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**Where the Tiger Does Not Roam:  
The Meaning and Use of Papers in North-West  
Zambian Borderlands**

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***Abstract***

Migration policies inevitably rest on bureaucratic responses concerned with the use of identity papers, visas, passports and other forms of paperwork. In research looking at movement between North-West Zambia and Angola, in Zambia, a very striking contrast was observed between the perspectives of the state and those of individuals on the use and meaning of papers. The former tended to see these papers as symbols of nationality and residence that people should feel privileged to hold. While some of the villagers took a similar view, others focused on the function of identify papers – what difference having (or not having) a set of papers makes to what you can do or not do. This contrast between *heartfelt* and *handheld* notions of nationality results in different expectations of behaviour and policy responses.

## ***Introduction***

Most of us find our wallets and purses stuffed full of papers and cards which contain information about our identity. These markers of identity are crucial links between individuals and the host of institutions with which they interact. However, we do not imbue all these cards with the same significance; for example, my supermarket loyalty card does not have the same 'value' as my university staff card.

I take the former as a means to get a small benefit, knowing full well that the supermarket is looking to use it for its own ends. I fill in their forms to get the card, with no concern for giving out full information or even truthful information. Why should I tell them my leisure interests? If I have to fill in that box, I will feel no qualms about lying. My interest is getting the discounts that come with the card. The card itself will stay hidden in my wallet and may even be a cause for embarrassment, especially if it is from Wal-Mart (Asda in the UK). However, in some circumstances, such cards may also be a mark of status: for example, the card of an upmarket supermarket (as Waitrose in the UK).

However, my university staff card carries a lot more meaning for me. Not only does it show that I am a member of a 'prestigious' institution but it also says something significant about me – what my job is. To get this card was not just a question of ticking boxes on a computer screen, but I also had to jump through various other hoops. The quality of information given in the process is of critical importance. If I lied in the interview or on the application forms, I will lose not only my card but also the job (if I am caught). I would feel very differently about somebody questioning my entitlement to this card that I would about questions over my store loyalty card.

This simple personal example illustrates how the meaning and value of cards and papers can affect both the way that they are obtained and how they are used. Their value and use are related not only to the interaction between the individual and the institution but also between the individual and their community. The significance of the card will therefore depend on the type of card, the individuals who hold (or do not hold) it and the particular social context in which they are found.

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Although supermarket loyalty cards have yet to cover the globe, nation states and their identity papers have. Every state issues identity papers and the vast majority of people are entitled to official papers from at least one state. These may take the form of national identity cards, passports, social security cards, driving licences and so forth. It may seem reasonable to assume that these papers have a greater significance to their holders than those issued by shops, but it cannot be assumed that they have the same significance to all people.

The starting points for this paper are the assertion that this relationship between people and identity papers is important and the observation that it has been little explored. During research in 1997 into the movements of people living in a remote area in north-west Zambia across the nearby border into Angola (Bakewell 1999), I asked many people about their nationality and also about their identity papers. I found their answers intriguing. There was no simple relationship between people self-description and the papers that they held. Moreover, their responses seemed to show very different attitudes towards the idea of nationality and the meaning of papers. Their diversity of perspectives was in sharp contrast to the more consistent views from state officials.

This was not the main focus of my research but has remained a subject of interest for some time. When writing up the project, I attempted to track down some literature on identity papers. I struggled to find anything at the time, but in the last six years, there have been at least four books looking at the development of passports and identity papers (Torpey 2000; Caplan and Torpey 2001; Lloyd 2003; Salter 2003). These texts provide fascinating details about the history of identity papers and how they have been used by states to exert their power. However, their geographical focus is on the industrialised states, where the use of papers is the most highly developed, rather than those regions of the world where the formal policies of states rarely match the realities of practice. Moreover, there is still very little work which takes a more anthropological approach to understanding what papers signify to their holders. Longman (2001) and Gordillo (2006) are notable exceptions.

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This dearth of ethnographic studies of identity papers is all the more surprising given the central role that they are being given in the modern state: controlling people's access to resources, their movements and their legal rights. From the perspectives of states, such paperwork plays a vital part in the implementation of a wide range of policies, in particular in so far as they attest individuals' citizenship. How these policies work in practice will depend on the ways in which people engage with the state and its symbols; in particular its identity papers. Even if a state manages to ensure that its agents conform fully to its bureaucratic procedures, the actual outcome will be mediated by the individuals and social context in which they are applied.

