Interpreting the Case of Refugees: Is it a Wicked or a Complex Problem?[1]

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Abstract

This paper argues that the refugee problem can be managed by using adaptive techniques, thus it is more suitable to use complexity theory lens than the wicked problem lens to understand this problem. Situated along the Thai-Myanmar border, Mae La camp, which is the largest refugee camp in Asia today, is the case used to illustrate the arguments. The paper suggests how tenets of complexity theory can be applied to study the condition of refugees. The level of application is divided into four phases of the problem: causes; immediate reaction; stable response to or an equilibrium state; and the rise of new contexts that change the situation. Key characteristics of complexity theory such as self-organization, non-linear explanations, interactions leading to emergence, and the presence of networks are prevalent in all four phases. The paper also articulates the policy options and their implications on how the problem can be managed.

Key words

Refugee, refugee camp, Thailand, Myanmar, complexity theory, public management

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Introduction

Refugees have unfortunately been a fact of global life for many decades. The number of displaced people worldwide has exceeded 50 million for the first time since World War II (UNHCR 2013). Currently, the top five countries that 'produce' refugees are Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan (UNHCR 2013). Many refugees have been in camps waiting for the resolution of political and legal disputes that have lasted for decades and have no solution in sight. The plight of Palestinians (since 1948) in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank, ethnic minorities from Myanmar in Thailand (since 1984), and Somalis in Kenya (since 1991) are examples of this situation. Given that refugee dilemmas are ubiquitous and also seem so intractable, it is not surprising that an intellectual field of inquiry often referred to as "refugee studies" surfaced many years ago and is now quite robust (see Black 2001; Cameron 2014). Indeed, journals, university institutes and think tanks have proliferated over the years to understand the myriad refugee situations that continue to arise in response to domestic and international conflicts.

At the risk of simplifying a voluminous literature, the plight of refugees is often examined through four broad conceptual lenses. The first is humanitarian assistance, meaning attending to the physical, material and psychological conditions of refugees (e.g. Hollifield M, Warner TD, Lian N, & et al 2002). A second lens is human rights, which pertain to the legal and jurisprudential principles that apply to refugees under international law and/or other interpretations of justice (see Hathaway, 1991). Conflict, whether the conflict derives from civil war, domestic insurgency or war between and among nations is yet a third lens to analyze refugee situations (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). A fourth perspective examines refugees through an anthropological lens such as studies about life in a refugee camp, life after resettlement or perhaps the identity challenges of youth while in the camps (for a study of resettlement challenges for the Karen in the United States see Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Each of these four conceptual lenses has a vast literature with many historical and contemporary examples.

We argue that there is an additional lens that should be considered to fully understand the situation of refugees. Drawing from public administration and policy, this lens is complexity theory and management. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate its conceptual utility through a case study of the refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border. Our aim is to deconstruct the refugee problem and provide an organized way to think about it using complexity theory as a framework for analysis.

In the first section we organize the literature related to complexity theory and the plight of refugees. The concept of networks is discussed followed by background of the case. Second, we distinguish two ways of portraying refugee challenges—wickedness or complexity. We show that the difference lies in the fact that wicked problems are impossible to solve whereas while complex problems are also extremely

difficult to solve, they can be managed by using adaptive techniques. Third, we suggest how tenets of complexity theory can be applied to study the condition of refugees. The level of application is divided into four phases of the problem: causes; immediate reaction; stable response to or an equilibrium state; and the rise of new contexts that change the situation. Key characteristics of complexity theory such as self-organization, non-linear explanations, interactions leading to emergence, and the presence of networks are prevalent in all four phases. Fourth, the paper articulates the policy options and their implications on how the case of this particular refugee situation can be managed.

Complexity theory and related concepts

Borrowed from the natural sciences, complexity theory has gained acceptance among social scientists including public policy and administration scholars and practitioners (See such as special issues Emergence: Complexity & Organization in 2010; and Public Administration Quarterly in 2008; and Public Management Review vol. 10). Frameworks used in public policy analysis such as institutional analysis and development (Crawford & Ostrom 1995) and advocacy coalition (Sabatier & Jenkins 1993) have similar characteristics to complexity theory. The study of networks and network governance (Koppenjan & Klijn 1997, 2004) also see the world as comprised of interactions between entities resembling complex systems (See also Kiel 1994; Overman 1996; Morçöl 2002; Trochim & Cabrera 2005).

Complexity theory has two major components: the unit of analysis and explanations about the world. The unit analysis is complex *systems* (which have multiple units within it); complexity *theory* is about how such a system behaves. Proponents of complexity theory claim that (1) it offers an alternative way to analyze public policy problems that differs from the reductionists and positivist approaches (Sanderson 2006), and (2) prescribes ways to cope with *complex problems* in the world (see Dennard, Richardson, and Morçöl 2008; Kiel 1994).

Key characteristics of complex systems include the absence of universal rules about behavior; the constant fluctuations of the situation; interdependency of parts in the system or subsystems (Klijn 2008); and that initial conditions can set path dependencies (Cairney 2012). The theory suggests that the system's behavior is based on a set of central concepts. They are non-linearity, self-organization, networks, adaptive systems, and emergence (Meek 2010). These concepts lead us to understand the need to study complex problems in a dynamic way. Teisman and Klijn (2008, 288) call this making "films of governance processes" and not only "snapshots". In addition, either by external force or internal interactions between entities, because elements (i.e. people, communities, organizations) have self-organizing capacities, unknown developments of the larger whole might occur, which may seem chaotic (Teisman and Klijn 2008). Small interventions or incidents can create the 'butterfly effect' where the context (or the fitness landscape) might radically change (Bovaird 2008, 320). This

sudden change and the state of stability are both parts of the punctuated equilibrium of the system (Teisman and Klijn 2008; Cairney 2012; Baumgartner and Jones 2014).

In terms of how to deal with complex problems, a few suggestions from complexity theory include the recognition of policy networks (Bovaird 2008); the need to have dual strategies to keep on course while concurrently to adapt to the dynamic and unpredictable developments of the landscape (Teisman and Klijn 2008); the importance of framing policy making and implementation as a coevolutionary process between policy makers and the system they govern (Gerrits 2010); the realization that policy punctuations can happen when new conflicts occur between actors, including policy makers and public managers (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). In sum, the notions of linear causal effects, rigid planning, and top-down command and control do not sit comfortably in the world of complexity (Teisman and Klijn 2008). Beyond commanding, there needs to be continuous communicative processes to resolve conflicting goals and interpretations among actors (Jones 2011).

