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The Political Economy of Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

There are fundamental factors driving migration dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) that are either not perceptible to, or adequately captured by, academics and politicians. Although migration remains largely undocumented in SSA, making accurate data on the phenomenon extremely scant, it is generally known to be on the increase. The increasing trend of migratory patterns seems poised to remain irreversible, even uncontrollable, given the interplay of economic, social and environmental conditions in the region. These internal factors are reinforced by the menacing international economic arrangement, which simultaneously marginalises and incorporates the region, and in the process either exacerbates or creates further migratory conditions and population displacements.

By standard dictionary definition, an emigrant is 'a person coming to live permanently in a foreign country' (Hornby 1989). However, this study broadens the definition of emigration to cover people who move from one location to another within a particular country (intra-state migration); or from one country to another (international migration) either for permanent settlement or for temporary sojourn. Intra- or international migration can be voluntary or forced. Voluntary migrants are people whose movement is, strictly speaking, not spawned by conditions beyond their control but who, for sheer discretion, choose to relocate in other regions of their countries, or in another country. This category includes economic refugees. Irrespective of the initial intention to settle, voluntary emigrants can at any time return to their countries or regions of origin.

Involuntary emigrants on the other hand are those who are forced by factors and circumstances beyond their control to seek sanctuary in other parts of the country or beyond the borders of their countries of residence. This category includes refugees and internally displaced persons. According to the 1951 United Nations (UN) Convention on Refugees, and the Protocol of 1967, a refugee is

[Any] person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (UN Protocol of 1967 as quoted in Keely, 1981).

The UN's definition, however, seems narrow and limited in scope as it tends to exclude people fleeing for reasons other than political persecution. Several authors, including Keely, (1981) and Gordonker, (1987), have accordingly supplemented the UN definition with the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) 1967 extension. According to the extended definition of the OAU, a refugee is

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 [my emphasis] (OAU, 1969).

In terms of broadening its scope, the OAU definition is a significant improvement over the UN Protocol since besides people fleeing political persecution, it also covers people who seek sanctuary across their national borders for environmental, economic and political reasons. However, both definitions are still deficient because they emphasise the crossing of national borders as the main criterion for attaining refugee status, thus explicitly excluding internally displaced persons. For several reasons, displaced persons ought to be considered refugees. Practical experience shows that the plight and conditions of internally displaced persons are essentially the same, if often not worse, as those seeking refuge in other countries. Also, historically, the UNHCR, NGOs and other aid agencies have responded to the plight of, or treated, internally displaced persons with nearly the same urgency as those described as 'refugees' in the UN and OAU conventions. Moreover, like refugees, internally displaced people are unable to determine their destinations and there is a continual disjuncture between their location choice and the settlement location preferred by the host authorities (Gordenker, 1987). In addition, displaced people, like conventional refugees, are unable to return to their regions of origin until the conditions that precipitated their initial displacement are stabilised. Furthermore, conditions that create refugees are always those that displace people. And often, people remain displaced not because they choose not to take refuge in a neighbouring country, but because they are frequently unable to make the arduous journey to a neighboring country. In mid-1990, for example, Sierra Leone closed its borders to refugees fleeing the Liberian conflict apparently fearing the spillover effect of the conflict (Sorenson, 1994: 179). The stranded Liberians at the Sierra Leonean border became displaced people though they would have preferred to be conventional refugees. In short, there are compelling grounds for revisiting the largely obsolete conceptualisation on refugees.

Causal factors for migration in SSA

Conventional explanations and analysis of the causes of migration and population displacements in SSA have focused on economic, political, natural disasters and environmental factors. These factors are deemed to be either spawning or exacerbating intra-state and international migration. For example, in analysing the dynamics of emigration in SSA, Adepaju (1994) argues that economic, demographic, political and cultural factors are central to Africa's refugee, population displacement and migration problems. Similarly, in a seminal study on refugees and internally displaced people in Africa, Miller (1982) identifies civil and ethnic conflicts, colonial and racist rule, oppressive governments and environmental factors disasters as the main causes of Africa's refugee crisis. In much of contemporary Africa voluntary migration has been spawned by economic reasons, and has been towards the more economically viable countries such as the Republic of South Africa and Botswana. During the Apartheid years, international migration in southern Africa was dominated by labour movement from the 'labour reserve' countries, particularly Lesotho and Mozambique, to the South African mines (Wilson, 1972; Lacey, 1981; Matlosa 1996). This trend did not abate with the crumbling of apartheid in 1994 but was rather reinforced by new categories of emigrants whose motive, like migrant mineworkers, is predominantly economic.

