Homeward Bound:
Refugee Return and Local Violence after Civil War

Book Précis

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Overview

What happens when refugees return? The number of refugees worldwide has nearly doubled in the past decade. Amid this rise in forced migration, the humanitarian community touts voluntary repatriation as the preferred solution to displacement crises. The driving assumption is that if refugees can go home, they will resettle peacefully and stay put. But conflict between returning and non-migrant populations is a nearly ubiquitous issue in post-conflict societies from Iraq, to South Sudan, and El Salvador. Why does refugee return so often lead to conflict? *Homeward Bound: Refuge Return and Local Conflict After Civil War* examines this often-overlooked relationship between return migration and violence in post-civil war settings.

Existing theories linking displacement with violence tend to focus on the movement of refugees out of a country, not their return. *Homeward Bound* addresses this gap in our understanding by explaining both the prevalence and character of returnee–non-migrant conflict. Using a political-ethnographic analysis of forced migration between Burundi and Tanzania, *Homeward Bound* argues that return migration creates new sources of conflict in societies recovering from civil war by pitting "those who returned" against "those who stayed." Conflict between these groups can fuel local-level violence and spur repeat displacement. By illuminating the role of refugee return in shaping future conflict and displacement, *Homeward Bound* provides a needed extension to theories of political violence and essential insight to policy makers innovating new approaches to combat protracted forced displacement.

Contribution

The book makes three central contributions. First, *Homeward Bound* develops novel theory to explain the linkages between refugee return and local conflict. Few political scientists have systematically examined the security implications of refugee return. Studies that have focused on refugee return have discussed the history of refugee repatriation and conceptualized what successful return should accomplish (Bradley 2013, Long 2013), documented the return experience (Allen & Morsink 1994, Long & Oxfeld 2004), and challenged the idea that refugees have a home to which they can return (Black & Koser 1999; Hammond 2004). However, no other book offers a theory to explain why, how, and under what circumstances refugee return creates new sources of conflict in countries-of-origin.

Second, the book advances the debate on the role of identity in conflict. Building on seminal scholarship in anthropology on exile and national identity (Malkki 1998), and in political science on the dynamics of violence in civil war (Kalyvas 2003, 2006) *Homeward Bound* demonstrates how displacement-based identities, developed in a relatively short period of time, can have significant

influence on post-conflict politics. These findings challenge long-standing emphases on ethnic, religious, and class divisions in the study of identity-based violence.

Finally, *Homeward Bound* provides insight into the connections between refugee return and repeat displacement. Few studies of forced migration based in comprehensive fieldwork are able to capture dynamics on both sides of a border, or from one phase of displacement to the next. Due to the timing of my research, I was able to conduct ethnographic data collection in both Burundi and Tanzania on the consequences of refugee return before Burundi's 2015 electoral crisis, and on the dynamics of renewed displacement after the crisis. The findings are therefore able to link return with repeat migration and demonstrate why developing alternatives to mass repatriation is critical in combatting protracted forced migration crises.

Argument & Method

The predominant finding in the literature linking forced migration and conflict is that outward displacement can prolong, exacerbate, or spread civil wars (Anderson 1983; Lischer 2005; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). For example, the Tamil diaspora provided funding to prolong the Tamil rebellion in Sri Lanka. Applying these theories' logic to post-conflict environment yields hypotheses that suggest that refugee return will exacerbate violence in countries of origin along pre-existing divides. Instead, I argue that legacies of forced displacement and return create new political identities in post-conflict societies based on where individuals lived during the war.

Displacement-based cleavages become salient, and can lead to violence, when local institutions render the differences between those who stayed and those who left more visible and higher stakes. Institutions governing land and property rights are often implicated in this process, as returnees try to recover land left behind. However, competing narratives of patriotism as well as perceptions of discrimination in access to citizenship, education, health care, or jobs can also intensify resentment between returning and non-migrant communities and fuel conflict between them.

The book evaluates the argument using an ethnographic case study of displacement between Burundi and Tanzania. The research design uses a combination inductive and deductive approaches to develop, evaluate, and refine the theory. The core constructs of my argument were developed inductively based on my observations living and working in South Sudan during the years just before and after the country's independence. I then use an in-depth ethnographic case study of migration between Burundi and Tanzania after Burundi's 1993-2005 civil war to test how well the argument holds in a second case.

Research for the study spanned thirteen months in South Sudan, Burundi, and Tanzania, during which time I conducted 258 semi-structured interviews with villagers and refugees, international humanitarian organization staff, government officials, and local experts, in addition to countless hours of participant and field observation. I use this data to interrogate whether new identity cleavages formed based on where individuals lived during the war, if institutions played a role in constructing those identities, and how conflict between these groups affected political dynamics in Burundi.

Burundi is a particularly useful case for studying the formation of displacement-related identities, in part because it is such a hard case. Burundian refugees during the civil war were primarily Hutu,

whereas those who stayed in country were more likely to be Tutsi. Because returning refugees were primarily Hutu, refugee return from Tanzania was more likely to exacerbate ethnic relations than produce new, cross cutting, migration-related divisions. *Homeward Bound* documents how even in Burundi, a country where ethnic divisions sparked a genocide and 20-year long civil war, refugee return can change the nature of identity-based competition in post-conflict societies.

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Plan of the Book

The plan of the book proceeds as follows: first, I establish the prevalence of displacement-related tensions after civil war, and illustrate their variation in intensity and character. I then outline my theory of return migration and conflict. Next, I use an in-depth ethnographic case study to analyze how well the theory holds in a particular context: refugee return to Burundi after the country's 1993-2005 civil war. Each chapter of the case study answers a different question related to the theory. First, how does refugee return create new identity categories in Burundi? Second, were these divisions salient, and if so why and in what form did they manifest? And finally, did experiences of refugee return shape future political behavior? The book concludes with a discussion of what these findings mean for policy makers managing forced displacement today.

