Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Forced migration – including refugee flows, asylum seekers, internal displacement and development-induced displacement – has increased considerably in volume and political significance since the end of the Cold War. It has become an integral part of North–South relationships and is closely linked to current processes of global social transformation. This makes it as important for sociologists to develop empirical research and analysis on forced migration as it is to include it in their theoretical understandings of contemporary society. The study of forced migration is linked to research on economic migration, but has its own specific research topics, methodological problems and conceptual issues. Forced migration needs to be analysed as a social process in which human agency and social networks play a major part. It gives rise to fears of loss of state control, especially in the context of recent concerns about migration and security. In this context, it is essential to question earlier sociological approaches, which have been based on the principle of relatively autonomous national societies. The sociology of forced migration must be a transnational and interdisciplinary undertaking.

KEY WORDS

migration / refugees / social transformation

Refugees, asylum and other forms of forced migration have become major themes of political debate in many countries. In Britain, as a quick glance at job advertisements in professional journals will show, social policy is increasingly concerned with these groups. Discussions on forced migration are closely linked to national-level concerns with border control and national security. These themes are, in turn, bound up with global considerations about

migration, conflict and development. Clearly, it is important for sociologists to include forced migration in research and analysis on processes of social transformation. This has not happened much in the past: there is little sociological literature on forced migration and one certainly cannot find a developed body of empirical work and theory. The British Sociological Association Conference on the Sociology of Exile, Displacement and Belonging in April 2002 was, therefore, a timely event, which, it is hoped, will mark a milestone in the development of this field of study.

In this article I examine the need for a sociology of 'exile, displacement and belonging' and discuss its theoretical framework, topics of study and methodological principles. I will argue that it needs to be understood as a sociology of forced migration in the context of global social transformation. This is because forced migration has grown dramatically and is a crucial dimension of globalization and of North–South relationships in the post Cold-War era. It is also linked in complex ways to processes of societal change in both the areas of origin and of destination of forced migrants. A sociology of forced migration cannot exist in isolation: it has to understand itself as part of an interdisciplinary and transnational project, informed by reflection on the social, cultural and political dimensions of forced migration. Forced migration studies have always been linked to such concerns, but the frequent failure to make this explicit can contribute both to poor sociology and to policy failure.[1]

Forced Migration and the Global Order

The most obvious reason why we should study forced migration is because it has grown dramatically in the post-Cold War period. The global refugee population grew from 2.4 million in 1975 to 10.5 million in 1985 and 14.9 million in 1990. A peak was reached after the end of the Cold War with 18.2 million in 1993. By 2000, the global refugee population had declined to 12.1 million (UNHCR, 1995, 2000). However, this includes only officially recognized refugees under the fairly narrow definition of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which refers only to people forced to leave their countries due to individual persecution on specific grounds. The fall in refugees after 1995 is due mainly to the 'non-arrival regime' set up by developed countries to prevent refugees entering and making asylum claims. This has led to containment of refugees in their areas of origin, as well as to growth of people-smuggling as the only way for many desperate people to make asylum claims.

The number of internally displaced persons – those forced to flee their homes, but who have not crossed an international border – has rocketed: from 1.2 million in 1982 to 14 million by 1986 and to over 20 million by 1997 (Cohen and Deng, 1998). The number of countries with populations of internally displaced persons grew from five in 1970 to 34 in 1996 (UNHCR, 1997: 130).

As for asylum seekers, annual applications in Western Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA combined rose from 90,400 in 1983 to 323,050 in 1988 and then surged again, with the end of the Cold War, to peak at 828,645 in 1992. Applications fell sharply to 480,00 in 1995, but began creeping up again to 534,500 in 2000. The UK had relatively few asylum seekers in the early 1990s, with 32,300 in 1992, but numbers increased to 55,000 in 1998 and 97,900 in 2000 (OECD, 2001).

Then there are types of forced migration which are hard to quantify. Millions of people are displaced every year by development projects such as dams, airports, roads, luxury housing, conservation areas and game parks. The World Bank puts their number at 10 million a year. Some are able to rebuild their livelihood, but many experience permanent impoverishment and marginalization (Cernea and McDowell, 2000; World Commission on Dams, 2000). Typically, it is rural dwellers, ethnic minorities and indigenous people who suffer 'in the national interest', while elites and transnational companies benefit (Roy, 1999). In addition, many people have to migrate because of environmental degradation, natural disasters and industrial accidents or pollution. In such cases, it is extremely hard to distinguish between environmental, economic and political factors, so that the label 'environmental refugee' is misleading and even damaging, since it can divert attention from complex causes (Black, 1998; Myers and Kent, 1995).