Networks are infused with the elements of complexity. Networks can be formal or informal. They may involve the institutionalization of new rules, procedures, and structures to govern the relationships among the members of the network, and they often lead to the creation of new public value and or joint discovery (Amirkhanyan, 2008, Agranoff, 2003; Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan, 1997; C. J. Koliba, 2006; C. Koliba, Meek, and Zia, 2011; O'Toole, 1995). The parties share risks, responsibilities and rewards, invest substantial time, share common turf and have high levels of trust (Himmelman, 2001).

There are three types of networks in public policy and administration: policy networks, service delivery networks, and governance networks (Isett, Mergel, LeRoux, Mischen, and Rethemeyer, 2010). Aside from generating policy ideas, policy networks help to formulate data and information for specific policy sectors. They also influence policy decisions (Waarden, 1992). Examples include policy networks related to combating human trafficking, anti-corruption, climate change, city management or environment protection (e.g. Stone, 2008). The cloud technology now allows for multiple analysts around the world to work on the same public policy issue simultaneously, creating 'instant' policy networks. One such example is a company called WikiStrat, which uses a number of crowd sourced consultants to produce analytical reports on world events such as the Arab Spring, the Ukraine crisis, and the 2014 elections in India.

A service delivery network is made up of multiple organizations that provide goods and services to targeted beneficiaries (Agranoff, 2003; Singh and Prakash, 2010). These networks may be led and co-funded by government, though they may include organizations in the private and non-profit sectors as well. They allocate both responsibilities and actual work requirements based on expertise and resources. Service delivery networks have extended beyond organizations to include individuals in the delivery chain in the form of co-production (e.g. Poocharoen & Ting 2015; Alford, 2002; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Meijer, 2011; Ostrom, 1996; Whitaker, 1980).

Governance networks are a combination of policy networks and service delivery networks. These are often large and complex networks that may focus on advocacy, political change or the formulation of policies. Governance networks may also be responsible for policy implementation (e.g. Coen & Thatcher, 2007; Crawford, 2006; C. Koliba et al., 2011; Provan & Kenis, 2008; SøRensen & Torfing, 2009). Examples include anti-corruption programs and poverty alleviation programs where donors, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the firms are connected to the network. We suggest that the concept of regimes, used in international relations literature, has similarities to the concept of governance networks. For example in the case of refugees, there are international regimes (laws and norms) that govern definitions of terminologies and acceptable behaviors by actors in involved, which is, in essence, global refugee policy. At the same time, there are a myriad of actors who implement the service delivery, ranging from humanitarian aid, various dimensions of empowerment and economic and social development. According to complexity theory, actors not only self-organize, but constantly interact, which produces the system that comprises the challenges embedded in managing the condition of refugees in a given location.

The refugee problem and its regime

In our view, there is no 'theory of refugees'. A rational, linear model would not accurately reflect the reality that the condition of refugees is complex and a non-rational phenomenon (Bascom 1998; Black 2001; Cameron 2014). The refugee condition that exists in so many areas of the world challenges the prevailing governance paradigm. The conditions include the international or cross-border dimensions of most refugee situations; the fact that they are most frequently protracted; they are often based on ethnic rivalries; and refugee conditions often include ideological, political, economic, social, and territorial conflicts. As a result of internal armed conflict in another country, many refugees “languish for years in refugee camps or migrate from place to place, without the chance to return home, resettle in a different country, or integrate locally” (Haerens 2010, p.16). This description depicts the typical situation for refugees, which stems from the host country’s unwillingness to accommodate the refugees due to economic factors, security, and political reasons. Most refugees rely on international organizations and non-government organizations to provide basic services such as health, education, food, and shelter. Like other complex problems such as the spread of disease, climate change, and poverty, existing international norms and regimes are unable to “solve” the multi-factor, multi-level conditions that are embedded in the refugee condition.

The current international regime pertaining to the treatment of refugees is outdated (Ogata 2000). The 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol are based on interstate wars; however, most refugee situations since the end of the Cold War have been created by armed conflict and civil wars involving non-state actors. Classic

rules of war and broad humanitarian principles are rarely complied with in situations that produce refugees. The core refugee regime embedded in international law does not accurately reflect what is actually happening on the ground. While refugees are mostly commonly the bi-product of internal armed conflict who typically flee their country and are unable to return due to fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social or political group, in reality, it is often difficult to ascertain whether a specific individual or family meets the conventional definition of refugee (particularly since some may actually be economic migrants).

Writing about this situation from the perspective of changes in the global shifts in refugee protection, Betts, observes, "while the formal refugee protection rules and the UNHCR's mandate stays largely the same, the most relevant politics for refugee protection occurs in parallel domains" (2009: 83). Betts goes on to show how countries have used other regimes, especially those that pertain to migration, to shift their responsibilities away from those that would apply to a refugee regime. Since the two—refugees and migrants—are often difficult to separate in practice, regime complexity can actually provide "cover" for a country that has limited interest in fulfilling obligations under international law. For the UNHCR it means that its traditional role of protection needs to accommodate to the "competitive" organizational pressures that come from organizations operating on overlapping but expanded norms. In their recent reports UNHCR now uses a set of terms to describe 'persons of concern'. These words are refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and returnees (UNHCR 2013). In sum, the refugee problem involves not only many actors, but there are inherent difficulties in defining terminologies and the boundaries of the problem.

The Refugee Problem along Thai-Myanmar Border

The refugee situation along the Thai-Myanmar border is no different from other cases around the world. Refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border have been there since 1984.[2] They come from several ethnic groups (Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Shan) who have fled armed conflict between the Myanmar army and various insurgent groups that, in principle, have been attempting to protect the interests of the ethnic group that they were fighting for. The Karen ethnic minority, represented by the Karen National Union and its military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army have been in armed conflict with the Burmese military since 1949 although a tenuous cease fire has been in place the past few years. A majority of the refugees on the Thai side of the border come from the Karen ethnic minority who reside in nine camps. The number of refugees in the

[2] The Royal Thai Government is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Rights of Refugees. Therefore, the government uses the term displaced persons rather than refugees to describe those who have fled Burma and are in nine camps along the Burma-Thai border. In this paper we will generally use the term refugees acknowledging, however, that this is not the Thai government's preferred term. We will also use the country name Myanmar and Burma interchangeably throughout.

nine camps totals about 140,000.[3] The largest of the nine camps is Mae La and it is approximately 60 kilometers from the Thai city of Mae Sot. The camp currently has a population of about 45,000 people. Our analysis is based mainly on this camp.

