

*1. The Why and the “Therefore” of Human Migration. A Brief Overview*

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Ever since the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871) the thesis that *Homo sapiens sapiens*, modern humans, originated in Africa is generally accepted. The mainstream and mainly consensused theory today, though disputed by some, is that of “Recent African Origin” (RAO) which posits that a single stream of *Homo sapiens sapiens* moved out of Africa some 60.000 years ago and disseminated over thousands of years across the planet. As they moved across the world, these humans gradually overran their predecessors, the Neanderthals and *Homo erectus*. There are those who dispute this theory by offering a paradigm in which *Homo erectus*, not *Homo sapiens sapiens*, originating from a series of African groups moved out of the continent and the date given for the beginning of this exodus is pushed back to at least two million years ago. Whatever the facts, the truth is that human beings have been on the move since the beginning of time. What is of interest to us is that our recent history has proved to be a period when more people have migrated than at any time before in human history. Human geographers, ethnologists, anthropologists and a host of scholars from other fields have produced a plethora of studies which delve into the reasons for migration on a mass scale and the consequences that derive from this phenomenon. Migration and its consequences have also become the focus of a wealth of creative writing that reveal how both individuals and collectives react, and are reacted to, within the context of migration, the migrant and host communities.

How do we define migration? What classifications of migration exist? What are the factors that contribute to migration? What kinds of migration are we dealing with today? What are the consequences of migration? These are some of the questions I want to try and answer here.

Migration can be defined in a variety of ways, amongst which:

1. An individual who lives permanently or temporarily in a country they were not born in.
2. A “working migrant” has been defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Migrants as a “person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.”<sup>i</sup>

Similarly the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights has established the following categories for migrant/refugees and stateless people:

1. Persons who are outside the territory of the State of which they are nationals or citizens, are not subject to its legal protection and are in the territory of another State.
2. Persons who do not enjoy the general legal recognition of rights which is inherent in the granting by the host State of the status of refugee, naturalised person or other similar status.
3. Persons who do not enjoy either general legal protection of their fundamental rights by virtue of diplomatic agreements, visas or other agreements.<sup>ii</sup>

These definitions reveal how difficult it is to define what constitutes a migrant and/or refugee and thus how nation legislations differ in accordance with their own understanding of the terms. It is precisely this difficulty which has led United Nations to create a permanent commission regarding the question of Human Rights and the status of migrants and refugees. It is a fact that, while the United Nations and the European Union might legislate and categorise who is or is not a migrant/refugee, each country will legislate internally and in the case of totalitarian states Human Rights may well be breached with regards to those who are “foreign”.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is that migration can take place within the individual’s own country. Historically, in Europe, this type of migration goes back hundreds of years as people began to move from rural to industrialised urban centres. State persecution can and does lead to alarming cases of internal migration even today. Nomadic peoples across the planet have engaged in seasonal internal migration for thousands of years. Thus we can establish two main simplified categories of migration: external and internal.

The factors that lead to migration are frequently referred to as “push / pull” factors and are, to a large degree, self-explanatory: “push” that which forces one from one’s homeland and “pull” that which attracts migrants offering, for example, opportunities not available in one’s homeland. The “push” factors have not really changed that much since the human race began to spread across the planet. People have been driven to seek new “homelands” as a result of: famine, drastic climate change, poverty, civil war, wars between nation states, territorial annexation, imperial expansion, religious, racial, ethnic, political and gender persecution. The list is longer and any of those mentioned, together with others one might add, can be considered “forced migration”, which lies at the heart of the verb “push”. Individuals and collectives are impelled by circumstance to move away from their homeland in order to survive and many could and are classified as refugees, especially those seeking refuge from war torn areas, genocidal policies, and states where Human Rights are held in abeyance. However, forced migration can also connote the violent expulsion, taking violent in its whole range of meaning, of both an individual or community from their homeland.

Contemporary examples would be the removal of the Chagos Islanders to Mauritius by the British. The islands, numbering around sixty, were/are part of the British Indian Ocean Territory. As such, the islanders came under the protection of the British until the 1960’s when the latter decided to allow the United States to build an airbase on Diego Garcia resulting in the forceful removal of all islanders.<sup>iii</sup> The tragic outcome of this

removal of the Chagos Islanders from their lands has been a high suicide rate among those in Mauritius, severe depression, and a sense of marginalisation within Mauritius itself.