A final form of forced migration is the trafficking of people across international boundaries for purposes of exploitation. The trafficking of women and children for the sex industry occurs all over the world. Thai and Japanese gangsters collaborate to entice women into prostitution in Japan by claiming that they will get jobs as waitresses or entertainers. Victims of civil war and forced displacement in former Yugoslavia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are sold to brothels in Western Europe. Women in war zones are forced into sex-slavery by combatant forces, or sold to international gangs. Although trafficking affects mainly women and children, there are also cases of men forced into debt bondage by trafficking gangs (Gallagher, 2002). The growth in people-trafficking is a result of the restrictive immigration policies of rich countries. The high demand for labour in the North, combined with strong barriers to entry, have created business opportunities for a new 'migration industry'. This includes legal participants, such as travel agents, shipping companies and banks, as well as illegal operators.

However, mere growth in numbers is not enough to justify a new field of sociological research. The numbers game has ambivalent results. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that about 150 million people currently live outside their country of birth – about 2 percent of the world's population (IOM, 2000). United Nations figures indicate that global migration is growing only slightly faster than overall population (Zlotnik, 1999). If we add up the global number of forced migrants – both international and internal – it would come to somewhere between 100 and 200 million (depending on assumptions and definitions). Some scholars therefore argue that

the key challenge is to explain why most people don't migrate – given the huge disparities in wealth, social conditions and human rights (Arango, 2000).

We need a sociological argument, that points to the significance of forced migration in contemporary society and in current processes of change. A first clue is provided by Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that 'mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor'. The new global economic and political elites are able to cross borders at will, while the poor are meant to stay at home: 'the riches are global, the misery is local' (Bauman, 1998: 9, 74). Of course many of the world's excluded also perceive that mobility brings the chance of wealth and are desperate to migrate, which helps explain the upsurge in asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants. Following the events of 11 September 2001, refugees have been branded as a sinister transnational threat to national security – even though none of the 11 September terrorists were actually refugees or asylum seekers. In fact, refugees and migrants have been increasingly linked to security concerns since the end of the Cold War, leading to the emergence of the new research field of 'political demography' (Weiner and Russell, 2001).

The link between economic integration and migration is to be found throughout the globalization literature. The crucial characteristics of globalization are the growth of cross-border flows and their organization by means of multi-nodal transnational networks (Castells, 1996; Held et al., 1999). Flows and networks can relate to economic factors such as trade and investment, to political cooperation and international organizations and to cultural products. However, such flows are always also linked to flows of people. Much of this is not counted as migration: circulation of business people, executives and highly-skilled personnel within transnational companies and inter-governmental agencies is seen as desirable mobility. The British National Health Service recruits doctors and nurses in Africa and Asia. Germany introduced a new migration law in 2002, explicitly designed to recruit information technology specialists from India and elsewhere. However, migration of less-skilled people, especially from South to North, is generally not seen as acceptable by policy-makers. Hence the growing importance of migrant networks and the transnational 'migration industry' as a way of organizing migration. In reality, Northern governments in Japan, the USA, Italy and elsewhere tacitly use asylum and undocumented migration as a way of meeting labour needs without publicly admitting the need for unskilled migration. Alternative and even criminal networks correspond closely to the logic of globalization (Castells, 1998: Chapter 3), while those who try to stop migration are still focused on the nation-state model.

It is easy to see why globalization provides a context for understanding economic migration, but how does this relate to forced migration? An answer to this question has two components. First, globalization is not a system of equitable participation in a fairly-structured global economy, society and polity, but rather a system of selective inclusion and exclusion of specific areas and groups, which maintains and exacerbates inequality (Beck, 1997; Castells,

1996; Hoogvelt, 1997). The most significant expression of this inequality is the North–South divide, but it is important to see this as a social rather than a geographical divide. Within both North and South, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion lead to increasing social inequality, as well as to areas of growth in the South and areas of decline in the North. These processes lead to conflict and forced migration. Second, the distinction between forced migration and economic migration is becoming blurred as a result. Failed economies generally also mean weak states, predatory ruling cliques and human rights abuse. This leads to the notion of the 'asylum-migration nexus': many migrants and asylum seekers have multiple reasons for mobility and it is impossible to completely separate economic and human rights motivations – which is a challenge to the neat categories that bureaucracies seek to impose.

