

# **NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH**

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## **Refugees, forced resettlers and ‘other forced migrants’: towards a unitary study of forced migration**

**David Turton**

E-mail: [david.turton@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:david.turton@qeh.ox.ac.uk)

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**Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit**

**Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
CP 2500, 1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland**

**E-mail: [hqep00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqep00@unhcr.org)  
Web Site: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)**

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In this paper I discuss a general problem that arises whenever there is an attempt to formalise and institutionalise a relatively new field of academic enquiry with the aim of having an impact on policy: namely, how to define the subject matter of the field. It might seem that the answer to this question is obvious: if we want our research to influence policy, then we had better define its subject matter in terms of categories and concepts which are employed by policy makers. This is the approach which was adopted within refugee studies, when it emerged as a field of academic enquiry in the early 1980s. Its concern to be ‘relevant’ (and, it must be admitted, its need for funding) led it to adopt policy related categories and concerns in defining its subject matter and setting its research agenda.

The trouble with this approach is that the categories and concepts employed by policy makers may not be helpful – indeed they are likely to be downright unhelpful - when it comes to the pursuit of scientific understanding. This, after all, is not their main purpose.<sup>1</sup> And yet, we must assume that the more rigorous the science, both theoretically and methodologically, the more likely it is to have a beneficial impact on policy (Jacobson and Landau, 2003). I shall argue in this paper that the academic study of forced migration is less likely to be ‘relevant’ to policy and practice, the more slavishly it follows policy related categories in defining its subject matter.

Perhaps the most obvious consequence of the dependence of forced migration research on policy related categories is that research on different categories of forced migrants tends to proceed as though on parallel tracks (Hansen, 1996). A good example of this is the so-called ‘research divide’ which Michael Cernea has identified between the study of refugees and the study of forced resettlers (1996). I shall therefore begin by considering some of the empirical and conceptual similarities between people who are classified as refugees and those who are classified as forced resettlers. I shall then stand further back and discuss the difficulty of separating out a category of *forced* migrants from migrants in general. This difficulty rests on the logical awkwardness, not to say contradiction, of combining ‘forced’, which implies a lack of alternatives, with ‘migration’, which implies choice and human agency. I shall suggest that the best way out of this difficulty is always to think of forced migrants as ‘ordinary people’, or ‘purposive actors’, embedded in particular social, political and historical situations.

In the third part of the paper I consider the main categorical distinctions that have emerged over the years within the broader category of ‘forced migrants’, namely ‘refugee’, ‘internally displaced person’ (IDP) and ‘development-induced displaced person’ (DIDP). Because these distinctions are artefacts of political and policy concerns, rather than of empirical observation and sociological analysis, they work against two fundamental requirements of the scientific method: the comparison of sub-classes within a class of related phenomena and the revision of categories and concepts in the light of empirical observation.

Finally, I discuss the implications of this for the general issue of ‘relevance’, within a problem-oriented field of study. I suggest that a good way to approach this issue is to distinguish, not between two kinds of professional activity, research and policy making, or between two kinds of people, the ‘academic’ and the ‘practitioner’, but between two kinds of knowledge, according to the manner in which it is produced. ‘Practical knowledge’ is produced by ‘doing’ and is necessarily unreflective and unself-conscious (though not necessarily false), while ‘scientific knowledge’ is

produced by the application of scientific method and is necessarily reflective and self-conscious, (though not necessarily true). I conclude that research on forced migration will be most relevant to policy when it is used, not to sustain and legitimise the practical knowledge upon which policy is based, but to scrutinise and problematise it.

### **Refugees and forced resettlers: tracing the connections**

‘Refugees’, for the purpose of this discussion, are people who have left their own country because of persecution and violence and who are unable or unwilling to return to it. ‘Forced resettlers’ are ‘development-induced displaced persons’ who have been allocated a specific area within their own country in which to resettle and who have been provided with at least a minimum of resources and services in order to re-establish their lives. The term may also apply, of course, to those who are resettled by government sponsored programmes which use resettlement as a technique of rural development and/or political control, as they have been used, for example, in South Africa, Tanzania and Ethiopia in the recent past.

The connections between refugees and forced resettlers can be traced on an empirical as well as on a conceptual level. Empirically one can focus on the experiences of forced migrants, rather than on the causes of their migration, and on the challenges they face in re-establishing themselves in a new place. Here I shall rely mainly on Cernea himself, and on an unpublished essay by Elizabeth Colson, ‘Coping in Adversity’ (1991), which is a rare example of an attempt to achieve precisely the kind of ‘bridging’ between two bodies of ‘research literature’ that Cernea has been calling for. Second, I shall move from the empirical to the conceptual level and suggest that both the figure of the refugee and the figure of the forced resettler can be seen as revealing underlying contradictions in the ideology of the nation-state as the dominant political organising principle of the modern world.

Both Colson and Cernea emphasise the “commonalities of experience...among the uprooted, however they are set in motion” (Colson 1991: 1). Colson focuses on the psychological stress caused by the experience of being forcibly displaced. She notes that, while all migrants are liable to increased levels of stress, this is compounded for forced migrants by bereavement at the loss of their homes and anger and resentment towards the agents and institutions which forced them to move. This is likely to lead, for both refugees and forced resettlers, to a loss of trust in society generally and to the expression of opposition and antagonism towards the administrative authorities, and towards the staff of humanitarian organisations, who continue to have power over their lives. For refugees, this is seen most obviously in a critical and resentful attitude towards camp personnel, as reported, for example, in Harrell-Bond’s account of Ugandan refugees in Sudanese camps (1986) and in Malkki’s account of Hutu refugees in Mishamo refugee settlement in Tanzania, who regularly described themselves as the ‘slaves’ of the Tanzanian authorities (1995a: 120).

