates. A 'refugee' consciousness exists and one might expect this to be mobilized as class consciousness if repatriation remains a frustrated option; particularly might this be the case as the interests of capital have benefited so widely from the successful economic and housing policies on the divided island. Again the paradoxical position of state interests is evident. For, to diminish support for refugees might reduce the burden on public revenue; but simultaneously it might intensify the development of the identity of a class under threat. Conversely, classified as refugees waiting to return – this has an apolitical and less threatening implication for state interests.

Although housing is no longer the explicit need, its symbolic value is inestimable. It is manoeuvred by the refugees as a negotiating device because of the things that go with it: special interest group status; proxy for repatriation – housing in Cyprus gives the label a link, albeit tenuous and convoluted, with this dominant aspiration.

These entangled political interests help to explain the contradictory responses of the refugees. The state, incorporates, in part intentionally, yet it wants to disengage. The refugees acquiesce in the creation of dependency; but they wish also to disengage from the unwanted outcomes of the policy. Dependency and independence, integration and the wish for the repatriation occur, ambiguously, together.

Turning briefly to the African situation, as might be expected, given the very different contexts, there are significant contrasts with the Cyprus case. Nonetheless, case specific issues apart, the general proposition holds. Displayed in different ways, there is, in the research literature, demonstrable support for the evidence on the politicization of the refugee label.

Familiar in Tanzania is the response of refugees to the withdrawal of assistance (Armstrong 1988) that we have already seen in Cyprus. Though this

research suggests a concern primarily with the consequences for material well-being, conceivably the underlying concerns of loss of political status are equally significant. Certainly the unwillingness to accept Tanzanian citizenship would seem to confirm that that is the case.

Salient differences in the way political identity is perceived and utilized are as follows. Whereas in Cyprus I have argued that a balance currently exists between refugee politicization and the state's growing interest in depoliticizing refugee status, African studies seem to confirm, as Karadawi tellingly asserts in his work on Sudan, 'pacification and depoliticization may be the prerequisites for humanitarian action' (Karadawi 1983:540). In deploying political solidarity, African refugees are inevitably in a weaker position vis à vis the interests of their hosts. They are less able to lever their hosts and command the kind of solidarity which is evident for the refugees in Cyprus. If a political identity is deployed then it is more likely to be by the host countries. The symbolism of settlement schemes is much more a political tool to attract international assistance (Harrell-Bond 1986; Karadawi 1983) than a policy instrument to serve refugee interests. Moreover this category may be tightly conceived to ensure that it remains sufficiently small in order not to threaten the *status quo*. Conversely it is reasonable to suppose that the essentially diffuse nature of self settled refugees in Africa creates *de facto* a diffused political identity. Despite material deprivation, conditions of self settlement, as we have seen, are conducive to a more integrated pattern of life with hosts. Moreover, the threat of detection, and thus encampment or repatriation, reinforces a tendency to merge with the landscape and not to declare a political identity, as Hansen's study demonstrates was the case with early Angolan influxes into Zambia (Hansen 1981). Caution should be exercised in driving this supposition too far. It is a matter of degree and circumstances.

These formulae point to the political marginalization of African refugees as a major objective and outcome of government and agency policies. Deploying the label in this way, however, need not always produce negative conditions. Preliminary research in Malawi hypothesizes that the state adopts a mediating role between different interests in its attempts to coordinate refugee assistance (Zetter 1991). In this instance the label refugee has achieved an important political currency (for the state at least), invested to encourage considerable assistance of a developmental nature for both refugees *and* hosts. This I suggest is a positive outcome, facilitated by an open door policy which, significantly, has not yet sought to create clear cut categories of self settled and scheme settled refugees. This is an important precondition; it removes the labelled distinctions, so powerful in Cyprus for example, between refugee and non-refugee, and also between refugee and refugee.

There is probably no more telling example of the refugee label concealing the 'political in the apparently unpolitical' (Wood 1985:6) than in the matter of food aid and in close proximity agreeing census figures for the number of refugees (Journal of Refugee Studies 1989; Clay 1989; Cuny 1989). Waldron (1988) demonstrates precisely this configuration in the study earlier cited. For

the Eritrean refugees in the camps, the principal meaning of their label was a basic one – access to food. For the various institutional factions the same debate sought to deploy the label in rather different ways. The issue was not one of declining food delivery and rising malnutrition (only some 59% of prescribed daily intake was available), even presupposing that logistical constraints in supply could be overcome. It was instead an issue of overall identity. With census estimates varying by as much as 200,000 (low 500,000, high 700,000), the real purpose of enumerating who were refugees was not to determine food provisioning but the ‘total investment in the Somali relief effort, which was a major component of the Somali economy’, (Waldron 1988;160).

