

The State, Refugees and Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

Population displacements, refugees and migration are not only common phenomena, but are also on the increase in sub-Saharan Africa.

Although scholarly explanations for the causes include political oppression, economic adversities and environmental degradation, conflicts and wars account for the bulk of sub-Saharan Africa's refugees and migration in recent years. These explanations are themselves dependent on, or symptomatic of, more fundamental causes, including "the problem of the African state" and its failure to address the region's environmental crisis.

States have shown incapacity to equitably distribute scarce resources among competing constituents or promote fair competition for these resources. By this, the state not only revives old tensions and sharpens deep-seated contradictions in society, but aggravates conflicts which in turn lead to refugees and migration.

Although environmental decadence is known to produce refugees or induce migration, the state is reluctant to establish credible environmental regimes capable of halting or reversing the current trend in ecological degradation.

The exigencies of the international economy create further salutary conditions for conflict and environmental degradation. The pressures to adopt structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in order to meet external debt obligations, for example, obligate sub-Saharan governments to be outward-looking rather than enhance their capacities to address the fundamental internal factors underlying the induction of refugees and migration.

Once refugees and migration are induced, the effects are felt by the refugees themselves, the home governments as well the host country. Refugees undergo traumatic experiences, the home government suffers from brain

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drain, and the host country is compelled to stretch its resources beyond limits to accommodate the new arrivees. While refugees further abuse the environment, illegal emigrants may resort to drugs pushing and prostitution (in the case of females) as part of their innovative survival strategies.

Sub-Saharan African states can significantly minimize the incidence of refugees and migration by shifting from the traditional partisan posture to distribute meagre resources fairly among the diverse social constituents in the state. Also, shifting environmental conservation from the margins to the centre of public policy will go a long way to reduce the number of persons who would otherwise be proactively or reactively displaced by ecological pressures.

INTRODUCTION

The history of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is one of refugees and migration. In recent years there has been a steady rise in the region's refugee population. In 1969 there were only 700,000; by 1994 6 million – nearly one-third of the 20 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 1994: 4); and in late 1995 6.8 million, excluding internally displaced persons (*The New Internationalist*, no. 283, September 1996: 18). This trend is unlikely to be reversed or controlled given economic, political, social and ecological conditions on the continent. Moreover, the global political economy which dictates Africa's economic fortunes, along with the ubiquitous structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), exacerbate or create salutary conditions for migration and population displacements.

This article examines the causes of migration and refugees in Africa, contending that state partisanship and its inability to enforce strict environmental regulations, along with global economic trends, are critical to an understanding of the conflicts that precipitate social displacements and migration. It also analyses some of the critical implications of refugee populations for host countries. Because refugees often become immigrants, it is important to show where these two phenomena converge and diverge.

REFUGEES VS. EMIGRANTS

Because of the close connection between migration and refugees in SSA, there has been a tendency to conflate the two phenomena. Although both involve exit from one country and entry into another, often spawned by similar conditions, they are technically speaking disjunctive. The 1951 and 1967 definitions of refugees established by United Nations instruments precluded internally displaced persons and was expanded by the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) convention of the Status of refugees in 1969 to cover,

every person who owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in *another place outside his country of origin or nationality* [emphasis added] (OAU, 1969).

Following the OAU Convention, refugees were classified on the basis of their background and motives for flight. Hamrell (1967: 9-10) distinguishes “rural” and “urban” refugees, the former being persons

who cross the borders of their country of origin and seek asylum in a neighbouring area, which very often, although not necessarily, is similar to their homelands in respect to climatic and general physical conditions and also from an ethnical and tribal point of view.

Urban refugees, on the other hand, are small groups from cities and towns, often with professional skills. Similarly, in the wake of the OAU’s resolve in the 1970s to support liberation struggles, it became fashionable to categorize refugees on the basis of whether or not they originated from racist and colonial-dominated or independent African countries (Omari, 1967: 85-87). With the transition of Namibia and South Africa from minority to majority rule in 1990 and 1994 respectively, this classification diminished in salience.

In general, refugees are distinct from emigrants who are defined as “persons coming to live permanently in a foreign country” (Hornby, 1989). Furthermore, the dynamics, objectives and, to some extent, conditions spawning the two situations are dissimilar. First, while migration is to a large extent voluntary, fuelled mainly by economic imperatives, refugeism is always necessitated by security concerns which lie beyond the control of the refugees. Second, because migration is voluntary, emigrants determine their destinations beforehand whereas refugees’ destinations are usually unexpected. Third, notwithstanding the initial objective of permanent settlement, emigrants may choose to return to their countries of origin whereas the prospects for refugees’ return are largely contingent on stabilization of the conditions which prompted their flight. Notwithstanding these differences, the conditions which cause refugee situations are quite often, though not always, those that provide the impetus for emigration.

CAUSAL FACTORS

In analysing the dynamics of emigration in SSA, Adepoju (1994) identifies four conditions, referred to as “regimes” – economic, demographic, political and cultural. Central to this analysis are the deteriorating economic conditions compelling skilled and unskilled labour to migrate, changing demographic patterns that exacerbate unemployment, political instability dramatized in

conflicts and wars, and the prevalence of certain cultural practices which are increasingly detested by youth, for whom emigration offers an escape from what they perceive as anachronistic traditional practices.

