

Review Article

Refugees and International Relations, Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan (eds)
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Events within the last year in Europe, Angola, Cambodia, Central America, Bosnia, Somalia, and Mozambique, and the concomitant economic and human costs, underline the urgency for national and transnational solutions to the issues of reconciliation and development. In fact, over the past four decades the numbers of people uprooted by war, economic stagnation, political repression, environmental collapse, and population pressures have increased dramatically. Today, they number close to 80 million people worldwide.

If present trends persist, the 1990s will demand more, not less, of those individuals and organisations engaged in such issues. They will demand more resources, commitment, political acumen, and a different paradigm of responses and collaboration. The emphasis of ***Refugees and International Relations*** is not only that the numbers of people effected by recent events are growing, but that the quantity and quality of protection, assistance, and durable solutions required for the different kinds of refugee movements world-wide has outpaced the structures and programmes of cooperation designed to respond to them.

In the introduction, Loescher presents a useful overview of the entire collection of 17 articles, and introduces the concept of the *international refugee regime*, which is crucial to understanding and appreciating "refugees and international relations". The "regime" is a transnational framework of cooperation that has, with a certain degree of predictability, a structure, systems of operation, working arrangements, norms and principles, roles played by a variety of organisations, and agreements (legal and non-formal) that have evolved to address refugee situations. The major protagonists in the regime are the UNHCR, national and international NGOs, national governments and their respective ministries that work on refugee issues.

The book focuses on the widening gap between regime responses, *vis-a-vis* the myriad of refugee needs/vulnerabilities, and is divided into three parts: "The International Framework"; "Dimensions of the Refugee Problem" and "The Search for Appropriate Responses to the Refugee Problem".

Part One describes the evolution of the international refugee framework in the post-World War II era, which was influenced heavily by the politics of the cold war and the Western powers. It was designed to respond to refugees who were generally from Eastern Europe and defined as *individual* "victims of persecution

because of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion". The UNHCR, the 1951 Convention, legal definitions and modalities of response were products of that time.

However, the characteristics of uprooted people in the succeeding decades changed. Decolonisation and wars of liberation in the 1960s, large-scale conflicts in the Third World in the 1970s, and migrations from south to north and south to south in the 1980s provoked *movements* of a different size and complexity, requiring different legal, institutional and systemic responses. Today, most of the world's uprooted do not qualify as "refugees" under the conventional definition. Though their lives and livelihoods are threatened, they often find themselves outside (but in no less need of) a framework of protection, assistance, and durable solutions.

Fortunately, the mandates of response and definitions have broadened over the decades (1967 Protocol; 1969 OAU Convention), and UNHCR has taken a greater role with groups that fall beyond the 1951 Convention definition. In addition, national and international NGOs have grown in numbers and have become increasingly accepted and solicited as working partners. UNHCR and NGOs find themselves working together for regionally-based, inter-institutional strategies, gender-sensitive programming, and approaches that place a higher value on recognising root causes and the vulnerabilities of people in flight. Staff from both build upon people's individual and collective strengths through community development, community-based programming, aimed at encouraging the building of self-esteem and empowerment.

Despite advocacy inside and outside of "the regime" (UNHCR, governments, and NGOs) for policies that better reflect refugee interests and reflect less interests of the West and individual nations, countervailing and often dominating pressures emerge that enact policies that are more restrictive, nationalist, and paternalistic. As a result, many refugee groups, especially the most vulnerable (unaccompanied children, female heads of households, the disabled, the elderly) fall through the cracks (or chasms as the case often is); they:

"...are not treated equally nor do all states respond similarly to refugee problems ... refugees and refugee issues become entangled in realpolitik, instruments of foreign policy, symbols of foreign policy, and mixed with internal migration politics and pre-existing ethnic conflicts and nationalisms" (pp 9-10).

Part Two identifies key "dimensions of the refugee problem". It includes chapters on:

- the disconcerting practice of armed attacks on refugee camps;
- the politics of humane deterrence (not humane and seldom a deterrent, but growing out of a real frustration by the receiving country that the regime is not working and other countries are not sharing the burden);
- the detention of asylum seekers in sub-human conditions;
- the "feminisation" of refugee and migratory movements and how indiscriminate gender-blind policies fail to respond to the specific needs and capacities of women;
- how *ad hoc* and uncoordinated refugee policies and responses in the north burden the countries of first asylum, neighbouring countries and/or the south; and
- how the varying degrees of "legality" for *de facto* refugees prejudices their possibilities for protection, assistance, and durable solutions.

Each chapter suggests alternatives to the present *modus operandi*.