This gap between the policy and practice is likely to be larger in cases where the state's capacity to implement policy is extremely limited. The example of Zambia presented in this paper is just such a case. The relationship between the state and the people living in its territory is far from straightforward especially as you move in the border regions hundreds of kilometres from the capital, Lusaka. In an area that is barely reached by the arm of the state, the meaning of 'legal' documentation and notions of 'nationality' are contested and open to a variety of interpretations. The limited capacity of the state means that informal procedures are common and there is considerable scope for negotiation. In such a context, the outcomes of policy will be shaped by local actors and it is all the more important to understand the meaning ascribed to identity papers.

### ***Zambia case study***

This findings presented here are part of a study into the impact of the improving situation in Angola on cross border movement from Zambia. I was interested to look at the repatriation of Angolan refugees through a migration lens. Although the focus of the study was on refugee movements, I was interested to question the assumption that refugees will 'naturally' return home. Therefore, it was important to avoid embedding this assumption in the research methods. To try to identify refugees and then ask them about their interest (or lack of it) in moving to Angola, would

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presuppose firstly, that it is possible to differentiate a refugee from others; and secondly, that they would have a special interest in moving compared to others who may fall outside the refugee category with which I started. Therefore, in this study I put to one side the term repatriation, loaded as it is with connotations of return and resumption of normality, and talked to all villagers about their interests in Angola, without distinguishing refugees from others.

The fieldwork was carried out over one year in Mwinilunga District of the North-Western Province of Zambia in a village approximately 50km from the district town and 8km from the border with Angola. I conducted structured interviews with 195 adults in the village and semi-structured interviews with key informants in the village and beyond. I also gathered life histories, accounts of movements and other data.

I asked people which nationality they felt themselves to have, offering the choice of Zambian, Angolan or Congo. For most people this required some deliberation and their response came with some justification. These comments, some of which are quoted below, seemed to indicate that many people felt they had choice of nationality and presented the one they felt to be most appropriate. Some simply replied they did not know what nationality they were or they claimed two. After this, I enquired after their identity papers asking if they had a Zambian National Registration Card (NRC), Angolan papers or a refugee identity card.

### ***Routes to Zambian nationality***

Every nation state expects to control the granting of citizenship and all have developed nationality law to specify who may become a citizen and how they are to go about it. With citizenship come rights to such things as land ownership, government employment and votes, and obligations such as national service and taxation. These will vary widely from state to state but at the most basic level citizenship grants the right of abode; a national of a country belongs there and cannot be forced to leave.

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Zambia is no different in this respect and its law specifies the means by which one can acquire Zambian nationality. If one enters Zambia as a national of another state and one stays on a residence permit for ten years, then it is possible to apply for citizenship. Zambians cannot hold dual nationality so one must relinquish one's existing nationality to take on that of Zambia. To engage in this process of naturalization a person must produce full documentation and also pay large fees at various stages. For example, as an alien one must obtain a blue National Registration Card (NRC), which on first application cost about \$80 in 1997.

For those who ran to Zambia to escape the war in Angola and stayed in the border area, this route to citizenship was effectively blocked. Anyone who entered as a refugee could not change their status to residency, and even those who might have avoided refugee status and could have found the right documentation were defeated by the scale of charges and bureaucracy. I met nobody who claimed to have followed this fully documented method of acquiring Zambian nationality.

However, in the villages there was another semi-documented path which gained people the papers they require to show that they are Zambian: a green NRC. These must be held by all Zambian adults and each year they are issued to young people from the age of eighteen. In practice, an application was endorsed by the chief once a headman had put forward a person as a 'child of the village', and it was then forwarded to the district council secretary, in this case in Mwinilunga. He was responsible for checking the details on the form and once he had approved the application, it was passed to the national registration office that issued the card.

Since it was normal for young people to apply as they finished school or reached the right age, they seemed to have no difficulties getting the cards whatever their parentage. They grew into their papers. In the eyes of the headmen, chief and even some senior council officials, those who had been born in Zambia or brought up there should be considered as Zambian citizens. These authority figures made no

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efforts to distinguish the children of refugees from the children of Zambians and their applications for NRCs were, therefore, readily approved<sup>1</sup>.

