BOOK REVIEW


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Displacement Risks in Africa is a useful compendium of displacement issues and a significant contribution to the resource base of a fairly well established academic fraternity engaging with Africa oriented refugee studies. As suggested in the title, displacement in this text is primarily concerned with refugees or displaced populations who physically relocate, rather than non-relocation displacement. A focus on the overall nature of the refugee and displacement predicament in Africa in terms of reintegration and resettlement is addressed as Part One. Jeff Crisp provides a comprehensive review of the nature of protracted refugee situations. The message is that there is no reason to believe there will be an end to it, but that vital lessons are waiting to be learnt in dealing with the inevitability of long-term refugeedom. Furthermore, building risk into displacement analyses highlights how prevention of displacement impacts could avoid grappling with often-ineffective cures. The editors point out that ‘discourse and instruments focus on the treatment of effects rather than causes of human uprooting’ (p.6), a sentiment that is supported by several of the contributions
that follow. It is also made clear from the opening introduction that institutional refugee rights and conventions abound. The problem is the failure to uphold them.

The heterogeneous and complex nature of refugee resettlement is apparent throughout most of the contributions. Effective solutions in addressing refugees’ needs are dependent on understanding particular circumstances of externally induced relocation or self-settlement. This varies for urban, rural and camp environments; during conflict, development or otherwise; and for different parts of society. Refugee groups are generally made up of social networks, key to survival during displacement, in particular when no formalized emergency relief is provided. The importance of social capital and how it varies pre- and post-displacement is addressed by Roos Willems (Chapter 2) for the case of refugees to urban contexts in Tanzania. However, it is not indicated here that what complicates matters is the nature of replacement of pre-existing civil society with alternatives during and after displacement (which is sometimes an extreme change). The survival networks of conflict replace any more obvious social capital restoration opening up the possibilities of a complex of less desirable coerced networks influenced by fear. This is exemplified by the example provided by Art Hanson in the following chapter (Chapter 3), which focuses on child soldiers. This case raises questions about the need for specialist policies for reintegration of ex-fighters. Hanson provides a unique attempt at identifying more precisely what might be needed, not least community education and a community development component. Although very useful advice is provided, it is also one of the most honest of the contributions in acknowledging that more questions may be raised than can be answered in dealing with social learning with this type of displacement.

Gaim Kibreab provides a fascinating contribution (Chapter 4) addressing a core theme of belonging and displacement. Although based on his observations of the particular experiences of Eritrean returnees, this chapter has much wider application in terms of how we might better assess displacement. Nationalism, territorial belonging, together with the debate on the relationship between people, places and identity lie behind understanding relative risks and outcomes. Based on the Eritrean case, Kibreab leaves the reader
with a closer understanding of just what it is that policy makers may fall short of understanding about displacement identity. By way of contrast but equally convincing is the following chapter by Takeuchi and Marara (Chapter 5) who demonstrate the Rwanda displacement crisis to be largely a function of people’s tie to specific areas of land. Rapid shifts in population density, due to return migrations were part of a long history of ethnic tension exacerbated by colonialism. Here we see that failure to recognize the cause of tension, leading to conflict, and then displacement, means that the resettlement process provoked yet further tension, fear and mistrust. The issue of reconciliation in terms of land is alarmingly complex to address and an issue ongoing in Rwanda to date. I found the argument for the case of land and Rwanda convincing in being the opposite outcome to that of Mozambique where I have considered this previously. Land availability for returnees post conflict was generally plentiful there and a remarkably sound peace has remained intact since the first half of the 1990s. Arguably, the complexity of ethnicity, kinship and state imposed identity existed in that case too, but land availability has prevented any more elevated an issue that might lead to community hostilities such as still ongoing in Rwanda.

Part Two opens with an analysis of the process of impoverishment, revealingly combined with a chapter on displacement through dam developments, and another on conservation projects. First we are presented with the Impoverishment, Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model (Chapter 6) attributed to the author of this contribution, Michael Cernea. The model is well acknowledged by scholars several of whom refer to it systematically in their contributions to this book. It is however important to note here that the items that make up the IRR model were by no means new even at the time this framework was first released. It is perhaps a list of what the lay reader or practitioner of development or relief work would expect to see, a basic criteria list of well-known displacement impacts. This perhaps explains its applied value. There are parallels in this approach with well established basic and extended needs analysis and with notions of primary subsistence and the poverty frameworks. The chapter is the longest of the book, seeking to document where the model has been used in scholarly work since its publication.
It is here that, in a research sense the model may be of additional use, to show how basic indicators show up in the varying contexts in which other authors have applied it. A more critical view of this contribution however, might be that it tends towards somewhat extensive promotion of ‘the author’s model’ in terms of adoption by the scholarly process rather than impact on refugee policy. Arguably, what is needed in this field is less of a prescribed model checklist, and more the skill of listening, empathizing and recording refugee and displaced people’s issues inductively. The contributors to this book have in most instances demonstrated that as possible. However, to its credit there is acknowledgment of the need for flexibility in the model and acceptance of the possibility of other ingredients. Two of these, less apparent in the original list, politics and education, are acknowledged during the course of this book.