If the case of the Chagos Islands was a sell out to the Americans who wanted a strategic base in the Indian Ocean, what happened to the people of Ocean Island, also known by its Kiribati name Banaba, one of the Kiribati Islands in Pacific Micronesia, was due to overriding neocolonialistic economic factors. Like the Chagos Islands, the Kiribati comprise several groups of islands: the Gilbert Group or Kiribati, the Line Islands and the Phoenix Group. The people of Banaba suffered tragically as a result of Japanese occupation during World War II, when so many of its inhabitants were brutally massacred. However, even before World War II the scene was being set for the final ruin of Banaba and for its Indigenous peoples.

The Banaba had something the rest of the world wanted and was going to get at whatever the cost to the people: phosphate. This devastating story of international greed at whatever price has its beginnings round about 1900 when the Pacific Islands Company Limited got the Banaban people to sign away the total right to phosphate mining to the British Company, later to become British Phosphate Commissioners under the joint ownership of the British, Australian and New Zealand Governments. The results of intensive mining, which includes the use of dynamite, have reduced the island's subsoil structure to something like a honeycomb, or gruyere cheese. The surface cannot sustain buildings with foundations and the island's ecosystem has been endangered. The removal of many of the Banaban people began in 1945 when the British Government relocated the majority to Rabi Island, thousands of miles away in Fiji. As the island became increasingly unstable further waves of migration followed to Rabi only a few returning once mining finished in 1979. It is now estimated that only some 200 people have returned to live on the island and the debate remains as to the weight of population the island could actually sustain. It has become, to all intents and purposes, inhabitable after thousands of years of human habitation.

If we move back through history we will find multiple examples of violent expulsion of peoples from their homelands often going hand in hand with persecution and genocide. Another form of violent forced migration frequently accompanies agendas of imperial expansion. While the two examples given above are of forced removal from one's homeland to a new offshore geographical location, imperial expansion and settlement of invaded territories give innumerable examples of internal forced expulsion from and dispossession of one's homelands. The British invasion of Australia in 1788 and subsequent settlement led to two forced migrations: on the one hand the Indigenous peoples of Australia were dispossessed of their lands and moved to missions and stations. They were also the victims of genocide, their numbers declining fast as a result of diseases against which they had no immunity together with massacres and head hunting. The results of dispossessing the Indigenous peoples of Australia and internal forced migration are still visible in contemporary Australian society, where they continue to be marginalised.

On the other hand, the colonisation of Australia took the form of forcibly removing convicted persons to the developing colony. It can be argued that were it not for the

convicts, the colonisation of Australia by the British would probably not have prospered. While the dispersion of the Indigenous peoples of Australia continued:

In 1837 a British parliamentary looked at the situation of indigenous peoples of the whole empire, from Newfoundland, where the last native was shot in 1823, to South Africa and Australia, where whole peoples were *en route* to extinction. The committee found that the Europeans had unlawfully conquered the natives' territory, decimated their numbers and undermined their way of live 'Injustice and cruelty' were the main causes of the extinction of the indigenous peoples<sup>iv</sup>

The story of the invasion and colonisation of Australia is not the only one of the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples' lands and consequent forced internal exile and/or genocide: South Africa before and during the apartheid era caused a massive removal of African peoples to black townships, while many leading opposition figures and freedom fighters were exiled within or deported from South Africa, tortured, executed or murdered. There is no end to the systematic dispossession and internal exile of Aboriginal peoples across the world from the time of the Greek empire to the neo-colonialism of the twenty first century.