The sociology of migration is a fairly new area, which has developed mainly in the context of voluntary (that is, mainly economic) migration. Migration research has traditionally been dominated by economists and geographers. However, the frequent failure of policies based on their work has highlighted the need to understand the social dynamics of the migratory process. This has led to a new emphasis on the role of family and community in shaping migration and on the study of social networks, social capital and cultural capital as important factors in the process (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; Castles, 2000; Massey et al., 1998; 1993; Portes, 1997). So far, such approaches have (with a few exceptions such as Van Hear [1998]) had little influence in refugee and forced migration studies. Understanding that forced migration is not the result of a string of unconnected emergencies but rather an integral part of North–South relationships makes it necessary to theorize forced migration and link it to economic migration. They are closely related (and indeed often indistinguishable) forms of expression of global inequalities and societal crises, which have gained in volume and importance since the superseding of the bipolar world order.

Forced Migration and Social Transformation in the South

Refugee movements are nothing new: as a result of war, conquest and political struggle they are as old as human history. The imagery of flight and exile is to be found in the holy books of most religions and is part of the founding myths of countless nations. The task for a contemporary sociology of forced migration is to analyse the new characteristics of forced migration in the epoch of globalization. Today, forced migration is both a result and a cause of social transformation in the South. Situations of conflict, generalized violence and mass flight emerged from the 1960s, in the context of struggles over decolonization, state formation and incorporation into the bipolar world order of the Cold War (Zolberg et al., 1989). Local conflicts became proxy wars in the East-West conflict, with the superpowers and their satellites providing modern

weapons to their protegés. Such conflicts escalated in frequency and intensity from the 1980s.

The context of this trend was the inability to achieve economic and social development and the failure to build legitimate and stable states in large areas of the South. What Mary Kaldor calls 'the new wars' are usually internal wars connected with identity struggles, ethnic divisions, problems of state formation and competition for economic assets. But they are simultaneously transnational as they involve diaspora populations, foreign volunteers and mercenaries and international intervention forces. They also draw in international journalists, UN aid organizations, NGOs and regional organizations. The means of warfare have also changed. The protagonists are not large standing armies but irregular forces. The aim is not control of territory, but political control of the population. Mass population expulsion is often a strategic goal, which is why the new wars have led to such an upsurge in forced migration (Kaldor, 2001). Ninety per cent of those killed are civilians. Both government forces and insurgents use exemplary violence including torture and sexual assault as means of control. Many politicians and media commentators saw the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda etc. as the resurgence of 'age-old hatreds'. It is more accurate to see such practices as systemic elements of a thoroughly modern new form of warfare (Summerfield, 1999).

Northern economic interests (such as the trade in oil, diamonds, coltan or small arms) play an important part in starting or prolonging local wars. At a broader level, trade, investment and intellectual property regimes that favour the industrialized countries maintain underdevelopment in the South. Conflict and forced migration are thus ultimately an integral part of the North–South division. This reveals the ambiguity of efforts by the 'international community' (which essentially means the powerful Northern states and the intergovernmental agencies) to prevent forced migration. They seek to do this through both entry restrictions in the North and 'containment' measures in the South. Containment includes humanitarian aid, peace-keeping missions and even military intervention. At the same time, the North does more to cause forced migration than to stop it, through enforcing an international economic and political order that causes underdevelopment and conflict.

However, violence and forced migration also cause social transformation. They destroy economic resources, undermine traditional ways of life and break up communities. Forced migration is thus a factor which deepens underdevelopment, weakens social bonds and reduces the capacity of communities and societies to achieve positive change. Post-conflict reconstruction rarely leads to restoration of the pre-conflict situation, but rather to new and often problematic social relationships. The study of forced migration therefore should be a central part of the sociology of development.

Forced migration is a factor in social transformation in an additional sense, as Mark Duffield has recently argued (Duffield, 2001). Persistent underdevelopment in large parts of the South is not an economic problem for the North, because these countries are largely disconnected from the global

economy. However, underdevelopment is increasingly seen as a threat to security in the North. This is because the South connects with the North in unexpected and unwanted ways: through the proliferation of transnational informal networks, such as international crime, the drug trade, people smuggling and trafficking, as well as migrant networks which facilitate irregular mobility. Such phenomena are partly a result of trends towards economic deregulation and privatization in the North, which open up the space for informal economies. The Al Qaida network can be seen as the very epitome of an undesirable transnational network, whose goals and mode of operation would have been unthinkable in any earlier epoch.