However, the politico-economic and environmental factors often cited for SSA's social

displacements are not autonomous. Rather these factors are reflective of more fundamental factors, two of which are germane here: First there is a factor Doornbos (1990: 179) describes as the 'problem of the African state'. This problem in turn entails two critical and interrelated issues; namely, the state's partisan posture and consequently its inability to address, let alone resolve, underlying tensions in society (Chazan et al, 1988: 172) on the one hand; and its failure to respond urgently and effectively to the crumbling ecosystem through the establishment of credible environmental regimes on the other (Nyang'oro, 1996). The second major cause of SSA's migratory and refugee dilemma which is rather surreptitious or proximate and largely unobtrusive, is the hostility of the international economy which exerts various forms of economic pressures and which in the process induces or exacerbates migration. Before elucidating on this latter causal factor, we first expatiate on the more internal factor - the role of the state.

The problem of the State

a. The state's partisan posture

Historically, the post-colonial African state has neither been able to distribute the meagre political and economic resources of the state fairly among its diverse competing constituencies, nor promote fair competition for these resources. This failure has heightened tensions in society and has led to conflicts and wars, which inevitably displaced people or induced refugees and migration. The contestations and war that have characterised the politics of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad, Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Congo, which are among the leading net producers of conflict-generated refugees, are all either partially or totally rooted in state partisanship and its failure to respond to the 'heterogeneous social realities' of these countries (Akokpari, 1998). Rather than according equal opportunities for the various constituencies within its boundaries, the state either promotes its own agenda (which in most cases is synonymous with the interest of some constituencies), or becomes an overt executive instrument for furthering the sectional interest of a particular constituency. Examples from Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and South Africa may suffice to illustrate how state partiality has been responsible for conflicts and the induction of emigration and refugees.

The Liberian civil war, which raged between 1990 and 1997, was 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. According to Ofuatey-Kodjoe (1994), Tolbert entrenched Americo-Liberian dominance in both politics and in 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. Advancing his Krahn ethnic group, Doe gave it all top political and military appointments to the marginalisation 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, beside the thousands displaced internally, over 700,000 Liberians had fled to Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ghana, while a great number of the country's professionals migrated to the United States (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.

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. It has been documented that only three of Somalia's numerous clans - that of Barre, his mother, and his principal son-in-law - dominated the country's politics. From among these clans were drawn members of the secret police, military intelligence and holders of all top administrative and political posts (Adam, 1995: 72). The lot of the remaining clans was marginalisation and their resentments were duly rewarded with repression and executions (Lewis, 1988: 222). Barre's reign of systematised 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.

The politics of exclusion practised in Somalia under Barre was similar to what obtained in Rwanda and Burundi which, since the 1960s, have seen thousands of their citizens migrate or take refuge in neighbouring countries because of incessant ethnic wars. In the main, the conflicts in these two countries have been between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi communities (Newbury, 1995: 12-17). The stage for conflict is set when one group dominated power and both excluded and persecuted the rival group. The scale of persecution heightened since the late 1980s as power oscillated between the rival groups. In early 1994, close to one million Rwandan Tutsis were massacred by the then Hutu government and its militias, apparently in retaliation for earlier Tutsi genocide. This development forced thousands of Tutsis to flee the country. With the capture of power by the Ugandan-backed Tutsi rebels, The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), in July 1994, thousands of Hutus fearing retribution fled into neighbouring Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia.

The political economy of Post-Apartheid South Africa induces many contradictions in migration, one of which is critical for this study. South Africa's relative economic buoyancy in a region of declining economies has become a centripetal force attracting both skilled and unskilled labour which use formal and informal migratory routes into the country. These emigrants come not only from the surrounding Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, but also from as far as Nigeria and Mali. The Pretoria-based Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) estimates that between April 1994 when the country transitioned to black majority rule and December 1996, no fewer than 5 million immigrants, mostly illegal, had entered the country (*Africa Today*, March/April, 1997: 35). Despite Pretoria's use of draconian measures, including electrified fences, it has not been able to stem the massive influx of illegal emigrants. Between 1992 and 1995 approximately 50,000 illegal emigrants were deported from South Africa annually (de Vletter, 1995: 27). In recent years sport is providing a new entry gate for many young sportsmen, particularly footballers, from other African countries into South Africa. Nearly all top South African football clubs now have foreign players, mostly from Burkina Faso, Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At the same time certain centrifugal forces spawn the emigration of South Africans. Notable among these are crime and violence which, according to a report of the World Economic Forum (WEF), are not only on the increase, but also becoming organised (*Electronic Mail and Guardian*, 13 February 1998). Violent crime has become a nation-wide spectre. The predominantly white farming community has become a target constituency. A report released by the South African Agricultural Union earlier this year revealed that 2,730 farm attacks were carried out on farms between 1992 and 1997. The report further revealed that 464 had been murdered between 1994 and February 1998, a figure which has since risen to 554 (*Electronic*