Unlike most refugees, forced resettlers (I refer here specifically to those displaced by infrastructural projects) have no choice about leaving their homes and cannot entertain the slightest hope of returning to them. Also unlike refugees, it is possible for their move to be planned well in advance. The authorities can therefore take steps to ensure that the disruptive impact of the move is minimised and that the standard of living of the resettlers is improved, or at least maintained. In practice, however, this hardly ever

happens: those displaced by development projects are not only (like refugees), typically, amongst the poorest and politically most marginal members of a society, but they are also likely to become even more impoverished as a result of the move. Forced resettlers, therefore, may end up “as alienated from their governments as the refugees who have fled their countries” (Colson: 1991: 15).

Based initially on her study of the forced displacement of the Gwembe Tonga of Zambia by the Kariba Dam in 1957-58, Colson has attempted, in conjunction with Thayer Scudder, to demarcate phases in the process of forced displacement, which are also found to apply to refugee populations. The first two of these phases are particularly applicable to refugees. First there is a stage of denial (‘this cannot happen to us’), when “the possibility of removal is too stressful to acknowledge” (Scudder and Colson 1982:271). After the move has taken place, there is likely to be a phase during which people will cling to old certainties and take no risks, even if this prevents them from taking advantage of new economic opportunities.

Following removal, the majority of relocatees, including refugees, can be expected to follow a conservative strategy. They cope with the stress of removal by clinging to the familiar and changing no more than is necessary (Scudder and Colson 1982: 272).

Here we may see a clear illustration of the difference which force, or the relative lack of choice in deciding whether, when and where to move, makes to the behaviour of migrants. The greater the area of choice available to them, even though they may be escaping from difficult or even life-threatening circumstances, the more likely they are to show high levels of innovation and adaptation in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by their new environment (Turton 1996).

The fact that forced resettlement, unlike the flight of refugees, can be planned in advance, and the fact that it is, in many cases, a seemingly inescapable consequence of economic development, has provided both the motive and the opportunity for social scientists to study its long term consequences. This research, much of it carried out by social anthropologists, has produced a huge amount of detailed information that has been used in efforts to promote improvements in the design and implementation of resettlement projects. Michael Cernea, who was formerly Senior Adviser for Sociology and Social Policy at the World Bank and the main architect of the Bank’s policy on ‘involuntary resettlement’, has been at the forefront of these efforts. His ‘impoverishment, risks and reconstruction model’ of forced resettlement is intended to act as a guide to the actions needed if the potentially impoverishing effects of forced resettlement are to be avoided or minimised. Two of these effects are particularly relevant to the comparison of forced resettlers with refugees: landlessness and loss of ‘social capital’.<sup>2</sup>

According to Cernea, empirical evidence shows that loss of land “is the principal form of decapitalization and pauperisation” of forced resettlers (2000: 23) and that “Settling displaced people back on cultivable land...is the heart of the matter in reconstructing livelihoods” (p. 35). Loss of social capital refers to the disruption and disintegration of the informal social support networks which are vital to economic survival in communities where individuals and households are vulnerable to short term and unpredictable fluctuations in income. Both of these potentially impoverishing effects of forced migration clearly apply to those forced to move by conflict, whether across

international borders or not, at least as much as they do to those forced to move by development projects.

On an empirical level, then, it is clear that refugees and forced resettlers “confront strikingly similar social and economic problems” (Cernea 2000: 17). But it is also possible to trace a connection between them at the conceptual level, by considering their relationship to the nation-state, or to what Malkki (1992) has called ‘the national order of things’<sup>3</sup>. The refugee, as a person who is unable or unwilling to obtain the protection of his or her own government, makes visible a contradiction between citizenship, as the universal source of all individual rights, and nationhood, as an identity ascribed at birth and entailing a sentimental attachment to a specific community and territory.

.....the twentieth century became the century of refugees, not because it was extraordinary in forcing people to flee, but because of the division of the globe into nation-states in which states were assigned the role of protectors of rights, but also that of exclusive protectors of their own citizens. When the globe was totally divided into states, those fleeing persecution in one state had nowhere to go but to another state, and required the permission of the other state to enter it (Adelman 1999: 9).

The figure of the refugee exposes a contradiction in the idea of the nation-state, as both a culturally homogeneous political community and as the universal principle of political organisation. The refugee is ‘out of place’ in a conceptual as well as an empirical sense. He or she is an anomaly produced by the universalisation of the nation-state as a principle of political organisation.

The forced resettler, as a person displaced ‘in the national interest’ to make way for a development project, makes visible a contradiction between the nation-state as, on the one hand, the ultimate source of legitimate political control and the principal agent of development in a given territory and, on the other, a community of equal citizens. The official objective of a project involving forced resettlement is, of course, to benefit a much wider population than that of the displaced themselves. And the key characteristic of this wider population is that it shares with the displaced population membership of the same nation-state. Co-membership of the nation-state, therefore, makes legally and morally legitimate a situation in which, as Cernea has put it, “some people enjoy the gains of development, while others bear its pains” (2000: 12). But who are these ‘others’ who are also fellow-citizens? In what sense are they ‘other’? Is it just that they are ‘not us’ or is it, more fundamentally, that they are ‘not like us’, that they have a different and systematically inferior, relationship to the sources of state power?

The empirical evidence suggests the latter answer is correct. In case after case of forced resettlement, we see the state exercising its right to expropriate property for public use against a relatively impoverished and powerless group of its own citizens, with typically disastrous consequences for their economic, physical, psychological and social well-being. In many cases, the displaced people are members of an indigenous minority who are forced out of their home territory or part of it. They are economically and politically marginal to the nation-state within which they were incorporated in the process of nation building and their forced displacement can be seen as a continuation of that same process. Writing about the contribution of forced

resettlers to the 'greater common good' in India, Arundhati Roy notes that well over half those due to be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River belong to ethnic minorities which make up only eight per cent of the Indian population as a whole. She comments:

This opens up a whole new dimension to the story. The ethnic 'otherness' of their victims takes some of the pressure off the Nation Builders. It's like having an expense account. Someone else pays the bills. People from another country. Another world. India's poorest people are subsidising the lifestyles of her richest... (Roy 1999: 18-19).

