

Once here, the high persecution group tended to have more immigration delays and problems. Of the 28.6% of Guatemalans and 37.4% of Salvadoreans in our sample who experienced immigration difficulties -- negative or late decisions, appeals -- 70% of the Guatemalans and 73.3% of the Salvadoreans were in the high persecution category. Four out of our 75 respondents were placed in preventive detention upon arrival.

## Conclusion

The trials faced by Central American exiles entering Canada are considerable. But for many more of their countrymen the situation is even more grave. There are approximately two million Central American refugees. Between 1979 and 1983 more than 50,000 Guatemalans and 250,000 Salvadoreans fled their countries' U.S.-backed military regimes. According to Arthur Helton, Director of the political asylum project of the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, a further one million left their troubled countries in 1984 (*Macleans*, May 13, 1985). It is believed that one million Central Americans have entered the United States where most reside illegally trying to elude the immigration authorities.

The Reagan administration insists that most of the illegal immigrants from Central America are economic migrants seeking to escape poverty rather than political repression. The study of refugees in Montreal clearly demonstrates exactly the opposite.

The United States deported Salvadoreans and Guatemalans at the rate of 400 each month in 1984. Many would then face imprisonment or even death. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) granted asylum to only 328 of 13,373 (3%) Salvadorean applicants in 1984.

We, as concerned Canadians, must apply pressure on our government to continue to avoid the double error made by the United States. We must not assume Central Americans are economic migrants. My data indicates a downward plunge in economic status. But the overriding issue is that Canada, unlike the United States, must honour its humanitarian obligations as signatory to the United Nations Convention and Protocol on refugees.

The words of two American Rabbis

speaking at a Tucson symposium should be taken to heart. Rabbi Marshall Meyer, who spent 25 years in Argentina, stated:

... what is happening to the Central American refugees parallels the beginnings of Nazism in Europe.

Rabbi Joseph Weiznbaum, whose father was an undocumented alien, adds:

These refugees are the Jews of today ... The good Lord has dealt out a new deck of cards, and we are the ones who must not be turning them away now.

[from *Reform Judaism*, Fall 1985]

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## New Publications

- *Memorandum Presented to the Government of Guatemala Following a Mission to the Country in April 1985* (Ottawa: Amnesty International, 1986).
- *Nicaragua: The Human Rights Record* (Ottawa: Amnesty International, 1986).
- *Guatemala: The Group for Mutual Support 1984-1985* (New York: Americas Watch, 1985).
- *The Continuing Terror: Seventh Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador* (New York: Americas Watch, 1985).
- *Human Rights in Honduras After General Alvarez* (New York: Americas Watch, 1986)
- *Human Rights in Nicaragua: Reagan, Rhetoric and Reality* (New York: Americas Watch, 1985).
- Stephen Golub, *Looking for Phantoms: Flaws in the Khmer Rouge Screening Process* (Washington, D.C.: United States Committee for Refugees, 1986).
- Philippa Valder, *Refugees: A Dilemma for the World* (Richmond, Australia: CHOMI, 1985).
- Ken Wilson, Rachel Ayling, Alexander de Waal, JoAnn McGregor, Mary Myers, Alula Pankhurst, Jonathan Wright, *The Luaya Expedition: A Report on Research in Yei River District, South Sudan* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Programme, Occasional Paper Number 1, 1985).

## Book Reviews

Barbara E. Harrell-Bond  
*Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*  
Foreword by Robert Chambers  
Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986

by Dawn MacDonald

In the late 1970s, with the name Idi Amin the current synonym for madman-devil incarnate, the world's compassionate cheered the seven-month effort of Tanzanian troops to reach Kampala and topple the despot. And that, for most of us, was the end of that. If we thought about Uganda at all in the next few years, it was with complacency. Of course there would be a time of further displacement for innocent civilians but it would settle down. The international humanitarian agencies we had assigned to do our caring for us would clean up while we grappled with the news of horrors elsewhere in the world.

How wrong we were. In southern Sudan alone, the refugee count of 2,000 Ugandans at the time of Amin's exit from power grew to 300,000 in the next four years. Even more startling, only twenty percent of these numbers obtained -- correction: sought and obtained -- assistance from the UNHCR, the central agency co-ordinating the security and material needs of those in flight.