There are many stakeholders involved in the politics and management of Mae La as well as the other eight camps. They include the Thai and Myanmar national governments (including military, police, border control agencies, immigration regulators, and labor agencies), bi-lateral donors, the UNHCR, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), provincial and local governments of both states, the self-governing bodies that are elected by the refugees in the camps, and insurgent groups referred to above that are associated with one or more of the ethnic groups among the refugees in the camps. In addition, stakeholders also include the Karen diaspora who live in various countries around the world, the resettled refugees, the displaced people on the Myanmar side, and the activists, humanitarian and development workers who come in and out of the area as individuals and bring attention to the plight of the refugees to their governments and the media.

The Thai Ministry of Interior (MOI) supervises the nine camps; however, there is a *modicum of self-government* in the camps through elected representatives of the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC). Basic needs and services such as food, health and education are provided by a number of INGOs who are funded by bi-lateral national aid agencies from Australia, Sweden, Canada, Norway and the United States. Countries beyond the region are also involved in the refugee issue when inhabitants of the camp apply for permanent resettlement. Provincial and local governments in Thailand also have an interest in the refugee population due to undocumented persons in their jurisdictions as well as potential illegal activities perpetrated by or on behalf of refugees. Meanwhile, the UNHCR oversees the rights of refugees under international law.

The refugee situation: A "wicked" or a complex problem?

Refugee situations frequently have a long duration and seem to be intractable; therefore, it may be tempting to conceptualize the plight of the refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border as a "wicked" problem since they have been there for three decades with no immediate end in sight. The term wicked problem has been in vogue for some time and has been used quite frequently not only in academic discourse but in general media coverage of particular thorny policy controversies (see PPI, 2011). The literature about wicked policy problems specifies some conditions that make policy challenges wicked. According to Rittel and Webber (1973) these conditions include:

1. Wicked problems have no definitive formulation. They have no clear boundaries

[3] It should be noted that this is a mere fraction of the number of undocumented in Thailand who fled Myanmar over the years, many who would be considered as economic migrants in addition to those who fled because of ethnic violence.

to articulate and define. There is always more than one explanation for a wicked problem. Every wicked problem is unique. There are no templates to follow. Every wicked problem is a symptom of another problem.

2. Solutions to wicked problems can only be good or bad, not true or false. Solutions can *improve* a situation but not solve the problem. There is no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error. Offering a solution to a wicked problem is often a one-shot design effort.

The concept of wicked problems has been applied to a wide range of international and domestic policy issues including irregular warfare (Smith and Clemente), an internal conflict with regional and international foreign and security policy implications (Price 2013), state fragility (Ramalingam 2012), crime and corruption (Roberts, 2012), cyber security (Malone and Malone, 2013), mental health (Hannigan and Coffey, 2010), child abuse (Devaney and Spratt, 2009) and global climate change (Levin, et al, 2012).

The messiness of the concept, however, comes from the fact that policy challenges may be complex—indeed most are—but not all complex policy issues are wicked. Head (2010) provides a useful way of separating the two as depicted in figure 1. By using the three interrelated ideas of complexity, uncertainty and divergence, Head suggests that wicked policy problems are those that extend beyond the highest thresholds of all three dimensions. While intuitively appealing this construct still begs the question as to whether a policy issue is wicked and when wickedness occurs.

Figure 1: Wickedness as a combination of complexity, uncertainty, and divergence.

Complexity of elements, sub-systems, and interdependencies	Low	Moderate	High
Uncertainty in relation to risks, consequences of action and changing patterns	Low	Moderate	High
Divergence and fragmentation in viewpoints, values, strategic intentions	Low	Moderate	High
		→ Wickedness	

Source: Brian Head, "Wicked Problems in Water Governance: Paradigm Changes to Promote Water Sustainability and Address Planning Uncertainty." December 2010, pg. 4.

Given the various efforts to portray a wide array of policy challenges as wicked problems, should refugees be added to the mix? Consider some of the criteria of wicked problems above. Surely there will be disagreements about whether the presence of displaced persons on the Thai-Myanmar border is in the same category

as, say, cyber security and global climate change. While depictions of wicked problems tend to be silent about the number of impacted persons in the wicked problem set. The number of displaced persons on the border is about 140,000—and the number is slowly decreasing. So, when compared to some of the other examples above, this is surely a modest number.

Returning to figure 1, the refugee situation shares the three ingredients of complexity, uncertainly and divergence. The number of stakeholders in the environment and their differing goals exhibits complexity. Uncertainty is clearly present in the political, economic, and social developments in the area and in Myanmar. To take just one illustration of uncertainty, the political changes taking place now in Myanmar and the overall political stability of the regime are still very uncertain and there is some concern that the political reforms may have stalled. Divergence is manifested by the difference values that are brought to bear on the refugee situation and the disparate interests of the key stakeholders.

However, labeling the situation as wicked is problematical. One criterion of wickedness is the difficulty of discerning clear policy options to resolve a policy problem. Yet, in the case of refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border the options are quite straightforward. There are essentially four options to typical refugee situations. First, they can be resettled to a third country. Second, they can be absorbed into the host country. Third, they can be repatriated back to the country from which they fled. Fourth, they can remain in the camps without resolution because the first three options are "off the table" so to speak. With the fourth option, the refugee state of affairs becomes a management challenge since multiple stakeholders are involved in maintaining the status quo. This introduces complexity and some need for coordination (see Head, 2013) but it does not necessarily make the situation wicked.

Refugee situations neither fall into the category of "black swans" (Taleb, 2007) nor are they "unknown unknowns" (Rumsfeld and Myers, 2002). They rarely occur without advanced warning, unlike a natural disaster, and there is transferability of knowledge from one refugee situation to another. To the extent that one would suggest that they are wicked problems, their wickedness lies in the difficulties involved in developing an acceptable and durable stable solution for the major protagonists. This is not unlike some conflicts in the world today such as the civil war in Syria. But, if the refugee condition on the Thai-Myanmar border is not a wicked problem and yet has been in place for three decades, what is it? We now turn to see how the complexity lens can help to analyze this problem.