In other words, forced resettlement is a 'price worth paying' for the good of the nation, provided somebody else pays it, where 'somebody else' refers to fellow citizens whose relationship to the state is different from, and inferior to, our own. It follows that, when affected populations form themselves into campaigning organisations to resist resettlement, they are challenging, not just a particular project, or the development policy of a particular state, but also the idea that underpins the state's claim to sovereign power over its territory: that it is a 'nation'-state, a national community of equal citizens. They are challenging, in other words, the legitimacy of state power. On this basis, the forced resettler has an equal claim, along with the refugee, to being considered the 'Achilles' heel' of the nation-state system (Adelman 1999: 93). Both categories of forced migrants expose underlying contradictions in the ideology of the nation-state.

Given the empirical and conceptual connections that can be traced between refugees and forced resettlers it is, on the face of it, puzzling that those who write and teach about refugees, should show so little interest in the substantial literature which now exists on forced resettlers. According to Cernea, the disinterest is mutual.

...the literature on 'refugees' coexists side by side with a literature on 'oustees' or on 'development caused involuntary displacement'. There is little communication and mutual enrichment between them. Concepts and propositions are not inter-linked, and empirical findings are rarely compared and integrated. For instance, most of the writings on refugees omit oustee groups from the typology of displaced populations. In turn, research on oustees forgoes the opportunity of doing comparative analysis by studying refugees. As a result, the chance for more in depth treatment is being missed (1996: 294).

Four years later he returned to the same argument, repeating the summary he gave in his 1996 chapter of the benefits to be gained from 'bridging the research divide'.

This potential for gain is fourfold. *Empirically*, the two bodies of research could enrich each other by comparing their factual findings. *Theoretically*, they could broaden their conceptualizations by exploring links and similarities between their sets of variables. *Methodologically*, they could sharpen their inquiry by borrowing and exchanging research techniques. And *politically*, they could influence the public arena more strongly by mutually reinforcing their policy advocacy and operational recommendations (Cernea 2000: 17, emphasis in the original).

The main benefit Cernea sees coming from the bridging of this divide is intellectual – it will improve the quality of research, theoretically and methodologically, in both areas.<sup>4</sup> But, as the above quotation illustrates, he also hopes that this will, in turn, help policy makers to recognise, and then prevent or minimise, the risks of impoverishment that are faced by both categories of forced migrants. Paradoxically, there are good reasons to believe that it is precisely the close relationship that already exists between research and policy in these two areas that has worked against the interchange of ideas and research findings between them. I shall return to this point later in the paper, as part of my discussion of the various sub-categories into which the overall category of ‘forced migrant’ has been divided. Before doing so I shall take a step back and consider the practical and conceptual difficulties involved in separating out forced from unforced migration, as a field of academic enquiry.

### **Who is a forced migrant?**

It seems logical to ask, first, why we need to attempt such a separation in the first place. At least three, mutually compatible but not equally persuasive, reasons come to mind. First, forced migrants have a distinctive experience and distinctive needs (Stein, 1981). If there is a problem with this approach it is that, by emphasising the common experience and common needs of forced migrants, we risk seeing them as a homogeneous mass of needy and passive victims. The truth is that there is no such thing as ‘the refugee experience’ (the title Stein gave to his article), and there is therefore no such thing as ‘the refugee voice’: there are only the experiences, and the voices, of refugees.

...there is no intrinsic paradigmatic refugee figure to be at once recognised and registered regardless of historical contingencies. Instead...there are a thousand multifarious refugee experiences and a thousand refugee figures whose meanings and identities are negotiated in the process of displacement in time and place (Soguk 1999: 4).

A UNHCR document quoted by Soguk, appears to go even further, on behalf of all migrants:

Behind the phenomena of moving lie deeper and often interrelated patterns of political, economic, ethnic, environmental, or human rights pressures which are further complicated by the interplay between domestic and international factors...there are as many reasons for moving as there are migrants (UNHCR 1993: 13).

Second, forced migration is a product of wider processes of social and economic change, processes that are normally referred to as ‘globalisation’, and which appear to be creating an ever increasing North-South divide in living standards, human security, and access to justice and human rights protection (Castles 2003: 16). It follows that forced migration, including the ‘migration industry’ of people trafficking and smuggling, can provide a kind of window on these processes, a way of examining and understanding them.

Third, forced migrants make a special claim on our concern. They require us to consider issues of membership, citizenship and democratic liberalism. They require us

to ask what our responsibilities are to the stranger in distress, the stranger amongst us, on our doorstep, who is seeking a better life for himself or herself and for his or her children, and the stranger half way round the world who is brought into our homes by satellite TV channels. They require us, in other words, to consider who we are - what is or should be our moral community and, ultimately, what it means to be human.

For these reasons, and especially the last two, forced migration is a phenomenon of increasing significance in today's world of cross-border flows (of trade, investment and information as well as of people) and transnational networks. This is a world in which the difference between rich and poor can increasingly be seen as a difference between those who are able to travel freely about the "space of flows", as Manuel Castells has characterised the contemporary global economy<sup>5</sup>, and those who are condemned to suffer what Zigmunt Bauman calls "the discomforts of localized existence"(Bauman, 1998: 2). These can include anything from threats to life and liberty to lack of educational and employment opportunities.

What appears as globalization for some means localization for others; signalling a new freedom for some, upon many others it descends as an uninvited and cruel fate. Mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values – and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times.

Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation. The discomforts of localized existence are compounded by the fact that with public spaces removed beyond the reaches of localized life, localities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control...(Bauman, 1998, pp. 2-3)

It is clear from the harrowing accounts of the journeys made by asylum seekers and economic migrants into the rich industrialised countries that they are prepared to take tremendous risks (of suffocation, for example, in container lorries and of drowning in crowded and unseaworthy boats) in order to escape the 'discomforts' described by Bauman.. From this point of view, the consideration of forced migration leads us, ultimately, to consider the gap between rich and poor countries, and the question of how far rich countries are prepared to go to close that gap, by means of development aid, trade reform and, crucially, the liberalisation of migration policies.<sup>6</sup>

But while forced migration is certainly a subject worthy of academic research, when we try to separate out a class of forced migrants from migrants in general, we are faced with a problem which is both methodological and ethical. The methodological problem is that it proves impossible to apply the term 'forced migration' to the real world in a way that enables us to separate out a discrete class of migrants. It turns out, on closer inspection, that most migrants make their decision to migrate in response to a complex set of external constraints and predisposing events. These constraints and events vary in their salience, significance and impact, but there are elements of both compulsion and choice, it seems, in the decision making of all migrants. In order to deal with the fuzzy boundaries between forced and unforced migration, therefore, we have to resort to the familiar device of the continuum.

Two authors who have done this for us are Anthony Richmond (1994: 59) and Nicholas Van Hear (1998: 44). Richmond has what looks, at first sight, like a fearsomely complicated matrix in which he places all kind of migratory movements in relation to various axes. He distinguishes between 'proactive' and 'reactive' migration as the opposite ends of a continuum. Towards the reactive end he places war victims and slaves and towards the proactive end retirees and returnees. He also tries to catch the reality that the causes of migration are political as well as economic, it being just as impossible to make categorical distinctions between the political and the economic causes and conditions of migration as it is to make categorical distinctions between proactive and reactive migrants. Van Hear has an equally challenging matrix, with one axis running from voluntary (meaning more choice/ more options) to involuntary (meaning less choice/less options). Along the other axis he has five kinds of movement - inward, outward, return, onward and staying put. At the involuntary end of his continuum he has refugees, and people displaced by natural disasters and development projects and at the voluntary end he has tourists, students and business travellers.

The ethical problem follows from this use of the continuum as a device for separating out categories of migrants according to the amount of choice open to them - entirely free at one end and entirely closed at the other. For this runs the risk that we will ignore, or underestimate, the most important quality of all migrants and indeed of all human beings: their agency. Richmond's choice of 'proactive' versus 'reactive' migration makes this particularly clear: he is classifying people on a continuum between those with and those without agency, forced migrants being those with little or no agency. But we know from studies that have been made of, for example, the behaviour of people in concentration and labour camps, that even in the most constrained of circumstances, human beings struggle to maintain some area of individual decision making - and those who succeed in this are those who survive best. Thus, even at the most 'reactive' or 'involuntary' end of Richmond's continuum, people probably have a lot more choice than we might think - or that these models allow us to think. They may have choices, for example, not only about whether but also about when, where, how and with whom to move - choices which cannot be encompassed by continua of this kind.

The term 'forced migrant' obviously implies that there is such a thing as 'unforced migration', but one hardly ever comes across this usage. What we usually find instead is 'voluntary migration', with forced migration being treated as synonymous with 'involuntary migration'. This is the terminology used by Van Hear, for example, in his representation of the continuum between force and choice. Strictly speaking, though, 'involuntary' is not the correct English word to oppose to 'voluntary'. Commenting on the usual English translation of Aristotle's distinction between an act for which an agent can be held morally responsible ('voluntary') and an act for which he or she cannot be held responsible ('involuntary') the philosopher Antony Flew writes:

This is certainly awkward, since in English the opposite of voluntary is not involuntary but compulsory: attendance at the rallies of the ruling party may - in different countries - be either voluntary or compulsory, but scarcely involuntary; whereas the cries, starts, and twitches which are so

typically involuntary could scarcely in any normal circumstances be said to be compulsory - or even voluntary. (1971: 226)

If it is linguistically 'awkward' to talk about 'involuntary' human migration, this is because, to migrate, when applied to human beings, implies at least some degree of agency, of independent will. To migrate is something a person does, not something that is done to him or her. People can be moved and displaced, but not 'migrated'. The term 'compulsory migration' is, for the same reason, no less awkward. Where there really is no reasonable alternative, as for example for the victims of the African slave trade, or for those forced to move because their homes are about to be inundated by the waters of a dam, it would be more appropriate, on linguistic and logical grounds, to speak of compulsory or forced displacement than of compulsory, forced or involuntary migration.

I do not conclude from this that we should dispense with the term 'forced migrant' and replace it with something else. It is probably the best term available, precisely because (unlike, for example, 'forced displacement') it does allow us to recognise the element of human agency in the great majority of the processes and events we wish to focus on. But we should be aware of the conceptual, logical and ethical difficulties it raises and not assume that it refers to a clearly discriminable class of events and individuals. It is perhaps best to regard it as a useful shorthand term which cannot be defined analytically but which allows us to bring together a whole range of overlapping ideas and events which resemble each other like the members of a family. "Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap" (Wittgenstein, 1969: 17, quoted in Kenny, 1973: 153).

A second conclusion is that, while we should be interested in the factors that limit choice and the ways in which individuals, households and groups make decisions in the light of those limiting factors, we should not lump people together into categories, according to the extent of choice open to them. Different forced migrants, however they are categorised, have different areas of choice and different alternatives available to them, depending not just on external constraining factors but also on such factors as their sex, age, wealth, social connections and networks. This means that we have to understand the point of view and experiences of the people making the decision to move, and/or where to move. We have to emphasise their embeddedness in a particular social, political and historical situation.

In other words, we should be focusing on forced migrants as 'purposive actors' or 'ordinary people', and this for two reasons, one practical and one ethical. The practical reason is that this is how migratory processes actually work. And yet research and teaching in the field of refugee studies has tended to focus on policy issues on the one hand and on the needs - physical and psychological - of forced migrants on the other. As Jeff Crisp has pointed out, there has been a relative absence of research on the factors that individuals, families and groups take into account when they make their decisions to leave their homes.

.....in terms of empirical enquiry (both in academic institutions and in operational agencies such as UNHCR) there has been a dearth of research on asylum seekers: how they reach the decision to leave their own country; what information is available to them when they make that

decision; the way in which their journey is financed; the degree to which it is planned with a specific destination in mind; and the extent to which they had prior contact with that country. Rather than focusing on asylum seekers themselves.....the refugee discourse has focused far too narrowly on issues of public policy. As a result, the empirical data collected on the migration strategies employed by asylum seekers (and the social networks of which they are part) is highly fragmentary in nature. (Crisp, 1999, pp. 4-5)

It is worth noting here that we are encouraged to think of forced migrants as identical members of homogeneous categories, rather than as ‘purposive actors’, by the metaphors we habitually and unselfconsciously use in order to conceptualise them. The most pervasive of these metaphors are what Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 25-32) call ‘ontological metaphors’, because they have to do with entities, substances and containers. We speak of flows, streams, waves and trickles of migrants. We speak of ‘asylum capacity’. We speak of dams, channels and sluice gates. We speak of being flooded, inundated and swamped. This metaphorical language of migration is clearly not ‘innocent’.