In his seminal study of “the homeless in Africa”, which focuses on refugees and the internally displaced, Miller (1982) identifies civil and ethnic conflicts, colonial and racist domination, oppressive governments, foreign invasion, and natural disasters as central to Africa’s refugee dilemma. Until the early 1980s, when parts of Southern Africa languished under colonial and racist rule, wars of liberation accounted for a large percentage of SSA’s refugees (Adepoju, 1982). In the 1990s, however, refugee flows and migration are principally caused by conflicts, economic adversities, drought and famine.

Yet, these causal factors are not ontologically autonomous, but dependent on, or symptomatic of, a more fundamental cause which has been described by Doornbos (1990: 179) as “the problem of the African state”. While state-engineered problems in Africa are manifold, two are particularly germane here: first, the state is partisan and therefore incapacitated to respond adequately to Africa’s “heterogenous social reality” (Chazan et al., 1988: 172). Second, the state has failed to establish credible environmental regimes to reverse the rapid rate of ecological degradation (Nyang’oro, 1996). In retrospect, the post-colonial African state has shown a fundamental incapacity to either fairly distribute its meagre political and economic resources among the diverse social constituents, or promote fair competition for these resources. Some observers argue that these lapses are at the heart of Africa’s conflicts (Lake and Rothchild 1996: 44; Richmond 1994: 12). Partisan as it is, the state has revived old tensions and sharpened existing contradictions in society which culminate in conflicts and subsequent massive population displacements.

The state’s ability to prevail with partisan politics is, in part, a progeny of its autocratic character acquired with the emasculation of formal countervailing institutions such as civil society. With unassailable powers, the state was emboldened to maldistribute resources to serve its ends while simultaneously curtailing the expression of dissent via intimidation, detention and summary executions. With legitimate avenues for expressing grievances closed, armed rebellion became the alternative (Copson, 1994: 76). Yet the African state displays a major paradox in that, while autocratic and seemingly powerful, it is often weak, lacking sufficient instruments of coercion to ensure absolute compliance with its legislation or foil rebellion before it consolidates (Chabal, 1986: 15; Callaghy, 1987; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982a; Bratton, 1989).

In many respects, state autocracy has translated into disregard for consultations or constructive debate on litigious issues. Posing as the repository of wisdom, it has imposed prescriptions for problems without consulting constituencies, even those most affected (Copson, 1994: 76). Negotiation is a last resort,

coming only when dissent is resilient and unfettered; when tensions have translated into full-scale armed conflicts. To stake their claim, aggrieved constituents generally either retreat tactically into exile in neighbouring countries to strategize an invasion, or initiate an armed rebellion against the state. In Uganda (1979), Liberia (1990), Ethiopia (1991) and Rwanda (1994) the state crumbled in the face of such rebellions. In others (Sudan, and until recently Sierra Leone), it became embroiled in an endless war of attrition with rebels. Each case induced refugees or led to emigration.

THE STATE AS A CAUSE OF REFUGEES AND MIGRATION

Conflicts

That the state has been partially or totally responsible for the ignition of conflicts which have induced refugees and migration since the 1960s is hardly debatable. Examples from South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire), Chad, Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Congo among the major net producers of refugees, are illustrative.

Until the early 1990s, South Africa's apartheid system was responsible for the creation of several thousand refugees. A structure which concentrated power in the minority white population and both marginalized and suppressed the majority black population, set itself as a target of civil disobedience and guerrilla attacks. In 1961, the apartheid regime banned black nationalist movements within South Africa, including the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) (Furlong, 1996: 351). This sent thousands of black South Africans into exile in neighbouring Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe where some established bases for further anti-apartheid operations. However, with the inception of the new political dispensation in 1994, thousands of exiled South Africans returned home.

Current conditions in post-Apartheid South Africa are simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal. On the one hand, relative economic buoyancy attracts skilled and unskilled, legal and illegal migrants, especially from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. The Pretoria-based Human Science Research Council (HSRC) estimates that by December 1996 between 5 and 6 million immigrants, mostly illegal, had entered the country (*Africa Today*, March/April, 1997: 35). On the other hand, crime, violence, uncertainty and suspicions of a black-dominated African National Congress (ANC) government, have induced the emigration of many of the country's mainly white professionals and intellectuals. According to the South African Central Statistical Service (CSS), 8,000 left the country between January and September 1996, comprising teachers (34 per cent), engineers (25 per cent), accountants (24 per cent) and medical practitioners (13 per cent) (Edmunds, 1997).

Zaire offers another illustration of state responsibility for the induction of refugees. Since 1960, the country has seen a number of civil conflicts, complicated by the attempts of Shaba (Katanga), the copper-rich province, to secede. Routinely, Kinshasa descended on Shaba with massive force, often with the assistance of French troops (as in 1977 and 1988). The Kinshasa-Katanga impasse generated thousands of refugees who fled to neighbouring Angola.

Like Katanga, the ethnic Banyamulenge Tutsis in the east of the country harboured secessionist aspirations and therefore remained a thorn in the flesh of the Zairian state. To deal with this threat, the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko isolated the region by denying it basic roads and infrastructure. However, when in November 1996 the Banyamulenge and other disaffected constituents coalesced in the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) under Laurent Kabila to dislodge Mobutu, poor communication and infrastructure in the region impeded government efforts to halt the rebel advance. Mobutu's isolationist strategy backfired. By June 1997, the entire country had fallen under rebel control following the flight into exile of the once-impregnable Mobutu (Fedarko, 1997: 23-24). The rebel adventure forced thousands of refugees, including Rwandan and Burundian Hutus already taking refuge in the region, to flee into neighbouring Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia.