One of the most compelling chapters in this section is "Refugee Women, the Forgotten Majority", by Genevieve Camus-Jacques. The specific vulnerabilities and capacities of women in refugee situations are largely overlooked, under-appreciated, and unaddressed. Inequities that characterised life in their place of origin are generally aggravated in refugee camps. Poor sanitation, pregnancy, children's illness, gynaecological problems, and mental stress are particularly hard on women in refugee situations. Overburdened with economic, social, and cultural tasks, women find it difficult to free themselves to attend training/skill building sessions (which are traditionally male-focused). When they do, such assistance, though designed to "help", can become a form of taxation.

Often, women are at the periphery of basic decisions that affect their lives before flight and at subsequent stages thereafter. They become:

"...refugees as a result of the political choices of their husbands or fathers. Once in exile, typically, they become subject to decisions taken exclusively by males: male refugee policy-makers, male camp authorities, male refugee leaders, male heads of family - with the predictable resulting bias".

Camus-Jacques place the above issues within the broader framework of equity, participatory development and empowerment:

"Women should be included in the design, management, and implementation of assistance programmes. Greater attention should be focused on women's potential and their ability to innovate, create, adjust. In general, refugee groups which are in control of their own affairs seem to achieve more...they need less our compassion and more our solidarity and support" (pp148-159).

In a similar vein, Elizabeth G. Ferris, in "Churches, Refugees, and Politics," describes how church-based organisations have moved beyond compassion and more toward solidarity over the years. Historically, their engagement in refugee assistance was based on moral premises, was considered "non-political" and centred on the provision of social services. Over time however, they saw the effects of their own government's exclusionary policies on refugees. In addition their grassroots experience exposed them to why refugee flows happen in the first place. Consequently, many now see advocacy in the "political" (non-partisan) realm as central to their work. While much of their activity with refugee groups is still operational (material assistance, counselling, training, etc), strategies to raise public awareness and change the policies and decision-making processes of governments and other organizations *vis-a-vis* refugee issues are seen as crucial in producing charitable results from charitable intentions.

The need for more policy and advocacy work becomes evident in "Responses of European States to *De Facto* Refugees" by Johan Cels. This well-researched and comprehensive article describes how the volume and origin of refugee flows, coupled with a deteriorating economic situation, can provoke xenophobic, nationalist and restrictive policies. Such measures end up reducing the entry of *de facto* refugees and preventing their access to protection and needed assistance/services.

Part Three, "The Search for Appropriate Responses", looks at such topics as development and relief strategies, repatriation, resettlement, safe haven, and early warning systems.

After so many years of effort by thousands of programmes and organisations, why is the regime not more effective? The search for more appropriate responses has been stimulated by many factors that include donor fatigue, experience, calculations of cost-effectiveness, renewed calls for accountability and questions of ethics. Many institutions recognise the need to move as quickly as possible beyond *relief* programmes (that emphasise care, maintenance and induce dependency) into *development* responses (that build on and strengthen individual and collective capacities, potential and self-esteem).

Jacques Cuenod, in "Refugees: Development or Relief?" proposes that refugees be trained as community development workers and that an international fund (with a structure and mechanisms to manage it) be established to support longer-term development work that enhances greater self-reliance.

Guy Goodwin-Gill in "Voluntary Repatriation" emphasises that refugees' interests, rights, security and welfare must be the starting point of any efforts to repatriate, and that "coercion and compulsion are unacceptable". Further, the successful coordination of repatriation requires a common agreement and commitment from a number of parties that include refugee leaders, governments, national and international organisations. Within the process itself, however, measures must be taken to provide for protection, security, and the conditions for integration and long-term development of returnees and their communities.

Fred Cuny and Barry Stein in "Prospects for and Promotion of Spontaneous Repatriation", highlight repatriation patterns in different regions of the world (Tigray, Cambodia, Mozambique, Uganda, and El Salvador). They show that an overwhelming percentage of people that repatriate do so outside the framework of institutional and legal protection and without assistance from the UNHCR and other international organisations. Cuny and Stein stress that the UNHCR is constrained by having to deal with sovereign governments, and though necessary, this is "ponderous and time consuming", and inadequate in promoting, coordinating and keeping pace with the repatriation process. In order to provide for proper protection and assistance, other non-state, non-UN, and non-official actors should be involved. Often ICRC and other organisations are better equipped by their mandates and nature to play this role and fill the gap left by UNHCR restraints. This thought-provoking article is sobering, timely and challenging for those agencies working in the southern Africa region with Mozambican refugees.

Robert L. Bach in "Third Country Resettlement" briefly discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different durable solutions, with a focus on resettlement. First:

"...repatriation involves more than return to a place or people ... homes may have changed irrevocably ... Villages ... have become battlefield monuments, family and friends may be gone, and the economic realities may be changed ... (returnees may) encounter discrimination and intolerance" (p 314).