Applying the Complexity Lens

In addition to the nature of the refugee presence in Thailand described above, there are four more features of this problem that deserve attention. First, we note the heterogeneity of the agents. Heterogeneity applies not only to the plethora of organizations—many of the stakeholders listed above. It also depicts the nature of the

refugee population for each person has a different story and differing needs and goals. For example in the choice of local integration, some want to work in Thailand as migrant workers with proper passports from Myanmar, while others prefer to get Thai citizenship and stay permanently in Thailand. Second, while UNHCR is the formal representative for refugees, there is no government or non-governmental organization that takes entire ownership of the state of affairs.

Third, there is a non-linear pattern to the interactions among policies. For example, while the Thai government continues to portray the fiction that the camps are temporary—and is supported by the fact that the shelters are built primarily from bamboo—many institutions have been established including schools, health clinics, and self-governing administrative apparatus that promotes the sense of community and permanency. Fourth, there is a web of connectedness of policies and agents. For example, education services in the Mae La camp is connected to Karen nationalism because it is provided predominantly by the Karen people, while health services are connected to the standards provided by the Thai state because of the hospitals and health clinics in Mae Sot city, and issues of human rights (women, persons with disabilities, and the rights of children) rely on international standards because of the norms that INGO workers bring in (e.g. Oxfam's gender training programs). These elements, or what might be termed the "facts-on-the-ground" contribute to the complexity embedded in the state of affairs of refugees.

<Figure 2: Diagram of the four dimensions to use complexity thinking>

We suggest that complexity thinking can be applied to the refugee case in four dimensions (See figure 2). First, it can be applied to analyze the cause of the refugee situation, which is often not a linear causal effect explanation. The reason why people flee is usually civil war or violent armed conflict but the cause of the conflict itself is usually much more complicated. It can relate to ethnic tensions caused by arbitrary lines of states drawn during colonial times (e.g. the Taliban story), inequalities (Stewart ed. 2008), oppression, or conflict over resources. Consider this first stage as the emergence of the refugee predicament.

Second, complexity thinking can be applied to explain and organize the immediate emergency response. In addition to finding family members and offering security, this includes provisions of shelter, food, medicine, and clothing. In this second phase actors interact rapidly and usually with little strategic planning or management due to the many organizations involved and the urgency of the problems that third parties are invariably confronted with when a refugee crisis unfolds. Refugees and aid workers form some level of self-organization to manage the immediate needs. In some situations, like the ongoing conflicts in Myanmar, refugees flee in waves. It is common for the first wave to settle and, after some time, be joined by others, organically building a refugee community in the camps that are provided by the host country.

Third, when the dust settles, the situation will move into a calmer, equilibrium scenario. This is where assistance and reaction is done under a longer time frame. The assistance includes registration, screening, and for the longer-term repatriation, resettlement, and local integration. At this stage the situation becomes more permanent especially in protracted conflicts, the refugee camp and services for refugees establish norms and procedures to manage the interactions among the many stakeholders. Refugee camps around the world are mostly in this stage where refugee members take part to self-organize certain services such as rules enforcing, education, health, livelihoods, and food rationing. In the case of Mae La camp, the refugees take leading roles to set governing rules inside the camp. These self-organizing groups interact as a large network inside the camp. They also interact with INGOs and government agencies and thus are part of the larger network of complex relationships governing the stability of the camp and its people.

Lastly, complexity thinking can be used to explain shifts and changes when a new context arises to disrupt the equilibrium of camp governance. In the case of the refugees in the nine camps in Thailand the political reforms led by President Thein Sein in Myanmar, the response to these reforms by the international community and the ceasefire agreements between the Myanmar government and armed ethnic minority groups have disturbed the equilibrium. Moreover, increased resource constraints caused by "donor fatigue" coupled with the substantial increase in refugees due to conflicts in the Middle East have also upset the equilibrium of the refugees in Thailand. Refugees in Thailand now worry about rumors of forced repatriation and some are beginning to temporarily return to Myanmar to observe, first hand, the feasibility of repatriation since this policy option now seems imminent. In addition, with the reduction of food rations due to the financial exigencies of INGOs caused by reductions in donor financial support, refugees are also going out to find work in the local economy despite the fact that this is illegal.

Analysis of the Complex Refugee Problem

In this section we focus on the third and fourth dimensions of the refugee problem because it is the current state of affairs on the Thai-Myanmar border. A calm scenario is now experiencing a gradual change due to shifts in external forces, which can result in large-scale disruption of the status quo. We divide the analysis into two parts: (a) the heterogeneity of actors and their networks and (b) the dynamic adaptation of the networks. We then provide a discussion of the three policy options of resettlement, local integration, and repatriation.

A. Heterogeneity of Actors and its Networks

At the ground level, major actors involved in managing the refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border are the NGOs that provide a range of basic services including food, health care and education. Principally among the INGOs is The Border Consortium

(TBC). As its name implies, it is a group of 10 INGOs from nine different countries. TBC has been providing food rations and shelter to the inhabitants of the camps for three decades (TBC 2013). The consortium works with the Thai government, UNHCR, and a number of other INGOs to provide services for the displaced persons in the camps. Furthermore, it promotes basic skills training and, most recently, readiness for return in light of the changing political conditions in Myanmar.

As Myanmar has opened up more and more donors are choosing to operate inside Myanmar, TBC has experienced "donor fatigue" and a corresponding decline in financial support, especially from the European Union, which represents both donor fatigue and the fiscal challenges faced by the countries in the EU that have been donors in the past. One important consequence of this decline in donor support has been the need to change food support to a rationing scheme that targets the most in need. For some in the camps this has recently resulted in a loss of food support if the family is deemed to be self-sufficient. Implementing the controversial change in food security has fallen to the self-governing Karen Refugee Committees in the camps (called Community Managed Targeting). This, coupled with the perceived change in the political climate in Myanmar has now resulted in a shift in TBC's strategic plan since repatriation is now considered a real option. Indeed, TBC is already implementing its 2013-2017 plan based on this new reality.