Technically, the result that emerges from the discussion above is that migration is always "forced" either as a result of violence or the drive to survive. There are, however, two other categories that I would want to include in the discussion. Forced migration comes about, as seen, consequent to a multitude of factors but always responding to the "push" forces that make individual or collective movement an imperative. There are those who, by definition, would not fall within the "push" factor paradigm: people like myself, a migrant to Spain in the 1960s. Nothing pushed me away from England, I migrated to join my partner and form a family. Interestingly enough, I also found that as the number of migrants from Morocco increased in Spain, I was not considered to be a migrant myself because I was northern European and white. This clearly underlines the racial equations that work within the definition of migrant in host communities. In 1968, J.J. Mangalam pointed out that "[i]f migration is an act of volition it implies a decision-making which usually involve a hierarchy of values"<sup>v</sup> Mangalam's definition thus creates a further category of migrant which does not respond to "push" forces but rather to a range of considerations which lead to a decision to migrate that responds to personal "pull factors".

The second category that does not respond to push factors are those people who are stateless and exiled from all social and legal benefits *in their own country*. Those who seek refuge outside their own frontier, where possible, obviously are pushed out by a laws or situations which have deprived them of their nationality. There is a community in question worth looking at in this regard and about whom not much is being done on an international level. The Rohingya people in Burma (Mynamar) have been fleeing to Bangladesh and Malaysia in countless thousands.<sup>vi</sup> Racially, religiously and linguistically the Rohingya people are distinct to mainstream Burmese society. Under the 1982 Citizenship Law brought in by the military junta, the Rohingya people were not recognised as citizens along with the descendents of Chinese and Indians living in the country. While individuals of Chinese and Indian descent could claim their own national citizenship once outside Burma, the Rohingya people could not. *Refugees International* has highlighted the plight of the Rohingya people:

Official Burmese government policy on the Rohingya is repressive. The Rohingya need authorization to leave their villages and are not allowed to travel beyond Northern Rakhine State. They need official permission to marry and must pay exorbitant taxes on births and deaths. Religious freedom is restricted, and the Rohingya have been prohibited from maintaining or repairing crumbling religious buildings<sup>vii</sup>. Though accurate statistics are impossible to come by inside Burma, experts agree that conditions in Northern Rakhine State are among the worst in the country. Rohingya refugees commonly cite land seizures, forced labor, arbitrary arrests, and extortion as the principal reasons for flight. Once a Rohingya leaves his or her village without permission, he or she is removed from official residency lists, and can be subject to arrest if found.<sup>viii</sup>

A stateless people, the Rohingya have nowhere to go and are marginalised even in Burmese refugee communities. The Rohingya are not the only stateless refugee people in the world. What has forced them out of Burma and is attempting to undermine their very existence within their homeland is the deliberate construction of them as stateless. Should Burma recover democracy, would the historic reticence regarding the Rohingya in their own country relieve their inner exclusion and marginalisation? One would like to think so, but their present marginalisation among Burmese refugees suggests that maybe not. Stateless people are a particularly vulnerable group; of no homeland, they technically have no document which will allow them to claim a nationality and thus a homeland to which to return should they so desire. *Refugees International* estimates that there are some twelve million stateless people and comments on some of the consequences that arise from this “non-status”:

Stateless status often keeps children from attending school and condemns families to poverty. Because statelessness often originates in past conflicts and disputes over what constitutes national identity, granting citizenship, which can only be done by national authorities, is inherently difficult.

(...) Nationality is a fundamental human right and a foundation of identity, dignity, justice, peace, and security. But statelessness, or the lack of effective nationality, affects millions of men, women, and children worldwide. Being stateless means having no legal protection or right to participate in political processes, inadequate access to health care and education, poor employment prospects and poverty, little opportunity to own property, travel restrictions, social exclusion, vulnerability to trafficking, harassment, and violence. Statelessness has a disproportionate impact on women and children.<sup>ix</sup>

Statelessness has been addressed by the United Nations in the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons followed by the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.<sup>x</sup> The fact that some twelve million people remain stateless and vulnerable has resulted in the *UNHCRs Global Appeal 2010 – 2011 Addressing Statelessness*, published on December the first 2009.<sup>xi</sup> One of the aims of their agenda is to “(...) use the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1961 Convention to emphasize the importance of accession to this treaty. The target set out in the Global Strategic Priorities is to reach 41 States Parties to the 1961 Convention and 68 to the 1954 Convention by the end of 2011.”<sup>xii</sup> UNHCR fully understands that “One of the key ways

to prevent statelessness is to grant nationality to children who would otherwise be stateless.”<sup>xiii</sup> It remains to be seen whether the position of migrant and non-migrant stateless people can in fact be improved. One is only too familiar with United Nations Conventions ratified by Nation States wherever and which is then held in abeyance when convenient.