However, in the case of older people, who came to Zambia as adults, it was more difficult to get an NRC as there were more likely to be questions as to why they were applying at this later stage in life. The exception was those who had come prior to 1968 when NRCs were first issued and all adults of any age were able to get them. Others described how they had managed to obtain the papers with the support of relatives or officials. In the run up to the Zambian general election in 1996, there had been a campaign to bring people on to the electoral role and some referred to applying successfully for NRCs at that time. Nobody spoke of any money being used to facilitate the process but no doubt a suitable sum in the right hands helps an applicant's case. Those who had obtained papers this way had not had to relinquish any other documents in their possession and there were some people who held a mix of Angolan, refugee and Zambian identity papers (see below).

Besides these people who had green NRCs to demonstrate their citizenship in Zambia, there were also many people who had run from Angola and who would declare themselves to be Zambian when asked, even though they had none of the papers to back it up. When they gave a reason, people often referred to the length of time they had stayed in Zambia, to having Zambian parents or to having their fields and livelihoods there. A number of people described themselves as Zambian because they were staying there. Some said if they should go to Angola they would become Angolan again (or for the first time). One old man argued that 'before the war people came from Angola to Zambia, these people stayed and are no longer Angolan. When we left Angola we thought to come to our relatives and now we stay with them [in Zambia], therefore, we are Zambian' (interview 19/6/97).

This fully documented, semi documented and undocumented nationality has a diminishing scale of recognition by the law, with the undocumented, not

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<sup>1</sup> Cards may still take a long time to be issued as the process can be very slow. While I was in the district office, there a number of people who were waiting, but the National Registration Officer said he could not issue any cards as he had no film to take the necessary pictures.

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surprisingly, having no legal standing whatsoever. For most purposes, the first two are effectively recognized, although a person who has obtained their NRC through the local chief and council may be vulnerable to exposure if there is any cause for scrutiny of their background. This is almost inconceivable given the lack of resources of the government departments and the cost of such investigations. It only seems likely should a person come particularly to the attention of the authorities, for example if they entered national politics and stood for a prominent position. This would prompt in-depth research and questions about the person's parentage and citizenship<sup>2</sup> (Human Rights Watch 1996: 34)

## **Identity papers and nationality**

This idea of nationality as a legal status is inseparable from the question of which identity papers people possess to demonstrate their claimed status. In the case of those who said they were Zambian, the possession of the appropriate NRC was sufficient to validate the claim in most circumstances that they were likely to encounter – even if it might have failed the test in a court.

Documentation was much less important in the case of those who claimed to be Angolan. Firstly, since they were staying in Zambia, being Angolan did not entitle them to any rights that might have been available to an Angolan in Angola. The nationality created no obligations on the state so the state had little interest in challenging it. Secondly, since many had fled from Angola with very few possessions over ten years before, few had Angolan papers and most of these were invalid and out of date since new registrations had been carried out for the 1992 Angolan elections. Those who had been registered as refugees by UNHCR had received refugee identity cards (RICs) and many showed these to demonstrate their Angolan nationality.

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<sup>2</sup> Given that the citizenship of Zambia's first president Kenneth Kaunda was challenged in the late 1990s on the grounds that his parents were not born within Zambia, the citizenship of most people in border regions could potentially be withdrawn.

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The disconnect between the papers people held and their 'official' nationality was demonstrated by the way papers were used by UNHCR for people moving into Cazombo in Moxico Province in Angola in 1997. Almost any documentation was accepted for those who wished to register in Angola as returning refugees, including Zambian NRCs. Since then the Angolan authorities have made some attempts to clarify whom they consider to be their nationals and carry out some registration, but in Cazombo, at least, ad hoc measures necessarily prevailed during 1997<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1: Identity papers held by villagers**

Papers held	Number	Percentage
Zambian NRC <sup>1</sup>	127	65%
Refugee identity Card	22	11%
Angolan identity Card	4	2%
Multiple identity cards <sup>2</sup>	15	8%
None	27	14%
Total	195	100%

<sup>1</sup>Includes young people who have not yet applied for or received their NRC (but expect to get one)

<sup>2</sup>These do not include the 3 people who have Congo papers, 2 of whom also have NRCs and 1 has RIC

**Table 2: Possession of identity cards by refugee designation**

	Zambian Green NRC			Angolan identity card			Refugee identity card		
	Refugee	Non-ref	Total	Refugee	Non-ref	Total	Refugee	Non-ref	Total
Yes	35	92	127	13	0	13	32	3	35
Not yet <sup>1</sup>	2	9	11						
Lost	0	1	1	18	2	20	3	2	5
None	49	7	56	55	107	162	51	104	155
Total	86	109	195	86	109	195	86	109	195

<sup>1</sup> Young people who had not yet applied for or received their NRC.

