

The African Refugees (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023) 590 pp, ISBN 978-0-253-06441-7 (hpk), ISBN 978-0-253-06442-4 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-253-06443-1 (ebk)

In *African Refugees*, authors Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso provide a comprehensive exploration of African refugee experiences, shedding light on the often-overlooked global challenge of forced migration in Africa. The book encompasses five parts with eighteen chapters, each offering vital insights into the African refugee experience.

Part one, *Context*, comprising chapters 1-5, constructs the essential backdrop for understanding the African refugee situation. In *Refugeehood in Africa*, the authors challenge migration stereotypes and emphasise the diverse factors driving African migrations, including economic opportunities. They link African refugee movements to colonialism's impact on borders and ethnic tensions, asserting that refugee populations and forced migrations are integral to contemporary international relations. This is supported by striking statistics: nearly 80 million people forcibly displaced globally, with sub-Saharan Africa hosting 39 percent. This fact underscores the continent's enduring struggle with refugee crises since the late 1950s (p.4).

In the subsequent chapters, *Refugee Studies*, and *African Refugee Studies*, the authors explore the historical roots of African refugee research, tracing its historical development, major debates, and contemporary trends. They acknowledge its Eurocentric origins and advocate for inclusivity from Global South institutions and African scholars to diversify perspectives, include indigenous viewpoints, and expand data sources. Their emphasis on incorporating refugee narratives into research is a vital contribution to the field.

In the chapters, *Human Rights Instruments on African Refugees* and *States and Policy Frameworks*, the authors conduct a comprehensive analysis of the challenges facing African refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the context of human rights instruments and policy frameworks. They address the historical context, the legal framework, and the complex interplay of issues, including political instability, economic decline, authoritarianism, and ethnoreligious divisions. They stress the need for balancing global human rights principles with local considerations in responding to refugee displacement. Their insights highlight the difficulties in translating international obligations into national policies and underscore the limited enforcement and monitoring of international frameworks.

In Part II, *Making Refugees*, which comprises chapters 6 to 8, the book delves into the historical and political factors behind displacement in Africa. '*Colonialism and the Making of Refugees in Africa*' and '*Postcolonial Politics, Wars, and African Refugee Problems*'

chapters underline the critical connection between historical legacies and present refugee crises. The authors argue for a comprehensive understanding of forced displacement rooted in the complex impacts of colonialism, examining its historical origins and economic motivations behind European expansion. They also highlight colonialism's enduring influence on postcolonial politics, contributing to ongoing regional turmoil and refugee challenges. The authors analyse generations of conflicts, from liberation wars to post-independence disputes, emphasizing the need for sustainable solutions.

In the contribution on *Internal Displacement in Africa*, the authors deeply explore the historical context, causes, and consequences of internal displacement. They argue that internal displacement is a precursor to cross-border refugee movements, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging internally displaced individuals. This perspective shift recognizes the interplay between various displacement triggers like conflict, natural disasters, and economic factors. The complexity of internal displacement in Africa, often resulting from the convergence of conflict, climate change, and economic factors, is underscored. Compelling statistics reveal that internal displacement in Africa in 2020 surpassed global refugee numbers. Case studies from Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, and Somalia offer practical insights into the diverse causes and consequences of internal displacement, highlighting the need for peace and stability among displaced populations.

In Part III of the book, *Displaced Lives* (chapters 9 to 13), the analysis shifts to African refugees in camps and cities, highlighting unique challenges for women and youth while showcasing their resilience and creativity.

Refugee Camps and Settlements in Africa explores the housing challenges in camps, settlements, and self-established communities. It discusses the advantages and drawbacks of different housing options and highlights the vulnerabilities faced by refugees and host countries, including xenophobia, overcrowding, and limited access to essential services. The concept of refoulement, which involves forcibly returning refugees to places where they might be persecuted or harmed, is explored, underscoring the importance of international condemnation of such practices and adherence to the non-refoulement principle in international law.

In contrast, the chapter on *Urban Refugees in Africa: Challenges and Solutions* turns the spotlight on the often-overlooked experiences of urban refugees. It exposes disparities in refugee status determination, dispels the common assumption that refugees are predominantly located in camps, and reveals the significant population of refugees residing in urban areas. This shift widens the discussion on forced migration, recognizing the

influence of urbanization on these experiences and the unique challenges and opportunities it presents. Additionally, it acknowledges the complexities of distinguishing refugees from economic migrants in urban settings, emphasizing the need for tailored solutions to address the unique protection needs and integration challenges faced by urban refugee populations.

In *African Refugee Women: Gendering Policy and Protection*, the analysis challenges stereotypes and acknowledges the diverse roles, agency, and resilience of African refugee women. It emphasizes the significant presence of African refugee women, who make up around 50% of the refugee population (p.310). The chapter advocates for gender-sensitive policies, emphasizing the need for an intersectional feminist approach to include refugee women's voices in decision-making and address their unique challenges, such as gender-based violence, limited access to reproductive health services, and economic opportunities. This perspective is essential because gender dynamics profoundly influence the refugee experience and highlights the importance of a comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach to refugee protection.

Turning to the discussion on *African Refugee Youth*, the authors address the challenges faced by young African refugees and the importance of family and community support networks in building their resilience. They also explore how religion, cultural values, and personal traits like outlook, intelligence, and altruism contribute to their resilience. This analysis highlights the demographic significance of Africa's youth while emphasizing their specific challenges, such as limited access to education. This underscores the injustice of denying them basic educational opportunities and raises concerns about potential security risks posed by a population of unskilled and uneducated youth. The perspective acknowledges the untapped potential of young refugees to contribute to their communities and host countries, with education being crucial in unlocking this potential.