The INGO community extends beyond TBC. The Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) includes 17 INGOs beyond the TBC group. CCSDPT works with UNHCR with the objective of coordinating all humanitarian and protection services provided to the refugees. A representative from CCSDPT told us that much of what the committee does is "information sharing." She made a point saying that, unlike UNHCR, they do not tell refugees in the camps what to do or not to do. Like the TBC, CCSDPT is now in a transition between providing refugees services on a recurring basis because of its basic mandate and the forthcoming challenges of voluntary repatriation in light of the changing political climate in Myanmar.

At the subnational level two jurisdictions are most relevant to the refugees in Thailand. Thailand is divided into 77 provinces. The camps are located in Tak Province, the most western province bordering Myanmar. From the perspective of the governor, the refugees from Myanmar are a small part of a much larger challenge involving the alignment of the province's economic plan with the regional economy that includes four countries—Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand. The goal is to create a special economic zone, which would allow more flexibility for companies that would be encouraged to set up businesses in the province. The assumption is that these companies will employ low skilled labor from Myanmar; however, refugees could, in principle, be part of this labor market. However, for this to happen Tak Province would need the central government to relax its current policy which prohibits refugees from work legally. Tak Province also needs help from the central government to negotiate with Myanmar to develop its border city and to further develop the road infrastructure to

connect the four countries so that more robust economic activities could really happen.

The City of Mae Sot is about 60 kilometers from Mae La camp. Like the province it is part of, it has the potential to be Thailand's western hub for transportation, trade, and logistics. A bridge connects Mae Sot to Myanmar and, on any given day, one can see considerable movement across the border. The city has been designated a special economic zone in 2015. Since the political reforms in Myanmar have been moving in the right direction, from the mayor's perspective, he would like to see more rapid progress (and investment) in the region. Like the governor of Tak Province, he also would like the labor policy changed that would provide the refugees and migrant workers with a path to legal status. At present, some refugees leave the camps temporarily for undocumented employment. The Ministry of Interior, the military and the police enforce the law sporadically and this situation provides an opportunity for corruption by Thai officials who demand bribes from refugees at road checkpoints near the camp.

At the national level Thailand's Ministry of Interior (MOI) is responsible for overall security in and around the camps and for registering refugees in the camps. MOI is also the primary central government contact for the UNHCR and the INGOs that provide services to the inhabitants of the nine camps. MOI prefers to maintain the fiction that the camps are temporary shelters rather than refugee camps per se and a sign in Mae La camp says so in both Thai and English. The home structures are built from bamboo, which reinforces the notion that the camps are temporary. Other central government agencies involved with the refugee situation include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Council, the Thai military, and the national police.

At the regional level the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is tangentially involved in the refugee issue—in an indirect way. Since 1997, when Myanmar was admitted to ASEAN, the overall strategy of ASEAN has been to engage with Myanmar to lessen the international isolation of the military regime. During Cyclone Nargis ASEAN countries tacitly agreed that humanitarian involvement should proceed from the United Nations principle of "responsibility to protect." That said, there is little evidence to indicate that the refugees have been a high priority for ASEAN.

At the international level the key international organization involved in the protection of the refugees is the UNHCR. As in other refugee situations UNHCR in Thailand has followed its usual protocol in negotiating between the Thai authorities and representatives of the effected ethnic communities. While the Karen leadership in the camps put forth a list of demands with respect to the options before them, UNHCR seems to be trying to help refugees prepare for repatriation though the organization has a number of conditions particularly the principle that repatriation must remain voluntary rather than forced. While UNHCR remains a key player, it must share responsibilities and influence with other organizations—a theme that will be illustrated in more detail below (See Betts, 2013 for an analysis of the changing organization environments affecting UNHCR).

<Figure 3: Diagram of the networks – in-progress>

- TBC, UNHCR, Thai Government - Ministry of Interior – national level
- UNHCR, Myanmar Government, Thai Government – international level
- Karen National United, Karen Committees in the camps – sub-national level with links to Karen expats (the diaspora) and former refugees around the world
- Karen youth groups, women's groups – community-level
- Many international networks on refugees – rran.org - refugee rights action network.

(In-progress)

Based on the above description of actors and their interactions, managing refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border certainly has qualities of all three types of networks described previously (See figure 3 above). Policy, for example, is exhibited by the coalition that forms around the basic options that exist for ameliorating the refugee situation (resettlement and eventually repatriation, in particular). Service delivery networks are straightforward in the camps and are evidenced by the coordination of INGOs and bi-lateral donors who provide basic services, especially food rations, health and education. Governance networks are similarly observed by the ongoing negotiations of the self-governing refugee committee, the UNHCR and the Thai MOI (the principal network players) who manage basic processes including the selection of refugee representatives in the camps who work with the principal stakeholders and keep camp residents informed about the changing political landscape.

There are, in reality, two levels of multi-stakeholder governance. The meta level involves most of the important stakeholders who will ultimately determine which of the three broad policy options are viable at any given time. However, at the day-to-day implementation level in the camps, key stakeholders are the INGOs who provide basic services and the Karen Refugee Committee who assist in carrying these services out. Complexity thinking tells us that these two levels interact and dynamically shape each other continuously.

B. Dynamic Adaptation of Actors and Networks

In this section we explain how, in complex systems, agencies cannot act in a unitary fashion; concepts are fluid rather than static; and there is constant adaptation to forces.

1) Agencies cannot act unitary

We explained above that a governance network in this case is the international

refugee regime plus the networks that operate in it. It is arguable that the Thai government, despite preferring something else, cannot act unitarily because they are a part of this complex system. The concept of regimes includes a series of interrelated norms and the associated associations that propel these norms in a given policy domain (see Orsini, Morin and Young, 2013). This formulation has promise because one could conceptualize multiple regimes that are overlapping in real time thereby making the condition truly complex. For example, Betts (2010) has shown that the refugee regime in itself has several dimensions depending on the reasons for migration. The causes of migration then determine the degree of refugee protection by the international community. To put it differently, refugees fleeing because of state fragility and violence are different from those who may migrate because of economic conditions. What he calls survival migration produces a different set of international responses from the classic refugee protection regime dominated by UNHCR.

Betts describes six cases of refugees in Africa and then introduces the concept of "regime stretching" to explain variations in the cases. Stretching occurs when norms that are expected to drive operational decisions are expanded to allow for more extensive refugee protection even in the absence of a legal requirement to do so. This may account for the Thai government's seeming tolerance of refugees from Myanmar for three decades even though Thailand has no international legal obligation to accept and care for them since the Thai government is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. A more nuanced interpretation would suggest that Thailand has accepted the displaced persons from Myanmar because the refugee regime is embedded in a more complex web of arrangements that therefore obviates unilateral action with respect to the refugees on its soil. International norms such as the presumption that humanitarian aid will be provided plus the principle of non-refoulement (prohibiting states from returning people to the territory they fled from if there is a risk of harm) constrain any unilateral action that Thailand might take.

Aside from the Thai government, it is obvious that other actors, such as the Border Consortium, INGOs that operate in the nine camps, UNHCR and the refugee management committee cannot act unitarily. Norms and expectations have been set as part of the complex system, and stakeholders have to gradually negotiate with one another as the landscape shifts. For example, even without adequate funding for activities on the Thai side, TBC continues to try to serve the refugees. Ongoing protection is embedded in day-to-day routines in the camps. Even a casual walk through the largest camp, Mae La, with a population of about 45,000 inhabitants, shows that basic services continue to be provided even with diminishing financial resources.[4] TBC are quite sensitive to the needs of the camps' inhabitants and coordinate with internally with the consortium members, the Thai authorities, and UNHCR. If we think of aid as its own regime then it further illustrates how the UNHCR's role is delimited certainly in both policy and operational routines. To put it differently, TBC has interests that may overlap but are not identical to the UNHCR.

[4] We visited the camp five times in total between 2012-2014.

Since maintaining trust among the refugees is a key objective for TBC, it is constrained from shifting its strategy dramatically and abruptly.

Even among the refugees themselves, as part of the complex system they also cannot act unitarily. This is especially the case for the camp committee and its leaders. Camps are spaces where social capital thrives and where community governance is practiced (McConnachie, K. (2014). Some studies have argued that it is important for refugees to participate in camp management (Mongi, A., Obol, S., & Oancea, L. 1995). Self-governance, however, has the paradoxical effect of constraining some options for individuals involved in camp leadership and may thereby encourage permanency, that is, the status quo.

Behaviors of refugees need to be understood as interactions between people as *whole*, not as separate individuals. In complexity thinking, emphasis is placed on self-organization and emergent behavior (Eve Mitleton-Kelly 2003, 41). In addition, refugees need not be seen as impotent victims but rather as political actors with the right to renegotiate their relationship with key stakeholders (Bradley, 2014). Many of the refugees originally came as a group from one village. They carried with them the authority structure and decision-making mechanisms used in the villages. This residue of interactions between people affects the micro governance mechanisms inside the refugee camps (reference). Thus, the decision related to repatriation (when, where, how, and under what conditions) could be a collective decision rather than an individual one for some families. These examples illustrate the need to study the whole and not each actor separately to provide operational solutions to the complexity we document.

2) Concepts are fluid

Complexity theory also shows that there is continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of the refugee regime including core definitions of key concepts. The on-going discourse of refugees versus migrants and the meaning of repatriation are examples. This complicates the situation on the ground and sometimes calls into question underlying concepts that were thought to be stable.

We can observe this in Mae La camp since the population is not static. On the contrary, inhabitants in Mae La include those who need immediate protection and those seeking new economic opportunities. Some displaced persons from Myanmar who fled the ethnic conflicts have been working illegally in Thailand. While the refugee camps along the border house about 140,000 people, they are prohibited from resettling or working in Thailand. Yet, the camps are quite porous and it is well known that some inhabitants leave the camps for undocumented work even though they risk deportation or imprisonment. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy about the official population in the camps. The Thai government stopped registering displaced persons in the camps (registration has important benefits with respect to access to some services in Thailand such as health care), the UNHCR had a registered population of 88,000 in Mae La camp, however, TBC, the group of INGOs and NGOs responsible for basic in camp services especially a feeding program, had a census of 137,000 in 2013. The

difference was comprised of unregistered refugees who were not eligible for selected services from the Thai government (Chia and Kenny 2012).

There is a blurred line between refugee and migrants. Needing international protection, the former has the right to seek and receive asylum in another state (Jose Riera, 2006). However, both refugees and economic migrants often move between place unauthorized and undocumented. They use services from smugglers and use similar fraudulent documents. This makes it more difficult to distinguish between the two. Many countries have introduced measures to curb irregular migration and combat human trafficking. These measures are often applied indiscriminately to refugees as well (Jose Riera 2006). People seeking asylum and protection are not served if they are thought to be irregular migrants.

The mix between refugee status and irregular migrant is one factor that makes this problem not only complicated but also complex. A person's status at any given time is fluid and dynamic – the distinction between a refugee and an economic migrant is difficult to distinguish since a person's motive may fluid. Political turmoil and conflict also evolve over time, the effects of being displaced might not be immediate but takes affect over time.

This issue underscores the point that the UNHCR and, more broadly, the core refugee regime as indicated by international law may not accurately account for what is actually happening in a particular refugee location like Mae La. To overcome this, some have suggested that it is sometimes advisable to blur the distinction between a refugee and a migrant as long as those who are unable to return to their country of origin receive protection, which they are entitled to under international law even when economic incentives may be a factor in a person's decision to leave the country of origin (Jose Riera 2006, p.30).

Another example is the concept of repatriation. The international community often interprets repatriation to be an essential part of peace building even when conditions remain unstable (Bradley 2014). One can argue that repatriation does not have to mean only the immediate physical return to the country of origin (Long 2012; Bradley 2014). Long (2012) deconstructs the concept of repatriation to mean a political process to rebuild the state. Repatriation is not just return, but involves the complex, long-term, and gradual processes of reintegration and reconciliation, including a renegotiation of the relationship between the refugees and the reformed state which may include flexibility in the timing of repatriation along with mobility of the target refugee population accompanied by physical protection (Long, 2012, p.165). Mobility in repatriation might involve the integration or combination of repatriation processes with opportunities for access to regularized labor migration channels, or continued temporary or permanent residency in a host community (Long 2012, p.165).

3) Constant adaptation and reaction to forces

Complexity thinking tells us that interactions between actors can be understood as complex adaptive systems (Bovaird 2008). The way different agencies have self-

organized to manage the refugee problem in this case illustrates that it is an adaptive system. As opposed to traditional approaches to command, control, prediction, and planning, complex adaptive systems use sense making and dynamic learning. An adaptive system thinks about the future and evolves along with social norms. It also allows for individuals' self-organizing and self-regulating mechanisms. In this case, in the midst of the seemingly chaotic network of relations, there is a relatively clear network of organizations that have legitimacy, resources, and expertise to manage the refugee state of affairs. By manage we mean the provision of humanitarian assistance (e.g. food, medicine, legal advice), development assistance (e.g education and skills training), and efforts to find longer-term solution for each refugee.

