

## Forced migration

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Forced migration as a substantive topic is a new field of academic scholarship. It was first delineated in *Imposing Aid*, the seminal work by Barbara Harrell-Bond (1986) and in the establishment of a center for the study of forced migration at the University of Oxford in 1982. Two important survey works in the 1980s and 1990s, Hansen and Oliver-Smith (1982) and Zolberg et al. (1989) contributed to the expansion of this academic field of study.

Prior to this period, there were some efforts to tease out types of migration and set up typologies. In the 1920s after the massive population dispossessions and displacements following World War I, Fairchild (1925) distinguished invasion, conquest, and colonization (hence dispossession) from immigration. Later scholars made distinctions between voluntary and involuntary movements. Some regarded the voluntary movement as affecting seasonal, temporary, and permanent workers, and nomadic pastoralists, while involuntary movements characterized those fleeing war, violence, or political pressure (Price 1969).

Others researchers elaborated on the basic distinction between voluntary and forced movement, developing more descriptive categories which drew in such factors as state migratory policies, the natural environment, aspirations, and freedoms, as well as social movements. Hansen and Oliver-Smith (1982) put forward the idea that voluntary and involuntary migrations should not be seen as dichotomous, but as distinct phenomena on a continuum of population movement. More recent work attempting to bring together the literature on voluntary and involuntary migration has stressed the similarities between, for example, "refugees" and "people displaced by development projects" (Cernea 1993). The effort to draw up distinctions between voluntary and involuntary or forced versus free migration never really gained a strong foothold in academic research as the convergence between these forms was often identified and

depended upon relationships to the state (Hein 1993), particularly the modern entity of the nation-state.

As Richmond (1994) points out in his *Global Apartheid*, most theories concerning migration focus on voluntary migration. This is due to the prevailing assumption among many researchers that economic factors predominate in determining the movement of people on a global scale. Many writers explicitly state that they find the movements of politically motivated migrants, or refugees, to be too spontaneous and unpredictable for empirical study. The movements and flows of economic migrants, however, are assumed to be more regular and thus amenable to analysis. Most migration is of people from poorer to richer areas of the world. The separation of economic from political factor, however, is difficult to make. Even those who focus their attention on the study of refugee movements recognize that there is a relationship between economic and political factors in the decisions taken to move or remain. Soguk (1998) underscores the enormous political, social, and technological changes, which trigger mass movements of people in search of better or safer places to live. Suffering as a result of poverty, famine, natural disaster, military coups, civil wars results in a steady flux of people expanding the world's forced migrant or "refugee population" (1991: 2).

What emerges from a review of research about forced migration is that the conceptual understanding of the difference between forced and voluntary migration is largely built upon descriptive characteristics. Forced migration or large "refugee movements" come with war and civil upheaval, political unrest, revolution, terrorism, expulsion of ethnic minorities, ethno-religious, and communal conflict, or large-scale human rights violations in oppressive state regimes. Refugee status is determined through *de jure* definition of a refugee (Convention refugee) used by the United Nations and adopted by many countries in determining eligibility for admission into that state. It is a post-World War II invention setting out to deal with the millions of Europeans displaced by

the war and seeking resettlement and assimilation in third countries. It is based on the individual claimant "outside of their own country, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (UNHCR 1951).

Yet even in these extreme cases, economic, social, and political factors are interdependent. Zolberg et al. (1986) clearly shows that the movements of refugees do not constitute a series of random events but rather form distinct patterns that are related to political transformations such as the break-up of former colonial empires, the creation of nation-states, and the collapse of authoritarian regimes. As Dowty clearly points out, "so-called economic migrants" are often responding as much to political repression as to material deprivations (1987). Among the many recent examples he cites are refugees fleeing Haiti where political repression and economic underdevelopment go hand in hand and Ethiopian refugees fleeing both famine and war. In such situations, Dowty makes clear, the distinction between "economic" and "political" becomes meaningless (1987).

For contemporary social sciences, however, such a distinction is important, as it is the basis upon which mainly Western countries agree to grant or refuse asylum. Being determined a "Convention refugee" allows a political victim to gain asylum in another country. Those found to be "economic migrants" in these state-determination processes are generally excluded from entry into Western states and sent back to where they came from. In non-Western states, the concerns regarding asylum are of less interest in determining permission to remain. In the Middle East, for example, forced migrants and other dispossessed and displaced peoples have largely been welcomed throughout much of the 20th century after the end of the Ottoman empire, and the creation of the League of Nations' British and French Mandated states of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. By and large such people have remained in the new nation-states where they found themselves and have been allowed to settle and

integrate if not assimilate. Only the Palestinians have actively faced "eviction" in places of refuge such as Lebanon and Libya.

### **Becoming a forced migrant**

The question that has intrigued researchers is why some people decide to move in situations of war and extreme political coercion and others choose to remain, go underground, and risk political imprisonment, torture, or even death. Forced migration or flight is just one out of many options individuals have. A number of social scientists, especially psychologists, have addressed the question of motivation and the decision to move in the context of armed conflict or political upheaval. They recognize that in most instances the decision to migrate under force is made in consultation with family members or others in close-knit communities. Accumulation of economic, social, political, and personal loss is regarded, by some, as a significant explanatory factor in such decision-making (Massey et al. 1990). Here a distinction is generally made between push and pull factors; push factors are generally understood to consist of economic and political insecurity in the sending country, while pull factors include perceived opportunities for political asylum, family reunion, or economic benefit. However push and pull factors are not necessarily as neatly independent as this polarity suggests.