The majority of people interviewed had identity papers of some form. Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the responses to questions about which identity papers people possessed. Zambian NRCs were the most common and very few people held only Angolan identity cards. There was a sizeable minority of fourteen per cent who had no papers at all, of which three quarters were refugees<sup>4</sup>. A small number had more than one set of papers and 3 individuals (2%) claimed to have all three sets.

<sup>3</sup> To establish if someone is a 'genuine returnee' the registration staff inspected their documentation and interviewed them. Ideally they would have a refugee identification card that they had brought from Zambia (or Congo), but Zambian national registration cards were also accepted if the person's story justifying being Angolan is corroborated by the interview, the local chief or neighbours. UNHCR kept whatever identification papers were produced to prevent the person registering again, a practice known as recycling. In fact the majority of people provided no papers at all.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, I have defined Angolan refugees as those who had a) either been born in Angola or spent considerable period of their lives in Angola, and b) either run from the war or, having left for other reasons, had

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When interviewing people, I accepted their answers without checking the papers, as asking to see them would have caused a lot of suspicion. Some chose to bring identity cards out voluntarily, usually to find the date of birth, which was stated on them. It seems likely that the number of NRCs was overstated, as people were keen to demonstrate their right to be in Zambia, and the number of RICs was understated, as very few accept the label 'refugee'. However, the only case I heard of somebody giving a false response was from a man who denied having an NRC, when he had received one with the support of relatives during a drive to register people before the 1996 Zambian election. This was technically illegal and he was cautious about revealing it to me.

The tables show the expected pattern of refugees being much less likely to have NRCs compared to the non-refugees. However, 40% of refugees had managed to acquire NRCs, more than have RICs. RICs had not been issued in the district since the late 1980s and younger people were less likely to have them. In contrast, as noted above, they had more opportunity for obtaining NRCs, especially if they came of age in Zambia. This was borne out by the data which showed the average age of refugees holding NRCs was lower than those without. Likewise, the average age of RIC holders was higher than those without.

## ***Nationality and self-identification***

These definitions of nationality, expressed in degrees of legal recognition and documentation, can be contrasted with another range of ideas of nationality around how people identify themselves. At one extreme is an understanding of citizenship as a right to stay in Zambia and make a livelihood. At the other, there is the more affective understanding where a declaration of nationality expresses a bond of affection to the state of which one is a national. Using this latter definition, to say one is Zambian is not concerned so much with a legal status but a declaration of a

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been prevented from returning. This is an operational definition that enabled me to categorize those who responded to my questions. In some cases, the categorization would not coincide with that given by the formal legal definitions, as used by UNHCR and the government. However, I remain confident that any of the people I included as refugees could have presented themselves as such to the authorities if they so desired.

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person's identity in the 'strong' sense of a consistent presentation of oneself in across time and in different contexts (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 10).

This range of views came across clearly in interviews and conversations. Some people would talk of their nationality as a pragmatic issue, saying things like, 'while I am in Zambia, I am a Zambian, but if I go to Angola, I will be Angolan;' 'this time I am Zambian as my wealth is from Zambia [i.e. house, and fields], but I will become Angolan again'. Others talked of there being no difference between Zambians and Angolans the important issue was that they all belonged to the same ethnic group (Lunda, whose 'territory' straddles the borders of Angola, Zambia and DR Congo) or they were relatives. Often a person's nationality would be defined by the papers they held, 'I am a Zambian because I have an NRC'. I described these people as having a *handheld* idea of nationality; it is something they see defined by papers or location and it is easily changed depending on the circumstances (Bakewell 2000).

In the middle ground were those who described themselves as Zambian or Angolan according to where they had been born or brought up, or where their parents had come from. Their nationality was a reflection of their history, a given fact of life: neither something to be adapted to the circumstances nor revealing a sense of strong identification with their country.

I described the other extreme as a *heartfelt* idea of nationality where a person depicts themselves as feeling Zambian or Angolan, as an attribute that they cannot, nor want to, change easily. In evidence for such a view were references to feeling their nationality in the heart, or '100 per-cent', 'full time' or 'pure' Zambian or Angolan. With such a view, people remain attached to Angola despite living in Zambia for a long time and in conversation they are likely to speak of pride or shame in their nation. In particular, some said that although they were Angolan, they were ashamed of the state of their country and its continuing war. Others maintained their national pride by considering the natural wealth and resources in Angola speaking of the ground glistening with diamonds and abundant game animals.

