It is hard to compare the Indochinese refugee settlement in Sweden to the Canadian experience. The discrepancies are legion. In numbers alone the Swedes host only 2,300 boat people, though family reunification programs have increased that number to about 3,000. There are 30 times that many in Canada. The Swedish effort was largely a government affair; the largest component in Canada was undertaken through private sponsorship. Though the Swedish group differed in language, religion, ethnic identity and their rural or urban origins, the group was relatively homogeneous. Nevertheless, in spite of and perhaps because of these and numerous other differences, the study, entitled A New Wave on a Northern Shore and published by the Swedish government, is very instructive. It was undertaken by Hugh Beach, a cultural anthropologist at Uppsala University, and Lars Ragvald, a sinologist at Stockholm University (who was also a member of the Swedish selection delegation during all four trips to the refugee camps.)

After providing a fairly extensive historical background in a study focused on resettlement, the authors review the selection process, the stages of resettlement, family reunification and the employment and job training provided by the Swedish government, is very instructive. It was undertaken by Hugh Beach, a cultural anthropologist at Uppsala University, and Lars Ragvald, a sinologist at Stockholm University (who was also a member of the Swedish selection delegation during all four trips to the refugee camps.)

The Indochinese Refugees in Sweden

by Howard Adelman

These self-interest and pragmatic criteria were balanced with the humanitarian concern for the needy, sick, and disabled.

For 4-6 months, the selected refugees initially went to accommodation centres operated by county employment boards where they were provided with clothing, medical care, language instruction and orientation programs. As in Canada, the health problem that caused the most worry to the Swedish public, for whom the concern was just as greatly exaggerated, was hepatitis. There too, dentists refused to treat Indochinese refugees who did not have a bill of health declaring them hepatitis-free. Similarly, the Swedes found that mental and emotional problems afflicted the refugees increasingly the longer they were there—primarily because of the trauma of family separation. Another parallel was the virtual uselessness of the initial information booklets provided to the refugees. The material was so dense, decontextualized and irrelevant to immediate needs, that the booklets were frequently discarded. Finally, the Swedes also found out that six months was insufficient for the refugees to learn Swedish, given the totally different native language structure.

One unique factor of the Swedish program was the family reunification program. While Sweden attempted wherever possible to bring out all relatives from a particular family (even when the family was distributed among a number of refugee camps), many refugees chose to go to Sweden because of Sweden’s embassy in Hanoi and the perception that Sweden could be more effective in arranging the emigration of relatives still in Vietnam. Of the 1,100 refugees chosen to go to Sweden, 800 were whole families, and 100 were individuals. The decision to select Cantonese speakers was based on two arguments: the lack of personnel in Sweden who spoke Vietnamese and the fact that a majority of “Boat People” were of Chinese extraction. (In fact, the Cantonese of many of the refugees was poor, and many spoke other dialects.)

The decision to take whole families was intended to ease the adjustment problems as well as limit the numbers who would be taken in under family reunification programs.
Board. Since Swedish family reunification is based on the core nuclear family — parents and children — this factor alone cut down the number of eligible applicants. When nephews (and nieces) who had migrated as part of an extended family attempted to sponsor their own parents, they were not permitted to do so if they were 20 years of age or older. When the word "family" means one thing to the Swedish authorities and another to the Boat People, it is not surprising that a great deal of confusion, misunderstanding and bitterness would arise over the family reunification program, especially given the expectations of the refugees who opted to go to Sweden. Nevertheless, Sweden has, proportionately, been considerably more successful in its reunification program than other countries of resettlement.

One similarity between the Canadian and Swedish experiences should be noted — the extremely rapid and successful adaptation of the refugees to a new work milieu in which they frequently establish productive workers. They are lauded for not "taking advantage" of the Swedish welfare system. Similarly in the schools, hard-working and respectful students are given the most expert and proportionate to the Indian success in its reunification program than other countries of resettlement.

One unique experiment proved to be an enormous success — the employment of a home-language teacher from the Indo-Chinese group in Gnosjo. On the other hand, the Swedish Red Cross "contact family" program (which paralleled the Canadians' "friendship family" program) in which a local Swedish family hosted an Indo-Chinese family, proved to be a failure. With very few exceptions the contacts rarely lasted past several visits. One also sees other advantages in Canada for the Indo-Chinese refugees compared to the situation in Sweden. Our multilingual programming in radio and television is envied, for example, in contrast to the Indo-Chinese in Sweden who live in a cultural vacuum. On the other hand, we have to envy their family pedagogue program, individuals assigned by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare to serve as links between the Indo-Chinese refugees and Swedish society with an ideal ratio of one pedagogue to 50 refugees for 2-3 years after arrival.