Thus far, we have looked at some of the “push factors” involved in individual or collective migration, together with some of the consequences. In so doing the reader might well have intuited the “pull factors” which draw a migrant away from their homeland to another. Borders and migration are hotly debated questions across the world, even more so after 9/11, but Barak Obama put his finger on two important points in a statement in 2007:

The time to fix our broken immigration system is now... We need stronger enforcement on the border and at the workplace... But for reform to work, we also must *respond to what pulls people to America... Where we can reunite families, we should. Where we can bring in more foreign-born workers with the skills our economy needs, we should.*<sup>xiv</sup>

The statement, while not unproblematic, does point to two major “pull forces” working within migration to developed nations: family reunion and the need for particular kinds of skills within the host country. “Pull factors” have not changed over centuries, nor will they for the foreseeable future. While war, famine, persecution and a long list of etceteras exist so will the “pull forces” that drive migration outwards: a better standard of living, security, hope for future generations, among others. Unless we can provide a world in the near future in which resources can be equally shared across national frontiers then migration will persist. The thousands of migrants that move legally/illegally in the twenty-first century do so because capitalism has created a massive rift between those who have and those who have not, even within a nation’s own frontiers. Whether or not the so called first world nations are genuinely interested in “filling in the rift”, providing infrastructures and support on all levels for developing nations to become self sufficient is, I believe, a moot question. Homo sapiens sapiens is not known for overwhelming selflessness, generosity and care of the other or for caring for its habitat.

There is, however, a particular group of migrants/refugees who are going to become the focus of the movement of peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: climate refugees/migrants. Down the centuries, people have fled from natural disasters and climate change; however, never before in human history has the planet faced the kind of devastation wreaked on it by humankind as at present. Sceptics argue that climate change has happened before, will always happen and life has continued. The question is, though, when previous climate changes occurred they were not caused by the outright misuse of the planet and its resources by human progress. The connotations behind the terms “climate *refugees*” or “climate *migrants*” is of vital importance in terms of how these thousands of individuals will be handled by the nations to which they flee as pointed out by Kristina Stefanova in *The Washington Times* in her article “Climate refugees in Pacific flee rising sea”: “Semantics has become part of the equation, as politicians debate what to call victims of global warming – refugees or migrants. Governments tend to prefer migrants, while international aid and environmental groups opt for refugees.”<sup>xv</sup> This is

not a mere semantic debate but one which is of vital importance for those people affected by climate change who have to find refuge in new “other” homelands. To be classified a migrant or refugee has real consequences on the way these groups and their rights may be dealt with in legal terms. Stefanova quotes Kathleen Newland of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington:

This distinction between the obligation owed toward a refugee in contrast to other people who are in trouble – even desperate trouble – is why the terminology matters, (...) It will be difficult for wealthier countries with lots of space to open their doors to people running from climate change, (...) I think it is much more likely that, if the rich do anything, they will try to work through governments and international organizations to meet their humanitarian needs in the short run and to help people adapt to the changed circumstances in the long run, (...) If climate change is very rapid and extreme, these efforts are likely to be far from adequate. Activist groups argue that wealthy countries have a moral obligation because they produce the most greenhouse-gas emissions, which most, but not all, scientists say causes global warming.<sup>xvi</sup>

At the moment there is no internationally accepted and legalised term to designate those who flee from the climatic results of GHG emissions<sup>xvii</sup>. The United Nations 1951 Geneva Convention describes refugees as those people who flee due to “reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”<sup>xviii</sup> It is grimly ironic that those who are going to suffer from GHG and its consequences are in fact nations who do not have a high ratio of carbon emissions. It is the developed countries that lead the ranking.