These and thousands of equally arresting facts have been presented in Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond's new book *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. But Dr. Harrell-Bond is concerned with a great deal more than the facts of this particular situation. From the outset her case study approach -- two years of observing and writing about the reality of the Ugandan refugees in the Yei River district of southern Sudan -- was planned to test all the assumptions underlying the behaviour and attitudes of those who interact with African refugees (there are currently five million fleeing terror, civil war and drought and the numbers have been predicted to go as high as fifty million by the year 2004). The intervenors include UNHCR policy makers and practitioners, the voluntary non-governmental organizations (NGOs) hired to implement UNHCR programmes, journalists, visiting delegates from donor governments, and hosts, both governmental and local, who are called upon to share their skimpy resources with the refugees.



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Dr. Harrell-Bond, an anthropologist, has made sure that first and foremost we get beyond the simplistic impressions of just who the refugees are, as portrayed by their fund-raising marketers. The clichés paint the picture of helplessness -- people with their hands out with no chance for survival outside the beneficence of the donor world.

Through Dr. Harrell-Bond's meticulous portrayals of the people she worked with and encountered in survey interviews, we get to know real people coping with real events and situations. In the words of the refugees themselves we learn the particulars of terror as children turn into bandits and a friend's mother hides a bit of cooked pumpkin she no longer wants to share. We learn of people pushed out of their homes by marauding soldiers on a vengeance tour of areas and tribal peoples associated with Amin's regime. Civilians on the run made shelters in the countryside. Sometimes they were pushed further and they made second and third shelters. Sometimes they returned home only to be pushed out again. Finally they crossed the Sudan border to seek uneasy asylum. Ugandan soldiers raided their camps at the borders. As the refugees pushed further into Sudan territory they discovered the baleful eye of hosts who resented their occupation of lands donated by the Sudanese government and exploited them as cheap labour.

In the midst of all this, the intervention of international assistance is minimal, inappropriate, ultimately a waste of money. Even for those who do accept assistance, it is but one branch of the survival strategy. Refugees, except for those truly helpless or dependent, are above all resourceful. They worked for the bad wages. They found ways to trade. They kept their eyes on the Ugandan situation in case there was a chance of resuming normal life at home. All this unfolded in extreme hardship and fear -- and by and large without the assistance supposedly available to them.

We discover that the very term "refugee" is meaningless. To both the UNHCR and the Ugandan, it means settled in a UNHCR agricultural settlement. Eighty percent of the refugees resisted -- often at the point of starvation -- such assistance. For many, professionals and traders before their troubles started, learning the farm business -- often without so much as a hoe -- just wasn't the best bet. For others, the settlement option implied a stigma, too much loss of independence. According to the eighty percent, known as the self-settled by the UNHCR, a refugee is someone else -- the person who accepts assistance.

Even Dr. Harrell-Bond was astonished at the ratio between self-settled and settlement refugees. Her original intention was to study only the settlement populations since only they related to UNHCR policy and fund expenditure. She went to the field with a fundamentally linear problem to explore: the donor and the recipient and all the folks in between who happen to be on that straight line. She even neglected to include the host countrypersons in this model. Her travel arrangements and all other permissions of access were strictly through the UNHCR.

But insight and intellectual honesty directed Dr. Harrell-Bond to a *holistic* approach. The problem had to be seen in relation to all its parts and some relationships between the parts were suddenly more important than others. The refugees and their Sudanese hosts were more at the crux of things than the refugees and their UNHCR benefactors, for example. Astonishingly, even the Ugandans themselves had something to learn here: that for example their singing of hymns of praise to Geneva was only an irritant to their Sudanese neighbours.

Even the name of the problem changes with Harrell-Bond's thinking. No longer called "refugee", which describes but one part, the problem is about an entire geographical context in which upheaval is taking place. Not only do we have Ugandan refugees of the self-settled and settlement kind. We also have former Sudanese refugees returning from a prolonged stay in Uganda following earlier civil war in the Sudan. Then we have the other Sudanese in flight, the victims of drought and famine travelling from the north of the country. And finally there are the hapless normal inhabitants of the southern Sudan, who without warning or preparation are expected to adjust to all this.

The traditional UNHCR tactic has been categorically linear, focused primarily on the refugees as the target of material assistance; only secondarily on the host government, and then warily, as the provider of land accommodation and protection guarantees for the incomers.