First, it is not a language which is spoken by migrants themselves - it is spoken from a sedentary, state-centric point of view. It is the language *we* use to talk about *them*, even if we, or our ancestors, were also migrants once. Second, this kind of language requires us to think of migration as an inexorable process, with its own force and logic – something which we did not bring about, but which we ignore at our peril. Third, the metaphors we use to talk about migration require us to think of migrants as an undifferentiated mass - as molecules in a liquid. It de-personalises, even de-humanises them and thus makes it easier for us to see them as a threat, or even as enemies.

The use of metaphor - understanding one kind of entity or experience in terms of another - is not something we can dispense with. It is fundamental to the way we understand and reason about the world.

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a *uniform* kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances we can refer to them, *categorise them, group them, and quantify them* - and, by this means, reason about them (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25, emphasis added).

But, as Ulf Hannerz has put it, “when you take an intellectual ride on a metaphor, it is important that you know where to get off” (2002: 6). To which one might add that it is even more important to know that you are riding on a metaphor in the first place. When we talk of ‘migratory flows’, then, we should recognise that we are talking metaphorically and that the metaphor encourages us to think of the people in question in a certain way - as passive victims of circumstances, carried along like identical molecules in a liquid - and ‘get off’ the metaphor before it is too late.

The ethical reason for focusing on forced migrants as ‘purposive actors’ or ‘ordinary people’ is that by emphasising what Soguk calls (writing of refugees) “their capacity for agency against all odds” (1999: 5), we increase our imaginative ability to identify with the suffering of others, to see them as potential members of our own moral

community. This is what the philosopher Richard Rorty describes as ‘human solidarity’.

Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the *particular details* [emphasis added] of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalise people different from ourselves by thinking, ‘They do not feel it as we would’, or ‘There must always be suffering, so why not let *them* suffer?’ (1989: xvi).

In short, the more we are able to see the forced migrant as an ordinary person, embedded in a particular set of local circumstances, the more difficult it becomes to ignore his or her plight - to become, and remain, a bystander.

### **‘Other forced migrants’**

There has been a growing tendency, over the past few years, in both academic and policy circles, for refugees to be mentioned alongside, and almost in the same breath as, ‘other forced migrants’. But who are these ‘other forced migrants’? A brief look at four recent publications, which can be seen as falling squarely within the field of refugee studies, shows that the people referred to belong to a particular category of forced migrants defined, like refugees, in terms of the reasons for their flight and their status in international law, namely ‘internally displaced persons’ (IDPs). The interest of researchers and humanitarian practitioners in the ‘internally displaced’ has been fuelled, if not inspired, by the growing concern of the international community with the ‘IDP problem’, a concern that is itself motivated not only by humanitarian considerations but also by the strategic political objective of Northern donor countries in preventing and ‘containing’ refugee flows.

In an edited collection, *Managing Migration: Time for a New International Regime?* (Ghosh 2000), Gil Loescher has a chapter entitled ‘Forced migration in the post-Cold War era: the need for a comprehensive approach’. This call for a ‘comprehensive’ approach to forced migration focuses overwhelmingly on refugees, defined as “people who have fled from and are unable to return to their own country because of persecution and violence” (2000: 190). There is, however, a short section on the ‘internally displaced’<sup>7</sup>, defined as “people who have been uprooted because of persecution and violence but who remain in their own countries” (loc. cit.) Passing reference is made to “people who have been uprooted by development projects”, but only to point out that they are amongst the ‘millions’ of forced migrants “who are outside UNHCR concern” (p. 191).

In his section on the ‘internally displaced’, which is headed ‘Addressing the growing problem of internal displacement’, Loescher notes that “A new comprehensive international regime for forced migrants will necessarily have to place internally displaced persons at the centre of its concern” (p. 210). He also calls attention to the need to strengthen the international human rights regime, so that the international community can better “monitor developments in human rights issues and intercede on behalf of forced migrants” (loc. cit.). It is here that one might reasonably have expected some reference to be made to the rights of forcibly resettled people, but it is

clear that Loescher's sights remain firmly fixed on those who have been forced to move by conflict.

The lack of any reference to forced resettlers is even more striking in a book edited by Ann Bayefski and Joan Fitzpatrick, *Human Rights and Forced Displacement*, (2000), the entire purpose of which, as the title implies, is to discuss the human rights of forcibly displaced populations. The book does, however, include a chapter (by Roberta Cohen) on the 'internally displaced' (as defined by Loescher), to which I shall refer later.

In a UNHCR working paper entitled 'Forced migration and the evolving humanitarian regime', Susan Martin defines forced migrants, "For the purpose of this paper", in the same way as Loescher, namely as "persons who flee or are obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence because of events threatening their lives or safety" (2000: 3). She makes only passing reference to forced resettlers, although she does note that they could become 'of concern' to the international community if their governments were unable or unwilling to provide them with protection and assistance (p. 6).

Finally, Howard Adelman, in an article entitled 'From refugees to forced migration: the UNHCR and Human Security', sets out to examine the significance of UNHCR placing the refugee issue, since the early 1990s, "within the larger context of forced migration" (2001: 7). It turns out, of course, that this 'larger context' is limited to the 'internally displaced.'

