

Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid. By Sarah Kenyon Lischer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. xii + 204pp. \$35. ISBN 0 8014 4285 0.

It is now almost a decade since the refugee camps of Eastern Zaire were at the epicentre of the regionalization of the Rwandan civil war. The failure of the international community to respond to the presence of armed elements in the camps resulted not only in the violation of a catalogue of refugee protection principles, but an escalation of the violence that soon dragged the sub-region into a protracted conflict.

Sarah Kenyon Lischer's *Dangerous Sanctuaries* cogently argues that these events should not simply be discounted as an anomaly. By turning a powerful analytical lens to the problem of refugee camp militarization in Central Africa and elsewhere, Lischer makes a significant and timely contribution to the academic and policy debate on the relationship between refugee movements and state security. The book poses three central questions: 'Under what conditions do refugee crises lead to the spread of civil war across borders? How can refugee relief organizations respond when militants use humanitarian assistance as a tool of war? What government actions can prevent or reduce the spread of conflict?' (p. 2) The book's response to these questions makes it an important read for researchers, policy makers and practitioners engaged in refugee protection, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and humanitarian programming.

Lischer begins by emphasizing that during the Cold War, a wide range of exiled communities in all regions of the Third World received political and material support from Western governments. With the end of the Cold War, Lischer highlights how Western governments now 'often fund international humanitarian organizations as a substitute for political or military involvement' (p. 5). Such an emphasis on humanitarian responses to political situations, however, can often be 'not only inadequate, it can be counterproductive' (p. 6).

Also inadequate, argues Lischer, have been recent explanations of the militarization of refugee camps and populations. Typically, such explanations have emphasized socio-economic aspects of the population, such as the size of refugee camps and the lack of economic opportunities for refugees themselves. Lischer counters that 'the political context of the crisis better explains the spread of civil war arising from refugee crises' (p. 10), and emphasizes the

importance of factors such as the origins of the refugee crisis, the policy of the receiving state and the influence of external state and non-state actors.

Central to Lischer's work is the argument that the militarization of refugee populations is not inevitable. In fact, one of the book's most valuable contributions is its examination of a number of parallel instances where refugee populations both did and did not contribute to conflict. In this way, Lischer presents a compelling explanation as to which populations are more likely to become militarized and why. She argues that in instances where refugee populations exist as part of a strategy of an exiled political organization, what she terms a 'state-in-exile', and in instances where host governments are either unwilling or unable to prevent militarization, refugee populations are very likely to be engaged in violent conflict. In contrast, in cases where refugees have fled generalized violence, and where the host state is both willing and able to exercise its responsibilities towards the security of the refugee population, the potential for violence is lower.

Lischer's consideration of three cases—Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran; Rwandan and Burundian refugees in Zaire and Tanzania; and Bosnian Muslim refugees in the Balkans—effectively demonstrates the efficacy of this distinction. By so doing, she provides analytically rigorous categorizations that will facilitate the consideration of current and future refugee situations.

Lischer then turns to the question of how humanitarian agencies should respond to the militarization of refugee camps, and specifically the highly complex challenge of separating and excluding armed elements from the refugee population. Here, Lischer argues that humanitarian organizations 'cannot approach their work in isolation from the political and military context surrounding it' (p. 143). She concludes that a more politically-savvy response from humanitarian agencies could involve, as a last resort, using humanitarian aid as leverage against reluctant political actors, while recognizing the ethical and practical challenges such a response would entail.

While the book revisits a number of familiar cases, it offers new insight and makes a significant contribution to a pressing debate. However, it is not without its shortcomings. In particular, the book could have done more to answer the third question it poses: what role can states play in reducing the potential security implications of refugee movements? While Lischer clearly outlines how both host and donor governments have interests at stake in responding to refugee movements, questions remain about the dynamics of those interests. Also, while she notes early in the work that 'qualitative and quantitative differences exist among incidences of theft, banditry, rioting and international war' (p. 11), she pays limited attention to these more indirect security concerns. Given that states like Tanzania have justified significant restrictions on refugee populations on the basis of the incidence of localized crime and insecurity, Lischer's framework would do well to incorporate an understanding of a wider spectrum of security concerns.

These points do not, however, detract from the overall significance of the book. More than ten years after the failure to respond to the eruption of

conflict in Central Africa, the international policy community remains at odds on how to respond effectively to the question of refugee camp militarization. Contemporary cases around the world indicate that the problem is not diminishing in significance. Those engaged in the formulation of practical responses to the challenges posed by refugee camp militarization would be well-advised to use Lischer's latest work as a point of departure.

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