The relationship between social and political constraints and individual choice is an important problem in the study of forced migration. It brings together the question of free will and agency as opposed to behavioral determination by forces over which we have no control. Talcott Parsons, the most eminent of American sociologists, grappled with these issues in much of his work starting with *The Structure of Social Action* (1964). Parsons used the term "voluntaristic action" to mean, among other things, free will or the capacity to make choices despite constraints. The implications of these concepts are beyond the scope of this article. However, as Richmond (1994) points out there are a few key points to consider with

regard to migration decisions. Such decisions, even those made under conditions of extreme stress, do not differ from other kinds of decision-governing social behavior. Also the distinction between free and forced or voluntary and involuntary is misleading.

All human behavior is constrained to some extent. Choices are never unlimited because we live in groups and our behavior reflects our need to remain part of a group. Thus our decisions are determined by forces which hold the society together, known as the structuration process (Richmond 1994). In an effort to understand why people move, Richmond attempts to integrate features of constraint and enablement, of unequal distribution of power, of naked force and physical coercion, material rewards, threats of deprivation, and various forms of persuasion and inducements. He introduces two new terms to the literature, *proactive migration* and *reactive migration*, largely as replacements for the terms “voluntary” and “involuntary.” What Richmond sets out to do is to identify the complexity of both proactive and reactive migration and to link them on a continuum between the extremes of an axis. This creates a gray area between the two but also allows for some descriptive categorization as to who will migrate out of “relatively unconstrained choice” while others like refugees react to circumstances almost entirely beyond their control.

The choices facing proactive migrants include whether to move at all, when to move, how far to go, and whether to cross an international border. These decisions tend to be motivated by socioeconomic considerations. The reactive migrant, on the other hand – a person or group of persons expelled from their homes, a stateless person, or a forced laborer – has little control over his or her environment, and the degree of choice over when and where to flee is severely restricted. The decision to move or flee will most often be motivated by a combination of economic, social, and political pressures while exercising some element of choice in determining where and when to move. The outbreak of war, or revolution, ethnic cleansing, terrorist activity, or other violent conflict

will result in a sudden and large-scale flight of people. When people feel they and their families are at serious risk, that their food supply or housing or livelihood is imminently threatened they will reactively migrate. When the accumulated “losses” become so great the decision to move outweighs the pressure to remain. At the receiving end in the West, this graying of the divide between economic and forced migration has been studied by Castles (2007) in the asylum migration nexus

### Studies in forced migration

The topic of dispossession and forced migration has not been rigorously examined, though groundbreaking studies do exist in the fields of history, for example in the work of Michael Marrus and his tracing of the emerging European consciousness of the refugee phenomena during the pre-World War II era (Marrus 1985); in Peter Gatrell’s *A Whole Empire Walking* (2005) and his documentation of the massive upheaval in the early Soviet era, in Polian’s (2004) overview of forced migration in Soviet Russia ; and in the work of Justin McCarthy presenting a revisionist view of the rise of the Turkish state at the close of World War I (McCarthy 1983).

Political science has made a particular contribution to understanding forced migration. Zolberg and his colleagues find that international factors often impact on the major types of social conflict that trigger refugee migration (1986). Weiner (1995) documents the sources and growth of refugee migrations and what this has meant for the international world order: a growing moral crisis in receiving countries. He considers that most of the world’s population movements, certainly after World War II, did not just happen, but were made to happen in order to serve a variety of political purposes in the sending countries. He regards much involuntary migration as being derived from the interests of a state to achieve some cultural homogeneity or assert state dominance and control over particular social groups.

Although by the 1980s world opinion had changed, and the cultural and social rights of

indigenous peoples were gaining ascendancy, nations still continued to expel minorities: the Chinese in Vietnam, Indians and Pakistanis in East Africa, Vietnamese in Cambodia, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kurds in Turkey, and of course the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians after the disintegration of the Yugoslavian state. In some cases states have expelled or pushed out whole social classes, for example middle-class Cubans at the start of Castro's socialist regime. From this perspective, Weiner sees forced migration as very much a foreign-policy tool used to force recognition, to destabilize a neighbor, or to extend cultural interests through decolonization or external colonization (1995). It is thus a part of the rise of nations and nationalism and, as a corollary, significant in the identity politics surrounding concepts of ethnicity, ethnic communities, and ethnic minorities.

The twentieth century saw a surge of forced migration, of people displaced, uprooted, and forced out of spaces they had occupied for decades if not centuries. For many scholars and aid specialists, it was the peculiar psychological effects arising from prolonged refugee status which attracted study and ameliorating concern. The world of the forced migrant and refugee was somehow strange and unfamiliar, and contrary to the natural/national order of things. Forced migrants, cut off from their "homeland," and thus deracinated, were regarded as lacking some of the qualities which made the rest of us human. For some this went as far as assuming a loss of culture along with the loss of "homeland." The forced migrant or refugee came to be generally regarded as an aberration from the way the world was meant to be organized. Hannah Arendt, writing about post-World War II in Europe, summed up these strange perceptions quite eloquently when she likened refugees and forced migrants to beings "thrown out of the family of nations altogether" (1973: 294).

SEE ALSO: Anthropology of migration; Anticolonialism, decolonialism, neocolonialism; European colonization, invasion, and settlement,

1500 to present; Genocide and displacement; Sociology of migration

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