Historically, the UNHCR has funded three solutions to the refugees' plight: repatriation, settlement in a third country, settlement in the host country. In Africa, the third option unfolds most frequently, and for a variety of reasons it most often takes the shape of agricultural settlements. With self-sufficiency as the ill-defined goal for the refugees -- it means the point where

the donor tap can be turned off -- agriculture holds the obvious promise of at least food self-sufficiency. But there are many other reasons for wanting to organize the refugees into settlements. For one thing, donors like their recipients to be visible. It makes the book-keeping of supplies (plastic dishes, blankets, hoes) easier. There are other debated arguments for settlements: the protection of the refugees against their raiding countrymen soldiers, the facilitation of Sudanese security concerns, the minimizing of crime.

But the settlements do not work. They produce neither agriculture nor self-sufficiency. The able refugees stay away from them and they become little welfare communities of the temporarily and permanently disabled -- set apart, yet the most visible indicator of the hardship shared by all. Looked down upon by the self-settled, envied by the Sudanese locals who see where all the foreign money is going, they have entered the black hole of relief aid. They are now undifferentiated statistics to whom are given the so-called essentials: the shelter, the food ration, maybe some tools and blankets. That there are endless problems which do not fit this response -- the need to bury one's dead, the need for transportation to a clinic, severe psychological trauma, suspicions that someone is practising witchcraft, to name a few -- has no play here. Neither does the proposition that among the settlement refugees there could be human resources to create new solutions, new ways out.

In a word, in this segmented and artificial approach, nobody is thinking about the whole problem -- least of all the representatives of donors. Their assumption of dominance in the situation belies the possibility of the most obvious partnership of all, between themselves and the Sudanese government. But African governments get the cold shoulder from humanitarians. Humanitarians cite incompetence, bad human rights records, even corruption as reasons. Apart from the massive arrogance these views represent, humanitarians have much to think about in terms of their own forms of corruption. Harrell-Bond found instances where relief workers sent spies to the homes of government officials to see if they could find evidence of unusual spending. Meanwhile, the do-gooders themselves blithely spend the dollars earmarked for compassion without even a modicum of accountability, moving from failure to failure, often hiring the unqualified just on the basis of their white skin. Problem-solving always means working with the

best-qualified available; in the Sudanese situation, Harrell-Bond found credentials and will among the Sudanese and Ugandans just waiting to be recruited.

Why not, asks Harrell-Bond, take the funding destined exclusively to settlements and make it a community affair? If the area as a whole could somehow benefit, refugees could be looked upon as an opportunity, rather than a burden. Why try to turn qualified Ugandan refugees into farmers when their arrival on the scene represents a positive infusion of training and skills?

But politics, rather than problem-solving, is the main act here. The settlement, far from being a safe haven, is a final theatre wherein the real power struggle between donors and recipients plays itself out. It does not sound like much of a struggle.

Dr. Harrell-Bond has opened a doorway onto immense, new territory. She wants all concerned not only to deal with the real facts but to fundamentally change the approach to those facts. In the process, she challenges every facet of the Western humanitarian philosophy. The idea, for example, that the act of "giving" -- forget for the moment that the actual givers are paid, often well-paid -- is a thing in itself, somehow beyond the usual standards of professionalism, beyond criticism, certainly on the part of the recipient. Or the idea that the humanitarian cause is apolitical, outside the ongoing dramas of local, national and international politics that is otherwise the context of the crises in need of aid intervention. Myth after myth explodes in Harrell-Bond's exploration. No one will read this book without twisting and turning upon their own preconceptions. Doing good, according to these new rigours, is not the easiest but the hardest thing in the world to do well. Not doing it well, worse, pretending to do it well, is a special form of evil.

Western humanitarianism surely rates in Dr. Harrell-Bond's system as one of the worst of political evils confronting the besieged refugee. Too often, the badge of compassion is used to disguise thoughtlessness, petty politics and sheer incompetence. While the donor world goes about its business, assuming that its conduits of international caring (the relief workers) are spending the money entrusted to them properly and solving the problems of the suffering, the job is simply not getting done and nobody -- at least not until Dr. Harrell-Bond arrived on the scene -- is asking the fundamental questions.

Why not, Harrell-Bond asked herself on

several occasions during previous years of field study in Africa, where nine times out of ten she discovered failure?

Harrell-Bond discovered that often behind the humanitarian piety is a pernicious will to keep critical observers out. In forty years of relief agency history, the practice of impregnability has become a fine art. Journalists are encouraged to cover situations that will enhance fund-raising, but the do-gooders generally avoid public analysis of their situations and activities and they go to great lengths to curtail journalistic access to information.