Duffield argues that the result is a fundamental change in the objectives of both development policy and humanitarianism. Containment of forced migration through neutral humanitarianism has failed. Similarly, the Washington Consensus – the neo-liberal credo of the World Bank and the IMF that underdevelopment could be countered by economic growth based on foreign investments and export-led growth – has proved mistaken. Humanitarianism and development policy have a new joint task: the transformation of whole societies in order to prevent conflict and to achieve social and economic change. The principle of transforming whole societies was contained in a remarkable lecture by the then Senior Vice-President of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, in 1998. He argued that development required fundamental shifts in cultural values and social relationships and that it was the task of international agencies to help bring these about (Stiglitz, 1998). In the meantime, Stiglitz has left the World Bank and been awarded the 2001 Nobel Prize for Economics. Development is now seen by Northern governments and international agencies as impossible without security and peace. This means that humanitarian action and military intervention can no longer attempt to be neutral. Rather, such interventions seek to restore peace at the local level through imposing certain political and economic structures as part of a system of 'networked global liberal governance'. This system has 'a radical mission to transform societies as a whole, including the attitudes and beliefs of the people within them' (Duffield, 2001). The price of being connected to global economic and political networks is thus the adoption of Northern economic structures, political institutions and value systems.

Forced Migration and Social Transformation in the North

Forced migration brings about social transformation in Northern societies by increasing the social and cultural diversity of populations and by contributing to the proliferation of transnational communities. This has much in common with the effects of other types of migration, but there are specific aspects connected with the distinctive experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. If one looks back to the period of deliberate labour recruitment by Western European countries as well as selective (that is, whites only) immigration programmes in

Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA up to the early 1970s, it is already possible to make out a trend towards greater diversity. Turks in Germany, North Africans in France, New Commonwealth immigrants in the UK and Mexicans in the USA all brought in new and varied religious, cultural and social practices. However, diversity has increased exponentially through refugee and asylum flows from the South and East, which became significant from the 1980s. In some cases refugee flows broke old taboos – for instance, the Indo-Chinese refugee programme brought the first significant Asian group to Australia, leading to the final demise of the White Australia policy.

Moreover, the opening of Northern societies to global inflows coincided with another important form of social transformation: processes of community formation of the earlier labour migrants and their descendants, once it became clear that they would remain permanently. It is important to remember that such processes had not been anticipated by social scientists, nor planned for by policymakers. The expectation had been either that the migrant workers would leave when no longer required, or that they and their descendants would become assimilated into the dominant culture. Sociological research on immigrants has been mainly concerned with processes of settlement and community formation and with the impacts on existing social groups.

To complicate the picture even more, the upsurge in forced migration coincided with the end of the long boom (marked by the Oil Crisis of 1973) and the beginning of processes of economic restructuring, deindustrialization, privatization and deregulation resulting from globalization. In this situation, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers appeared as the physical embodiment of the external threat to jobs, living standards and welfare. The result was a politicization of migration and asylum, marked by heated public debates and competition between the political parties to be toughest on 'illegals'. Extreme-right movements proliferated and racist violence became a serious problem. The construction of the threatening 'Other' as a legitimation for public order measures and as a diversion from fundamental economic and political problems has been a focus of much study (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Lutz et al., 1995; Solomos, 1993; Vasta and Castles, 1996; Wrench and Solomos, 1993). What we lack is sociological work on the impact of the newer groups that have arrived since the 1990s. Yet the emergence of multicultural societies in Northern countries took place simultaneously with the increasing diversity and complexity brought about by the new global migrations. Clearly, this should form a significant theme for sociological investigation.

An emerging sociological theme in this context is the growth of transnational communities. These may be defined as groups based in two or more countries that engage in recurrent, enduring and significant cross-border activities, which may be economic, political, social or cultural in character. Transnational theory argues that the rapid improvements in transport and communications make it possible for migrants to maintain their links with co-ethnics in the place of origin and elsewhere, while also building communities in the place of residence. The result is multiple affiliations which question the

dominance of the nation-state as the focus of social belonging. Under the older label of the diaspora, refugees and exiles have always fitted the model of the transnational community. However, it can be argued that such exile diasporas are taking on new characteristics under the conditions of globalization (Cohen, 1997; Van Hear, 1998). Only a minority of migrants probably belong to transnational communities, with most still fitting into earlier models of either temporary migration or permanent settlement.

Forced Migration and Social Transformation in Intermediate Countries

It would be wrong to reduce the whole world to North or South. There are many countries which belong geographically to the South, but which have achieved industrial take-off. The 'Asian tigers' (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) are being joined by the 'little tigers' (Malaysia and Thailand), as well as by newly industrializing countries in Latin America. Giant states like India, China, Mexico and Brazil have dualistic economies with fast-growing modern industries, surrounded by declining rustbelts and backward rural areas. Russia and other former parts of the Soviet Empire are in danger of joining the South, while parts of Eastern and Central Europe are experiencing modernization and expansion. Such processes of change involve substantial migrations, both economic and forced. For example, the trafficking of women from war zones in the former Soviet Union is rife. Many asylum seekers from Eastern Europe belong to persecuted ethnic minorities. Economic migration between Indonesia and Malaysia is bound up with ethnic conflicts at both ends of the chain. Internal migration from the West of China is connected with the situation of the Uighur minority. Similarly, Asian labour-importers are beginning to experience the same sort of dilemmas as Europe and North America (Castles, 2001a). It is impossible to pursue such examples here but, again, it seems clear that forced migration must be an element in attempts to analyse change in many transitional societies.

