



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES
REFUGEE

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Refugees and War in Africa: The Failure of Development

In Africa at least one person in two hundred is a refugee and the number is increasing daily. Yet this total, nearing six million, does not include the millions who remain inside their national border, displaced and facing starvation. Certainly it is true that in some parts of Africa -- notably in the South -- drought still plays a part, but it is war and civil strife, complicated by underdevelopment and international politics, which continue to be the primary causes of involuntary migration.

Africa's problems are complex and of long duration. In the 1970s many nations were favoured by unprecedented commodity booms which created markets and buoyant prices for raw goods such as sugar and sisal, cotton and coffee. In the following decade, deflationary policies adopted by Western nations severely hindered African economic advance. These same African nations were now caught between a falling demand for their raw materials and increasing debt repayments as interest rates on money borrowed in the 1970s spiralled. By 1984 Africa's debt burden amounted to over 50% of its total GNP. At the same time, the price of imports, particularly of oil and capital equipment, soared. This further exacerbated balance of payment problems so that in the 1980s African

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Tug Wajale refugee camp, home for 32,000 Ethiopians in Somalia, 1986. BEN FAWCETT/ICRFAM (UK)

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governments have had to borrow externally, not to fund development projects as in previous years, but to finance balance of payment deficits.

Concomitant with this economic crisis has been a decline in food production. In the 1960s food production for subsistence and local markets tended to keep pace with the growth in population. But since 1969 food production per capita has plummeted,

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for instance, between 1973 and 1984, per capita production of food crops dropped some 20%. The reasons for this are many and include environmental mismanagement, overstocking of land and incorrect agrarian policies, soil degradation and the shift from food crops to production for export. It is also a result in part of both large scale migrations of rural people to towns and government policies which tend to favour town dwellers, such as the depression of farmers' prices in order to placate urban populations. The massive drought in the north, east and south further reduced food production figures.

Drought and famine are not natural phenomena, but have causes which lie in policies pursued in the past by colonial regimes and currently by governments determined to develop their economies according to models often borrowed from the outside and in many instances unsuitable.

Faced with worsening balance of payment deficits, reduced food production and an annual average birth rate of 3.1%, African nations are vulnerable to crises such as war or drought. On the individual level, people with little food reserves, already chronically malnourished, are incapable of remaining in their homes for any length of time as crops wither or guerrillas attack and armies invade.

Yet in many parts of Africa this has been the situation, and it goes some way towards explaining why six million people are in exile. These wars and the conditions they create raise critical issues which donors, governments, researchers and international agencies must address.

Conflict in Africa evolves from a few issues of great importance: self-determination of subjugated peoples, ethnic rivalries and the failure of national conciliation, the integrity of borders in post-colonial states, the strategic and military value of certain regions to the Eastern bloc and the West, and the continuation of apartheid in South Africa and Namibia.

In the Horn, for instance, most civil strife is the result of attempts by groups within Ethiopia to achieve a certain degree of self-determination. As an empire, Ethiopia

has within it a number of peoples who see themselves colonized by the Shoa Amhars and who wish instead to determine their own political, economic and social agendas. The Ethiopian government, on the other hand, rules from the centre and pursues policies intended to consolidate its power, weaken regional opposition, and transform the political economy of the nation. The two current policies of "villagization" and "resettlement" are seen by many as further attempts to undermine opposition groups by removing people, such as the Oromo, from their land and settling amongst them northerners who support the liberation movements.

On the other side of the continent the Sahrawi are also fighting to obtain their right of self-determination. Over a decade ago a UN investigative team discovered that the Sahrawi strongly supported their political movement, Polisario, and were ardently opposed to the integration of their nation into any other neighbouring country. But today, while some 165,000 Sahrawi refugees reside in camps near Tidouf, Algeria, the war continues between Polisario and the Moroccans, while peaceful solutions to the conflict are bogged down in talk about whether the two protagonists ought to negotiate directly and who should be allowed to vote if and when a UN-supervised referendum is finally conducted.

In the Sudan, another war is being waged as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) is fighting in an effort to change the structure and the philosophy of a central government which it feels does not represent the interests of the south. In the south, where some two million Sudanese displaced by the war face starvation, insecurity is further increased by the presence of Ugandans, refugees from Obote's regime who have not yet felt secure enough to return home, and newly-arrived Ugandans, some with guns, who have fled north as the Museveni government tries to suppress elements which are still loyal to previous presidents.

In Chad the situation is more complex, but political instability is rooted in the inability of successive governments to bring about reconciliation between the multitude of ethnic groups, the vying

regional interests and different religious communities. The involvement of Western powers, especially France and the United States, attests to the international character of the conflict, which recently has become less of a civil war and more of a war of a Western-backed Chadian coalition against Libyan troops.