Mail and Guardian, 21 August 1998). Private security consultants and the South African Police Services (SAPS) both agree that 99 percent of these murders are not politically motivated but attributable to crime. Senseless murders are not only the nightmare of the new South Africa; drugs, theft, rape and AIDS have compounded the security crisis of the country. In the midst of a seemingly crumbling security environment, large numbers of the mainly white professional class have either migrated or are intending to migrate. According to conservative estimates of the South African Central Statistical Service (CSS), 8,000 of these, including accountants, engineers, medical practitioners and teachers, left the country between January and September of 1996 (Edmunds, 1997).

Thus, wherever actual conflicts have generated refugees, or where threats of uncertainty and insecurity have compelled skilled and unskilled labour to migrate, the responsibility of the state is almost always evident. There are, however, exceptions. 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).

b. The state's failure to establish credible environmental regimes

State responsibility for the creation of refugees and migratory conditions results not only from its failure to remain neutral or mitigate conflicts, but also in its adoption of ad hoc environmental policies, thereby inducing refugees and migration either proactively or reactively. Although environmental factors have produced fewer emigrants and refugees than conflicts, ecological pressures on population displacements and demographic changes 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 ten 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 to 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 ongoing 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 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 movements 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 were to engage 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 1992).

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 just a quarter of its original size within a decade (Nyang'oro, 1995:203). Today some observers contend that the threat posed by deforestation to the survival of the Ghanaian state is more serious than the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Bour, 1998:5). 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 as opposed to \$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, 1995: 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 Nation Environmental Protection (UNEP)

study warns that at the global deforestation rate of 6 percent 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 the 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 the 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, conflicts and migration

New trends in the global economy, reflecting globalisation, the upsurge in the use of biotechnology, the declining importance of Africa's primary products and Africa's systematic marginalisation in the world's economy, are potential causes of tensions and conflict. These trends not only leave the African state with very little 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 margins, and on the other hand, incorporate it via structural adjustment, underscores the continent's uncertain posture in the new international division of labour (NIDL). 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 marginalisation 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 percent 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, 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, exacerbates scarcity and intensify distributional conflicts. Thus, as Africa's debt grows concomitantly with depressing economic and environmental conditions, and as poverty exacerbates the despondency of the majority of the population, tensions and contestations are inevitable (Copson, 1994: 90). Some afro-pessimists, including Kaplan (1994), argue that these indicators are precursors of an impending explosion of social anarchy. Whichever scenario prevails, the induction of refugees and emigration is a mathematical certainty.

While conflicts predated Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), proliferation of the latter, underscored by throbbing economic austerity, along with the tendency to compound rather than ameliorate the debt crisis, increase SSA's susceptibility to conflicts (Shaw, 1994; Adekanye, 1995). Exhausted by the stressful fight with 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, capitalising on the state's apparent fatigue, rebel movements overrun national capitals, some with minimal resistance as in Rwanda; declared autonomy as in Eritrea; and forced the state to make concessions as in Sierra Leone but produced 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).

One effect of SAP was to cause a phenomenal expansion in the informal economy. As economic opportunities declined and prospects for formal employment shrank, the informal economy became the alternative for economic survival. Accordingly, informal economic transactions have increased not only within countries, but also across borders and spelling critical implications for cross border informal migration. Thus in almost all SSA countries, in particular those following structural adjustment policies, informal economic activities have become the norm rather than the exception. Young school graduates drift from the rural to urban centres in the hope of securing formal employment only to realise that such jobs are simply non-existent. Rather than returning home, they take refuge in the informal market and remain in their new destinations in anticipation of making a living.

Cross border informal economic activities have also expanded. These transactions facilitate informal migration and involve a wide variety of merchandise, including drugs and narcotics. Attempts by SSA governments to curtail informal cross-border trade are unlikely to be effective. Borderlines between countries are vast which, along with shrinking resources, make African governments unable to secure the necessary infrastructure for effective border patrols. Moreover, African borders are artificial, many of them dividing ethnic groups. The presence of kinsmen and tribesmen across the border makes it fairly easy to engage in economic activities while evading custom duties (Brown, 1995: 230). Also, smuggling across borders has become lucrative. Because of tariffs, smuggled goods attract higher prices outside the country. Thus, as cross-border informal activities increase, so is the increase in the number of informal migrants.

Political democratisation thrust on Africa from the 1990s as corollary to SAPs, has also produced two new protagonists - the state and civil society. The opening up of the political space has emboldened civil society to wage war against the oppressive African state. The state, as in for example, Abacha's 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 - marginalisation, 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 the refugee crisis.