The Sociology of Forced Migration as Part of a Much Broader Project

The deliberations so far seem sufficient to argue for a special branch of sociology in this area. But the notion of a sociology of 'exile, displacement or belonging' seems to put too much emphasis on the subjective and cultural aspects of forced migration and to neglect its structural dimensions. That is why the concept of a sociology of forced migration seems preferable. But is a sociological sub-discipline of this kind really possible? It would contradict everything said so far to argue for a separate form of inquiry in the sense of distinct research topics, theories and methods. If forced migration is an integral part of

globalization and the North–South divide, then it cannot be studied in isolation. The sociology of forced migration needs to define itself as part of the broader undertaking of understanding the social transformation processes inherent in the emerging global social order (or disorder).

This does not mean that every study of a specific forced migration situation needs to include an analysis of the global political economy. That would be a demand that would stultify empirical research. Rather, it means that there is a need for a scientific division of labour in which specific studies of specific groups or situations are informed by broader studies of global social, political and economic structures and relationships – and vice versa. The micro- and macro-levels have to be linked through an analysis of the complex processes that mediate between them. Ethnographic and cultural studies approaches may find that change is experienced at the local and personal levels, yet they need to be linked to broader analyses of institutions and structures. In other words: there can be no local studies without an understanding of the global context and no global theorization without a basis in local research. This comes back to the Frankfurt School's principle that analysis of every specific social phenomenon requires an awareness of its embeddedness in the societal totality.

A further consequence of this approach is that the sociology of forced migration must understand itself as a component within an interdisciplinary undertaking. Migration is an existential shift which affects every part of human life. No single discipline can adequately describe and analyse this experience on its own. There are roles for:

■   history, anthropology, geography, demography, political economy and economics in explaining the causes of forced migration and the dynamics of movement;
■   political science and law in examining entry rules, migration policies and institutional structures;
■   psychology, cultural studies and anthropology in studying individual and group experiences of exile, identity, belonging and community formation; and
■   law, political science and social policy studies in analysing settlement and community relations.

Sociology – as the study of the individual, society and the relationship between structures and group processes – is involved in research on all the above aspects of the migratory process. Its task is to help bring together all the varying perspectives in an overall understanding of the societal dynamics of forced migration. One side of this is connecting forced migration with social relations, ideas, institutions and structures at various levels (global, regional, national and local). The other is the study of processes of loss of identity and community disintegration and then the processes of redefining identity and of rebuilding community. The sociology of forced migration does not, therefore, have a fenced-off

research field, but shares it with many other disciplines. The specific character of sociology lies in its theoretical and methodological approaches, as I will discuss below.

From Sociology of the Nation-State to Transnational Sociology

Some years ago one might have stated the task of the sociology of forced migration as the study of people forced to flee from one society and becoming part of another one. Globalization and transnationalism make this conceptualization anachronistic, since the boundaries of national societies are becoming increasingly blurred. If the dynamics of social relations transcend borders, then so must the theories and methods used to study them. This is a problem for sociology, for it developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries as the science of 'national industrial societies' (Wieviorka, 1994). It was concerned with problems of integration and order in emerging industrial societies, problems that were politically and culturally framed by the nation-state. One central characteristic of Western nation-states was their competition to colonize the rest of the word. Sociology and its sister discipline, anthropology, were thus concerned with understanding societies and cultures in order to control 'dangerous classes' (that is, the industrial workers) and 'dangerous peoples' (that is, those who resisted colonialism) (Connell, 1997). In early sociology we find developmental models, such as those of Herbert Spencer or Émile Durkheim, which assert the superiority of the Western industrial model. Later we find models of social order and conformity in the work of Parsons and other functionalists. The exception to this preoccupation with the national is Marx's political economy, which foreshadows globalization theory. Yet later critical sociology, while drawing on Marxist ideas, often implicitly took the nation-state as the framework for class analysis.