Teisman and Klijn (2008) state that self-organizing actors create their own perception of what they want and how to behave in the landscape they are in. This can lead to self-referential behavior denying the effects from other agents (Teisman and Klijn 2008). Actors continuously recalibrate their self-organization structure and norms according to external and internal forces, no matter how large or small those forces are. These capacities may lead to unknown developments of the larger whole, which may seem chaotic. Consider the following examples.

The first example is how refugees would over time develop their own preferences about their future. Many become engaged (if not already) in pursuing political membership in their state of asylum or their original state via the networks of organizations such as diaspora, INGOs, human rights groups, and faith-based organizations (Bradley 2014). For example, there is ample evidence to suggest the close relations between refugee camp members, insurgents, and political organizations seeking autonomy of the Karen state. Due to inadequate recognition of the Karen language and culture by the Myanmar government, members of the Karen education wing, who operate from the Thai side, some who live in the camp, oversee the quality of over 1,000 schools in the Karen state, including its curriculum and the salary of teachers. They are, by default, the ministries of education for the Karen people. They have adapted to the context to be able to still provide education, based on Karen nationalism.

The second example is the recent decision to reduce food rations for camp members. The decision by the INGO community is in response to declining bi-lateral budgetary support, especially from Western Europe where a combination of domestic budget constraints in the aftermath of the deep world-wide recession that began in 2008 and donor fatigue have combined to reduce funds for basic services such as food. In 2008 rice rations were 15 kilograms a month. This was reduced to 13 kilograms in 2011 and 12 kilograms in 2012. Starting in 2013 a new system of targeting food rations was introduced in the camps with three categories: self-reliant (no rations), standard rations and most vulnerable. This change has caused many refugees to seek employment outside the camp. In effect, this contributes to blurring the lines of refugee and economic migrant further.

Foreseeing the need to adapt, as the problem shifts from immediate

humanitarian relief to securing livelihoods and skill sets for self-reliance, the network has begun to re-strategize. Evidence of adaptation includes how TBC staff is acquiring new skills related to community development. TBC's work is gradually shifting from only doing food delivery to agricultural skills training. Some INGOs are starting to operate from inside Myanmar, to help refugees assess the situation on the ground, especially whether it is conducive to return. Other INGOs are empowering the refugees by educating them on topics such as women's rights and advocacy work. It is believed that these new skills can help enhance people's chances of economic mobility.

The third example is a microscopic view of how tiny forces can also send ripple effects in a complex system. In 2014 the UNCHR, via a local Thai agency, went in the camps to conduct a simple survey on preferences related to repatriation. This act led to rumors that soon the camp might close. People felt reluctant to answer the survey thinking that it might bind them and were fearful of forced repatriation. The survey created anxiety among refugees, and negative feelings towards UNHCR. The emergent behavior that resulted includes more people going back to their villages to assess the prospects of returning. This is an example of how the effect of external force, no matter how small, may be unpredictable and difficult to control.

The last example is how a decision far away can have a major impact on the refugees. When the United States, the country that had accepted the majority of refugees who were permitted to resettle to a third country ended its resettlement program, this decision impacted not only refugees directly, it surely had an effect on other key stakeholders such as the UNHCR (Approximately 75,000 Karen have been resettled to the United States). Many refugees, who are still on the list to be resettled, are uncertain about their future since they are unsure whether they will be able to complete the resettlement process. Such change in a policy affects the credibility of UNHCR officials and INGOs who communicate directly with refugees, making it more difficult to manage relationships on the ground.

Discussion of Policy Options

As mentioned earlier, the broad policy options to ameliorate the refugee situation are, on the surface, straightforward—resettlement to a third country, integration into Thai society and repatriation. Each option has its own challenges. Consider resettlement first. Resettlement is an option as long as a third party country is willing to accept refugees. In the past 10 years this has been an option, albeit for only a small percentage of the total documented and undocumented refugees from Burma. Resettlement is often limited to only the well educated and, relatively, well-off families and individuals who have the opportunity to seek asylum in developed countries (Bradley, 2014). Approximately 90,000 refugees have been resettled to third countries. The vast majority have gone to the United States (followed by Australia (10,220), Canada (4,000). A small number have been resettled to European countries (see Su-An Oh, 2014; edited book from Springer, 2014). But, resettlement to the

United States has ended thereby closing off the biggest pipeline. Besides, resettlement is an option only for those displaced persons who have been registered by UNHCR. The Thai government suspended registration a few years ago effectively closing off this option for the majority of refugees remaining in the camps. To date, other countries have not opened up their doors to Burmese refugees making resettlement an unrealistic option going forward and some evidence suggests that resettlement produces an improved quality of life for the displaced persons it is not without some problems (see Su-An Oh, 2014). Curiously, despite the resettlement of approximately 90,000 people, the overall population of the camps has not had a corresponding drop since unregistered displaced persons have continued to flow into Thailand.[5]

Integration into Thailand has happened informally for years though there is no official Thai government recognition of this fact. Burmese have settled in the northern city of Chiang Mai and can be found in other communities in the country. Nevertheless, there is no official policy encouraging resettlement—quite the contrary—and it is unrealistic to expect Thailand to suddenly grant legal status to the displaced persons remaining in the camps. It is doubtful that external pressure will impact Thailand's decisions surrounding the displaced persons. What this means is that undocumented individuals working in the shadow economy will likely continue even if the third option—repatriation—becomes viable in the near future.