Third country resettlement, however, is beset with negative factors as well. Today, unlike after World War II, the world community is:

"...faced with ethnic and national groups which have virtually no tradition of resettlement in those receiving countries and do not have a community organisation waiting to receive them" (p 318).

The variety of refugee movements has rendered traditional legal and policy concepts more and more irrelevant. The subsequent piecemeal measures by governments, however, have created multiple, unequal and inequitable legal status that result in unequal and inequitable treatment, access to assistance, and socioeconomic opportunities for advancement.

Similarly, "Temporary Safe Haven" by Dennis Gallagher, Susan Forbes Martin, and Patricia Weiss-Fagen, describes how these *ad hoc* mechanisms resulting from domestic politics or foreign policy, are not necessarily responsive or relevant to the needs and circumstances of those in search of safe haven. The Declaration of Human Rights gives people the right to seek asylum, but governments are not obligated to take them in. Further:

"...large scale complex movements do not necessarily have recourse to the international instruments of refugee protection" (pp 334-347).

The article offers a comparative analysis of safe haven traditions in Europe, Canada, and the United States; and convincingly argues that international and regional agreements are crucial in setting up ways to deal with legal and social-economic problems that really cannot be resolved by any one country.

Complementing the aforementioned policy of legal and programmatic proposals to enhance regime effectiveness in refugee responses, Leon Gordenker advances another mechanism in "Early Warning of Refugee Incidents." A small and well-organised early-warning centre could, with advanced technology and a representative body to conceive and manage it, predict to some degree forced migrations. This would give organisations time to make preparations (stockpiles, logistics, institutional linkages, etc). Sometimes an isolated event (hurricane, earthquake, sudden outbreak of conflict, etc) causes the mass movements of people, but at other times, the cause is a process that can be seen, measured, and reported on over a period of time (the graduated deprivation of rights, crop failure and food shortages, insurgency and counter-insurgency, etc). Staff can be trained and agencies can set up systems to detect and advise on such early-warning signs, enabling the regime to make more timely and adequate responses.

Gervase Coles, in the concluding chapter "Approaching the Refugee Problem Today", makes a call to the international community to move beyond its traditional Euro-centric bias and its misplaced emphasis on care, maintenance, and external settlement. He urges instead that more focus should be given to the causes of refugee flows and their prevention, as well as to reconstruction and restoration.

Refugees and International Relations, successfully conveys the message that the regime and its composite institutions (UNHCR, NGOs, governments, etc) can no longer go on with "business as usual". The uprooted people of the world require a new paradigm of policies, partnerships, programmes, and practices that go beyond our traditional legal and institutional framework and responses. Loescher reminds us that refugees are a:

"...global problem requiring global solutions ... movements are neither marginal to central issues, nor unique and isolated events ... (they are) an integral part of international politics and relations" (p 2).

The book is prophetic in that current events in Europe suggest that the more the regime and governments are seen as incapable of coping and responding to the volume and nature of refugee movements, the more pressure there is by people and governments to become restrictive and closed. Reactive and restrictive policies based on prejudice and fear can become self-fulfilling prophecies. We have seen that restrictive and negative measures that pass the burden to neighbouring countries, or to the south, are neither effective nor just, and in the long run tax the whole system (*albeit* unevenly). Thus, the countries that can least afford it, pay the price; and the people who most need cooperation, suffer the consequences.

The book is excellent background reading for its coverage of a comprehensive range of problems and questions surrounding refugee issues; and appropriately punctuates the need for broader and deeper thinking by governments, organisations, the public and policy makers. Its own premise, however, is that the refugee regime is to a great degree a reflection of international politics and relations; and it therefore (now only three years old), does not reflect (and could not have reflected) the implications, dilemmas, challenges, and changes inherent in cases like Somalia, Angola, Bosnia, or Cambodia. Nor did it try to project what the regime would look like in a changing world order, or what the new roles, responsibilities, activities, and patterns of cooperation would be for UNHCR, NGOs and governments. Also, what is an effective role for the UNHCR and NGOs in today's conflicts: conflict management?; creating the conditions for peace and reconciliation so development can take place?; to more effectively respond to the most vulnerable/high risk groups (unaccompanied children, female heads of households, the disabled, the elderly)? These questions require serious consideration and there are no easy answers.

The recent events and the above issues provide a challenging research agenda for scholars and practitioners engaged in "refugees and international relations". Hopefully the partners in the southern Africa region will heed the call for better planning, partnerships, programmes, policies and cooperation across institutional and geographic boundaries. A great need exists to better identify, document, and disseminate lessons learned and experience gained.

Schumacher in *Small is Beautiful* admonished us to construct an economics as if people mattered; may the regime construct a legal and programmatic structure and pattern of response to the plight of refugees, as if people mattered as well.

Reviewed by Tom Lent, Director of Training, Save the Children Federation (USA).