   This has two consequences. First, the stranger, or 'Other', is seen as deviant and potentially dangerous. We see this most clearly in the assimilation theories developed in the USA in response to the mass immigration of the early 20th century (Gordon, 1964). Assimilation theory was influenced by work of Robert E. Park and the Chicago School who studied inter-group relations in the 1920s when Chicago's population was over one-third foreign-born (Park, 1950). In assimilationist views the migrant is characterized as someone whose pre-migration culture is useless and even harmful in the new setting. He or she must go through a process of re-socialization or acculturation, which involves renouncing the original culture and adopting the values, norms and behaviour of the receiving society. The latter is seen in functionalist terms as fundamentally homogenous and harmonious. The immigrant has to be assimilated – or at least integrated – to restore this harmony. Migrants who maintain their own languages, religions and cultures and who cluster together as a way of coping with racism and exclusion are seen as a threat to social cohesion.[2] This common

sense understanding of the need for immigrants to adopt the dominant culture remains highly influential in most immigration countries today, especially in popular and political discourse, but also in academic approaches.

Second, if sociologists see the nation-state as the 'container' (Faist, 2000) for all major aspects of social life, this implies the need for distinct bodies of social-scientific knowledge for each country. Despite international inter-change between sociologists, there was (and still is) considerable national speci-ficity in the modes of organization, the theoretical and methodological approaches, the research questions and the findings of the social sciences. Within each country there are competing schools or paradigms, yet these func-tion within distinct intellectual frameworks with strong historical roots and sur-prising durability. The determinants of national specificity include: religious, philosophical and ideological traditions; the varying historical roles of intellec-tuals in constructing national culture and identity; the relationships between states and 'political classes'; the role of social science in informing social policy and the modes of interaction of state apparatuses with universities and other research bodies.

The tunnel vision brought about by such national models is a major bar-rier to understanding in migration research. Fundamental ideas on the nature of migration and its consequences for society arise from nationally-specific his-torical experiences of population mobility and cultural diversity. Past experi-ences with internal ethnic minorities, colonized peoples and migrant labour recruited during industrialization have helped shape current attitudes and approaches. Historical precedents have led to stereotypes and practices which are often deeply embedded in political and cultural discourses, so that they have become an unquestioned 'common sense' (Goldberg, 1993: 41–3), which affects even the most critical researchers. Such national ideologies affect govern-ment policies on migration research, shape the questions asked by migration researchers and influence modes of explanation and analysis. A look at any major migration country will show the importance of such national models (Castles, 2000; Castles and Miller, 1998).

Today, global change and the increasing importance of transnational pro-cesses require new approaches from the sociology of migration. These will not develop automatically out of existing paradigms, because the latter are often based on institutional and conceptual frameworks that may be resistant to change and whose protagonists may have strong interests in the preservation of the intellectual *status quo*. If classical social theory was premised on the emerging national-industrial society of the 19th and early 20th century, then a renewal of social theory should take as its starting point the global transfor-mations occurring at the dawn of the 21st century. The key issue is the analysis of transnational connectedness and the way this affects national societies, local communities and individuals (Castles, 2001b). Migration in general, and forced migration in particular, are amongst the most important social expressions of global connections and processes. The sociology of forced migration is, there-fore, important not only as a field of sociological enquiry in itself, but also as

an area with the potential to make major contributions to 'global sociology' (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000).

Why do Migration Policies Often Fail?

Research on forced migration has always been close to practical and policy concerns – in fact it is often policy-driven: that is, its research questions, methods and even findings are shaped by the political interests of governments and funding bodies (Black, 2001). This raises an interesting question. Anyone who studies migration policies closely will be struck by how often they fail to meet their objectives, or, indeed, even achieve the opposite. Here are a few examples.

- Australia's postwar immigration policy was designed explicitly to keep the country white and British. Instead it led to the emergence of one of the world's most diverse societies, with immigrants from over 100 countries (Castles et al., 1988).
- Germany's 'guestworker' recruitment between 1955 and 1973 was designed to provide temporary migrant workers who would not settle permanently and could be sent away when they were no longer needed. Instead, when the economic downturn came in 1973, family reunions increased, ethnic communities developed and Germany became a multicultural society (Castles et al., 1984). This led to major social and cultural changes, including a major change in German citizenship law in 1999.
- The US Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was designed to curtail illegal migration and reduce entries. Instead it led to an upsurge in immigration, both legal and illegal (Portes, 1997: 818).
- In the 1990s, Western European countries adopted both national and regional measures to reduce immigration and the entry of asylum seekers. The unforeseen consequence of such restrictions was the rapid growth of a transnational 'migration industry'. Rather than stopping immigration, the measures created business opportunities for new transnational enterprises (both legal and illegal).