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Although in Zambian law it is not possible to have dual nationality, in the villages things are not so simple. As noted above some had multiple papers, while others described themselves as having two nationalities. In the semi-structured interviews people were asked first what nationality they considered themselves to be, and then what identity cards they held. When juxtaposed, as they are in Table 3, these responses show that in many cases there was no direct link between a person's sense of national identity and the papers that they hold. A surprising number of people who described themselves as non-Zambian turned out to have an NRC. For these people at least it is possible to suggest that they have a handheld Zambian nationality while their heartfelt nationality is with another country, either Angola or Congo. In particular over a third of the refugees who have acquired an NRC do not feel themselves to be Zambian. Others expressed their position in words with comments like, 'I am Zambian by living here, but my whole heart is in Angola;' 'by birth I am Angolan, but by staying here I am Zambian;' or 'I don't know which nationality. I was born from Zambia but my wealth is from Angola'.

**Table 3: Possession of NRC by nationality and refugee designation**

	Nationality claimed	Possessing NRC		Total
		Yes/Lost/Not yet	None	
Non-refugee	Zambian	93	2	95
	Angolan	3	2	5
	Congo	4	2	6
	Zambian/Angolan	2	1	3
Sub-total		<b>102</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>109</b>
Refugee	Zambian	22	20	42
	Angolan	8	20	28
	Congo	1	0	1
	Zambian/Angolan	5	4	9
	None/don't know	1	5	6
Sub-total		<b>37</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>86</b>
Total		<b>139</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>195</b>

The concept of nationality is much more complex than this simple spectrum from handheld to heartfelt nationality suggests. Given that interviews were held in Zambia, it is to be expected that people presented their Zambian nationality more strongly than any other, as it reinforced their right to be where they were and there was little to be gained by taking the risk of describing themselves as Angolan to a European researcher.

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### **Official views of nationality**

The range of views of nationality that are prevalent in the villages contrasts strongly with a much more consistent official perspective. From the offices of Lusaka to Mwinilunga, government officials spoke of Zambian nationality as a key element of one's self identity: a heartfelt nationality demonstrated by full documentation. Any pragmatic or handheld idea of nationality was dismissed as fake and those who acquired NRCs by anything other than the full legal process were illegal aliens using fraudulently obtained documents.

When asked about the reason why it was impossible in Zambian law to become a Zambian citizen if one was staying in the country as a refugee, the late Commissioner for Refugees acknowledged that this was a problem for people but there were no plans to reconsider this. He gave two examples that demonstrated the rationale for the government position. When the Federation of Rhodesia broke up and Zambia received independence, there was a Zimbabwean (Southern Rhodesian) who remained in Zambia, accepted its citizenship and rose to ministerial position in the Zambian government. Despite this, when Zimbabwe achieved independence this man renounced his Zambian citizenship and went back to Zimbabwe. Second, although the Tanzanian government gave citizenship to Rwandan Tutsis (Gasarasi 1990), many of them have returned to Rwanda, as Rwandans, since the victory of the Tutsi dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front in 1994; they even left senior positions in Tanzania in order to go back.

The immigration officer in Mwinilunga told a similar story of Angolan refugees who had acquired NRCs through the chiefs and then thrown them away when they returned to Angola. This illustrated his point that those who say now that they do not want to go to their country will at some stage change their minds, and this is a reason for not allowing them to take up citizenship. According to headmen in the study area, there had been trouble when Congolese refugees had obtained NRCs, then defaced them and left them stuck on trees as they made their way back into Congo. The local headmen were blamed by the authorities for helping these refugees

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to get the cards, especially since this happened near the time of Zambian elections and it slowed down the registration process and stopped some Zambians voting.

Two aspects of the government attitude to nationality were revealed by these stories. First, they showed that Zambian nationality was portrayed by officials as an honour worthy of great respect, and any abuse of it or its symbols, such as the NRC, was taken as an affront and an insult to the nation. No doubt much of this was concerned with the rights that came with citizenship, including the right of residence, participation in elections, formal employment and government services. Rejection of these was taken as an insult akin to the rejection of hospitality. This suggested a view that all the benefits of a person becoming a citizen accrue to the individual while the government is the generous patron allowing them into the family of Zambia. The idea of the pragmatic adoption of nationality while a long term resident in the country was not acceptable to official eyes.