No doubt similar strictures apply to academic research, but, writes Robert Chambers in his foreword to *Imposing Aid*, academics have complied to the disinformation process by only belatedly seeing refugee studies as a proper area for serious research -- and then only with an urban, elite bias which does not apply to rural Africa where most of the refugee action is. African refugees remain stereotyped as an uneducated, undifferentiated mass. Far from being seen as a set of individuals with endless differences to be attended to, the African refugees are regarded as not quite human, especially in their threshold for suffering, which too many have assumed is much higher than that of non-Africans.

Harrell-Bond's breakthrough volume (in Chambers' view, it is the first of its kind) required two six-month-periods in the field each of the two years, first concentrating on the observation of all sorts of outside intervenors, the relief workers, the members of international donor delegations, and the journalists. She watched the interactions of the outsiders and ultimately the effect of all this on the plight of the refugees.

Even short visits from the outside can have major impact. UNHCR was under pressure to provide ambulances to one district after an advisor of President Reagan had watched patients being carried to the clinic in wheelbarrows. On the other hand, the stick handling applied to journalists keeps them from confronting their own stereotypical thinking and they end up writing the same old simplistic doggerel.

Harrell-Bond arrived in the Sudan with model criteria forged a few years previously as a result of a study she did for Oxfam on Sahrawi refugees in Algeria. According to her report published in 1981, Algeria had permitted the Sahrawi complete autonomy in the areas they had settled. The camps still relied on capital infusions from the

donor community but their success in mobilizing the personal resources of the refugees had much to do with the fact that no outsiders lived or worked in the refugee areas. The fundamental idea of participation at work in Algeria became the central core for this book: the critical search for *anti-participation* attitudes, the subtle and not so subtle ways the powerful employ to control the behaviour of the powerless. These attitudes thrive in the demi-worlds of refugee camps and according to Harrell-Bond, they are not only unfair but also expensive, ineffective and wasteful.

With anti-participation comes the imposition of aid, a one-way street which neglects the concerns of the hosts, the government officials and local folk who have been told to share their reality with strangers. In addition, the creative energies of the refugee are suppressed and far too often the end results provoke unnecessary hostilities in all directions.

One aches throughout Dr. Harrell-Bond's description of failure in the Sudan UNHCR operation for the mitigating character or instance that would have been a sign of hope, a direction for the future, a positive demonstration of how things could be. William Shawcross in his prize-winning *The Quality of Mercy*, a description of refugee operations on behalf of post-Pol Pot Cambodians, provided examples of competence and even heroism to soften his black picture of disorganized and deceitful humanitarians. But while Harrell-Bond graciously acknowledges UNHCR officials for their support of her independently funded study, adding that the field operation she visited in southern Sudan was among the best of all such programmes, the reader will find few further positives in Dr. Harrell-Bond's observations.

Dr. Harrell-Bond has offered so much in this effort -- with *Imposing Aid* she has pointed the way to new generations who will now hopefully take up the challenge of refugee research and studies -- it seems greedy to ask for more. But in future volumes, more about the institution of the UNHCR itself, its history, its leading personalities, particularly as pertaining to Africa, would be helpful. We should also know how much the Sudanese operation costs, as well as the operational costs of the other UNHCR activities in Africa.

And then there is the question of Dr. Harrell-Bond's writing style which has not quite kept up with the parts-whole method of examination she uses. In the end, the gestalt comes through, but since she is in the business of creating new rules, her

book writing style would be well served by an unacademic (dare we say journalistic?) narrative that openly uses the chronology of her time in the Sudan as a framework. And we could use a more visually descriptive sense of people and places.

The weaknesses of Harrell-Bond's study disappear in the awesomeness of her achievement. She has provided a point of beginning to all the players -- donors, private and governmental, administrators and, most of all, the recipients of policy, the refugees and their hosts -- to imagine a kind of help that is unimposed. Then the "giving" would look more like sharing and the "Haves" would concede to the "Havenots" some of that asset valued most: power.

Dawn MacDonald is a journalist who has recently returned from a fact-finding trip to the Ogaden desert region of Ethiopia where the UNHCR oversees a \$40 million recovery programme for returning Somali refugees. She wishes she had read Dr. Harrell-Bond's book prior to her journey.