It cannot be denied that there are strong practical reasons for maintaining a clear distinction between refugees and the 'internally displaced' on the one hand, and forced resettlers on the other. The key point here is that both refugees and the 'internally displaced' are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their governments, while forced resettlers have been deliberately moved by their own governments in the name of 'eminent domain' law, which allows property to be expropriated from its owners or traditional users for the sake of a wider public good. Forced resettlers, therefore, expect to be compensated for the land and property they have lost and it remains the theoretical responsibility of the government that moved them, under the national legal system, to provide them with protection and assistance

Development-induced displaced persons (DIDPs) generally remain in their country of origin and their legal protection should theoretically be guaranteed by the government. In terms of the international state system, the government is responsible for ensuring that the rights of people under its jurisdiction are respected....the complexities of DIDR [development-induced displacement and resettlement] result specifically because the government that is responsible for the displacement is also responsible for ensuring the protection of DIDPs. (Barutciski 2000: 2).

There are also strong practical grounds for maintaining a clear distinction between refugees and the 'internally displaced', because of the different statuses of these two categories of forced migrants in international law. Refugee protection, for which there exists a strong body of legally binding norms and principles, "is essentially about promoting asylum in foreign countries", while the protection of the 'internally displaced', for which there are no legally binding norms and principles, "is basically

about humanitarian intervention in troubled countries” (Barutciski, loc. cit.). There is, of course, much debate about how to address the needs of the ‘internally displaced’, given that there is no single international organisation with a mandate to protect and assist them. What appears to be widely accepted is the importance of not running the risk of ‘diluting’ the protection currently afforded to refugees under international law by extending the term (as would be perfectly meaningful in everyday speech) to other forced migrants who do not qualify for the same level of protection under international law – and to speak, for example, of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ refugees.

For Cernea, “The key policy objective in forced resettlement is restoring the income-generating capacity of resettlers” (1996: 314). According to Barutciski, this would be an ‘overly ambitious’ objective to entertain in the case of refugees.

While conceptual models that emphasise the reconstruction of livelihoods are appropriate for DIDR situations which may or may not involve abuse on the part of local authorities, they are not necessarily appropriate for refugee emergencies that are by definition situations in which the victims’ human rights are violated.....it would be overly ambitious to believe or insist that emergency refugee assistance is intended to restore the livelihoods of victims of persecution or conflict to levels before their flight (Barutciski 2000: 2)

There was a time, of course, when such an objective would not have been seen as ‘overly ambitious’. That was during what has been called the ‘asylum phase’ in the history of the post-war international refugee regime (from the 1960s to the 1980s), when the integration of refugees in the country of first asylum (usually in the developing world) was seen, along with voluntary repatriation, as the most viable and feasible ‘durable solution’ to the ‘refugee problem’. Thus, during the 1960s and 1970s, agricultural settlement schemes for refugees were set up with the help of the UNHCR in several African countries, the aim being to help refugees re-establish themselves in a new country and to become self-sufficient.

Between 1961 and 1978, approximately 60 rural settlements have been installed, most of them in Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania... In the 1990s, nearly a quarter of all refugees in sub-Saharan Africa were estimated to be living in 140 organized settlements, most in the eastern and southern regions....Planned land resettlements have long been considered the best means for promoting refugee self-sufficiency and local integration. (Lassailly-Jacob 2000: 112)

It is here, in the planning of agricultural settlement schemes for refugees, that research on forced resettlement has, potentially, the greatest practical relevance to refugee policy. (Kibreab, 2000, pp. 324-331). But this policy has significantly changed since the 1980s, to one which focuses on prevention and containment in countries and regions of origin, and on early repatriation, rather than on the reconstruction of refugee livelihoods in countries of asylum.<sup>8</sup>

The days are past when many rural refugees could be assisted toward achieving self-sufficiency in exile. Going into exile now means hiding among locals or surviving in transit camps, where the living conditions are so poor that few wish to stay on. (Lassailly-Jacob 2000: 123)

There is consequently little incentive for policy-oriented research in refugee studies to concern itself with the findings of the equally policy-oriented research on forced resettlers.

But there is another, more fundamental, way in which the dominance of policy concerns in the study of forced migration can be seen as working against the integration of research findings on different populations of forced migrants. The scientific point of distinguishing subsets within a class of related phenomena is to encourage and facilitate comparison between those subsets, in order to throw light on the wider class, and to aid (in the sense of make more acute) the observation, description and analysis of empirical data. These objectives are interdependent, since there must be a constant readiness to revise and sharpen abstract categories in the light of empirical observation. The trouble with the categories used in the study of forced migration is that, being dictated by political and policy concerns rather than scientific ones, they actually discourage comparison within the broader category of forced migration and are not amenable to revision in the light of empirical evidence.

Consider the term ‘refugee’ itself. This is the name of a legal category, based on the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which was itself heavily based on the ‘strategic political objectives’ of the Western powers at that particular historical moment. (Hathaway 1991, quoted in Chimni 2000: 14). Hathaway distinguishes ‘five essential elements’ in the Convention definition, of which the first is ‘alienage’: the claimant for refugee status must be outside his or her country of origin. But the exclusion of ‘internal refugees’ from the Convention definition was not “so much a matter of conceptual principle, as it was a reflection of the limited reach of international law” (Hathaway, 1991, quoted in Chimni, *op.cit.*: 401). He quotes Shacknove’s argument that alienage is not a necessary condition for establishing refugee status, which depends rather on “the physical access of the international community to the uprooted person” (Shacknove, 1985: 277). It follows that

....the physical presence of the unprotected person outside her country of origin is not a constitutive element of her refugeehood, but is rather a practical condition precedent to placing her within the effective scope of international protection (Hathaway 1991, quoted in Chimni, *loc. cit.*)

The key criterion, then, that distinguishes the legal category ‘refugee’ from ‘other forced migrants’, i.e. alienage, is not based on ‘conceptual principle’ and is not a ‘constitutive element’ of refugeehood. It follows that the term ‘refugee’, as used in the language of refugee protection and the language of refugee studies, does not distinguish a ‘subset’ of forced migrants that can be meaningfully compared to other subsets. As Malkki has put it, the term is not “a label for a special, generalisable ‘kind’ or ‘type’ of person or situation” but “a descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations” (1995b: 496).

The ‘IDP’ category is even more hazy and imprecise. The ‘internally displaced’ are defined, in the ‘Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement’ of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as

persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a

result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border' (quoted in Chimni 2000: 242).