Why do migration policies fail? These cases are drawn from migration in general, but there are analogies in the forced migration field. Sociologists can draw on the Mertonian notion of the 'unintended consequences' of social actions (Portes, 1997: 818). But we need to ask more specific questions. Why do policymakers fail (or refuse) to see what is happening around them? Remember how German politicians chanted the mantra, 'the German Federal Republic is not a country of immigration' right up to the late 1990s. The problem was perhaps less one of not seeing obvious facts and more one of being unwilling to admit to past errors of judgement. More important for sociologists: did the researchers get it wrong, or did the politicians and bureaucrats

ignore them? The answer is both. Because social scientists often allowed their research agendas to be driven by policy needs and funding, they often asked the wrong questions, relied on short-term empirical approaches without looking at historical and comparative dimensions and failed to develop adequate theoretical frameworks. They gave policymakers narrow, short-term answers that led to misinformed policies. Those sociologists who refused this role and provided more critical analyses were largely ignored. They did not get funding or invitations to carry out official studies.

The key point is that policy-driven research can lead not only to poor sociology, but also to bad policy. This is because narrowly-focused empirical research, often designed to provide an answer to an immediate bureaucratic problem, tends to follow a circular logic. It accepts the problem definitions built into its terms of reference and does not look for more fundamental causes, or for more challenging solutions. The recommendations that emerge are chosen from a narrow range of options acceptable to the commissioning body. Migration policies fail because policymakers refuse to see migration as a dynamic social process linked to broader patterns of social transformation. Ministers and bureaucrats still see migration as something that can be turned on and off like a tap through laws and polices. By imposing this paradigm on researchers, the policymakers have done both social scientists and themselves a disservice. But we have to ask ourselves the uncomfortable question: why have so many of us accepted this role?

The answer lies in the origins of forced migration studies. As Richard Black points out, it 'has always been intimately connected with policy developments' (Black, 2001: 58). Moreover, as an academic field, it is very new, dating back to only the early 1980s. It has always had close links with humanitarian organizations, both inter-governmental and non-governmental. This practical orientation is a strength, since it ensures concern for the human consequences of the phenomenon and prevents any flight into abstract theorizing. But it is also a weakness because it can lead to reactive and narrow research that does not bring about the accumulation of knowledge. A corollary is that the sociology of forced migration is seen as peripheral and atheoretical by mainstream sociology. This means that researchers often have no choice but to seek their funding from policy bodies (like the Home Office or the European Commission) – with the consequences just described.

It is important for forced migration researchers to seek ways out of this dilemma. These could include:

∎ greater concern for theory, especially linking forced migration research to broader theories of social relations, structures and change;
∎ linking theory to a critical reflection on the practice of the various participants in forced migration processes, including the forced migrants themselves, humanitarian agencies, receiving communities, social institutions and policymakers;

∎   the professionalization of forced migration research by seeking fora in mainstream sociological courses, conferences and journals; and

∎   seeking to make it clear to policymakers and funding bodies that independent research, based on theoretical, historical and comparative principles, leads to more useful public knowledge than short-term policy-oriented studies.

Theoretical Framework

It is now possible to summarize the consequences of the preceding discussions for the theory, research topics and methodology of the sociology of forced migration and social transformation.

With regard to theory, Portes has argued that the predominance of local-level empirical studies in migration research has led to an over-emphasis on issues of cultural distinctiveness and adaptation and a neglect of the over-arching factors of economic and social structure (Portes, 1997). It is, of course, important to study the cultural dimensions of exile and of the encounter between different groups, but to generalize from micro-studies of diversity can lead to a false impression of a fragmented social world. Rather, it is necessary to relate such studies to broader theoretical explanations of the structural causes of forced migration and the structural determinants of the patterns of incorporation of forced migrants in various types of society. This will help to explain why forced migration has increased exponentially in the South in recent years, why Northern societies have reacted in similar ways to refugees and asylum seekers and why diverse groups have often ended up in similar societal positions. Portes emphasizes the importance of theory to achieve cumulative knowledge, but goes on to warn us not to expect a 'grand theory' of migration that can explain every aspect of it in every place. Such a theory would be so general as to be vacuous. Instead he advocates a set of 'mid-range theories' that can help explain specific empirical findings by linking them to appropriate bodies of historical and contemporary research.

It is clear that there can be no compartmentalized theory of forced migration. Theory, in this area, means analysing forced migration as a pivotal aspect of global social relations and linking it to an emerging new political economy in the context of US political and military domination, economic globalization, North–South inequality and transnationalism. This implies departing from the national focus of traditional social theory and taking global flows and networks as the key frameworks for social relations (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998; Held et al., 1999). Migrants are then to be seen as moving, not between 'container societies', but rather within 'transnational social space' (Faist, 2000), in which 'global cities' with dualistic economies form the key nodes (Sassen, 1991). In such spaces, transnational communities are emerging as a new focus for social and cultural identity for both economic migrants (Basch et al., 1994; Portes, 1999; Vertovec, 1999) and forced migrants (Cohen, 1997; Van Hear, 1998).