Repatriation seems to be the option that is now receiving a "push" from different directions. The Thai government would like to see repatriation begin but, to date has not put overt pressure on the refugees to relocate to Myanmar. The consensus seems to be that the political reforms in Myanmar are putting the country on the right path to absorb the refugees. But the devil is in the details including assessment of whether the cease fire will be permanent. A significant push factor is the actions of the non-governmental organizations and their support to the refugees. Some have set up operations in Myanmar and have begun to shift their focus to programs that will benefit persons in the country, not outside it. Funding cuts have required some INGOs to curtail their support to the refugees in the camps in addition to the cut in food rations mentioned above. The primary INGO supporting education, ZOA, closed its activities in the camps, handing over responsibilities for education to other NGOs. Informal border activity by refugees who returned to Myanmar to assess local conditions in their villages in Myanmar is slowing increasing. There is little reason to expect anything other than a slow erosion of INGO support for the refugees in the camps since most will "follow the money" and shift their focus to Myanmar, especially in light of donor fatigue due to 25 years of support of the refugees in the camps. Meanwhile, while the UNHCR maintains the view that repatriation must be voluntary, its salience depends on the viability of the other options on the table.

Taken individually, the options are not especially complicated. However, the three alternatives are not really mutually exclusive if one looks at them from the

[5] This point was discussed above on the camp population not being static.

perspective of the refugees themselves. For example, resettlement actually has multiple steps and phases and it is rarely without challenges that are both anticipated and unanticipated. Some are the usual adjustments of new immigrants such as learning a new language; housing, employment and navigating both legal issues and, more broadly, the cultural challenges of a society different from their own (see Kenny, need date for a description of resettlement challenges of the Karen in the United States). Even with these challenges resettlement seems to have been the most desirable for a subset of the refugees. One by-product is that some of the camp leadership plus some of the skilled refugees such as teachers were the most likely to resettle. This not only impacted the camps. It is likely to have a deleterious effect on repatriation since these skills would then be in short supply, at least initially. Meanwhile, resettlement invariably has the negative impact of separating extended families, especially when the option ends as it recently did in the case of resettlement to the United States. [This section needs to be thought through more and extended].

Consider the option of status quo—essentially doing nothing different. Is this feasible? As of this date the Karen leadership in the camps is unenthusiastic about repatriation. Their view is that conditions in Myanmar have not yet stabilized and it is their view that Karen territory in Myanmar is not ready to be repopulated due to the effects of long term armed conflict in the area. The UNHCR repeats the mantra of voluntary repatriation suggesting the locus of decision remains with the refugees themselves. But the conditions in the camps are surely not improving and the continuing cuts in donor aid, especially food rations, may be slowly moving the decision toward an "end game." While the Thai government is silent about its intentions it is not unreasonable to assume that it is tiring of the status quo. But there is a caveat and that is the rather porous border between Thailand and the Karen state in Myanmar. It is well known that some camp residents have moved back and forth between Myanmar and the camps, partly to assess conditions for repatriation but also for economic reasons. Unless Thailand takes the unlikely step to seal the border—all of the current evidence suggests the contrary—it is likely that the border will remain porous. What this also means is that unofficial integration into the Thai economy by a subset of displaced persons will remain a viable option. Furthermore, the development plans of Tak Province and the City of Mae Sot includes cheap labor from Myanmar, which can also include residents of the camps.

The status quo option creates an interesting moral conundrum for some of the key stakeholders. As the economic conditions in the camps continue to worsen, this increases the likelihood that more and more camp residents will seek undocumented work in the surrounding areas. It is an open secret among some of the INGO managers participating in the network that this occurs and it is well known and, in fact, even encouraged by some of them even though the refugees are prohibited from leaving the camps and working. Representatives of non-governmental organizations acknowledged this reality to the authors in June 2013 and also recognized the dubious moral stance embedded in the situation. But they argued that the refugees had little

choice in light of declining donor support (for an interesting treatment of norms as applied to refugee situations see Weiner, 1998).

Conclusion

Resolving the longstanding impasse of the refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border does not fit a conventional model of multi-party negotiations. The reason, quite simply, is that the major stakeholders are simply too varied in terms of power and interests, and legal status. Any resolution of the impasse will certainly depend on the decisions of nation states—Myanmar, Thailand, and countries still willing to resettle refugees. In addition, the central role of UNHCR in managing refugees in the immediate post World War II period to the present needs to be recalibrated in light of changing realities. In a thorough historical review of the international refugee regime and the place of UNHCR in that regime, Barnett (2002: 262) writes, "The model of global governance that best suits the refugee regime is that already represented by UNHCR, complemented by various regional networks. But this is a model that needs to be reworked to recognize the changing realities of the international system." To put it differently, UNHCR cannot, of course, resolve the refugee situation by itself. Does this suggest a case for "global governance"?

The answer, we believe is, not really. Briefly, a global governance perspective would require a shared norm perspective concerning the refugees by the major stakeholders. A key stakeholder is Myanmar. Here, most observers are tracking the political reforms that are happening in the country. Since 2011, when Nobel peace prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi regained her freedom of movement and speech, and her political party the National League for Democracy re-entered the political process all eyes have been on the changes that have been taking place spearheaded by President Thein Sein. Political prisoners have been released, press freedoms have been expanded and opportunities for foreign direct investment have been increased. Yet, the military is still very much a political force in the country and ethnic tensions and outright conflict is still very much part of the country's political tapestry. Ethnic violence, especially toward the Rohingyas, has been especially pronounced and a change in the constitution that would allow opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to run for President has, as of this writing, stalled. What this suggests is that the underlying state fragility that contributed to the refugee situation in the first place is still very much present despite the guarded optimism one can discern from the international community that seems to be cheering the reforming generals on. Most important, there is no clear signal about whether or not the regime is interested in the repatriation of the Karen refugees, independent of what the Karen refugees themselves prefer at this stage (for a good review of the political situation in Myanmar as of 2012 see Steinberg, 2012). From the vantage point of the KRC leadership the optimism about political reform in Myanmar is premature. Meanwhile, Thailand is experiencing its own political tensions that, so far, have not changed the underlying dynamics of the refugee situation, but this

can change in the not-to-distant future.

Protracted refugee situations, where refugees have been dislocated for many years because of armed conflict and state fragility, are common around the world. The situation on the Thai-Myanmar border is not unique. As the case demonstrates, refugee situations have multiple stakeholders with overlapping though not identical interests. It is suggested that the application of complexity theory to the study of public administration fits well with the proclaimed trend from government to governance (Teisman and Klijn 2008). This entails the study of interplay between actors, its networks, strategies, and the landscape that the actors operate in. Since refugee situations last a long time and are rarely solved, a useful way to view them is through a complex theory and management lens. A refugee situation like the one that exists on the Thai-Myanmar border is manifested by adaptability. The conditions are rarely "solved" but, rather, managed.

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