Second, these stories showed a deep scepticism about the possibility of people, especially refugees, changing their allegiance from their nation of origin to Zambia. People may make statements with their mouths and sign papers to gain a new nationality but they will still retain their attachment to the state from which they came. In the case of those who were forced to leave their homes and become refugees, it may serve their purposes to swear allegiance to their host state, but as soon as conditions change in their place of origin they will return, forgetting any loyalty to their hosts. All officials, at national and local level, seemed to agree that Zambian nationality should not be available to those who had any intention to return to their country of origin. From the government's perspective a change of nationality should entail a profound change of self-identity, which is not likely to be easily reversed. It was not just a question of pieces of paper but a process of naturalization and *becoming* Zambian. The bureaucratic procedure reflected this requirement, as a person had to demonstrate their commitment by living as a resident for over 10 years in Zambia, give up any other nationality and make a declaration of loyalty before a magistrate, in order to become Zambian (interviews 15/7/97).

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The bureaucratic control over nationality enabled the government to determine what sort of people it wants to accept as citizens. When describing the process of naturalization, government officers suggested that the qualifications and expertise of a person should be key factor in the success of their application for citizenship. The acting Commissioner for Refugees commented that immigration was very strict and was likely only to consider applications from a person with property or married to a Zambian; they were most likely to reject applications from peasant farmers. A local government officer in Mwinilunga observed that the immigration law was there to keep out the wrong sort of people: those who would be a drain on the nation's resources, such as subsistence farmers, rather than innovative people who would contribute to them.

Some government officers were sympathetic to the situation of those who came as refugees and had no avenue to citizenship. One council secretary said that the existing law was unfair as it passed refugee status through the generations, so the children of refugees were also refugees (interview 14/7/97). He argued that since they had grown up in Zambia and many would never go to Angola, they should be fully accepted as Zambian citizens. He observed that other foreigners could come and take residency and become citizens in due course and the same possibility should be open to refugees; 'why should refugees be the unfortunate group?' The late Commissioner of Refugees, although rejecting the idea of granting citizenship to refugees, did suggest that that the refugee bill should be revised to include provision for refugees to become residents, which would at least start them on the path to naturalization.

Although government officials expressed disapproval of villagers obtaining NRCs 'illegally', there were various levels of understanding of their situation. For example, one local official in Mwinilunga recognized the difficulties of making judgements about who is Zambian. He cited the case of the Zambians who ran to Angola in the 1960s with a senior chief who was promoting Lunda nationalism against the Lusaka government. These people stayed in Angola for some years and then came back into Zambia fleeing the war with the Portuguese.

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At one border crossing, an immigration officer referred to Angolans who had stayed in Zambian villages without papers for a long time as 'naturalized Zambians' who immigration did not 'chase'. Immigration officials spoke of dealing with people as they came to their attention, rather than actively pursuing 'illegal immigrants'. Immigration offices on the border have such limited resources, in particular with no transport, that their officers would have been unable to investigate any other cases even if they had wanted to. It was widely recognized that the chiefs and local people were happy with the situation and any attempts to enforce the law would have been deeply unpopular, if not actively resisted. The area in which I was working was noted as an area where the chief strongly supported the settlement of refugees in the villages.

The Zambian state's desire to control its nationality and citizenship is one it shares with all nation states. It has been a major concern for African states after independence, when they had to establish a national identity within colonial borders, which often cut across ethnic groups. It was therefore necessary for them to establish rules of citizenship that firmly establish to which state people belong. This was crucial in the political and military context of Southern Africa, where 'front-line states' were under constant threat from Portuguese colonialists (until 1974) and from apartheid South Africa (until the late 1980s). As these old regional existential threats to the state have receded, they have been replaced by more global concerns about security, which can justify the continuation of strong controls. Cheater and Gaidzwana (1996: 194) observed that within the region, these rules on citizenship were becoming more exclusive as states moved towards:

the *ius sanguinis* view that citizenship must be acquired through ascribed descent, irrespective of place of birth, which has replaced the earlier settler-determined territorial or *ius solis* model based on individual mobility and contractual achievement.