Conflict, forced migration and humanitarian action are closely linked to the political economy of global change (Chimni, 1998; Duffield, 2001; Kaldor, 2001; Zolberg, 2001). There is no space to discuss such approaches adequately here, but they provide a starting point for theoretical advancement in the sociology of forced migration and social transformation.

Research Topics

This theoretical perspective implies a broad range of interlinked research topics ranging from local ethnographic studies right through to global political economy. The crucial principle, as outlined above, is to integrate various levels of analysis into a new global political economy. Here are some examples of important research topics for the sociology of forced migration and social transformation. They are grouped for convenience, but many topics transcend these rough categories:

Overarching Issues

- The political economy of forced migration.
- Gender dimensions of forced migration.
- An organizational sociology of humanitarian and refugee agencies.

Causes of Forced Migration

- Causes in countries of origin.
- Why forced migrants go to one country rather than another.
- Informal economies in the North as a pull factor.

Dynamics of Mobility

- Migrant networks.
- The migration industry.
- The migration–asylum nexus.
- Institutions of migration control.
- Refugee camps and reception centres as total institutions.

Dynamics of Settlement

- Social policy for forced migrants and its relationship to broader social policy.
- The socio-economic and cultural experiences of the second and subsequent generations.

- The relationship between bureaucracy and human agency in refugee settlement.
- Forced migrants and citizenship: how forced migrants can achieve or regain the condition of being citizens and what effects their presence may have on citizenship as an institution.
- Public opinion and discourses on forced migration and settlement.

Community and Identity

- Transnational communities.
- Ethnographic studies of specific groups.
- Community studies on settlement and inter-group relations.
- Identity formation in exile.

Methodological Principles

Methodology is not, of course, identical with methods, which I will not discuss here, except to say that forced migration research needs the whole gamut of qualitative and quantitative techniques employed in contemporary sociology. Quantitative methods can often be problematic in this area: reliable data-collection rarely takes place in situations of conflict and insecurity. Ethnographic and other qualitative techniques will often be the primary methods, but should be linked to larger data-sets and surveys, where possible.

Methodology refers to the underlying principles for research and analysis. The development of forced migration sociology cannot be based simply on an accumulation of data through a proliferation of empirical studies. The research needs to be guided by new questions and approaches, based on broad theoretical understanding. As this follows from what has already been said, I will merely list some basic methodological principles here.

- *Interdisciplinarity* is essential. Sociologists should work in interdisciplinary teams in larger projects and make use of the research findings of other disciplines in smaller ones.
- *A historical understanding* of both the sending and receiving societies is vital in understanding any specific forced migration situation.
- *Comparative studies* of experiences in different societies can increase awareness of general trends and alternative approaches.
- Forced migration researchers need to take a *holistic approach*, linking their specific research topic to broader aspects of forced migration and its embeddedness in social relations at various spatial levels.
- A key level for analysis is that of *transnational social transformation*.

■   However, the understanding of *local, national and regional patterns* of social and cultural relations and how they are affected by broader changes is equally important.

■   The best organizational framework for linking the different spatial levels is the *transnational research network*, involving researchers in both sending and receiving countries.

■   It is vital to investigate the *human agency* of the forced migrants and of the sending and receiving communities.

■   This implies the need for *participatory research methods* which give an active role to forced migrants in research processes.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to address problems of sociological research on forced migration at a very general level. The key argument is that sociologists should be concerned with forced migration because it is a central aspect of social transformation in the contemporary world. The old understanding of refugee situations as a string of unrelated and specific humanitarian emergencies does not stand up to the reality of the early 21st century, in which forced migrations have become an integral part of North–South relationships. I have tried to discuss some issues which are crucial for the further development of the field. It is important to work out the specific tasks, research themes and approaches of a sociology of forced migration and to link the sub-discipline to an emerging sociology of global social transformation. This endeavour has to depart from the nation-state boundedness of most sociological tradition and to understand itself as part of a transnational and inter-disciplinary undertaking. This essay can only be seen as a preliminary effort, which will have achieved its purpose if it stimulates further discussion amongst sociologists.

Notes

1   An earlier version of this article was presented as a keynote address at the British Sociological Association Conference on the Sociology of Exile, Displacement and Belonging at Staffordshire University from 17–19 April 2002. I thank the participants in the conference and four anonymous reviewers for comments on the paper.

2   It is important to note, however, that work of the Chicago School itself contains far more subtle analyses of the significance of ethnic identity and cultural meanings for inter-group relations (Lal, 1986). Such discussions have led recently to a new interest in the concept of assimilation in the search for better models for understanding immigrant incorporation in the USA (Alba and Nee, 1997; Zhou, 1997).

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