The rebellion in Zaire reflected the people's deep sense of frustration with over three decades of Mobutu's kleptocracy, a misrule that has been well documented (Parfit and Riley, 1989; MacGaffey, 1991; Askin and Collins, 1993). In the main, Mobutu's state showed little inclination to distribute resources fairly among the various competing constituents within Zaire. A typical personal ruler (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982b), Mobutu surrounded himself with sycophantic generals who constituted what Sandbrook (1985: 91) calls the "Presidential Brotherhood". In a symbiotic fixture, these generals were granted power, top political and administrative posts strategic for wealth accumulation in exchange for their loyalty. With impunity, the president and the brotherhood, together with their cronies, plundered the wealth of Zaire (Gould, 1979: 87-107). Intellectuals and students who spoke up against the unjust system ended up either in jail or as political refugees in foreign countries.

The Chadian conflict which began in the 1960s and prolonged into the 1980s, was no less significant in inducing refugees. Essentially, the conflict resulted from rivalry between the predominantly black population in the south and the Islamic-Arabic people in the north for domination of the country's politics. In the 1980s, the complexion of the conflict changed to involve rival Islamic-Arabic groups. Libya's intervention in aid of Goukouni Oueddei's faction, and the subsequent involvement of Egypt, France, and indirectly the US, to support

the rival faction of Hussein Habre, significantly intensified the conflict (Foltz, 1995). In the mid-1980s, the OAU succeeded in mitigating the conflict with a peace-keeping force.

The anatomy of the Chadian conflict is akin to that in Sudan where the islamized, arabized and light-skinned population of the north has consistently dominated Sudanese politics to the exclusion of the black, Christian and traditional worshipping populations of the south. Inter-regional tension between the north and the south was heightened by the former's attempts to theocratize Sudan along Islamic principles (El-Affendi, 1990: 372-3). The ensuing war between Khartoum and southern rebels, especially the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), claimed thousands of lives and forced many southern Sudanese into exile in Ethiopia, Uganda and Zaire. Many professionals also migrated to Europe, the Middle East and North America.

Since the 1960s, Rwanda and Burundi have seen thousands of their citizens take refuge in neighbouring countries following genocidal wars between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis (Newbury, 1995: 12-17). The stage for conflict was set when one group dominated power and both excluded and persecuted the rival group. The scale of persecution heightened in both countries in the late 1980s as power oscillated between the two rival groups. In early 1994, over 800,000 Rwandan Tutsis were massacred by the Hutu government and its militias, forcing thousands of Tutsis to flee the country. With the capture of power by the Ugandan-backed Tutsi rebels, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), in July 1994, thousands of Hutus fearing retribution fled into Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia.

Although Somalia is fairly homogenous by African standards, Siyad Barre's inauspicious policies of divide-and-rule and partisanship fuelled inter-clan animosity and vendetta. As Adam (1995: 72) has noted, only three of Somalia's numerous clans – that of Barre, his mother, and his principal son-in-law – dominated the country's politics. From these clans were drawn members of the secret police, military intelligence and holders of all top administrative and political posts. The remaining clans were marginalized and their resentments duly rewarded with repression and executions (Lewis, 1988: 222). Barre's reign of systematized terror (1969-1991) sent hundreds of opponents fleeing the country. However, sustained opposition to his regime culminated in its demise in 1991. The enduring legacy of Barre's partisan rule is the intense inter-clan rivalry and warfare unfolding in Somalia in the 1990s.

Ethiopia's experience is equally illustrative. The Marxist-styled regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam repressed and routinely executed its opponents. However, the bulk of the regime's fury was reserved for the two main separatist movements, the Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrea People's Liberation Front (EPLF). As Keller (1995: 128) notes, negotiation

with the separatists never featured as an alternative on the Government's agenda. The result was prolonged war between Addis Ababa and the EPLF producing over 350,000 refugees. The situation was complicated in 1977-78 by the Ethiopia-Ogaden war. In the unfolding turmoil and insecurity, thousands of ethnic Somalis sought refuge in Somalia, Sudan and Kenya. As the rebel advance on Addis Ababa became unstoppable, Mengistu absconded in May 1991 and Eritrea declared its independence following a referendum in April 1993.

Liberia is a recent sombre example. The crisis is rooted in the state's blatant exhibition of partiality in distributing resources among Liberians. President William Tolbert's demise, the beginning of Liberia's troubles, was spawned by his failure to accord equal opportunities to the country's sixteen ethnic groups. As Ofuately-Kodjoe (1994) argues, Tolbert entrenched Americo-Liberian dominance in both politics and the economy. Growing disaffection for his regime culminated in a military coup that elevated Samuel Doe to power in 1979. Doe, however, failed to learn from history. He advanced his Krahn ethnic group, gave it top political and military appointments to the marginalization of the others, especially the Gio and Mino tribes. Gios and Manos eventually constituted the bulk of the force of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) which ousted Doe, and which subsequently plunged the country into civil war in 1990. By 1991, besides the thousands displaced internally, over 700,000 Liberians had fled to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ghana (Tison, 1991). With the successful conduct of the 19 July 1997 general elections which effectively ended the war, and which returned Charles Taylor as president, many Liberians returned home.