The case of dam-induced resettlement is outlined by Chris to Wet (Chapter 7). Whilst the overall figures of people displaced by dams in Africa is actually not high in comparison to other forms of displacement (less than 0.5 million), it has devastated a good number of communities. It exemplifies a failing of development in that in no instance of this type of development have all stakeholders been satisfied with the outcome. It is also clear that many more than those immediately resettled have been affected. The story of dam developments is one of a lack of consultation and participation, which is the precursor to impoverishment. The case of conservation-induced displacement by Kai Schmidt-Soltau (Chapter 8) is interesting in that only 54,000 people are in this instance indicated as having actually been relocated for the whole of Central Africa. If hosting area population impacts are taking into account figures are significantly higher, but this still clearly contrasts significantly with the magnitude of conflict related displacements dealt with elsewhere in the book. Sometimes more than half a population of a country is displaced. For example, if a fuller list of categories of internally displaced people is taken into account, as well as refugees who crossed international borders, it is estimated that over half of Mozambique’s 14 million population were displaced during the war there (Green 1992). Similar magnitudes apply to Angola and other African nations, not directly dealt with by this book. Nonetheless,
displacement through conservation programs is clearly critical for this very much smaller group. Also, the point that conservation is for global gain, but at local cost, is a poignant and fair one highlighted in this chapter, and one that demands a rethink in terms of wider resonance beyond conservation areas. For example, further contributions with this logic would need to extend the argument to the potential impacts on African displacements of climate change should this be increased further by combinations of industrialized nations’ pollutants and loss of vegetation. This middle section of the book is useful in that it alerts us that displacement risks are also through economic and nationalistic development, and through conservation in the name of nature. Also, some dam and conservation projects have included a measure of participation and some benefits, which is rarely the case for other forms of displacement.

Part Three addresses the implications of displacement induced inwards migration for host populations based on a case study from northern Kenya and two from Ethiopia. Whilst much of the book has understandably focused on vulnerability and negative displacement impacts we start to get a better glimpse here of refugee and host community adaptation and resilience. Itaru Ohta’s case study of the Turkana and Sudanese refugees in northern Kenya is the clearest example (Chapter 9). The explanation of there being a relatively successful relationship between refugee and host, despite some notable impacts and incidents, is convincingly explained in term of the self-assuredness of the Turkana. Individual characteristics of hosting groups are therefore seen as one of the keys to possible reduced problems with hosting communities. A further example would be the case of rural displaced populations in areas of Mozambique’s cities in the 1990s (Collins 1998). Little conflict between the displaced and hosting group and little difference in vulnerability could be explained in terms of both communities subsisting at a common level below that of absolute poverty. Each community experienced common risks to health and wellbeing largely determined by their immediate environmental and economic context. But, these examples contrast dramatically with the very different situation described by Eisei Kurimoto (Chapter 10). Here a story of uneven opportunity and imposed resettlement categories lies behind a detailed account
of the complex emergency of Gambela, Ethiopia. This demonstrates how human adaptability and tolerances can break down with tragic consequences when overridden by overpowering structural or political forces, including in the management of humanitarian aid. At this point the role of the international ‘contribution’ is also brought under the spotlight. Yntiso Gebre’s recounting the suffering caused by imposed settlement in Ethiopia provides a further example of how politics and aid can be destructive of human coping in adversity (Chapter 11).

Surprisingly, there is no concluding chapter, although some of the summing up is provided in the introduction. In my view it would have been possible to summarize further some of what is presented here in terms of the key displacement risks across this work. The opportunity is modestly seized upon here, and is certainly in one way or the other indicated within the various contributions. In my view the message is that displacement risks in Africa are about a lack of security, reconciliation of conflicting groups, accountability of governments and humanitarian assistance, and of a sense of justice more widely. Where issues are continuously left unresolved it leads to further perpetuation of displacement risks and outcomes. To some extent the continent is facing the scenario of ongoing inter-ethnic alliances and feuds in a context of changing local and regional structures and political economies, including that presented by aid. This is in part the scenario referred to in this book by Gebre as ‘resettlement-induced deterioration of livelihood’ (p.375). However, refugee situations are highly diverse, such that homogenizations of displacement conditions or the refugee process of survival might not be helpful, although refugeedom tends to cause that. Furthermore, refugees aspire to much more than just survival and coping.

For such an extensive book, it is perhaps unfair to flag what might be missing here. However, by way of constructive comment I would point out that it is generally short in examining displacement also as a state of underlying development trends. The book concentrated on the more quantifiable physical examples missing the opportunity to comment on underlying creeping displacements of development of underdevelopment and contemporary globalization processes (of economies and cultures) that impact on the continent. It seems incomplete not to include analysis of displacement of life and
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livelihood through for example free trade and structural adjustment programs. Whilst the book does mildly imply that displacement occurs in situ and through misguided development action, it neither ventures far into the issue of displacement as cultural rape. The full meaning of location and ancestry, of nature, culture and spirit in relation to land, kin and origin, would perhaps be beyond the scope of this text. However, there is some hint in this direction in the work of Kibreab. To assess meaning in people’s sense of belonging and security, and the impact and recovery from displacement, we would probably need to enter beyond the domains of exogenous written word. Furthermore it could be argued that to capture the essence of displacement more thoroughly it would require contributions from a wider group of African scholars and non-formalized thinkers from communities experiencing displacement. The contributors are most likely sensitized to the participant voice in their various fields of expertise, but the written contributions often lack evidence of this in constructing this book. There is also surprisingly little on health despite the fact that HIV/AIDS as with other previous diseases is displacing and impoverishing on a far greater scale than most of the other displacement examples used in this text. A more gendered view of displacement is also conspicuously absent although some contributors provide brief comment. It is perhaps also fair to point out that 11 of the 12 contributors are male. Beyond these observations as part of my critique, I found the book on the whole highly engaging and informative. Perhaps it is best classified as a contribution to a subject area for which there is clearly plenty of room for further exploration, understanding, and influencing of change.

References