### **Renato Camarda**

#### ***Forced to Move***

Introduction by Ronald V. Dellums  
Edited by David Loeb and Susan Hansell  
Translated by Susan Hansell  
and Carmen Alegría  
San Francisco: Solidarity  
Publications, 1985

#### ***Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees From El Salvador and Guatemala***

London: El Salvador Committee for Human Rights, Guatemala Committee for Human Rights, War on Want Campaign Ltd., 1985

#### **by Tanya Basok**

*Forced to Move* and *Out of the Ashes*, two recent books on Central American refugees, complement one another in several ways. *Forced to Move* focuses only on Salvadorean refugees, mainly in Honduras. *Out of the Ashes* describes the situation of Salvadoreans and Guatemalans who seek asylum in other Central American countries, Mexico and the United States.

*Forced to Move* is based on testimonies by refugees, volunteers, doctors, nurses, priests, Honduran solidarity workers, UNHCR representatives and others. Except for a short introduction, chronology of the crisis and the update at the end of the

book, there are no interventions by the author. The reader faces the task of reconstructing events and forming a picture of camp life from scattered bits of information revealed in testimonies. *Out of the Ashes*, on the other hand, offers a precise and succinct summary of the refugee situation through a more detached narrative. *Out of the Ashes* is informative, while the other book is very moving. The former appeals to reason, the latter to emotion.

One needs only compare the titles of these two books in order to understand the difference in their focuses. The title "Forced to Move" brings out images of repression, violence and coercion. There is a photo of a family (mother, father and two children) on the cover. Next to them stands a soldier holding a gun. *Forced to Move* is a collection of stories about why Salvadoreans had to abandon their homeland, why and how they were relocated against their will from La Virtud camp to Mesa Grande and why they were being forced to move from Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande to yet another area in 1983. It is a textbook of human suffering.

By comparison, *Out of the Ashes* is a statement of hope, of resurrection and of reconstruction of the lives of refugees. In contrast to the deadly image of the gun, the cover of *Out of the Ashes* presents symbols of life and hope: green trees, blooming flowers, women cooking food, people wearing brightly-coloured clothes. The book is an ode to human strength and resistance in the face of overwhelming problems. It portrays rebuilding of the society under the difficult conditions of camp life. Refugees do not give up but, instead, organize literacy classes, carpentry, hammock-making, pottery and other workshops. They cultivate land and form committees. Once a week they call a general assembly of all camp residents.

There are occasional references to these aspects of the refugee life in *Forced to Move*, but they are rare. There are photos of religious ceremonies, theatre performances and classes for children in the chapter on life in the camp. However, the text which accompanies these photos covers repression of refugees and solidarity workers by the Honduran army. A photo on page 43 depicts women during the elections for the refugee coordinating committees. Information on these committees is missing, however. While a few pages are devoted to the determination of the Salvadoreans to work, learn and produce in the camp, most of the book is a denunciation of violence aimed at innocent

people by the Salvadorean and Honduran armies.

*Forced to Move* raises anger which is necessary in order for people to react to this injustice. *Out of the Ashes* inspires faith and hope in the will to survive.

**Cynthia Brown, editor**  
***With Friends Like These:***  
***The Americas Watch Report***  
***on Human Rights &***  
***U.S. Policy in Latin America***  
Preface by Jacobo Timerman  
Introduction by Alfred Stepan  
Toronto: Random House, 1985

#### **by Alex Zisman**

Since its inception in 1981 the Americas Watch has been monitoring and promoting the observance of human rights in Latin America. It has periodically published reports and supplements on individual countries in the region. Often enough -- as in the case of the publications dealing with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras -- the exposure of human rights violations substantially relied on testimonies dealing with the plight of refugees. These reports and supplements were crisp, exceptionally informative and readily accessible to the general public. In *With Friends Like These* the collective effort of the Americas Watch contributors Cynthia Brown, Holly Burkhalter, Robert K. Goldman, Juan Méndez, Allan Nairn and Arye Neier not only follows but handily complements this previous body of work.

The massive flight of Central and South American refugees over the past decades responded -- and still responds -- to a coercive reality fostered by power groups which over the years have been refining and building on a legacy of social and economic inequalities and human rights abuses.

The United States may well have purported to act as a sort of godfather in the region, but, for all its democratic inclinations and sporadic attempts to encourage the improvement of standards of living and limit the disparity of wealth distribution, when forced to choose between social justice and the status quo, it almost invariably leaned towards the latter at the expense of the former. As a result, U.S. human rights guidelines in Latin America often proved contradictory. Despite some genuine concerns for human rights

*Continued . . .*