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 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.

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 premises of the term "irregular". 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