The authors analyse culture and creative arts as coping mechanisms for refugees in their chapter on *Hope in Displacement: Refugees and Cultures of Creativity*. They discuss the adaptability and fluidity of culture in forced displacement, emphasizing its role in both causing and alleviating displacement. The chapter explores cultural conflicts and targeting during violence and genocide, highlighting the importance of creative activities like music, poetry, dance, and visual arts as essential coping mechanisms for refugees. These activities enable refugees to express themselves, find solace, and protect their cultural identity, demonstrating the transformative power of culture and the creative arts in forced displacement. Creativity is positioned as a vital tool for closure and fostering optimism for the future, with various functions in refugee camps, including economic and educational aspects. The chapter also addresses the need to dispel negative stereotypes about migrants

and preserve cultural identity in the face of cultural disconnection and hybrid identities resulting from displacement.

Part IV, *Protection and Solutions*, covering chapters 14 to 16, offers a thorough examination of topics such as refugee protection, management, durable solutions, and their connection to the development challenges faced by African refugees. It assesses the policies of African states, the international community, and their alignment with the Global Compact on Refugees.

In their chapter on *Refugee Protection and Management*, the authors advocate for a holistic approach that emphasizes early intervention and cooperation among states, international organizations, and civil society. They focus on the international framework and developments in Africa, highlighting the responsibility of the international community in safeguarding refugees. This includes legal recognition, identification, remedies, safety, humanitarian aid, and durable solutions. The perspective stresses the need to provide refugees with the same rights and freedoms as citizens expect from their governments.

The authors clarify the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees' role in designating the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the principal guardian of refugee protection. They trace the UNHCR's evolution from aiding European refugees during the Cold War to becoming a global force. The chapter highlights the UNHCR's active engagement with diverse stakeholders, stressing collaboration with international bodies, regional groups, and NGOs. It acknowledges both successes, like aiding East Bengali refugees in 1971 and Burmese refugees in 1978-79, and criticisms, particularly its emphasis on humanitarian relief over security and development.

This chapter highlights the transformation of the UNHCR's role in Africa, shifting towards a broader humanitarian focus influenced by the 1969 OAU Convention. It addresses contemporary challenges, such as political shifts, diminished consensus on humanitarian efforts, and obstacles to international cooperation, while emphasizing the UNHCR's ongoing significance as a global player responsible for emergency aid, technical support, and legal protection. It also delves into durable refugee solutions, integrating the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and reinforcing the 1951 Convention's implementation. The chapter explores the politics of refugee management in Africa, covering concepts like self-reliance, burden-sharing, and the mutual benefits for refugees and host communities. It acknowledges the importance of addressing root causes, amplifying the voices of displaced groups, and maximizing the benefits of migration for both refugees and host communities.

In *Durable Solutions and the Crisis of Development*, the book explores the pivotal role of durable solutions in refugee management, aiming to ease refugee suffering and support their

return to normal lives. It thoroughly examines the three classic durable solutions—voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement—and their associated intricacies and challenges. The book also acknowledges other short- and medium-term solutions that have been tried with varying degrees of success. It advocates for a comprehensive, context-sensitive approach to durable solutions, emphasizing the need for coordinated efforts among host countries.

In the chapter entitled *Home, Return, and Postrelocation*, the authors delve into how displacement impacts individuals' sense of "home," considering cultural, emotional, and social ties. They also explore how host country conditions affect refugees' views of home and the challenges of relocation. The chapter rigorously analyses refugees' desire to return to their home countries, considering factors like peace and essential amenities. Additionally, it highlights that refugees' perception of "home" varies based on the duration of their exile. The analysis emphasizes that returning "home" involves a complex journey, extending beyond the physical place to reviving ancestral systems and cultural heritage.

Part V, *Conclusion*, encompassing chapters on *Citizenship, Rights, and Development*, and *The Future: Ending Africa's Refugee Crisis*, marks the book's final section. It offers recommendations for addressing Africa's refugee crisis by reshaping state-society relations, promoting human rights, and seeking comprehensive solutions. The authors stress the significance of citizenship beyond legal status, analysing historical and contemporary contexts in African nations. They assert that citizenship transcends national boundaries and explore the impact of social identity manipulation on governance and human rights violations in displacement, and they deepen the discussion by considering various factors such as security, the Human Development Index, ethnic patronage, modernization theory, climate change, technological readiness, and demographic shifts.

In their final remarks, the authors present a comprehensive roadmap to tackle Africa's refugee crisis, highlighting the importance of addressing displacement root causes, protecting human rights, and promoting international cooperation. They stress the need for affluent nations to support refugee aid, update legal frameworks, prioritize girls' education in camps, and shift towards long-term development and skills training to empower refugees and reduce displacement.

In summary, *African Refugees* by Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso offers a comprehensive exploration of African refugee experiences, with an emphasis on incorporating the voices of refugees. While it can be repetitive at times, the book challenges stereotypes, promotes inclusive solutions, and makes a significant contribution to refugee studies. It is an essential resource for scholars, policymakers, and humanitarian

organizations seeking insights into the challenges African refugees face in their pursuit of safety, dignity, and a brighter future.

Dr Mebratu Kelecha

Research Fellow at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa (FLIA),
London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).