"Global Refugee Policy: the Case for a Development Oriented Strategy", a public issues paper of The Population Council (a John D. Rockefeller III, independent non-profit organization instituted in 1952) prepared by Charles Keely with Patricia Elwell, proposes a shift in focus from relief and resettlement to development. The study is divided into four parts: (1) a discussion of the international definition of a refugee; (2) an overview of their numbers, location and origin; (3) a sketch of the international response to refugees; and (4) conclusions arising from these discussions. The central issue is dealt with in the first section, and the historical background is relegated to the third section.

The two issues raised about the 1967 Protocol definition are familiar — the meaning of persecution and the requirement that a refugee be outside the country of nationality; i.e., individuals fleeing areas of armed conflict are not refugees. (By contrast, the Organization of African Unity Convention on Refugees extended its definition to include victims of war or civil conflict who need only leave their place and not their country of habitual residence.) In addition to the problems of the narrowness of the definition, there were also problems of interpretation. What is persecution? Given a government's role in economic policy, whatever the ideology of that government may be, bourgeoisie (mainly Chinese) may suffer in Vietnam or small landowners (mainly Indians) may suffer in Central America from government policies which deprive these groups of an ability to make a reasonable or even minimal living. Are they persecuted? The distinction between political and economic refugees becomes muddled.

Thus, people fleeing civil strife, people fleeing from a country with an ideology antithetical to the host country (self-exiled Europeans), people who, after having fled, might very well be persecuted upon return (Haitians), people fleeing oppressive economic policies — all have been granted refugee status under various humanitarian guises without qualifying under the U.N. definition.

However, seeking the basis of refugee policy on a clear definition of "Who is a refugee?" may be itself a source of the problem. Instead, the starting point should be the realities of displacement, for the definition itself is rooted in the particularity of the post-World War II experience in Europe. That perspective stressed resettlement in third countries when the emphasis now should perhaps be given to in-place activity and a development context.

This is Keely's central thesis. Aid should be shifted from maintaining camps and seeking resettlement to channelling resources to asylum countries for development aid and assistance to the indigenous population. Included in such a shift in emphasis would be our attitudes to humanitarian traditions. We would have to attend to the slow pace of indigenous economic and political solutions as well as the bureaucratic shifts that would be required from domestic human service agencies to foreign ministries and agencies.

When we shift from the strategy issues for dealing with refugees to the actual data on the refugees themselves we see how conceptual issues intersect with facts. Are displaced persons from civil war to be included in the numbers? When are former refugees considered to be firmly resettled and excluded from the calculations? Whose counts are to be relied upon — agencies', those of first asylum countries, etc.?

But, whatever the basis, it is clear that almost all refugees are in developing areas with half of them in Africa. This fact, along with the analysis of the historical background of solutions to the refugee problem rooted in Europe, is used to reinforce the thesis of shifting from a resettlement strategy as the back-up to repatriation to a development strategy of aid to countries of first asylum in the developing world.
The Trauma of the "Boat People"

Sixty-four Vietnamese Chinese refugees were asked to report "What happened during the flight?" as part of a survey conducted by Lawrence Lam of York University. The chart lists the events most frequently experienced by these "boat people."

We now have hard data to tell us what the Indochinese refugees have gone through — and continue to go through! These figures should awaken us to the fact that these refugees are still in need of assistance. Given that such a high proportion of the refugees witnessed or experienced traumatic events such as suicide, death, loss of family members, rape and lack of drinking water and food, we should also become more sensitive to the adaptation problems of Indochinese refugees.

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Books Received

**The Hai Hong: Profit, Tears and Joy** by Rene Pappone. Published by Employment and Immigration Canada. 1982. This book tells the story of the Canadian government's involvement in the 1978 Indochinese refugee crisis. The author, Rene Pappone, was at that time employed by Employment and Immigration Canada as a media relations officer.

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**A Query**

Is it an appropriate time to propose an international conference to compare the studies of the various forms of Indochinese refugee resettlement utilized in different countries? For there will inevitably be a "next time." The lessons of the past may be very appropriate.

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The Refugee Documentation Project at York University is concerned with acquiring and preserving archival materials pertaining to refugees in and from all parts of the world. (The Project's library is open between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. on weekdays.) Donations of documents, papers, reports or other library materials are encouraged.

If you have worked with refugees or have conducted research on refugees or refugee-related issues, please write and tell us about your work. A function of the Project is to create an index of Canadian individuals and organizations concerned with refugees in order to establish a referral network among people needing information on refugees.