The ongoing turmoil in Congo is rooted mainly in state partisanship and elite manipulation of the political process. Since its ascension to nationhood nearly 38 years ago, Congo has seen a dozen coups, civil wars and political assassinations. Yet the country is unique among troubled African states because of its notoriety in the use of private militias by élites to pursue political ambitions (Magan, 1997). Since the end of the 13-year military rule of Denis Sassou Nguesso with the election of Pascal Lissouba as president, inter-militia clashes have intensified. Although political élites in Congo shared similar ideologies, they routinely appealed to ethnic and regional sentiments and manipulated public opinion in their violent struggle for power. Between June and October 1997, the "Cobra" and "Zulu" militias loyal to Sassou Nguesso and Pascal Lissouba, respectively, engaged in fierce battle that led to the demise of Congo's first democratic government. By the end of October 1997, the conflict had claimed over 3,000 lives and forced hundreds of the 900,000 residents of the Congolese capital, Brazzaville, to re-locate in other parts of the country.

Indeed, instances of state partisanship are also evident in other countries, including Angola, Mozambique, Uganda and Sierra Leone. Thus, wherever

actual conflicts have generated refugees, or where threats of uncertainty and insecurity have compelled skilled and unskilled labour to migrate, the state's partial or total responsibility is almost always evident. There are, however, exceptions. For example, border skirmishes between Mauritania and Senegal in April 1989 induced migration and refugees and also displaced over 70,000 persons in both countries (Adepoju, 1994: 205).

The environment

State responsibility for the creation of refugees results not only from its failure to mediate or mitigate conflicts, but also in the adoption of ad hoc environmental policies thereby proactively and reactively inducing refugees and migration. Although environmental factors have produced fewer emigrants and refugees than conflicts, ecological pressures on population displacements cannot be underestimated. As a rule, migration and refugees are induced if the environment deteriorates and is less supportive of human habitation (Richmond, 1994).

The impact of the environment on refugees and migration has long been felt in Africa. In 1985, an estimated 10 million Africans fled their homes because of wars, government repression and the inability of land to support them (Timberlake 1985: 185). Nine years later, USAID warned that 11.6 million Africans in ten countries were threatened by famine from drought (Press, 1994: 3). The Sahelian droughts of 1973 and 1984 caused massive population displacements. Hundreds of environmental refugees from Burkina Faso and Niger were forced to seek sanctuary in Ghana, Nigeria and other coastal countries (Trolldalen, 1992: 159). Drought-displaced persons in Mali also moved south to Ghana, while nomads in the north of the country crossed into Algeria and Libya (Fair, 1996: 36). Similarly, pastoral Somalis of northern Kenya have had to cross back and forth into Somalia in search of pasture, adapting their culture to correspond to geographical variations rather than political boundaries.

Environmental degradation has also generated conflicts which have in turn induced refugees and migration. Such conflicts have hinged upon diminishing environmental resources and the competition among user constituencies. Eco-conflicts have taken several forms, including clashes between pastoralists and farmers, eco-refugees and host communities, local communities and the state, as well as between host communities and foreign multinational companies. For example, perennial conflicts between the Baggara herders of Northern Sudan and the Dinka in the South of the country forced some pastoralists to relocate (Keen, 1994: 3). In a study of the on-going Sudanese civil war, Suliman and Omer (1994: 23) concluded that "many of the current disputes are not being fought along traditional political borders, but most remarkably, along the ecological borders that divide richer and poorer ecozones."

Sudan is not alone in witnessing ecowars and population displacements; many other SSA countries have suffered similar fates. In Mauritania and Senegal, land shortage has led to increasing concentration of population on both banks of the Senegal river. Subsequent competition for land led to conflicts that claimed nearly 1,000 lives and displaced several hundreds (Trollaldalen, 1992: 143). The Ogaden war fought in the late 1970s was partly a result of conflict over grazing rights. Since 1980, violent conflicts have erupted between ethnic Dagombas and Konkombas, Nchumurus and Gonjas, as well as Gonjas and Konkombas in Northern Ghana over land and farming rights. These conflicts claimed hundreds of lives and displaced hundreds more (Brukum, 1996).

Similarly, neighbouring communities in Nigeria have skirmished over farmlands while some have clashed with state security agencies as the latter sought to establish control over forests and curb environmentally damaging practices such as logging and poaching (Obi, 1997: 23). In the Niger delta, the Ogoni community has battled with Shell, the giant oil company, over environmental pollution. Environmental degradation is thus a direct rather than a proximate cause of refugees, displacements and migration as commonly assumed (Suhrke, 1992: 28).

Yet the tenuous interconnection between a fragile ecosystem and population movement has hardly elicited the attention of African states which fail to formulate or enforce coherent environmental regulations. Concerned with economic revival and debt repayment, SSA governments have consistently relegated environmental conservation to the margins of policy. The implications of debt and its ancillary structural adjustment programmes for Africa's environment engaged the attention of the July 1992 Earth Summit Conference in Rio. The conference noted that,

rapid population growth, poverty, and environmental degradation are closely related and may be exacerbated by the structural adjustment programmes imposed on developing countries by banks and international agencies concerned with inflation control and loan repayment (George, 1994).