The 'essential' purpose of the definition is to "help identify persons who should be of concern to the international community because they are basically in refugee-like situations within their own countries" (Cohen, 1996, quoted by Chimni, 2000: 407). The inclusion of people who have fled their homes because of 'natural disasters' (itself a highly ambiguous and imprecise concept) is intended to cater for cases where governments "respond to such disasters by discriminating against or neglecting certain groups on political or ethnic grounds or by violating their human rights in other ways" (Cohen 2000: 82).

A first point to make here is that, on these grounds, it would be logical and understandable to prefer the term 'internal refugees' to 'internally displaced persons'. This would both recognise the 'refugee-like' situation of the people being referred to (i.e., that they had moved because of persecution and/or violence) and make clear the distinction between them and forced resettlers, who are also displaced within their own countries but who are not in a 'refugee-like' situation. As noted earlier, however, the logic which dictates the use of 'IDP' rather than 'internal refugee' is a practical, not a conceptual one: it has to do with a concern not to undermine the protection available to refugees under the 1951 Convention, which makes 'alienage' an 'essential element' (Hathaway 1991, quoted in Chimni 2000: 15) of the legal definition of a refugee.

Secondly, the form of words used to justify the inclusion of those displaced by 'natural disasters' in the definition of 'internally displaced person' could easily be used to extend the definition to many if not most of today's forced resettlers, even though they are not mentioned in the formal definition. Indeed, principle 6.2(c) states that all human beings have a right to be protected from 'arbitrary displacement', including cases of "large scale development projects, which are not justified by compelling and overriding public interests" (quoted in Chimni 2000: 427.)

But this ignores the main issue in forced resettlement, which is not simply that people should be protected from 'arbitrary displacement' but that, however compelling the public interest reasons for displacing them, there remains an obligation on governments to protect their political, social and economic rights (Pettersson 2002). On the one hand, then, the definition (of IDP) is extendable to a huge variety of different situations, groups and individuals, and yet it is confined in practice to a relatively narrow range of displaced persons, namely those displaced by violence and persecution. It is therefore too vague and ambiguous to serve as a meaningful analytical category for comparative purposes.

For the same reason, these policy-related categories are also unhelpful when it comes to the observation, description and analysis of empirical data - of the world as it actually is. In an unpublished address given at the 2001 meeting of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, the head of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, Jeff Crisp, lamented the fact that UNHCR staff "seem to know less and less about the people and communities we work with" (2001: 9).<sup>9</sup> He gives a number of explanations for this - security problems which keep UNHCR staff away

from rural areas where refugees are mainly found, increased paperwork which ties staff to their computers and rapid staff turnover 'in remote locations'. He also complains that researchers in refugee studies are spending too much time in libraries and not enough in the field. By way of illustration, he mentions having met several postgraduate students in the recent past who wanted to write dissertations about the international community's responsibilities towards the 'internally displaced', but none who wanted to investigate their situation "on the ground" (loc.cit.).

This call for more in-depth empirical research on forced migrants goes to the heart of the matter I have been discussing in this paper, because it puts the focus on the experiences of refugees and 'other forced migrants', rather than on the causes of their flight or their status in international law. But the argument I have presented here suggests that this lack of knowledge of the everyday lives and preoccupations of refugees 'and other forced migrants', may have a deeper, structural cause than lack of time and/or interest amongst UNHCR staff and academic researchers respectively.

Empirical research, as opposed to mere random observation, cannot proceed except in the light of general propositions which, among other things, identify the phenomena to be investigated and group them into meaningful categories. These categories must, in turn, be open to refinement and revision in the light of particular observation. But this condition cannot be met by categories which are designed to meet the needs of practical politics and humanitarian assistance rather than of scientific enquiry. The category distinctions which I have been discussing in this paper are tenaciously upheld by academics, policy makers and activists alike, on the grounds that they are vital, given the current 'reach' of international law, for the protection and assistance of refugees. But they would not stand up to the close scrutiny which would inevitably result from the kind of field-based, empirical research that Crisp appears to be calling for (Allen and Turton 1996: 5-9). If taken seriously, therefore, such research could lead to a wholesale questioning of the category distinctions upon which the current international regime of refugee protection and humanitarian assistance - and possibly much else - is based.

I believe that such questioning could only be to the long term advantage of those – the majority of the world's population – who are currently suffering 'the discomforts of localised existence', including those whom the international refugee regime is mandated to protect. But when knowledge has potentially radical and disturbing consequences for established thought and practice, ignorance may well be considered bliss. This raises an issue that every problem-oriented field of study must face: how to combine scientific rigour with 'relevance'.

### **The problem of relevance: practical versus scientific knowledge**

We can surely agree that there is no justification for studying, and attempting to understand, the causes of human suffering if the purpose of one's study is not, ultimately, to find ways of relieving and preventing that suffering. This clearly applies to the study of forced migration, given the scale of the human problems involved and the level of suffering that must be observed, documented and analysed by anyone wishing to carry out research in this field. We can also agree, on a priori grounds alone, that the only kind of science that is going to make a positive and lasting contribution to the improvement of human wellbeing is science that meets the highest

standards of theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour. This is borne out, empirically, by the history of those improvements in human wellbeing that have resulted from the application of scientific method to the prevention of suffering, whether in the natural or social sciences. One thinks, for example, of the ‘relevance’ of the work of the chemist Louis Pasteur to the control of bacterial diseases and of the work of the economist Amartya Sen (1981) to the prevention and relief of famine.

This issue is usually debated by asking such questions as ‘How can we make academic research relevant to the real world?’, or ‘How can we bridge the research-practice divide?’ Judging from the persistence of this debate, and the apparent lack of a satisfactory resolution to it (the fact that it ‘won’t go away’) we should consider the possibility that it is not a ‘real’ debate at all: that it is not capable of a satisfactory resolution, if conducted in its current terms.

