
Book Reviews

Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan, editors
Refugees and International Relations
New York: Oxford University Press, 1989

by Lisa Gilad

Refugees and International Relations is a goldmine of information and analysis about the global context of forced migration. Particularly refreshing is the inter-disciplinary character of the book, with contributions by internationally recognized protection experts working within the UNHCR and outside of it, and academics ranging from history to sociology to political science to international relations. This is an excellent source book in the growing arena of Refugee Studies, but it is not a book for the beginner who would have benefitted from a glossary of terms and more detailed descriptions of the root causes of refugee flows.

Space does not permit me to describe each chapter, so I will highlight several of the themes running throughout. Loescher's opening remarks prod the reader to think about the foreign policy implications of the international refugee regime, the emptiness of humanitarian rhetoric when it is not matched by appropriate action, and the necessity for creative responses to the expansion of the refugee problem (see especially chapters by Mtango, Gordenker and Coles). One is left with the impression that it is high time to depart from the narrow confines of the Convention definition of refugee to deal with the protection concerns and basic human rights, including socio-economic rights, of what the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Hocke, calls "extra-Convention refugees", more commonly referred to as *de facto* refugees. Many chapters specify the gamut of restrictive measures used to deter arrivals of *de facto* refugees who are deserving claimants: notably "humane deterrence", first asylum rules, visa requirements, detention practices, and fines against airline carriers for transporting undocumented migrants or asylum seekers (Widgren,

McNamara, Helton, McDowall, and Cels). This happens particularly in Southeast Asia, Western Europe and North America. In the West, these measures reflect the endeavour to contain the Third World refugee problem outside of the borders of developed states. Chapters such as those on disaster relief by Kent and on the difficulties of turning refugee assistance into development aid by Cuenod bring into stark relief the problems inherent in the predominant Western focus of physically sustaining refugees in camps or settlements without providing them with the means to create their own support. Refugees suffer from the short-sightedness of donor states.

Even when long-range planning is utilized in the case of voluntary repatriation, such as the return movement from Djibouti to Ethiopia in 1983, anything can go wrong — like a drought (Goodwin-Gill, p. 270). In fact, it appears that *unplanned* voluntary repatriation by refugees frequently is less problematic than when it is extensively planned by the UNHCR in coordination with the country of refuge and the country of origin. Cuny and Stein's well-crafted chapter shows that refugees will march back home even when it is not safe, without permission of the authorities, without the promise of amnesty and so on (p. 296). Faced with the prospect of years in camps, with dependent approaches to their upkeep, it is not surprising that refugees take such risks, however dangerous.

Several chapters deal with strengthening legal protection for refugees and the obstacles confronted when trying to do so. For example, Mtango details the legal documents which should prevent military and armed attacks on refugee camps, and makes excellent suggestions for developing an instrument which would categorically prevent this inhumane occurrence. Yet his own analysis portrays the probable futility of producing such an instrument without specific sanctions imposed upon states permitting such attacks.

Coles argues that it is time to stop thinking about refugees in a humanitarian mode: "the refugee problem is entirely political, since it concerns an individual's relationship to a polity and the relationship of polities to one another" (p. 394). It appears that the Churches have come to

grips with this fact, as Ferris's discussion about the politicization of the Churches's refugee aid roles clearly shows, as does reference to Sanctuary movements in the United States, Britain and Switzerland in other chapters. In regard to the rationale of non-interference in "internal matters", Camus-Jacques implies that it is necessary to stop saying that it is inappropriate to intervene in the dilemmas experienced by refugee women because gender inequalities and subordination belong to the realm of culture — which is suddenly sacrosanct. Refugee women face inordinate protection problems as women; if "interference", hopefully with the support of the women themselves, is required to redress problems, then it is time to get off the fence and do so. There is recent evidence that the UNHCR and its NGO partners are demonstrating movement in this regard.

There are some weaknesses relating directly to the foreign policy implications so well conceived in most chapters. In particular, lack of critical discussion of the relatively new terms "irregular movements" or "irregular refugees" is apparent in several chapters; an important exception is found in the chapter on temporary safe haven where Gallagher, Forbes Martin and Weiss-Fagen refer to Gilbert Jaeger's comprehensive analysis of the underlying premiss of the term "irregular".¹ More striking is the introduction of new terms which obfuscate reality. Bach claims that "Salvadoreans are engaged in spontaneous third country resettlement" because, he says the argument goes, they should have sought protection in Mexico (according to the INS) but instead are seeking asylum in the United States (pp. 320-323). Resettlement is associated with refugees who already have refugee status of one form or another; this solution is regulated by Western states which select refugees who meet their immigration criteria, as well as their political and/or humanitarian objectives. Salvadoreans in the United States are asylum seekers or remain "undocumented aliens" because they have

¹ On this point, see James C. Hathaway's article "Burden Sharing or Burden Shifting? 'Irregular' Asylum Seekers: What's All The Fuss?" in *Refugee*, Vol 8, No. 2 (December 1988), pp. 1-2.