The contention of the Earth Summit Conference is neither sanguine nor rhetorical; it is factual and founded on compelling evidence. For example, in a bid to augment foreign exchange earnings, Ghana, the acclaimed star of adjustment (World Bank, 1994), sharply increased its timber exports causing the country's tropical forest area to shrink to a quarter of its original size within a decade (Nyang'oro, 1996: 203). Also, out of desperation to obtain hard foreign currency to service its foreign debts, Benin has been willing to accept toxic wastes in its oceans for compensatory payments of \$2.50 per tonne compared with \$4,000 in the US (UNEP, 1995: 15). The Nigerian Government's execution of Ogoni environmentalists in November 1995, in defiance of

international pleas for clemency, further illustrates the willingness of the African state to trade the environment for hard currency. In the process, environmental regulations are waived or readjusted in order to cooperate rather than oppose multinationals even when these corporations hasten ecological bankruptcy (Hutchful, 1985: 118). Sadly, most African states seem beguiled by the obsession with economic growth to the limitations imposed on development by ecological decay (Nyang'oro, 1996: 197).

Lack of strong environmental regimes leave Africa increasingly vulnerable to ecological catastrophe. The menace of desertification resulting from deforestation and growing failure of land to support vegetation is even more dire. A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) study warns that at the global deforestation rate of 6 per cent annually, Africa's entire forest will disappear in 100 years (Wells, 1989: 162). Without a concomitant rate of afforestation and appropriate land use, Africa loses 36,000 square kilometres of land on average to the desert annually (Nnoli, 1990). Deforestation and desertification are facilitated by the indiscriminate clearing of vegetation for farming and firewood, the establishment of refugee camps, and by erosion which deprive the soil of essential nutrients for vegetational support. But while environmental factors aggravate Africa's refugee problem, external exigencies unleashed by the international economy seem to further worsen the continent's predicaments.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND CONFLICTS

New trends in the global economy, reflecting globalization, the upsurge in use of biotechnology, the declining importance of Africa's primary products and Africa's systematic marginalization in the world's economy, are potential causes of tensions and conflict. These trends not only leave the African state with few resources for distribution, development or rent-seeking, but also escalates the continent's already heavy debt burden, a recipe for violence and conflicts (Brown, 1995: 100-103).

The emerging contradictions in the international economy which, on the one hand, position Africa on the margin, and on the other hand, incorporate it via structural adjustment, underscores the continent's uncertain posture in the new international division of labour. Shrinking direct foreign investments (DFIs) and declining international aid flows (ODA), the most glaring manifestations of Africa's marginality (Callaghy, 1991), compound the continent's already precarious economic security dilemma (Shaw and Inegbedion, 1994). In recent years, Africa's marginalization has assumed a humanitarian dimension reflected in the slow international responses to the continent's familiar quagmires of conflicts and disasters.

The functional correlation between economic crisis and conflicts has been well established. Smith (1992: 141-2) has noted that about 50 per cent of the 25 most indebted Third World countries were at war in 1990 or early 1991. Similarly, Brown (1995: 101) notes that only four countries – Niger, Sao Tome, Senegal and Tanzania – of Africa's 33 most indebted and economically distressed, have so far been spared the horrors of conflicts and wars. The linkage between poverty and conflicts was stated even more poignantly by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, Mrs. Theresa Sevigny who argued that,

deepening poverty is already leading to mounting instability. The widespread unrest, turmoil and violence which is now afflicting an unprecedented number of countries is linked by one common thread of growing economic malaise, regardless of the ethnic and political guises it adopts. In Liberia, Rwanda, the Horn of Africa Poverty is the tinder which ignites the resentments and fears that all people and communities harbour (Sevigny, 1990).

As a rule, economic crisis exemplified in long periods of recession, unemployment and inflation, exacerbate scarcity and intensify distributional conflicts. Thus, as Africa's debt grows concomitantly with depressing economic and environmental conditions, and as poverty exacerbates despondency of a majority of the population, tensions and contestations are inevitable (Copson, 1994: 90). Some afro-pessimists, including Kaplan (1994), argue that these indicators are precursory of an impending explosion of social anarchy. Whichever scenario prevails, the induction of refugees and emigration is a mathematical certainty.

While conflicts predated SAPs, proliferation of the latter, underscored by economic austerity, along with the tendency to compound rather than ameliorate the debt crisis, increase SSA's susceptibility to conflicts (Shaw, 1995; Adekanye, 1995). Exhausted by the enormous economic crisis of the 1970s, the African state was scarcely in total control in the 1980s. By severely curtailing its distributive powers, SAPs undermined the capabilities of the African state further, including its ability to contain conflicts (Akokpari, 1996a: 17-26). Thus, capitalizing on the state's apparent fatigue, rebel movements overrun national capitals, some with minimal resistance as in Rwanda; declare autonomy as in Eritrea; and force the state to make concessions as in Sierra Leone but produce refugees in the process. Some countries which rigorously followed adjustment conditionalities, notably Ghana, however, managed to avert conflicts mainly because of the state's skilful use of its authoritarian powers (Akokpari, 1996b).

Political democratization thrust on Africa from the 1990s as corollary to SAPs, has also produced two new protagonists – the state and civil society. The opening of political space has emboldened civil society to wage war against the

oppressive African state. The state, as in Nigeria, has in turn responded with renewed repression, despite the new dispensation, forcing political opponents into exile.