Other states in Southern Africa have shared the Zambia government's requirement for exclusive allegiance from citizens and its scepticism about those who change their loyalty. 'In the region, there seems to be a generally xenophobic reaction to citizens

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with a taste for mobility and multiple identities' (Cheater and Gaidzanwa 1996: 197). This has been strengthened in Zambia by the government's manipulation of citizenship to exclude its political opponents, which has continued from the late 1990s to today<sup>5</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

This case study from Zambia illustrates the sharp contrast between the perspectives of the state and those of large numbers of people 'with a taste for mobility,' who live on its remote borders. The clear rules expressed in the law are blurred as one moves away from the centre of state power, where its capacity rigorously to uphold the rules is limited. This has created the room for manoeuvre in which many refugees, with the support of their hosts and local officials, have been able effectively to become citizens and acquired the papers to prove it.

The data presented is not sufficiently detailed to reveal systematically how the concept of nationality is deployed by individual villagers in different contexts and circumstances. This was never the aim of the research. However, it does seem clear that for some the primary significance of their claim to Zambian nationality was the rights to which it entitled them, whereas for others it was an important act of self-identification.<sup>6</sup>

Such self-identification is clearly socially constructed and must be expected to vary with the context. The nationality that a person declared to me as an external observer will not necessarily be the same as that submitted on the census form or discussed around the household fire. Moreover, a person's self-identification will have to contend with that imposed by others. I saw this often in practice when someone who had described themselves as Zambian during an interview might later be described by others as Angolan. As Brubaker and Cooper point out, self-identification 'takes

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<sup>5</sup> See report in Post of Zambia 21/10/05 reported in SAMP News October 2005 [www.queensu.ca/samp](http://www.queensu.ca/samp).

<sup>6</sup> Similar contrasts between pragmatic and affective notions of citizenship might be expected elsewhere. For example, Andersson (forthcoming: footnote 22) observed, 'Zimbabwe's decreased popularity is also evidenced by the numerous Zimbabwe-born youths of Malawian descent waiting for the processing of a Malawian passport at the Department of Immigration in Blantyre..

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place in dialectical interplay with external identification, and the two need not converge' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 15).

They also go on to claim that modern states are capable of an exceptional form of external identification, which yields a definitive answer to the question of a person's nationality.

External identification is itself a varied process. In the ordinary ebb and flow of social life, people identify and categorize others, just as they identify and categorize themselves. But there is another key type of external identification that has no counterpart in the domain of self-identification; the formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions.

The modern state has been one of the most important agents of identification and categorization in this latter sense. In culturalist extensions of Weberian sociology of the state, notably those influenced by Bourdieu and Foucault, the state monopolizes, or seeks to monopolize, not only legitimate physical force but also legitimate symbolic force, as Bourdieu puts it. This includes the power to name, to identify, to categorize, state what is what and how is who. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 15)

In the case presented in this paper, the state may have the monopoly of power to issue identity papers, but it is not clear that this extends to imposing its categorisations. Given that the system for verifying people's claims to papers rests on local mediators – village headmen, chiefs and local officials with views of citizenship at odds with the written codes – the process of identification may generate results far from the formalised, codified and objectified systems envisaged by Brubaker and Cooper.

In such a context, what do identity papers signify? If the community identifies someone in a particular way and the state is a long way off, the papers may become a useful but not essential document for identity in everyday life. Whether you have them or not does not really change your social position. It has limited day to day significance. Moreover, if the community, including local authorities feel that you

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should be identified in a particular way, they will find a way round the system to generate the papers required.

Perhaps we have to ask first, whose categorisations have the most salience for individuals. Is it more important to be seen as Zambian (or Angolan) by the state or is the crucial identification that which is imposed by the community in which people live? Do a person's identity papers say more about their relationships within the local context, their position in the local community, than their relationship with the state?

Longman raises similar issues with respect to the Rwandan state's attempts before the 1994 genocide to use documents to fix individual ethnic identities. He observes that in Rwanda 'ethnic identity is understood as an essential characteristic of individuals, not an official designation'; it is easy to overestimate the state's capacity to impose its identifications (Longman 2001: 374). This Zambian case does not support the idea of national identity being an 'essential characteristic' of a person. If anything it suggests that it is socially constructed, but not primarily at the level of the state. While we might expect the state to have a monopoly over the identification of its nationals, this case study indicates that Longmans' doubts about its capacity to fix *ethnic* identities should also be echoed for *national* identities.

These questions are posed in the context of the extreme edges of a very poor nation. However, they may also raise issues which challenge the monopoly of state categorisations elsewhere. For example, in the UK a person 'who works in a recognised profession or has good standing in the community' who has known the applicant for at least two years is required to countersign passport application forms.<sup>7</sup> There is a parallel to the way that the Zambian authorities rely on the chiefs; it is based on the assumption that the counter-signatory, being of 'good standing', will share a common sense of how people should be categorised that is consistent with the formal system.

