

## Book/article review

***This Place will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia.* (2004). Laura C. Hammond. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.**

Laura Hammond's book is a study of a community of Tigrayan refugees as they re-establish themselves after being repatriated to a new place in their 'native' country of Ethiopia. It is a must read for social scientists and humanitarian workers involved in resettlement and reconstruction in conflict-affected areas. Her analysis of the dynamics of repatriation and resettlement focuses on the anthropology of the family, including both gender issues and religious practice. Hammond chronicles family struggles and the challenges that are overcome as people transform an unknown space into a personalized place that they eventually will call home. She calls this process *emplacement*. By focusing on multiple experiences, including the refugee camp experience, the return journey, and the resettlement process, she adds a unique and comprehensive account to the literature on migration and refugee studies. The author follows a group of families from the refugee camps in Sudan to a new returnee settlement called Ada Bai in the north-western corner of Ethiopia (not far from the borders of Sudan and Eritrea). Under the best circumstances, repatriation and resettlement are difficult processes for communities returning to their natal villages. Returning to a place where returnees have no family, no history, and thus no sense of place, presents unique challenges to promoting successful reintegration. Hammond demonstrates the

creativity of residents as they draw on available resources and social networks on both sides of the Ethiopian – Sudanese border to turn Ada Bai into a liveable place. Nowhere is this demonstrated more saliently than in Chapter Four, '*The household food economy*'. Ten families kept income and expenditure diaries for three months, throughout the dry (food scarce) season, to assist Hammond in understanding the mechanisms and survival strategies that families use to make ends meet in a new environment. These strategies involve subtle changes to the norms of food sharing in order to keep enough food for immediate family members, informal borrowing, selling assets, and micro-finance assistance from local non-governmental organizations (NGO). This chapter is particularly useful to practitioners with an interest in assisting returnees become economically independent and free of debt. Chapter Five, '*We have each lost a child: birth, death, and life-cycle rituals*', illustrates how the rituals of birth and death allow returning families to inscribe themselves and their culture on their new landscape. This is an important part of the emplacement process. In analysing birth and death simultaneously, Hammond shows how long-term poverty and multiple displacements bring forth anxiety and grief and how religion (Christianity and Islam) frequently acts as a reservoir, giving strength to persevere. The book's contribution to the literature on development work in conflict-affected areas is proven through Hammond's careful analysis of the politics of aid and the politics of repatriation. Repatriation and resettlement depends on funding and cooperation

between international organizations and local government. Hammond explores the context of resettlement in Ada Bai within these wider social and political networks. This shows how agencies, politicians, and returnees construct one other and understand one another's motives and agendas in the resettlement process. Her ability to interpret the resettlement experience from the returnees' perspective is crucial to our understanding and interpretation of these processes elsewhere. Hammond shows how individuals participate in NGO development projects or local elections in order to portray themselves as 'good citizens'. This perceived group will be considered deserving of the goods, resources, and services that will not only assist in resettlement, but perhaps also improve livelihoods and living conditions. Hammond also provides an insider's perspective of how particular UN organizations operate [i.e., UNHCR (UN Commission on Human Rights) and OHCA (UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)]. Her treatment of their responses and interventions in refugee return programmes reflect her appreciation of their work. Yet, she balances this appreciation with healthy criticism. She reveals the implications that the lack of clear mandates between sister UN agencies, as well as institutional failure to optimize resource allocation, have

for returning populations. Hammond touches on intra-agency politics, demonstrating how persons who work with refugee populations on a daily basis often have little to no control over their budgets and fiscal allocations. Finally, she elucidates how politicization of the repatriation process can put UN agencies at odds with local government officials.

Overall, Hammond has written a book that successfully bridges academic scholarship and 'hands-on' project implementation in refugee studies. As a programme manager responsible for a resettlement project in conflict-affected areas of northern Sri Lanka, Hammond's analysis has helped me to rethink the potential implications of our own project implementation and future planning. Her stories of returnee family experiences and the politics surrounding repatriation elucidate perhaps the smaller details of the returnees' social and economic circumstances that will help practitioners providing counselling and psychosocial support services within the context of the resettlement process focus better.

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