

Nicholas Van Hear, Christopher McDowell, eds. *Catching Fire: Containing Forced Migration in a Volatile World*. Program in Migration and Refugee Studies Series. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006. 280 pp. \$32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7391-1244-1.



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A World of Forced Migration Complexes

The definition of “genocide” focuses first and foremost on the destruction of groups rather than on the flight of refugees and internally displaced persons, but mass violence has often generated such population flows. The Armenian Genocide was one such case that generated massive migration of internally displaced persons and refugees. Several phases of mass violence during and after the Second World War had the same effects, and other notable examples of mass violence since the Second World War have likewise sent hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of civilians on desperate journeys to find security. *Catching Fire* provides a broad overview of the effects of mass violence. This collection of essays is not a study of genocide or mass violence, but *Catching Fire* makes clear the terrible burdens posed by forced migration as well as the difficulties responding to forced migration.

Catching Fire will likely prove of most interest to practitioners and theorists concerned with refugees and internally displaced persons. For researchers investigating genocide, the book provides a clear overview of the

complexity of modern forced migration. It is organized as a series of case studies by various authors. Taking a global perspective, the book brings together case studies that focus on Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and East Timor. The choice of examples is itself instructive; the sheer geographic range dispels any assumption that forced migration is a problem unique to any single region or continent.

The wide-ranging group of authors includes specialists in migration, international law, and human rights, who worked as part of an international collaborative project. The essays examine the causes and human experience of displacement as well as responses by governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including relief work and efforts at encouraging return and repatriation. The reader interested in prevention will gain an overview of efforts to mitigate the effects of mass violence, though the essays generally stand back from labeling the form of particular cases of mass violence.

Catching Fire provides a model of what the editors

call âforced migration complexesâ (pp. 1-3). As the term suggests, varied factors have generated forced migration: civil wars, invasion, violent campaigns by militia forces, and various state programs of relocating and concentrating populations. Some exacerbating causes of forced migration, such as drought, are not related to genocide, mass violence, or ethnic cleansing at all, but the cases scrutinized in *Catching Fire* all bear the marks of human agency: by its very nature, forced migration cannot be accidental. This book does not, by and large, seek to categorize different forms of mass violence, but much of the violence and flight in Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Burundi took an ethnic form, and this was sometimes true of Afghanistan as well.

Catching Fire builds a picture of overburdened and sometimes shattered states that foster violence and instability, leading to forced migration. The authors of the essays in no way excuse state actors or rebel movements responsible for driving forced migration—the reader learns of violent paramilitaries. But at the same time, forced migration thrives amid instability in settings where some states lose the effective control of many standard state

functions. Afghanistan furnishes an extreme case of governments that are either fragile or altogether lacking in international recognition.

Although the case studies in *Catching Fire* show a wide array of responses by varied NGOs, governments, and external powers to forced migration crises, a more expansive final analysis of common findings would have been useful. It is clear, however, that successful repatriation remains a persistent problem. Once forced from their homes, victims of forced migration may long remain apart from the rest of society even after the initial shock of relocation. Competition for resources may soon fray bonds of solidarity between new hosts and migrants. At the same time, responses to forced migration can aim beyond merely addressing specific crises and venture into the realm of âtransforming whole societies,â a goal that Nicholas Van Hear notes can either bring criticisms of âneo-imperialism or re-colonizationâ or lead to hopes of providing sufficient security and resources to end the very practice of forced migration (pp. 216, 220-221).

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