Are we willing to call these displaced people refugees and take in the consequences of what we have produced? In my way of thinking we have no choice but to call people dislodged by the effects of climate change refugees. I base this argument on the fact that if we look at the numbers of people who will be involved in forced movement away from their homelands due to the rise in sea levels, desertification of once arable fertile lands, lack of access to water, famine produced by over-cultivation of farm land and many other factors, they are indeed genuine refugees fleeing disaster, like those who flee from war zones or political persecution. That we will accept them as such and respect their rights remains to be seen. There has to be effective legislation as well as a large number of nations willing to act as host. We know from statistical studies that the world’s population is continuing to grow and that the mass of land that can sustain that number in terms of food and vital resources is dwindling.

The statistics involved with regard to the displacement of people through climate change speak for themselves: 150 million people will be on the move by 2050—that is in forty years time. The Environmental Justice Foundation in its recent report *No Place Like Home – Climate Refugees* has called for a new international agreement which will allow these people to survive.<sup>xix</sup> Many of the Pacific atolls together with those in the Indian Ocean will disappear, house prices of properties near the coast in some Pacific coast zones are dropping as a result of the prediction of the rise in sea levels. In China and Africa internal migration is beginning to pick up pace as a result of the desertification of land, Australia is in the grip of the worst drought in history while glaciers are retreating at an alarming pace.

This is the key question in population movement that the twenty first century has to deal with. We are now entering the second decade. How long are we going to wait, prevaricate before we legislate with foresight, squaring up to our responsibilities to others and to the planet?

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<sup>i</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL MIGRANT WORKERS AND MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES. Article 2.1. Adopted by General Assembly resolution 451158 of 18 December 1990. In force since 1 July 2003. [http://www.ideels.uni-bremen.de/migrant\\_defs.html](http://www.ideels.uni-bremen.de/migrant_defs.html). Accessed 15/2/2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Points 3,4,5 come from IDEELS North-South Conference: Building Partnerships for Sustainable Development at [http://www.ideels.uni-bremen.de/migrant\\_defs.html](http://www.ideels.uni-bremen.de/migrant_defs.html) accessed 15/2/2010. Accessed 15/2/2010. The original documents can be found at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/rapporteur/>. Accessed 15/2/2010.

<sup>iii</sup> The removal of the islanders took place between 1967 and 1971 and was ratified by the then British Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey.

<sup>iv</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes, 1837. From Lindqvist, Sven. *Terra Nullius. A journey through No one's Land*, London: Granta Books, 2007. 9.

<sup>v</sup> Lewis, G.J. *Human Migration*, London: Croom Helm Ltd. 1982. 8 From Mangalam, J.J. *Human Migration: A guide to migration literature in English, 1955-1962*, Lexington: Kentucky Press 1968.

<sup>vi</sup> Officially renamed Myanmar by the Military Junta in Burma, many people, including myself, refuse to use this name.

<sup>vii</sup> The Rohingya are Sunni Muslims.

<sup>viii</sup> *Refugees International*, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/rohingya-burma%E2%80%99s-forgotten-minority>. Accessed 24/2/2010.

<sup>ix</sup> *Refugees International*, <http://www.refintl.org/who-we-are/our-issues/statelessness>. Accessed 15/1/2010.

<sup>x</sup> Both Conventions are available on the following United Nations Pages, 1954.

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/stateless.htm> and 1961 [http://untreaty.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/6\\_1\\_1961.pdf](http://untreaty.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/6_1_1961.pdf).

<sup>xi</sup> UNHCR is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

<sup>xii</sup> *UNHCR Global Appeal 2010-2011 - Addressing statelessness*. <http://www.unhcr.org/4b02c5e39.htm> Accessed 1/2/2010 .

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>xiv</sup> Statement on U.S. Senate Floor, May 23, 2007. Emphasis mine. For the full text see <http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/ImmigrationFactSheet.pdf>.

<sup>xv</sup> *The Washington Times*, April 19 2009. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/19/rising-sea-levels-in-pacific-create-wave-of-migran/?page=2>. Accessed October 2009.

<sup>xvi</sup> *The Washington Times*, April 19 2009. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/19/rising-sea-levels-in-pacific-create-wave-of-migran/?page=2>. Accessed October 2009.

<sup>xvii</sup> GHG is Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

<sup>xviii</sup> For further Reading see [www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf)

<sup>xix</sup> <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page590.html>. Accessed February 2010.