Perhaps the most common way of characterising the ‘gap’ between research and practice is to distinguish between two different categories of people, academics and practitioners, each engaged in different kinds of professional activity and each with a different objective: academics, it is sometimes said, want to understand the world, while practitioners want to change it. This apparently clear distinction soon becomes blurred, however, when one seeks to give it empirical content. For, on the one hand, it turns out to be no easy matter to sort individuals unambiguously into the two categories (academics, for example, often want to change the world too) and, on the other, understanding the world is obviously a pre-requisite for deliberately, systematically and beneficially changing it.

A more productive way of approaching the issue might be to distinguish, not between two kinds of people or professional activities, each focused on a different objective, but between two kinds of knowledge, scientific (or academic) and practical, which the same person can happily combine and make use of, depending on context and situation. Since all knowledge is socially produced, an obvious basis on which to distinguish between different kinds of knowledge is to focus on differences in their modes of production and reproduction.

Thus, we can say that practical knowledge is produced ‘by doing’ - that is, through the very performance of a task or activity which is not aimed primarily at producing knowledge - while scientific knowledge is produced by an activity which has precisely that objective. We can say, further, that it is a characteristic of practical knowledge to be unreflective and unself-conscious (though not necessarily false) because it is produced by ‘doing’ and that it is a characteristic of scientific knowledge to be reflective and self-conscious (though not necessarily true) because it is produced by the deliberate application of the hypothetico-deductive method of science.

From this point of view, the best way to make scientific knowledge ‘relevant’ to practice is to use it to scrutinise and problematise what practical knowledge takes for granted, not to sustain or legitimise it. It follows that the application of scientific knowledge to a specific practical task is not necessarily conducive to its effective implementation. Indeed, by raising doubts about the legitimacy and/or desirability of the proposed objective and/or the methods chosen to achieve it, such knowledge may require that the task be either given up altogether or radically re-thought. We should therefore expect and welcome some degree of tension, or even conflict, between scientific and practical knowledge.

In this sense, there is indeed a ‘research practice divide’, but the tension which is symptomatic of this divide will disappear only when yesterday’s science has become today’s common sense - and is therefore no-longer thought of as science. It follows that we should at least consider the possibility that, when public policy relating to forced migration fails to meet its objectives, this may be in part because the assumptions that guide research on this topic have been tied too closely to the practical, short term concerns and preoccupations on which policy is based. According to Stephen Castles, this might help to explain the spectacular ability of Western governments’ immigration policies to bring about the opposite of what they intend.<sup>10</sup>

The key point is that policy-driven research can lead not only to poor sociology but also to bad policy. This is because narrowly-focussed 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, nor for more challenging solutions. (Castles 2003: 26)

This presents a twofold challenge to all those involved in the study of forced migration and in the design and implementation of policies intended to improve the situation of forced migrants. First, we need to adopt a unitary and inclusive approach to the definition of the field which means, as I have argued in this paper, encouraging research which is aimed at understanding the situation of forced migrants at the local level, irrespective of the causes of their flight. This focus on the local is not, of course, intended to rule out consideration of the global. On the contrary, failure to recognise global connections in the study of local level events and processes arises only when there has been a failure to specify the local in sufficient detail - when it is not situated with sufficient clarity and precision within a particular place at a particular time.

Second, we need to recognise that research of this kind will inevitably call into question the adequacy and usefulness of existing generalisations, assumptions and categories and that it is by such questioning that academic research can play its most effective and beneficial part in the general improvement of human welfare. We should remember these words of Louis Pasteur, a scientist whose practical contribution to the improvement of human welfare it is difficult to exaggerate: ‘Il n’existe pas de sciences appliquées mais seulement des applications de la science’ (‘There are no such things as applied sciences; there are only applications of science’) (Pasteur 1872: 42).

## ENDNOTES

This paper draws on three others, prepared at various times over the past few years, for presentations at the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC), University of Oxford, and elsewhere. The first ('Some problems with refugee studies'), was given as a seminar for students at the RSC; at a Workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh, organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka; and at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg. The second ('Conceptualising forced migration'), was a lecture prepared for the RSC's International Summer School in Forced Migration. The third ('Refugees and "other forced migrants"') was written for a Summer School module on 'Development-induced displacement and resettlement' and formed the basis of a presentation given at a workshop on 'Settlement and resettlement in Ethiopia', organised by the United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists (28-30 January, 2003).

1. Quite what is their main purpose, on the other hand, is another matter. I assume that the first and most pressing concern of any institution, political or otherwise, is to pursue its own vested interests and ensure its own survival and reproduction.
2. The others are 'joblessness', 'homelessness', 'marginalization', 'food insecurity', 'increased morbidity' and 'loss of access to common property resources'. (Cernea 2000:20)
3. The argument that follows is set out at greater length in Turton (2002)
4. Personal communication, 23/9/03.
5. '...our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds and symbols. Flows are not just one element of the social organization' they are the expression of processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life' (1996, pp.411-20).
6. According to the economist Dani Rodrik, 'instituting a system that would allot temporary work permits to skilled and unskilled workers from poorer nations, amounting to three percent of the rich countries' labor force would easily yield \$200 billion of income annually for the citizens of developing nations – vastly more than what the existing WTO trade agenda is expected to produce' (2002). For further discussion of the potential increase in 'world welfare' to be gained from liberalising the 'temporary movement of natural persons'. see Winters et al, 2002.
7. I shall continue to place inverted commas around 'internally displaced', in order to emphasise the point that this category is normally not intended to include those, like forced resettlers, who have been displaced within their own countries, but not because of violence and persecution.
8. This was the result of the dramatic increase in the numbers of refugees and 'others of concern' to the UNHCR which occurred during the 1980s, coupled with geopolitical changes that coincided roughly with the end of the Cold War (Turton 2002: 34).
9. See also his recent paper 'Why do we know so little about refugees? How can we learn more?' (2003).
10. Among other examples, he cites the US Immigration and Control Act (1986), which was intended to reduce illegal immigration but which led to an upsurge in both legal and illegal immigration, and the efforts of Western European countries, in the 1990s, to prevent the entry of asylum seekers, which gave a powerful impetus to the transnational 'migration industry' of people smuggling and trafficking.



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