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<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.passport.gov.uk/passport\\_first\\_appform.asp#sign](http://www.passport.gov.uk/passport_first_appform.asp#sign) – the form even gives a list of acceptable profession for counter signatories!

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The increasing use of biometric techniques as a means to verify people's identity and entitlements may make such personal verification redundant and eliminate the final 'face to face' social practices involved in acquiring papers, especially in wealthier countries. The generation of identity papers and passports may be reduced to a purely bureaucratic exercise conducted online. Identity papers and electronic cards may give way to virtual papers embodied in our flesh.<sup>8</sup> We face a future where the symbols of formal identification and categorisation imposed by states and others (especially private enterprise) are being literally internalised.

While such developments have raised many concerns about civil liberties, human rights and state power, we have asked far fewer questions about what papers already mean in the lives of individuals in different contexts. Clearly they have an instrumental value:

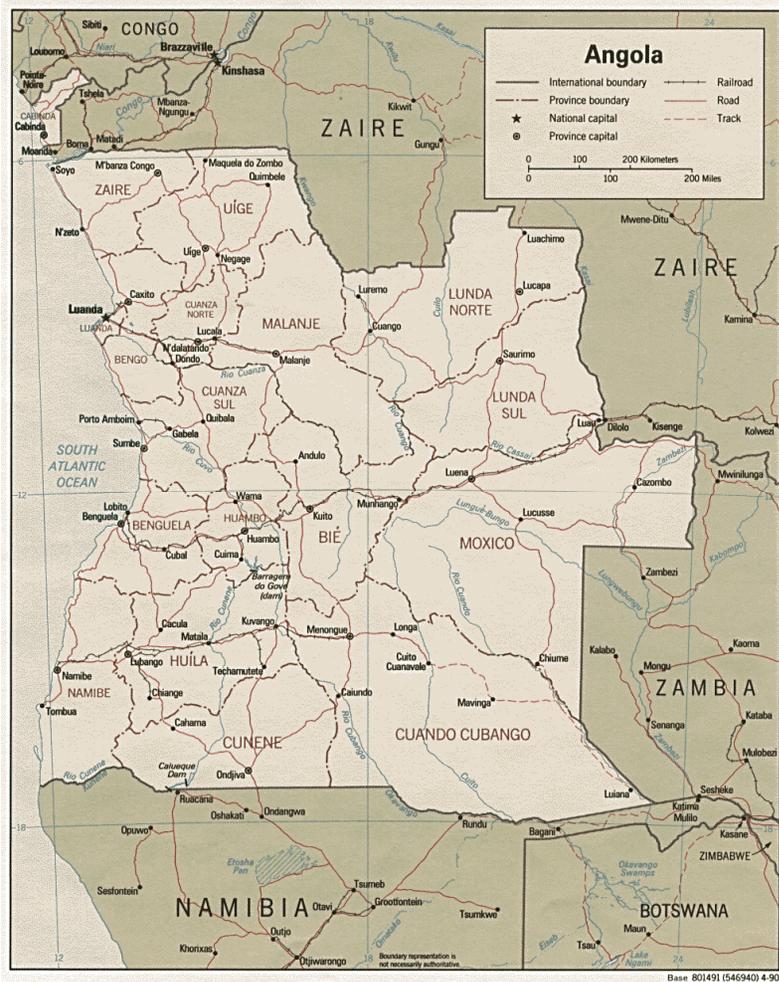
'Being able to produce a state-sanctioned proof of identity does affect whether one can cross international borders, access social benefits, or pass through a policy checkpoint on the street. Yet the naturalization of those objects often makes one forget that passports, green cards, or driver's licenses are worthless without the social relations that produce them and give meaning to them as symbols of something else. The power that people invest in those documents lies there, in those relations and conventions, rather than in the physical materiality.' (Gordillo 2006: 173)

The question which needs much more research is how far these 'relations and conventions' are shared within nations and across borders. This Zambian case study suggests that we must look below the level of the state to the heterogeneous notions of nationality and identity found within local, national and transnational communities. Until we start to unpack these different meanings and uses of identity papers, we may be assuming that states have more power than they really have; we may be letting the paper tiger roar unchallenged.

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<sup>8</sup> This is already seen in advanced payment systems which are authorised by thumbprint (on trial in three Oxford Co-operative stores – see <http://www.paybytouch.com/>)

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