Conflict in South Africa and Namibia is clearly based on efforts of blacks in those nations to achieve national self-determination. The war that has spread beyond the borders into the wider subcontinent is the result of attempts by white South Africans to halt the de-colonization process. The Pretoria regime, intent on staying in power, has adopted a regional policy which fosters war in neighbouring states by directly attacking refugee communities and economic infrastructures, and by supporting dissidents intent upon undermining governments in the region which oppose apartheid and support international sanctions against South Africa.

The problems in Africa which generate refugees are exacerbated by the support different governments give to opposition groups in neighbouring states. For instance, Ethiopia's support to the SPLA in Sudan was stepped up, reportedly in retaliation for the Sudanese government's assistance to the liberation movements operating in Ethiopia. Similarly, in southern Africa tension is increased by the support given the Mozambican dissidents by South Africa and Malawi. Indeed, South Africa has supported at one time or another in the last decade at least five different opposition groups in neighbouring states.

To make matters worse, the superpowers are involved in the domestic affairs of African states. In search of strategic positions and military advantage, they ally themselves with governments and opposition groups, providing them with arms and logistical support. Indeed, the sale of arms to Africans has become big business. The sub-Saharan arms bill for 1980-83, for instance, was over US \$7 billion, with major customers being Ethiopia, Nigeria, Angola, and the Sudan, followed by Somalia, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Major suppliers include the USSR, France, Great Britain, West

Germany, the US and Italy, though South Africa, Brazil and Israel also have customers on the African continent. International involvement of this nature does nothing to alleviate tension, reduce conflict or halt the flow of refugees.

The following papers are concerned with the causes of mass involuntary migration in Africa and the responses of host communities to the influx of refugees. The bitterness felt by many refugees is to be found in the essay by Taha Abdi. As an example of the type of work that can be done outside Africa to give refugees and their hosts a voice, the report of a seminar sponsored by the Refugee Studies Programme at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, is included. The resolutions passed by African government officials who work with refugees show that new ground is being broken. Initiatives such as these can contribute to halting the flow of refugees and to better assisting them and the communities that serve as their hosts.

Diana Cammack

International Collaboration

• This Special Issue on Africa of *Refuge* is a good example of the ongoing collaboration between the Refugee Documentation Project at York University and other foreign research institutions such as the Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University, England. While *Refuge* serves as an important tool to ensure the dissemination of refugee work, the Refugee Documentation Project has also been actively involved in the promotion of international exchanges on other fronts. Several of our affiliated scholars and researchers have been using facilities abroad while a succession of foreign visitors have met with us to exchange information on research units and projects and utilize the data base at our own Resource Centre. As a member of the International Refugee Documentation Network, the RDP has been involved in a project sponsored by the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) in collaboration with the UNHCR to establish a mutually accessible data bank of refugee documentation throughout the world. The RDP will shortly receive a comprehensive software programme, CDS/ISIS, developed by UNESCO.

Letter from the RDP Director

I wish to express our gratitude to subscribers to *Refuge* and to the Friends of the Refugee Documentation Project for their donations. Without your steadfast support, the work of the RDP could not have gone on.

I also thank our staff for their dedication to the production of *Refuge* and to research projects which were completed during this past academic year. *Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugee* was produced by Alex Zisman, Feature Editor; Noreen Nimmons, Managing Editor; and Alice Dinerman, editorial Assistant. Christina Lee, Visiting Fellow, and Penny Van Esterik were the guest editors of a special edition on refugee women and Barbara Harrell-Bond, Co-ordinator of the Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University, is the guest editor of this current edition on refugees in Africa.

As activity increased again this year at the RDP's Resource Centre, students, faculty and visiting researchers were professionally assisted by researchers Gilda Farrell, Starla Goggins-Leavy, Fernando Mata, Noreen Nimmons, Chow Ying Wong and Ka Hung Wong. Together with external researchers Tanya Basok and Leslie Rider, this group made possible our highly successful seminar series "Refugees in Policy and Practice", which was designed by our Research Co-ordinator Noreen Nimmons and co-sponsored by the Dean of Graduate Studies. We shall continue the seminar series in an expanded format throughout the full 1987-88 academic year. In the planning stage are various research projects, one of which is a special two-day workshop, December 3 and 4, 1987, titled "Reconstitution of the Refugee Family: Policies, Programmes, Problems". Further details regarding speakers and registration will appear in the next editions of *Refuge*. We anticipate the arrival next year of at least one refugee who will join York's graduate programme, and the assistance of a Visiting Fellow, also a refugee.

Finally, special thanks are due to York University professors who have served as Advisory Board members: founding director Howard Adelman, legal specialist James Hathaway, Latin American research specialists Alan Simmons and Peter Landstreet, Southeast Asian specialists Penny and John Van Esterik, and Institute for Social Research director Gordon Darroch. Their advice and assistance have been an indispensable asset to the Refugee Documentation Project.

C. Michael Lanphier