In short, the causes of refugees and migration cannot be divorced from the forces and contradictions unleashed by the global economy – marginalization, debt and structural adjustment – which hatch conditions for conflicts and economic adversities. Paradoxically, although heavily devastated by the international economy, sub-Saharan Africa must also take on the onerous task of managing refugee crises.

IMPLICATIONS OF REFUGEES

The ordeal of refugees

The implications of refugee flows and migration are palpable both for refugees and host governments. Refugees often face unspeakable traumatic experiences. The facts of unwillingly leaving one's home with no prior preparation; leaving behind possessions to embark on a journey whose destination is unknown, compounded by uncertainty about the duration of one's homelessness – in a sense, entrusting one's life into the arms of fate – are telling, emotional and devastating.

These experiences are worsened by the speed with which refugees must move in order to escape a crossfire. Often, refugees are without adequate food or water and must trek on foot for many days, covering several kilometres under the scorching African sun, sometimes under unrelenting rain storms. Miller (1982: 5) contends that, under such miserable conditions, "no sound [could be] more distressing than the plea of the homeless". The cry of the homeless is even more distressing where they have to wait for many gruelling weeks before humanitarian assistance reaches them. Yet what most draws international concern and compassion for refugees is their demographic composition. Studies have shown that the majority of refugees are the weak and innocent (Adepoju, 1982). A demographic analysis of 350,308 Somali refugees in late 1979, cited in Miller (1982: 12), shows that 59 per cent of the refugees were children below 15 years, 32 per cent were female adults and only 9 per cent were male adults, many of whom were elderly.

The problems of refugees are also frequently compounded by conditions in their camps. Overcrowding and overpopulation not only overwhelm aid workers, but also carry the possibility of epidemics. Diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery and ebola have been known to spread rapidly under crowded conditions. Exhaustion from many days of walking and lack of

adequate food, significantly reduce the ability of refugees to survive these illnesses. The UNHCR estimated that more than 50,000 of the 1 million Rwandan refugees who poured into eastern Zaire within four days in July 1994, died soon after of cholera, dysentery and malnutrition (UNHCR, 1996: 18). Although the epidemic was eventually brought under control, an average 60 deaths a day was still being recorded in late 1996 and early 1997 (*The Globe and Mail*, 22 April 1997: A11). Lack of effective control also makes refugee camps ideal scenes for crime, rape and violence. Where conditions degenerate into intolerable levels, many are compelled to trade their few possessions for basic necessities, often available in the burgeoning informal markets within and around the camps.

Meantime, refugees leave behind challenging problems for the home government. For example, the exodus of people could severely disrupt agricultural production and general economic activities, thus setting the stage for famine and economic depression that compel the country to rely on massive food aid and imports. Also, home countries lose large numbers of professionals and middle class elements who escape political oppression, war, insecurity or economic adversities. In the final analysis, development efforts of the home country are seriously impeded. In general, from the time they flee to the camps, refugees are not only a burden to UNHCR and aid workers, but also to the host government.

Implications for the host country

Refugees often compel the host country to greatly stretch its resources. Already heavily indebted, SSA countries lack adequate resources, infrastructure and facilities to accommodate their own populations. To suddenly have to feed and shelter additional scores of thousands arriving within the span of a week may be extremely difficult, even unbearable. Tanzania has traditionally shown generosity towards refugees. In the 1970s and 1980s, it granted asylum and nationality to thousands of Burundian, Mozambican, Rwandan and Ugandan refugees (Gasarasi, 1987). However, with its own economic crisis out of control, it ejected thousands of Rwandan Hutus taking refuge within its borders in December 1996. For similar reasons, Ghana almost turned back over 600 Liberian refugees stranded on the high seas in July 1995 had the UNHCR and the international community not promised immediate assistance.

In addition to economic reasons, host governments often perceive refugees as a security threat if they use their sanctuary as a base for attacks on their home government. This possibility is high if the refugees had been vanquished in a previous conflict. In mid-1996, for instance, armed Hutu refugees in eastern Zaire were reported to be using their camps as military bases to launch attacks on Rwanda, allegedly with the encouragement of the Zairian Government (Fedarko, 1997: 24).

Military adventurism by refugees against their home government spawns two immediate and interrelated consequences. First, it strains relations between the refugees' host and home countries. For example, between 1994 and 1997, Zaire's relations with Rwanda deteriorated as the latter accused the former of aiding armed Hutus attempting to re-capture Kigali. During the same period, Zaire-Uganda relations also deteriorated because of Kinshasa's suspicion that Kampala aided the Banyamulenge Tutsis and the ADFL. Fearing that refugees could pose security threats or undermine the country's relation with Rwanda, Zambia ensured that all Hutus seeking refuge in the country were registered and disarmed at the border before being allowed entry. Similarly, concerns that the war might spill over into the country compelled Sierra Leone to close its borders to Liberian refugees at some point in 1990 (Sorenson, 1994: 179).