Labels, then have powerful political meanings. They are a crucial index of differing assumptions and contradictory political interests surrounding the designation refugee. The process of ‘delinking’ case from story, in order to achieve conformity with institutional and ultimately state interests, represents control and the designation of certain kinds of acceptable political status. Programmes, like rehousing refugees, food provisioning and so on, potentially become both policy means and ends. They conceal more difficult political aspirations and needs, like repatriation or integration. In this way a label is delinked from what, in extreme conditions and large-scale unmet needs, may be potentially revolutionary circumstances. It is reformulated into a status, which helps to remove challenges to the prevailing ideology and structures. Labelling legitimized this kind of action. Precisely, this can occur because labels like refugee appear benevolent, neutral and obvious.

### **Conclusions**

Labelling matters so fundamentally because it is an inescapable part of public policy making and its language: a non-labelled way out cannot exist. A theory of labelling provides some constructs with which to observe the way bureaucratic procedures and practices form a refugee identity. It is the instrumentality of these procedures, in creating an official status and in establishing the asymmetrical relationship between power and powerlessness, which this paper has explored. By reinforcing actions of designation, labelling means conditionality and differentiation, inclusion and exclusion, stereotyping and control. To summarize, there are a number of conclusions relevant to policy-based perspectives on refugee labelling.

First there is the vulnerability of refugees to imposed labels. Refugeehood, contingent on accepting a bureaucratized delivery of basic and familiar needs, may not differ from the experience of non-refugee groups. Nor may it, in every case concerning refugees, be a fundamental change from pre-existing conditions – although it was in Cyprus. Where refugees differ, crucially, from most other client groups, is in two respects. First conditions of extreme scarcity prevailing in refugee situations create new procedures, rules and categories – familiar experiences of designation become substantially changed. Most

significant however, is the fact that the modes of designation occur rapidly, in traumatic and unfamiliar circumstances. It is this that makes refugees extremely vulnerable to institutionalized perceptions, an imposed crisis-based identity and a prescriptive programme of needs. Given this turbulence, ambivalent and non-compliant responses should not be surprising.

Second, designation is not an end in itself. Labels create their own momentum especially where transitory situations become protracted. This momentum is not independent of the label but preconditioned by it. We have seen evidence of this in second generation housing and refusal of title in Cyprus and in cases in the African situation where dependency and non-integration are displayed by refugees. In this way they can sustain an image of a transitory status. In Cyprus this was especially important where permanent housing has been increasingly identified with permanency of settlement in the south. These dynamic characteristics of the label again help to explain how patterns of alienation and politicization emerge.

Third there is an important element of symbolism in labels. Clearly the symbolic, to have credibility, must have some material representation – housing, food distribution and so on. But, these material provisions may also be deployed as a proxy for other more important institutional statuses – refugees wanting repatriation, greater political representation. Again identities become transformed and quite distinct from the initial assumptions, for example that refugees need housing, and the bureaucratic procedures to achieve them.

Fourth concealed within a label are several co-existing but contrasting identities, as the cases in this paper have demonstrated. There are distinctions: between refugee and non-refugee; between different categories of refugee; between agency, government and the refugees' own perspectives; between manifest and latent components. Rarely are these co-existing identities compatible. There is no normative identity which can be agreed. The conceptual tools of labelling seek to disaggregate these identities. For it is only in this way that a clearer account can be given of why disjunctive and confusing outcomes accompany virtually all refugee assistance. The point is not that one model of identity is necessarily superior to another. 'Rather, three things are crucial: how identities are defined and adopted; who controls them; and how the different categories complement or conflict with each other' (Zetter 1988:105–106).

Finally, we have seen how labels have been instrumental in forming a political identity. The debate about labelling in public policy, therefore is ultimately one about empowering the powerless, like refugees. In short, it is about participation in forming an identity and thus in enabling greater access to and control over decisions about their own lives. Arguably, it is the failure to recognise this fundamental issue, which, in the end, inhibits manifestly humanitarian intentions being achieved.

Careful observation of how the label refugee is constructed is essential. The alternative is predetermined stereotypes, inappropriately applied models from other cultures, crisis-imposed identities of powerlessness and dependency

which 'tend to destroy much of what they wish to support and undermine the identities they wish to sustain' (Zetter 1988:106).

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