The *Introduction* motivates the book with a discussion of voluntary repatriation as the preferred solution to international crises and the increased instances of forced repatriation today. It concludes with a summary of the argument and an outline of the rest of the book.

Chapter One establishes the prevalence of conflict related to return migration after civil war using brief comparative case studies of Iraq, South Sudan, and El Salvador.

I then outline my two-pronged theory of refugee return and conflict in full. First, I argue that return-migration creates new social cleavages in countries-of-origin based on where individuals lived during the war – in-country or abroad. For individuals living abroad, shared experiences of adapting to new environments, combined with the very act of leaving, signal in-group belonging in contrast to both host-country nationals and co-nationals who remained in country. Some characteristics that define these groups are discrete and observable – language, accent, way of dress, religion. Others are more nuanced, based on perceptions of differences in ideology, patriotism, roles in the prior conflict, access to wealth and education, or 'deservedness' of peace dividends.

Second, these divisions become politically salient, or not, through interaction with local institutions and practices, such as property rights, land rights, language laws, and citizenship regimes. The belief that institutions in the country of origin provide different dividends to individuals based on their migration history creates dynamic cycle: as individuals begin to understand their position in society as

connected to their migration history, their future political and social behavior adjusts accordingly. This reifies displacement-related divisions and sows animosity between returnees non-migrant groups.

Chapter Two details the ethnographic approach I used in the book and elaborates on the ethical considerations of conducting research with displaced populations in areas affected by violence. I begin with a discussion of the theory development process in South Sudan. I describe the evolution of the field site selection from theory development in South Sudan to theory refinement and data collection in Burundi and Tanzania. I detail what this fieldwork looked like in practice, including designing and conducting ethnographic interviews and field observation, responding to unexpected political crises, and staying safe in violent contexts. I conclude with a discussion of the ethics of working in communities affected by displacement.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five comprise the case study of displacement between Burundi and Tanzania.

Chapter Three demonstrates how refugee return following Burundi's 1993-2005 civil war created new group identities at the local level between so called *rapatriés* (returnees) and *residents* (non-migrants). The *rapatrié* category was further subdivided by era of most recent flight – the "1993 returnees" the "1972s returnees." I leverage the ethnographic data to show how these new divisions were evident in the use of different labels and nicknames to distinguish returnees and non-migrants, in the development of stereotypes or narratives about how returnees and non-migrants behaved differently, and in the perception of discrimination based whether one was a *rapatrié* or *résident*.

Chapter Four interrogates the role of institutions in reifying displacement-based identities leading, in this case, to widespread local-level conflict. Using interviews, field observation, and analysis of government documents, I demonstrate how both informal institutions, like patrilineal inheritance practices, and formal institutions, including the commission established after the war to govern land conflict rendered the *rapatrié-résident* divide salient in local politics and fomented violence returnees and non-migrants.

Chapter Five evaluates if and how these legacies of forced migration affected future behavior in Burundi. I find that individual and community experiences of return migration after the civil war shaped both the character and timing of renewed refugee flight when Burundi faced heightened political conflict in April 2015. I find that the "1993 *rapatriés*" tended to be among the first to flee the 2015 conflict, as they were the group facing the greatest economic and security threats from land conflict in Burundi. *Résidents* or return-migrants who (re)gained assets were more likely to wait and see how the conflict would play out before making the risky decision to flee.

Chapter Six concludes with a discussion of the core findings and their implications for peacebuilding and refugee policy. I first discuss why peacebuilders often fail to understand how social processes of war, like displacement and return, alter the political landscape in post-conflict settings. As a result, peacebuilding interventions may overlook new sources of conflict during peacetime, or worse, exacerbate displacement-based identity divisions. I then explore what the book's findings mean for the current "three durable solutions" framework for displacement crises (repatriation, resettlement, and local integration). I argue that the durable solutions approach is a straightjacket which allows states to control refugees, and prevents innovation of strategies that will better serve displaced populations. Instead, the international community needs to start thinking outside of the repatriation-resettlement-local integration box and consider alternative solutions for refugees that embrace mobility.

<u>Target Audience</u>
The book has crosscutting academic appeal. The introduction, case study chapters, and conclusion will be useful for undergraduate and graduate courses on civil war, forced migration, African politics, human security and humanitarian intervention, and identity politics. The conclusion's focus on policy innovation will appeal to master's programs teaching the practice of peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. Chapter two will be useful in graduate level research design and qualitative research methods courses in political science and sociology, particularly in light of increasing concerns about field research ethics.

The book will also appeal to a broader audience than typical for an academic book. Refugee politics is of great interest right now to scholars, policy makers, and general news consumers. With these audiences in mind, I use an accessible writing style throughout, and the ethnographic evidence lends itself to a more engaging story-telling format. I have had success writing about these and related topics for audiences at *Slate, Foreign Policy,* and *The Monkey Cage*, and expect that readers of similar outlets like, *The Economist, Foreign Affairs,* and *The Atlantic,* will find the book interesting and approachable.

Policy makers and humanitarian practitioners will be especially interested in chapters one, four, and six. These chapters describe the trend of conflict related to refugee return which some policy makers may not be familiar with, discuss how international interveners' practices can exacerbate returnee–non-migrant conflict, and elaborate on what the findings mean for policy responses to protracted displacement.