Implications of the refugee crisis

(i) 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 valuable possessions to embark on a journey whose destination is unknown, compounded by the 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 at 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 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), is more revealing. This analysis shows that 59 percent of the refugees were children below 15 years, 32 percent were female adults and only 9 percent were male adults, many 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 one million Rwandan refugees who poured into eastern Zaire within four days in July 1994, died shortly of cholera, dysentery and malnutrition (UNHCR, 1996: 18). Although the epidemic was eventually brought under control, an average of 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 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. This sets 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. Between 1985 and 1995, for example, Zambian universities lost more than 200 lecturers, forcing the closure of some departments. Similarly, the massive exodus of health workers almost paralysed the country's health services. In the final analysis, the development efforts of the home country are seriously impeded.

At the same time, migration spawns benefits for the supplying country, although this fact is not often recognised. Many economically less viable countries depend heavily on migrant remittances. Lesotho, for example, has about a quarter of its working age population (approximately 100,000) working on South African mines. Since 1976, the government of Lesotho has instituted a policy of Compulsory Deferred Payments (CDP) by which through a

bilateral agreement with Pretoria, 60 percent of the migrant wages would be paid through the Bank of Lesotho in Maseru. Migrant labourers were therefore compelled to draw large percentages of their salaries from Lesotho. Although this became a source of grievance for the workers (which compelled the Lesotho government to reduce the CDP to 30 percent in 1991), it also became a major source of government revenue through interest payments. According to Matlosa (1996: 181-182), CDP to Lesotho amounted to R444 million, R264 million and R276 million in 1990, 1991 and 1995 respectively. Moreover, migrant remittances sustain many unemployed Basotho. One study estimates that each migrant miner supports between 10 and 15 dependants (Coplan and Thoalane, 1994).

Mozambique is also highly dependent on migrant labour, whose earnings is estimated to account for about one-third of the country's foreign exchange receipts (de Vletter, 1995: 22). Similarly, Charlick (1994) has noted that the economy of Niger depends heavily on Niger nationals working in Nigeria. Although Ghana and Nigeria are resource-rich, most people in these countries, particularly those in the rural areas, rely to a large extent on the remittances of their kinsmen and family members in the diaspora for sustenance. On the aggregate, however, emigrants and particularly refugees tend to pose major challenges not only to the UNHCR and aid workers, but also to the host government.

ii) Implications for the host country

Emigrants, especially 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. Suddenly having 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 80s, 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 have 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, relations 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.

Secondly, 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 privatisation 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 on 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 and immigration.

Tensions between local populations and refugees are not uncommon. These may be minimised 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 over 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 come to constitute a source of concern for the host government. 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 little surprise that the first diagnosed AIDS cases in Ghana in 1986, for example, were women who had been engaging in prostitution in Ivory Coast, 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 provides 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 enhances their ability to circumvent official regulations. Moreover, the pathetic situation of refugees frequently renders them inviolable 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 of vegetation and trees. Large camps require large tracts of land. Second, grass is used for roofing temporary homes and trees are felled for firewood. Often, when firewood become scarce, animal dung, previously used as fertiliser, is substituted (Ghimire, 1994: 566). Refugees may also set up small farms or grazing grounds and thus facilitate deforestation. Thirdly, 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 the 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. Yet, this is not to suggest that no positive gains are associated with migration. On the contrary, there are net benefits which may be direct or indirect to the receiving country. While the South African economy feels the brunt of emigrants, its mining industry, for example, has benefited tremendously from migrant labour. In 1991 foreign miners accounted for 45 percent of the total labour of 354,452 in the gold mines, and 18.6 percent of the 35,406 employed in the coal mines (de Vletter, 1995: 25). Mine authorities have relied on migrant labourers because until recently these were not unionised and therefore could not make strong demands for wage increases or improved conditions of service. Besides, the peculiar history of South African educational system has necessitated the acceptance of large numbers of foreign professionals into the educational and health sectors. Since 1980, Zimbabwe, for example, has supplied South Africa with nearly 15,000 professionals, including doctors, dentists, engineers, teachers and veterinarians (de Vletter, 1995: 22). Most of these accept postings to rural areas where white south Africans will not normally go. Other countries like Botswana and Lesotho also depend on large numbers of professional emigrants to staff their health and educational institutions. Large proportions of the teaching staff in the University of Botswana and the National University of Lesotho are foreign nationals.

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 the 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.

The pressures to meet adjustment conditionalities and external debt obligations reduce the ability of African governments to take 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 minimise 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, population displacements and migration.

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