Second, rebel military attacks on the home government encourage the involvement of foreign mercenaries who have added new complexities to local conflicts in recent years. Mercenaries encourage the privatization of conflicts as they are available for hiring by beleaguered regimes to quell internal insurgencies or repel invading rebels. In December 1996, the ailing Mobutu regime engaged the services of 400 extra-African mercenaries, including Belgians, Croats, French, Italians, Russians and Serbs in a desperate bid to halt the advance of the ADFL (Misser, 1997: 21; *Africa Today*, March/April, 1997: 22). Polemics over the efficacy of contracted mercenaries to rapidly terminate Africa's conflicts may linger for some time because, while in Sierra Leone the involvement of the South African-based Executive Outcomes (EO) preserved the country (Rubin, 1997: 48-55), it prolonged the war in Angola. As a rule, where mercenaries fail to swiftly outgun rebels, prolonged fighting induces more refugees.

Tensions between local populations and refugees are not uncommon. These may be minimized or averted where the new arrivals settle across the border among their kith and kin. However, where languages and cultures are diverse, tensions may easily arise over farming and grazing lands or commercial activities. Also, given the ubiquity of poverty, local populations may grow envious of refugees receiving assistance and this could heighten tension between them. In 1994, there were tensions between Eastern Zairians and the Tutsi refugees who settled among them, apparently over land. Similarly, there were sporadic eruptions of conflict between Ghanaians and migrants from neighbouring countries in receiving areas such as Accra (Trolldalen, 1992: 159).

In the face of shrinking formal employment opportunities, refugees, and especially illegal immigrants, have become a source of concern for host governments. As these possess neither the professional skills nor the relevant immigration papers to secure formal jobs, they may tend to engage in drug racketeering. This is precisely the worry of South Africa which suspects that

illegal Nigerian immigrants are at the centre of the country's booming drug trade (Amupadhi and Commandeur, 1997). For female illegal immigrants, beside drugs, the appeal of the sex trade is often strong. It is not surprising that the first diagnosed AIDS cases in Ghana in 1986 were women who had been engaging in prostitution in Côte d'Ivoire, apparently to escape economic adversities at home (Konotey-Ahulu, 1987: 206; Potter, 1994).

In their battle against adversities and desperation, refugees may resort to innovative survival strategies. They may, for example, generate an informal economy, sometimes beyond the control of the host government, which provide congenial environments for the peddling of illicit merchandise such as drugs by indigenous criminals. While a few refugees profit from the illicit trade, the temporal and transitory nature of their stay enhance their ability to circumvent official regulations. Moreover, the pathetic situation of refugees frequently render them unsuspecting to the host government's law enforcement agencies.

The impact of refugees on the environment is often massive and takes several forms. First, the establishment of refugee camps necessitates clearing vegetation and trees. Large camps require large tracts of land. Second, grass is used for temporary roofing and trees are felled for firewood. Often, when firewood become scarce, animal dung, previously used as fertilizer, is substituted (Ghimire, 1994: 566). Refugees may also set up small farms or grazing grounds and thus facilitate deforestation. Third, as part of the search for food, refugees may rapidly deplete game stocks within the vicinity of their camps. Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire were known to have poached every conceivable "edible" creature in the area, including rats, antelopes and monkeys.

In their fight against the home government, rebel exiles may also adopt scorched earth methods, including pollution of major water sources or sabotaging oil wells or pipelines as did the Angolan rebel movement, UNITA, in the 1980s. The interconnection between the environment and refugees is thus cyclical and mutually reinforcing, making it difficult to separate cause from effect (Timberlake, 1985: 185). Conflicts generate refugees who, in desperation to survive, adopt environmentally-hostile methods. Environmental degradation in turn leads to further refugees.

CONCLUSION

While the causes of Africa's refugee crisis may seem complex, deeper analysis reduces these to the prevalence of conflicts, environment degradation and the hostility of the global economy. Given the tendency for persistence of state partisanship, despite Africa's new political dispensation, refugee flows may be irreversible. At the same time, the global economy cannot be predicted to

favour the continent. Indeed, as structural adjustment remains the dominant paradigm of development, and as debt and deteriorating economic conditions remain its inevitable correlates, tensions and conflicts are sure to remain and with them refugees and migration.

Pressures to meet adjustment conditionalities and external debt obligations reduce the ability of African governments to take a resolute stance on environmental conservation. In the face of such pressures, African governments relax environmental regulations, if these exist at all, in an effort to persuade new multinationals to invest or dissuade existing ones from leaving. As external exigencies compel African states to be more outward looking, little attention is paid to the destruction caused to the environment by traditional farming practices. The cumulative result of adjustment, debt and government inaction is the rapid destruction of Africa's once-rich environment that has facilitated the flow of refugees and emigrants.

In large measure, the elimination of conflicts will minimize Africa's refugee problem. It is therefore necessary for the state to take concrete measures to refrain from partisanship and to accord all competing internal constituencies access to state resources, as the lack of this lies at the heart of Africa's conflicts and population movements.

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L'ÉTAT, LES RÉFUGIÉS ET LA MIGRATION EN AFRIQUE SUBSAHARIENNE

Les déplacements de population, les mouvements de réfugiés et la migration, outre que ce sont des phénomènes courants, accusent une tendance constante à la hausse en Afrique subsaharienne.

Bien que les explications savantes concernant leurs causes comprennent l'oppression politique, les difficultés économiques et les dégradations écologiques, ce sont les conflits et les guerres qui ont provoqué la plus grande partie des mouvements de réfugiés et des migrations en Afrique subsaharienne au cours des dernières années. Ces explications dépendent elles-mêmes ou sont symptomatiques de causes plus profondes telles que le "problème de l'État africain" et son incapacité de réagir devant la crise écologique que subit la région.

