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Robert Stoddard

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, rstoddard1@unl.edu

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Refugees: A Third World Dilemma

John R. Rogge, editor

Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield 1987. xi and 370 pp, tables, figs., ackn., biblio., index, contributors. \$43.50, cloth.

The mass movement of humans takes on considerable geographic importance because of the associated changes in the source area, in the region of destination, and in the people who leave a home territory for a foreign environment. These repercussions are often accentuated when people are forced to flee their homeland and to beg for asylum in a strange setting. With the number of contemporary refugees in the world greatly exceeding the volume of voluntary international

migration, the need among geographers for information about refugees is great.

Easily accessible materials that summarize geographic knowledge about the refugee phenomenon are generally lacking (although there are a few exceptions, such as the article by George J. Demko and William B. Wood, "International Refugees: A Geographical Perspective," *Journal of Geography* 1987, 86:5, 225-28). *Refuges: A Third World Dilemma*, a collection of thirty papers about various aspects of refugee experiences, only partially fills this information gap.

Informational limitations result from: 1) the multitude of authors, 2) the organization by region, and 3) the lack of a consistent geographical emphasis. Unless an editor demands considerable alterations, the first limitation is common. As frequently occurs in the publication of conference proceedings or a collection of articles from diverse sources, the chapters are not well integrated. This results in a lack of cross-referencing, in somewhat contradictory statements, and in the repetition of several basic ideas.

In respect to the second limitation, the editor did briefly discuss his option of organizing the contents by topics or by regions. Although the regional organization makes it easy to acquire locational information, it complicates the goal of understanding the various components of the refugee phenomenon. Busy instructors who want to expand their knowledge about the principles of migration by focusing on the spatial and ecological behavior of refugees will have difficulty finding the pertinent sections in this book.

The lack of a consistent geographical emphasis (the third limitation listed here) is the most disconcerting aspect of the book. Several authors discuss historical backgrounds, governmental policies, socio-economic conditions, and/or psychological problems with virtually no comments about their associated geographic implications. This weakness is demonstrated by the lack of maps in many chapters. Too often the maps that are included only provide place names; they do not contribute to an analytical understanding of locational factors.

Unfortunately, one additional element that might be considered is the title. Indeed, Third World countries are the focus of all chapters (except the last four) and these countries are certainly bearing the brunt of hardships associated with refugee movements. But, given the magnitude of refugee problems and today's global interconnections and interdependency, one wonders if it is appropriate to imply that refugees impose a dilemma only for Third World countries.

In spite of these limitations, the book does provide valuable information about several aspects of refugee movements. For one, the complexity of the term is made apparent by the diversity of situations creating "refugees." In the past, except during wartime, refugees were usually a few individuals fleeing governmental persecution because of their political beliefs. Now most movements involve large populations (i.e., over several million), who may flee from a catastrophic event (e.g., famines, war), or from government and/or societal persecution, which threatens them economically and socially, as well as politically.

Furthermore, although the term normally refers to persons who move across international boundaries, the "refugee"

phenomenon can result in other ways. Certainly refugee-like conditions occur within countries, such as in India (Bengalis and others in Assam) and in Indonesia (involving Chinese minorities). In a few cases, people do not move but a boundary or political administration over a territory changes (illustrated in Palestine, by the non-Bengali community in Bangladesh, and by the creation of Homelands in South Africa).

Difficulty in defining the phenomenon is also illustrated by the following questions: What differentiates a "voluntary migrant" who seeks a place with better economic opportunities from a "refugee" who is "forced" to flee an area where basic needs cannot be satisfied? In what ways does the refugee phenomenon today differ from the forced movement of slaves and Native Americans of the past? At what stage does a resettled refugee become only an "ethnic minority" in the country of asylum?

Even though the book is not organized so each of these topics is discussed as a unit, the book does contain a good index, which allows readers to find discussions of such issues. Also, an extensive bibliography provides the base for additional research into several facets of the refugee dilemma. Certainly the book should be read by all who are interested in this important geographic problem.

Robert H. Stoddard, Department of Geography, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska.