

The Birth of a 'Discipline': From Refugee to Forced Migration Studies

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This essay seeks to understand and explain the birth of Forced Migration Studies. It argues that the turn from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies must be viewed against the backdrop of the history and relationship of colonialism and humanitarianism, as a certain commonality binds the past and present eras. The move to Forced Migration Studies accompanies the inauguration of a phase of political humanitarianism with a distinct accent, albeit encapsulated in new forms and issues, on 'civilizing' the Other. In making this contention the paper distances itself from both the defenders and critics of the turn to Forced Migration Studies. It *inter alia* contends that Refugee Studies, like Forced Migration Studies, has served the geopolitics of hegemonic states. But since all knowledge is dual use, both have also had humanitarian effects. But a greater degree of disciplinary reflexivity would go a long way to ensure that the genuinely humanitarian strand in Forced Migration Studies prevails.

Keywords: refugee studies, forced migration studies, political humanitarianism

Introduction: Knowledge and Power

A decade ago I wrote an article, 'The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South', in which I argued that while knowledge production and the policies of states and international institutions in the area of Refugee Studies do not share a unique relationship, the expansion of Refugee Studies in the eighties was arguably a function of finding ways to cope with the growing arrival of refugees from the south to the north (Chimni 1998; Bradley 2007: 125).¹ The growth of Refugee Studies took place at a time when the end of the cold war had undermined the non-humanitarian rationale of the international refugee regime, testing the limits of western humanitarianism. In this period Refugee Studies saw the invention of the 'myth of difference' (between second and third world refugees), the turn from an exile bias to voluntary and later involuntary repatriation, a sharp focus on internal causes of refugee flows, and the inauguration of the debate whether UNHCR's mandate and resources should be extended to the protection of IDPs. It was my belief that

as time passed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees would be undermined by innumerable measures taken by western states to deter, detain and push back asylum seekers as a part of a policy of containment.

In the present essay I will argue, with the sole purpose of initiating a debate, that in considering the subsequent shift from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies the issue is not, as has been suggested recently, whether Refugee Studies should distance itself from Forced Migration Studies (Hathaway 2007). For this is to perpetuate a fundamental misunderstanding about Refugee Studies. The underlying assumption that Refugee Studies is necessarily on the side of the rights of refugees is mistaken. Refugee Studies is no angel. Indeed, it can be argued, as I had done, that much of Refugee Studies has served the same purpose as Forced Migration Studies may be accused of, that of legitimizing the containment of refugees from the south to the north (Chimni 1998). There is thus *continuity* between Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies that is entirely missed by both the advocates of Refugee Studies and the proponents of Forced Migration Studies. It is also misplaced criticism that the field of Forced Migration Studies is problematic because it does not turn on clear or hard legal categories; legal categories are not merely devices for inclusion but also of exclusion,² as Zetter has persuasively demonstrated in his pioneering work on the label 'refugee' (Zetter 1991, 2007).

Furthermore, life and epistemology do not imitate legal categories. Instead, legal categories most often seek to 'discipline' life and knowledge to realize dominant interests in society. There is in any case nothing intrinsic in Forced Migration Studies that prevents Refugee Studies from safeguarding its own autonomy. The question of identity is in my view *only relevant from the perspective of institutions* (both academic and inter-governmental) that have been established to further Refugee Studies or mandated to protect refugees. In that instance it is certainly a valid question to ask whether the limited mandate and scarce resources of these institutions should be devoted to a broader range of issues and persons.³

It is interesting to note here that the move from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies does not proceed, as it should, to claim unity with Migration Studies.⁴ This should be a logical move if, as is argued, sociological phenomenon and not legal categories is the determining factor in knowledge production. If the boundaries between refugees and IDPs are blurred at the existential level so are the borders between forced and voluntary migration. The difference between the two is only between types of movements and degrees of coercion involving the varied exercise of agency. But in this case the interests of powerful states militate against the conjunction of voluntary and forced migration.⁵ On the other hand, the move from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies is part of the *new humanitarian agenda* that furthers the goals of hegemonic states. In short, *I would like to distance myself from both the critics and defenders of the turn to Forced Migration Studies in as much as my argument differs from both.*

The move from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies should in my view be explored against the backdrop of a western strategy to employ *political humanitarianism* to legitimize a new imperial world order. There is continuity here between the colonial era and the present that was only interrupted by the imperatives of cold war politics. The meaning of the turn to Forced Migration Studies, I therefore make bold to suggest, has to be examined in the matrix of *the history of humanitarianism in and since the era of colonialism*. For revisiting the past will help understand the complex relationship between humanitarianism and imperialism, especially its role in legitimizing imperialism.⁶ It will in turn help review the emerging relationship between western policy makers, Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies.

More specifically, the move to Forced Migration Studies may be seen as a part of the shift towards the agenda of *new humanitarianism* that calls for the abandonment of the principles of classical humanitarianism (practised only in the period of the Cold War when depoliticized humanitarianism served a political purpose) and the reconfiguration of the concept of forced migration (making it more inclusive).⁷ It is worth recalling here that the principles of classical humanitarianism were never applied to the colonial world; even the founding fathers of international humanitarian law had, at least in the beginning, a colonialist orientation (Megret 2006: 272).⁸ The civilized/uncivilized binary was used to exclude the colonial world from the benefits of the laws of war (2006: 284 ff). The humanitarianism of the times was (on which more later) what may be termed colonial humanitarianism.

In the present era the changing concept of humanitarianism has two dimensions: external and internal (see generally Kennedy 2006: 131). When turned outwards, as has been noted, humanitarianism today means political humanitarianism. Its inward reflection is a variety of communitarian policies (or multiculturalism) attempting to come to terms with the Other. The turn to Forced Migration Studies thus accompanies and often provides justification for intrusive and muscular humanitarianism on the one hand and communitarian rationales for the validation of bound borders on the other. The critique thus is not of Forced Migration Studies *per se* but of its ties to the idea and strategies of new or political humanitarianism. But as Donini has observed,

like it or not, humanitarian action is part of global governance, if not of global government. It lives in parallel with, and is sometimes subordinated to, processes of economic governance, political containment strategies and military action that are functional to the interests of the 'global North' (Donini 2007: 49).

Forced Migration Studies is now, it deserves emphasis, part of a *radically different project*, that is, to establish a *post-colonial imperial order*.

History of Refugee Studies: History and Content

Let me, however, return to Refugee Studies to stress that it has been a double-edged sword so far as the rights of refugees are concerned. I wish

to emphasize here, and I will continue to remind, that knowledge is mostly dual use. It can be deployed by social forces of both dominance and emancipation. Thus, for instance, historically the science of economics is associated with capitalism and anthropology with colonialism. The same disciplines have, however, also provided powerful critiques of capitalism and colonialism. To put it differently, if we are to speak truth to power a crucial precondition is critical self-reflection on the origin, evolution and character of the discipline. Such self-reflection should, however, be part of a dialogic approach that is equally receptive to a double critique, that is, the critique of critique (on dialogic approach generally see Chimni 2001: 158ff.). It is in this spirit that the present essay is written.

Refugee Studies has always evolved in response to the problems of the times. Four phases in its evolution can be identified: the first phase was from 1914–1945 in which specific inter-war problems were addressed. As Black has pointed out, in this phase there was ‘a strong bias towards practical issues’ with a focus on the ‘absorptive capacity of land and colonization,’ ‘the professional refugee’ (i.e., refugee professionals, such as doctors, scientists, etc.), the League of Nations and ‘private and governmental organizations’ (Black 2001: 59). The second phase from 1945–1982 saw ‘voluminous studies of the refugee camps left after the displacements of the two World Wars, as well as work on the interwar International Refugee Organization and its post-war successor, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (Black 2001: 57).

The third phase from 1982–2000 saw the rapid development of Refugee Studies. In this period the Refugee Studies Programme (RSP) was established in Oxford (1983) followed shortly afterwards by the publication of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* (1988). A Center for Refugee Studies was created at York University, also in 1988. The International Research and Advisory Panel (IRAP) was set up soon afterwards (in the period 1989–1990) ‘as an annual information exchange forum on refugee policy and practice’. The expansion of Refugee Studies was a response to both the growing number of refugees and increased South–North flows (Chimni 1998). It may be recalled that the non-entrée regime was already beginning to be constructed at this early stage. Grahl-Madsen wrote as early as 1983, that ‘in country after country a tendency toward a more restrictive interpretation and application of important provisions, sometimes even a disregard for rules of international law’ could be noticed (Grahl-Madsen 1983: 15). Such a trend sought legitimacy in the extensive knowledge generated about refugees and the refugee regime.

To the extent that the expansion of Refugee Studies was a function of the anxieties and concerns of Western states in the wake of increasing movement of asylum seekers from the south to the north, the purpose of this expansion was achieved. The number of refugees in the world have declined to 8.3 million, with asylum applications to the North falling for a fourth year

in a row, dropping 25 per cent since its peak in 2001, and is at its lowest point since 1988 (UNHCR 2006: 91–92). It is therefore no accident that Refugee Studies is now witnessing a relative decline and is being replaced by Forced Migration Studies to come to grips with current preoccupations of western policy makers with the asylum–migration nexus or the fate of growing numbers of IDPs.

To be sure, the knowledge of the life world of refugees and refugee communities produced in the period of expansion contained much that was critical of the policies of states, including the non-entrée policies of western states, and undoubtedly produced humanitarian effects. Thus, Refugee Studies helped counter the image of refugee as a parasite, critiqued the practice of imposed aid, underlined the need for listening to refugee voices and adopting participatory approaches, elaborated the rights of refugees, highlighted the special needs of refugee women and children, paid attention to the psychosocial health of refugees, highlighted problems relating to the integration of refugees in host societies, pointed to the dangers of involuntary repatriation, and identified the institutional and democracy deficits in inter-governmental and non-governmental agencies concerned with the welfare of refugees. This was no mean achievement and those associated with the growth of Refugee Studies can be proud of it.

But the knowledge produced in the period 1980–2005 also contributed to shaping and justifying western policies. The relationship of Refugee Studies with power or governmental policy-making is in other words a complex one.⁹ A particular knowledge–power constellation configured to legitimize the non-entrée regime (Chimni 1998). The knowledge of a subject, it is worth reiterating, is always crucial to its regulation; in the absence of requisite knowledge it is difficult to shape an appropriate legal and political response. The required knowledge is produced not only in universities but also outside them by intergovernmental organizations and NGOs. There is the integral relationship between knowledge production, knowledge dissemination and power even as critical knowledge seeps through power nets and systems. While knowledge is not always implicated with power, other than in the reductive sense that knowledge cannot be produced outside some social and/or institutional location, it is always a potential object of cooption. Unsurprisingly, states and international institutions moved swiftly in this period to selectively appropriate the fruits of Refugee Studies (*Ibid.*).

Often the relationship between knowledge and power is overt; power can simply dissuade the production of critical knowledge. The battle over definitions of the term ‘refugee’ expresses the more obvious aspects of the relationship between knowledge and power. The abandonment, since the early 1990s, of attempts to contest the partial nature of the definition of ‘refugee’ contained in the 1951 Convention shows how Refugee Studies took its cue from state policies. Thus, it was repeatedly noted that ‘there is no realistic possibility of revising the Convention definition’ (Sztucki 1999: 63).¹⁰

Black therefore rightly points out that ‘the relatively uncritical use of a policy-based definition of refugees within academic writing has a long pedigree’ (Black 2001: 63)¹¹:

... the development of academic literature [was] based less on theoretical reflection about what constitutes a refugee, or a conceptually coherent field of study, and more on the documentation of empirical examples of displacement, often led by researchers based within policy organizations that are directly concerned with responding to (or even causing) particular types of displacement (Black 2001: 65).

In the circumstances an attempt by some scholars to attach a special salience to legal categories is somewhat odd (Hathaway 2007). The legal definitions of ‘refugee’ have always been partial and designed to serve State policy. The failure of academia to address the definition issue (despite the expanded definition in the 1969 OAU Convention) ironically meant that it was left to the ‘practitioner’, in particular UNHCR, to devise ways to overcome this closure. The practitioners to their credit turned to international human rights law (such as the Convention against Torture) to compensate for the unethical definition of ‘refugee’, leading to the idea of ‘complementary protection’ (for details see Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2007: 291ff.). The latter is an instance of how knowledge production can have humanitarian effects, but equally of how the debate on definitions was displaced.

The legal positivist methodology with its focus on extant legal categories is thus deeply flawed. In any case, a certain legal fetishism characterizes the view that legal categories provide protection to refugees. It may come as a surprise to some that no country in South Asia is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or has a national law on the status of refugees (albeit admittedly they may have laws on the statute book that can offer protection) and yet they have provided refuge to millions of refugees (on the legal condition of refugees in India see Chimni 2000: 462–537, 2005: 277–314). To be sure, in the absence of a refugee specific regime it cannot be claimed that refugees have access to all their rights and entitlements, but the record of South Asian States is (in relative terms) no poorer than the current record of the rich North with its formal commitment to the Convention (Chimni 2007). Law is not the panacea for social problems that it is made out to be and legal categories not the last word in shaping humane responses, especially when the very definition of ‘refugee’ is problematic. Therefore, without decrying the value of entitlements framed in law, it may be said that the reliance on the existence of legal categories as a basis for seeking the independence of Refugee Studies is misplaced.

If a serious critique of Refugee Studies, in particular Refugee Law, is not forthcoming it is because the agenda of evolving Refugee Studies is set in the North. All the *major* centres of Refugee Studies are located in the North.¹² The key journals on refugee issues are published there. To note this is in no way to decry the efforts of progressive western scholars to fight the restrictive

practices of their governments or advance the rights of refugees (as noted above). It is merely to stress the need for scholarship that questions the assumptions that inform dominant strands of Northern thinking with regard to the causes and solutions of refugee flows, and to advance alternative viable models of responsibility sharing and humanitarian assistance. I make this point here because both the recent issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* on 'Methodologies of Refugee Research' (vol. 20(2) 2007) and the subsequent issue on Forced Migration Studies (vol. 20(3) 2007) and UNHCR's important publication *Refugee Protection in International Law* (Feller *et al.* 2003) do not appear to carry (to the best of my knowledge) a single article by a third world scholar. Let me hasten to add that this is not to suggest in any way a policy of deliberate exclusion. Indeed, generally speaking, quite the contrary is true. Constant attempts are made to include Southern voices.¹³ But the principal locus of knowledge production, in so far as theoretical and methodological issues are concerned, remain northern academic institutions or north-dominated international governmental and non-governmental organizations. It is the division of labour between theoretical/methodological knowledge and empirical/descriptive knowledge that is problematic. It has meant that local knowledge, despite the overwhelming consensus on its need, has played a marginal role in shaping Refugee Studies.¹⁴

The Turn to Forced Migration Studies: Global Governance of the Displaced

Since the mid-nineties we have seen a turn from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies. The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) was created out of IRAP, degrees in Forced Migration Studies have come to be offered by several universities or educational institutions including the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University,¹⁵ and journals such as *Forced Migration Review* (in 1998) were launched.¹⁶ The themes addressed by Forced Migration Studies include the world of IDPs, the smuggling and trafficking of persons, armed humanitarian intervention, and the construction of a post conflict state, revealing that the concept of forced migration has been reconfigured to *primarily* reflect the geopolitical and strategic concerns of western states; it has also undoubtedly had some humanitarian effects.

In contrast to the present focus on forced migration, Refugee Studies occupied centre stage in the period of the cold war. The concentration on the international refugee regime in this period, as we all know, also reflected western interests; the refugee symbolically denounced the world of 'actually existing socialism'. The current interest in all types of displaced persons, accompanied by attempts to establish a *new* system of global governance for the displaced, is no different. At least one explanation for the shift from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies is that a new system of governance anticipates knowledge about *all forms* of displacement and its

subjects within a transformed international system. This knowledge feeds into a new frame of rules and institutions, and a set of strategies and practices, that will allow the west to control or manipulate all forms of displacement, including voluntary migration, from the south to the north. More specifically, it creates opportunity for and legitimizes western intrusions into the non-western world.

Even simple data and statistics get implicated in these strategies; IDPs are a case in point. It is entirely understandable that Cohen and Deng (whose work I much admire) relied on high IDP figures to argue the case for a separate legal regime and institutions for IDPs.¹⁷ But the act of counting can never be a value free exercise. Information turns into knowledge and social categories to engender legal norms for behaviour.¹⁸ Thus, for example, if we were to count all people afflicted with diabetes in any country it would yield significant numbers that could then become the basis for framing international norms of behaviour towards diabetes patients. The international community could thereafter make out a case for (some form of) intervention to assist with the prevention and cure of diabetes. I am not suggesting that IDPs did not exist; they always did. It is therefore the act of ‘discovery’ (at a particular historical juncture) that needs to be interrogated. To so imply is not to subscribe to any kind of conspiracy theory but rather to contend that truth is not always opposed to power: truth can help produce knowledge, experts, and a ‘discipline’, to legitimize hegemonic practices. To put it differently, the role of IDP numbers is crucial to the transition to a new regime in which the category ‘refugee’ continues to exist but shares space with the category IDP.

Evaluating the contribution of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* over the years Zetter has written that

the existence and plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was hardly recognized in 1988, still less the impact of development-induced displacement (DID). Some estimates suggest that numbers of IDPs and DID people then and now far exceed convention refugees. JRS has recognized the significance of these new phenomena (Zetter 2000: 352).

Less than two decades after the alleged neglect the UNHCR talks of ‘the international community redressing *one of its greatest failures*, the neglect of internally displaced persons’ (Guterres 2006: 9, emphasis added). The number of refugees, it is pointed out, has fallen to 8.3 million while the number of IDPs ‘of concern to UNHCR rose to 6.6 million. In addition, UNHCR assisted some 1.6 million returnee refugees and IDPs’ (UNHCR 2006: 92). Has the contribution of Forced Migration Studies in creating and foregrounding this category on the *international* plane been co-opted by policy makers in the North to feed its strategy of containment? Or is it the case that hegemonic politics has been uncritically embraced by Forced Migration Studies?

Knowledge is however always double-edged. It cannot be produced and confined for singular purposes. Allow me to travel across disciplines for

a moment and touch upon, in the context of the arrival of the category 'IDPs', the example of anthropology. According to Colson,

anthropology's most impressive contribution so far to issues of displacement may well be the founding of the RSP, Cultural Survival, IWGIA [International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs], and perhaps its contribution to the World Bank guidelines, and the assistance anthropologists have given to the emergence and empowerment of globalizing networks of indigenous and other peoples who demand to be consulted and are prepared to oppose plans that affect and may displace them (Colson 2003: 14).

Anthropology has thus contributed much to the transformation of Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies.¹⁹

There are both good reasons for this transformation, as also unintended consequences. I will first mention the good reasons. Anthropologists have recorded the similarity in experience among refugees and IDPs, often overlooked because of the presence of territorial boundaries and corresponding divisive legal categories (Turton 2003). Given the shared experience of IDPs and refugees, dissimilar treatment of them is difficult to justify.²⁰ The emphasis must therefore be on the travails of forced migration and not on different legal categories. Anthropologists have also drawn attention to the needs and rights of those displaced inside a country. In this regard a new legal regime for IDPs has been created (under the leadership of an anthropologist, Francis Deng); the UN Guidelines on IDPs were adopted in 1998 and widely disseminated thereafter. Thanks to the contribution of anthropologists there is a consensus today that the international community has a legitimate interest in seeing that the rights of IDPs are respected.

On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that the move to Forced Migration Studies has come about at a time of greater flow of refugees from the third world to the western world, in particular since the end of the cold war. It is at this critical political conjuncture that Forced Migration Studies made its entry into the academic and institutional world. With the result, as I noted some years ago in a lecture to Summer School participants at the Refugee Studies Centre, that the category 'refugee' has become just another category of forced migrants. There is no longer anything unique about being a refugee. A whole range of issues, including the nature and form of development, rights of IDPs, the smuggling and trafficking of human bodies, the question of transnational organized crime, and the issue of humanitarian intervention today vie for analytic attention. Furthermore, donors are encouraging research on these issues.²¹ To put it differently, Forced Migration Studies is about so many things and categories that the focus on refugees is being lost sight of, thereby lowering their profile in the international system (Nadig 2003: 373). This would not be problematic if this development did not proceed apace with the western restrictive asylum regime. Needless to add, this is no fault of anthropology but of how the knowledge it produces of its subjects is used by power.

In any case *the containment of refugees is only an element of a larger problem*. My central concern is that forced migration issues have today become *part of a western project of global dominance* and that Forced Migration Studies is implicated in it. Its key elements: rights of IDPs, protection of human rights, smuggling and trafficking of persons, a post-conflict liberal state have been used by powerful states to justify unacceptable and unlawful intrusions (including armed humanitarian intervention) into the developing world. It must not be forgotten *that IDPs, the central subjects of Forced Migration Studies, primarily exist only in the non-western world*; as is the case with other key subjects of Forced Migration Studies. Forced Migration Studies always seeks to signify the Other and has become part of a *new 'crisis of representation'*. Geertz had cautioned many years ago that

the entrance of once colonized or castaway people... onto the stage of global economy, international high politics, and world culture has made the claim of an anthropologist to be a tribune for the unheard, a representer of the unseen, a knower of the misconstrued, increasingly difficult to sustain.... (cited by Ben-Ari 1999: 398).

The resulting anxiety explains, as Geertz went on to note, the desire of contemporary anthropologists to distance themselves from the colonial encounter, as 'they have no experience and want none' (*Ibid.*). But the act of distancing (and the preoccupation with the present) without the recognition of persistent deep structures means the possibility of repeating history. To put it differently, the act of distancing has led to the *double* neglect of networks of global power, historical and contemporary, within which its subjects reside.

Changing Nature of Humanitarianism: Historicizing a 'Discipline'

Therefore unless the move from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies is located in the critical history of the world system, it is difficult to understand the significance of the shift. As Malkki has noted, 'involuntary or forced movements of people are always only one aspect of much larger constellations of sociopolitical and cultural processes and practices....' (Malkki 1995: 496). I will contend, and this is *my central thesis*, that as the movement of refugees from the south to the north became the primary preoccupation, and the cold war ended, the colonial logic of humanitarianism took over. That is to say, the entry of the southern refugee, without the constraints of the cold war, immediately implicated Refugee and Forced Migration Studies in a radically different project viz., the impulse to reform the Other. It became an integral part of a Civilizing Project in which the focus shifted from refugees to the reform of third world countries whose policies cause extensive internal and external displacement. Let me elaborate.

By humanitarianism I mean an ensemble of material *and* cultural practices that have as their aim the promotion of human welfare. A humanitarian act is at all times the carrier of cultural meanings even as it brings material assistance

and relief to people in distress. The cultural meaning of humanitarian practices shapes and is in turn shaped by the political ideas of an age. What we are seeing today is the revival of the liberal cultural-political ideas of progress and reform that informed the colonial project. It has led (it bears repetition) to the arrival in the west of the ideas and practices of *political humanitarianism* at the international level and the concern with a migration–multiculturalism nexus at the domestic. As a result the ideas of complex emergency and muscular humanitarianism on the one hand and communitarian philosophies that prescribe bounded boundaries on the other (the writings of Michael Walzer are a good example of the latter) have come to occupy centre stage.

To understand these developments we must look at the *longue durée* viz., the history of humanitarianism from the colonial era to the present (Duffield 2005).²² The past must be revisited, not from any perspective, but from the perspective of the subordinated or subaltern peoples. For the relationship of humanitarianism and colonialism, when written as part of uncritical national histories in the West, is presented as an optimistic one. The anthropologist Dirks writes (in the context of India) that 'built on fabrication, colonial history mirrors the general distortions and displacements of imperial self-representation—the use of imputed barbarism to justify, and even ennoble, imperial ambition' (Dirks 2006: 5). In this view 'imperial history has been written in the service of empire itself' (2006: 27). Dirks notes that colonial history 'veiled its dependence on the world outside by legitimating and naturalizing empire, ultimately representing it as at best nothing more than a burden and a terrible responsibility' (2006: 332). In short, the need to go over the colonial history of humanitarianism arises from the fact that *a certain commonality binds the past and the present*. In both eras, as Douzinas notes, the non-West is seen to combine 'the suffering mass and the radical evil-doer, the subhuman and the inhuman rolled into one', providing infinite legitimacy for all western humanitarian intrusions (2007: 13). As Douzinas says in the context of the human rights movement:

Despite differences in content, colonialism and the human rights movement form a continuum, episodes in the same drama, which started with the great discoveries of the new world and is now carried out in the streets of Iraq: bringing civilization to the barbarians. The claim to spread Reason and Christianity gave the western empires their sense of superiority and their universalizing impetus. The urge is still there; the ideas have been redefined but the belief in the universality of our worldview remains as strong as that of the colonialists (2007: 21).²³

The western meddling in the non-western world in the past, as today, clashed with liberal principles but was explained away through invoking the ideas of progress and reform. As Mehta notes in *Liberalism and Empire*, the urge to reform the world explains the

necessary tension [of the politics of empire] with other liberal notions such as tolerance, the right to representation, equality, and ... consent and sovereignty

of the people. In the empire, this latent impulse—this urge to reform and progress—which otherwise so often remains obscured and contested behind a concern with rights and individual freedom, *becomes virtually determinative and singular* (1999: 80).

This urge to reform, albeit amidst a different world order, also informs contemporary humanitarianism and underlies the shift to Forced Migration Studies. The reform sentiment has, transgressing ideological boundaries, come to be embedded in the idea of liberal democracy.

In this background, we should also be cautious in sharply contrasting the role of humanitarian agencies and western state policies (for example Zetter 2007: 189). Historically speaking, there has been no necessary conflict between the two: the two often worked in tandem during the colonial era and continue to do so in the post-colonial era, i.e., other than when classical humanitarianism briefly took root during the Cold War. Political humanitarianism has refused to be limited by the classic concept of humanitarianism with its emphasis on the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. In the post-cold-war era international humanitarian agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, have come to accept the view that it is their task to address both the causes and aftermath of a humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian organizations have become, as Donini *et al.* note, ‘a largely owned subsidiary’ of dominant states, subjecting them to their political and security interests (2004: 260). Bilateralization of aid, earmarking of funds, and control over budgets by states are among the instruments of control (2004: 262 ff). This understanding has, in the words of Barnett, ‘swept them . . . into the world of politics. Humanitarian agencies and states began to share agendas’ (Barnett 2005: 724).

One result is that humanitarian agencies have begun to neglect local voices as these often conflict with the agenda of states that fund them. In this framework, difference is a problem rather than simply a different mode of being. It has also, as in colonial times, led humanitarian agencies to accept the idea of reform from outside and thus muscular humanitarianism. It is of course another matter that armed humanitarian intervention has not materialized in instances where urgently required: Rwanda being the classic case. Much of the changed approach can be traced to the desire of humanitarian agencies to be active participants in transforming the non-western world in ways that realize the Western vision of good governance.

Humanitarian agencies have also, as a consequence of being swept into the world of politics, become implicated in a neo-liberal vision of humanitarianism. Market humanitarianism has come to impact the practice of humanitarian agencies as they are now vying for funds and influence in a competitive humanitarian environment. It has engendered humanitarian practices that tie the humanitarian agency more closely to the policies of western states and the international institutions they control. It is no accident that humanitarian agencies are today supporting armed intervention policies of the west and

a neo-liberal vision of post-conflict societies (Chimni 2002). To be sure, there are a great variety of humanitarianisms and agencies out there, but it would not be wrong to contend that northern discourse and practices of humanitarianism tend to prevail amidst this diversity of discourses and agencies (Chimni 2003).

I must hasten to add, that juxtaposing the policies of western states and humanitarian agencies is in no way meant to disregard the story of succour and sacrifices. Individuals associated with humanitarian agencies have brought relief and protection to thousands of people the world over, often involving the ultimate sacrifice. But the structural role of humanitarianism has arguably been that of the caring arm of imperialism (*Ibid.*).

If Refugee Studies or Forced Migration Studies did not, it deserves reiteration, initially have to confront the colonial conception of humanitarianism it was because Refugee Studies (as against the study of refugees) emerged in the period of the cold war in the east–west context. But the centrality of the south–north flow since the early 1980s has brought into play the practices that informed humanitarianism in the era of colonialism. Refugee Studies has now to find its home in the interstices of Forced Migration and Migration Studies and is inevitably squeezed between the two. The migrant is enmeshed in and is at the cutting edge of social transformations that are global in scope. It brings to bear upon the category ‘refugee’ the weight of the past in ways that are yet to be fully understood. A simple return to the past, or retrieval of the space of Refugee Studies, is no longer possible. It would, among other things, mean reinventing Refugee Studies in the context of a new phase of hegemonic politics.

Conclusions

The birth of a discipline is not an ahistorical process; disciplines begin and evolve, suffer ebbs and flows, in response to external developments. These developments most often reflect the interests and worldview of dominant social forces and a new discipline carries their marks on its body. But once a discipline germinates it cannot be subordinated to dominant interests alone; it is also amenable to the production of knowledge of concern to subaltern classes. However, on the whole, the modern social sciences have historically evolved in crucial ways to produce knowledge about the dominated Other in order to legitimize subordination (Said 1978). Both Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies cannot be said to have radically breached this understanding. Of course, there always have simultaneously been insurrectionary theories that work for the empowerment of subaltern and marginal groups. There is likewise a submerged trend in Refugee Studies and Forced Migration Studies that seeks to further the project of empowerment of displaced persons. The challenge before us is to strengthen it and get it to surface.

The move from Refugee Studies to Forced Migration Studies takes place within an imperial global order in which hegemonic states seek to use the ideas and practices of humanitarianism to advance parochial goals. The critique here is not of Forced Migration Studies *per se* but the shape it has assumed and the manner in which the ideology and practices of ‘humanitarianism’ are being deployed. On the other hand, there is no alternative to recognizing the existential realities of displacement, for legal categories cannot be the ultimate arbiters of social realities: the translation of knowledge into legal categories is always implicated in power. But if it is not to be left to states and international organizations to shape Forced Migration Studies, there is a need to be self-conscious about the intimate relationship between knowledge and power. Thus anthropology was closely associated with colonialism but a process of self-criticism has enabled it to come to terms with its past. It is in this spirit I understand and view Elizabeth Colson’s call that we create ‘an anthropology able to deal with the twenty-first century’ by theorizing the accumulated experience and learning from all forms of displacement to create a more humane world (Colson 2003: 12).

As for Refugee Studies, it must be remembered that even when restrictive measures of Western states are criticized, what are validated are often particular philosophical and political ideas about what kind of boundaries western states may legislate (Gibney 2004). Invariably methodological nationalism carries the day, even when the turn to Forced Migration Studies is legitimized on the basis of growing global democratic space. The world of displacement has thus become a site of power to embed selective humanitarian practices that facilitate the exercise of hegemony.

The stakes, I may stress, are big. The real concern of the North, if I may so suggest, is the defence of global capitalism that guarantees unprecedented affluence to certain sections of the Northern, and now small sections of Southern, citizenry. But such are the times that (despite the current global financial crisis) the ‘enemy’ cannot be identified even by its victims. To use the words of the French thinker Derrida, ‘one can neither show it, nor name it as such, but only indicate it, by a silent movement of the finger’ (Derrida 1976: 266).

Acknowledgements

This is a revised version of a paper delivered (read on my behalf) as the opening address on ‘The State of Forced Migration Studies’ to the 11th Biennial IASFM Conference held in Cairo in January 2008. I would like to take this opportunity to thank IASFM and its hosts, the American University in Cairo, for the invitation. I wish to thank Gregor Noll and two anonymous referees for going through earlier drafts and making several helpful suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank Barbara Harrell Bond and Ranabir Samaddar for their remarks as discussants of the paper in Cairo. The usual disclaimer applies.

1. According to Scallettaris, 'A distinctive characteristic of Refugee Studies is its intimate connection with international policy, more precisely with the international refugee regime' (2007: 36).
2. As Goodwin-Gill and McAdam succinctly put it, 'the refugee in international law remains one of the most politically contested issue of our time' (2007: v).
3. For instance, Goodwin-Gill and McAdam point out that 'for UNHCR to assume protection and assistance responsibilities for the internally displaced raises a number of institutional dilemmas, including issues of legal standing and conflict of interest' (2007: 32).
4. 'Empirical studies have clearly demonstrated that the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary movements are blurred and that refugees are part of complex migratory phenomena. A wider migration approach has often proved more appropriate and profitable in studying refugee-related situations, as a strictly refugee approach which isolates refugees' problems from non-refugees' poses the risk of giving the scholar a blinkered view that does not allow one to grasp all the processes and issues at stake' (Scallettaris 2007: 39).
5. In the words of Bradley 'many researchers and refugee advocates have well-founded reasons to suggest that bilateral donors' support for forced migration research is often motivated by a desire to limit migration and advance the economic and security interests, more than concerns for the rights and well-being of the displaced' (2007: 125).
6. But as one refugee scholar laments 'history has always been notable by its absence. When in 2000, the editor of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* reviewed the disciplinary basis of hundreds of articles submitted since the first issue in 1988 he found that materials addressing historical issues accounted for just 4 per cent of the total' (Marfleet 2007: 136).
7. Barnett explains: 'the widely accepted definition of humanitarianism—the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger of harm—emerged in opposition to a particular meaning of politics and helped to depoliticize relief-oriented activities. Many activities might alleviate suffering and improve life circumstances, including protection of human rights and economic development; but any actions that aspire to restructure underlying social relations are inherently political. Humanitarianism provides relief; it offers to save individuals, but not to eliminate the underlying causes that placed them at risk. Viewed in this way, humanitarianism plays a distinctive role in the international sacrificial order... The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence thus served to depoliticize humanitarian action and create a "humanitarian space" insulated from politics' (2005: 723).
8. Henry Dunant, who was in the early years 'a colonialist and a colonizer', later 'overturned his pro-colonization stance' (Megret 2006: 272, 275).
9. The knowledge–power relationship can either be direct or see the co-option of knowledge in ways not envisaged by the knowledge producers. Thus, from the policy options explored in the Refugee Studies literature, a state may pick those that fit its containment vision. This is exemplified in the work of scholars like James Hathaway who are critics of western policies even as their work is used *as a resource* for containment policies. Noll (2007) has identified the theoretical infirmities in the work of Hathaway that creates space for such selective appropriation.
10. There was a refusal to address the issue of expanding the definition of refugee on the lines of the 1969 OAU Convention. On the other hand, there was the

beginning of the debate on the need to include the world of IDPs in the international regime for displaced persons.

11. Hayden has noted how, among other things, it 'exclude[s] from theorization' 'issues of social class and economic rights' (2006: 486).
12. There is no doubt that a number of refugee centres have been established in the South, including the one in Cairo that hosted IASFM. However, to the best of my knowledge and assessment these centres are not shaping the knowledge production agenda.
13. On a personal note, I have been a member of the Academic Advisory Board of UNHCR (1996–2000), and of international advisory boards of the principal journals on refugee studies (*Journal of Refugee Studies*, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, *Refugee Survey Quarterly* and *Forced Migration Review*) and have been invited to innumerable conferences, meetings and to deliver lectures on refugee issues.
14. Bradley notes that 'a scan of the forced migration literature easily demonstrates that ample room remains for diverse Southern perspectives to be better integrated into contemporary debates' (2007: 122). Speaking of North–South research collaboration Bradley observes that although 'it is poised to grow in the future, but new partnerships will inevitably confront the persistent and well-documented challenges associated with international research cooperation. In addition to the question of agenda-setting, obstacles include language barriers; complex management structures; inequitable access to financial resources, libraries, conferences, training and publishing opportunities; mismatched expectations for the partnership; lack of in-depth, face-to-face interaction; and different levels of methodological sophistication' (2007: 128). It is perhaps the case that Southern partners also have some leverage in setting the research agenda but these seem difficult to translate into practical interventions (2007: 130, 132).
15. See for instance the various diplomas and degrees offered by the Forced Migration Programme in the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, see <http://migration.org.za/teaching/>; a Diploma in Forced Migration is also offered by the American University in Cairo, see <http://www.gradschools.com/Program/Egypt/Forced-Migration-and-Refugees-Studies/215250.html>.
16. Interestingly it was earlier brought out as *Refugee Participation Network* which began publication in 1987, see <http://www.fmreview.org/aboutus.htm>.
17. In their well-known publication *The Forsaken People* Cohen and Deng noted that when IDPs 'were first counted in 1982, 1.2 million were found in eleven countries. By 1997 the number had soared to more than 20 million in at least thirty-five countries' (1998: 1). The figures are cited as 'estimates' provided by the US Committee for Refugees (Cohen and Deng 1998: 14 endnote 1). In their tribute to Cohen's work, Deng and Kälin stress that there are 24 million IDPs because of internal conflicts and 'many millions more' displaced by development projects and natural disasters (2006: 3).
18. Roberta Cohen, who drew attention to the vast numbers of IDPs, is (rightly) credited with 'defining a field of academic and intellectual study' and, along with her Brookings colleagues, with elaborating the concept of 'sovereignty as responsibility' (Deng and Kälin 2006: 3). The lesson is that 'only if IDPs are identified and quantified can the necessary responses be developed and implemented in a targeted and effective way' (Rasmusson 2006: 17). It 'is a precondition for effective advocacy aimed at improving responses to the global internal displacement crises, and to support efforts to prevent new displacements' (*Ibid.*).

19. Historically, it is interesting that of all the disciplines involved in the study of human behaviour, as Harrell-Bond and Voutira note, 'anthropology has the most to contribute to the study of refugees' (1992: 6–7).
20. The IASFM consequently adopts a broad definition of 'forced migration'. It defines forced migration as 'a general term that refers to movements of refugees and internally displaced people (people displaced by conflicts) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects' (Nadig 2003: 361).
21. 'For example, in recent years many donors have been keen to fund research and policy initiatives on human trafficking, largely in response to pressure from the United States government. This was the case in South Africa, where trafficking was given a high priority by policymakers and international agencies such as the IOM despite the limited data available to suggest that it represents a large enough problem in the region to merit such attention. The Institute for Security Studies, a prominent African research organization, accepted a Belgian grant to carry out a study on trafficking in the region, but only tackled the issue with the caveat that the Institute would stand by the results of its dispassionate analysis of the issue, even if the study reached the potentially controversial conclusion that trafficking is not as critical an issue in the region as international organizations and policy-makers have assumed' (Bradley 2007: 124–125).
22. Duffield thus talks of 'the colonial present'. In the context of development and security of developing countries he observes: 'In vectoring from the colonial past to the colonial present, the subjectivities and relationalities of the authoring agents involved have mutated rather than the manoeuvre itself. From administrators working within the territorial parameters of the colonial state, the biopolitics of development is now enacted through a much broader and heterogeneous range of non-territorial, public/private institutions, networks and actors. The baton has been passed to a new generation of administrators working for donor governments, multilateral bodies, UN agencies, NGOs, private companies and academic institutions in, or connected with, the world's crisis states' (Duffield 2005: 155).
23. Or as Nardin puts it: 'In the old literature of empire, colonial rule was rationalized as providing backward peoples the benefits of civilization: public order, public health, modern communications, economic development, and eventually constitutional rule. The new literature of empire rationalizes intervention in similar terms. Most of the old justifications for empire are close to the surface in current understandings of America's mission' (2005: 25).

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MS received March 2008; revised MS received December 2008