Les États se sont montrés incapables de répartir équitablement leurs ressources limitées entre différents segments concurrents de la population ou de favoriser la création d'un système de concurrence loyale pour la mise à disposition de ces ressources. Cette lacune du côté de l'État n'a pas seulement pour effet de ranimer les anciennes tensions et d'accentuer de profondes contradictions au sein de la société, mais d'aggraver aussi les conflits qui, à leur tour, provoquent des mouvements de réfugiés et des migrations.

Bien que la détérioration du milieu ambiant engendre d'elle-même – on le sait – des mouvements de réfugiés ou des migrations, l'État hésite à mettre en place des régimes écologiques viables pouvant arrêter ou inverser la tendance actuelle de dégradation de l'environnement.

Les exigences de l'économie internationale créent aussi des conditions propices aux conflits et aux dégradations écologiques. Les pressions exercées pour faire adopter des programmes d'ajustement structurel (PAS) permettant à un pays de respecter ses obligations sur le plan de la dette extérieure ont pour effet, entre autres, de contraindre les États subsahariens à regarder vers l'extérieur plutôt que de renforcer leur capacité de s'attaquer aux facteurs internes qui sont la cause profonde des mouvements de réfugiés et des migrations.

Une fois que ces mouvements et migrations sont déclenchés, les effets sont ressentis à la fois par les réfugiés eux-mêmes, les gouvernements des pays de départ et les pays hôtes. Les réfugiés connaissent des situations traumatiques, le gouvernement du pays de départ voit fuir ses intellectuels et le pays d'accueil est obligé, pour faire une place aux nouveaux arrivants, de partager la même quantité de ressources entre des groupes de plus en plus nombreux, au-delà même de limites acceptables. Les réfugiés dégradent encore davantage

l'environnement et les immigrants illégaux se livrent parfois au trafic de drogue et à la prostitution (dans le cas des femmes), qui font partie de leurs stratégies improvisées de survie.

Les États de l'Afrique subsaharienne pourraient atténuer dans une large mesure les conséquences de la présence des réfugiés et des migrations en délaissant leur politique partisane traditionnelle et en cherchant à répartir équitablement leurs maigres ressources entre les divers segments de la société. Le fait d'accorder à la protection de l'environnement une place centrale et non plus marginale dans la politique officielle contribuerait pour beaucoup à réduire le nombre de personnes qui, autrement, seraient contraintes au départ, à titre préventif ou après coup, en raison de pressions écologiques.

EL ESTADO, LOS REFUGIADOS Y LA MIGRACIÓN EN EL ÁFRICA SUBSAHARIANA

Desplazamientos de poblaciones, refugiados y migraciones no sólo son fenómenos comunes sino que además son cada vez más frecuentes en el África Subsahariana.

Entre las explicaciones tradicionales de las causas de estos fenómenos figuran la opresión política, las dificultades económicas y la degradación del medio ambiente, pero en estos últimos años son los distintos tipos de conflictos y las guerras los factores que determinan la mayor parte de las migraciones y los movimientos de refugiados en el África Subsahariana. A su vez, estos factores dependen o son sintomáticos de otras causas más fundamentales, como "el problema del Estado africano" y su impotencia para enfrentarse con la crisis ambiental de la región.

Los Estados se han revelado incapaces de distribuir equitativamente los escasos recursos entre sus bases en competición o de promover una justa competición por esos recursos. De esta forma, el Estado no sólo reactiva viejas tensiones y agudiza profundas contradicciones sociales sino que además agrava conflictos que, a su vez, provocan refugiados y migraciones.

Es sabido que la degradación ambiental produce refugiados o provoca migraciones, pero el Estado se resiste a establecer regímenes ambientales creíbles capaces de detener o invertir la actual tendencia a la degradación ecológica.

Las exigencias de la economía internacional aún crean condiciones más favorables para los conflictos y la degradación ambiental. Así, por ejemplo, las presiones para que los países adopten programas de ajuste estructural que les

permitan hacer frente a sus deudas externas obligan a los gobiernos subsaharianos a ocuparse más del exterior que de su capacidad para hacer frente a los problemas internos fundamentales subyacentes a los movimientos de refugiados y migrantes.

Una vez desencadenados los movimientos de refugiados y de migración, son los propios refugiados, los gobiernos de origen y los países de acogida los que sufren los correspondientes efectos. Los refugiados atraviesan experiencias traumatizantes, los gobiernos de origen sufren la pérdida de personal calificado y el país de acogida se ve obligado a extender excesivamente sus recursos para acomodar a los recién llegados. Los refugiados aún someten a mayores presiones al medio ambiente, mientras que los emigrantes ilegales pueden recurrir al tráfico de drogas y a la prostitución (en el caso de las mujeres) como parte de sus nuevas estrategias de supervivencia.

Los Estados del África Subsahariana podrían reducir considerablemente la incidencia de refugiados y migrantes abandonando sus tradicionales posiciones partidistas para distribuir equitativamente sus escasos recursos entre las diversas clases sociales del Estado. También el hacer de la conservación del medio ambiente una parte más central de la política pública contribuirá en gran medida a reducir el número de personas que más pronto o más tarde se hubieran visto obligadas a desplazarse por presiones ecológicas.