Anthropological Theory and Fieldwork:
Problem Solving Tools for Forced Migration Issues

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Abstract:

Anthropology's theoretical domain positions both applied anthropologists and critical theorists at the forefront of refugee studies. In this paper I conclude that identity formation is conditioned by irregular varieties of debate at every level of a social system, an understanding that should help anthropologists address forced migration issues. I propose that the adoption of identity politics as the centerpiece of forced migration analyses could establish a universal model which would not inhibit representation of the dynamic current behind social change that is virtually transparent within all varieties of displacement.

Introduction

Anthropology's theoretical domain positions both applied anthropologists and critical theorists at the forefront of refugee[2] studies. A recent emphasis in international affairs over normative issues such as human rights, environmental issues, etc. (Oliver-Smith 1996), and anthropological inquiry into how social change, place, discourse, and power shape collective identities suggests that researchers can provide salient critiques of public policy (see Black 1998; Camino 1994; Chavez et al.1990; Hansen 1993; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992; Shipton 1990; Williams 1990). In the ensuing discussion I propose that the primary feature of forced migration explored, irrespective of type (i.e., development displacement, environmental displacement, war-induced displacement, etc.), is not the institutional services provided or international law but the contest among individuals, institutions, and international powers that intervene "on behalf" of refugees in an increasingly "deterritorialized" world (Appadurai 1990,1992; Clifford 1988, 1997a, 1997b; Cohen 1997; Hannerz 1987; Hebdige 1987; Robertson 1988; Rosaldo 1989; Said 1979, 1984, 1986). I will consider the dynamic energizing this conflict, a dialectic over identity between actor and system, as an *identity fractal*[3], a structure inherent to multiple levels of forced migration that – at each level – is duplicated in substance and complexity but not in scale or dimensions. Just as the mathematician Mandelbrot concluded that irregular mathematical structures permeate every level of nature, I conclude that identity formation is conditioned by irregular varieties of debate at every level of a social system, an understanding that should help anthropologists address forced migration issues.

Background

Social Science research on displacement and relief programs has occurred since the 1960s, but it is only recently that interest in this field has erupted (Cernea 1996; Shipton 1990), "practically carving out a topical subfield in social science" (Cernea 1996:16). It appears that the days when humanitarian endeavors (i.e., refugee related services) escaped academic inquiry because of their moral freight (Harrell-Bond 1986) are coming to an end. With the formation of the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Program in 1982, and the publishing of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* in 1988, it is evident that academia has noted the intellectual challenges presented by the 27.4 million refugees worldwide and the nearly 100 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR 1997). Also in 1988, the American Anthropological Association established the Committee on Refugee Issues (CORI) as a committee of the General Anthropology Division (Malkki 1995). The committee has since published six volumes of *Selected Papers on Refugee Issues* (1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1996, 1997).

Anthropological Research of Refugee Issues: A Matter of Domain

Between anthropology's theoretical domain and its methodological strengths, it is naturally positioned to be at the forefront of refugee studies. As Richard Waller states, "Disasters may expose at a particular point in time, the inner workings of a society," (quoted in Johnson and Anderson 1988), it is evident that anthropologists' reliance on longitudinal and empirical research prepare them to respond to current events with an understanding of the socio-historical context of a specific community and a foundation from which to fully appreciate accelerated social

change (Shipton 1990). Already, displacement theorists clamor for further empirical research to test the "existing myriad of theoretical assumptions and to develop alternative concepts" (Kibreab quoted in Turton 1996:62). Black comments that refugee studies present social scientists with a unique opportunity to observe rapid social change and identity formation. However, unlike his counterparts, Black asserts that an ahistorical approach is needed in order to build a strong theoretical model of displacement.

Refugee issues, as Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992) state, "fall within disciplinary concerns" (1992:6). Anthropological understanding of social change and liminal states (a topic to be more thoroughly reviewed below), they say can be converted into policy recommendations:

> In anthropological terms, refugees are people who have undergone a violent rite of separation and unless or until they are "incorporated" as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin) find themselves in "transition," or in a state of liminality." This "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969) status may not only be legal and psychological, but social and economic as well. Moreover, encoded in the label "refugee" are the images of dependency, helplessness, and misery. (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992:7)

Moreover, anthropologists' insights into power, and their expertise on the structure of authority, "place them in an advantageous position to contribute to the formation of policy (James 1991; Harrell-Bond, Voutira and Leopold 1992)" (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992:7).

Through anthropological methods, it would be possible for research into refugee issues to heed Johnson and Anderson's (1988) advice that the study of "crisis" situations attend to the encompassing social, political, and ecological conditions. Moreover, refugees' displacement offers anthropologists the opportunity to study social change "not merely as a process of transition within a cultural enclave, but in the dramatic context of uprootedness where a people's quest for survival becomes a model of cultural change" (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992:9). For instance, Hirschon's *Heirs of a Greek Catastrophe* (1989) documents the long-term process of cultural adaptation that displaced peoples undergo.

Pain and Social Process:
An Anthropological Merger

Research on refugee issues contributes to a new anthropological movement in which painful events (i.e., displacement) are viewed as part of cultural flow rather than being: considered ruptures to social life, (Davis 1992; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992; Hastrup 1996; Malkki 1997); correlated to illness (Good et al. 1992); or construed as problems with interpersonal communication (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991). Davis advocates reforming the discipline so that the "comfortable anthropology of social organization and the painful anthropology of disruption and despair" (1992:149) are fused. He notes that Colson's (1960) work on the displacement of the Gwembe of Tonga placed "suffering at the unforgivable center of social order" (1992:150). In addition, Davis marshals de Waal's (1989) study of famine in Darfur, Sudan, that depicts hunger as "an incremental form of suffering" (1992:151), contrary to Malthus' assertion that mass starvation leads to death, to argue that even large scale disorder and pain are eminently human affairs that are an integral part of the social order. De Waal argues that it is only through a refined understanding of famine that anthropologists may redress the western misconception of famine as an organic death sentence. He argues that Sudanese differ between "famines that kill and famines that do not" (de Waal 1989:77). In fact, incremental suffering caused by food shortages are highly social in nature, as shown by de Waal's example of the USAID famine relief in Darfur, Sudan in 1984-1985 that produced, rather than alleviated, suffering. Tracing how food aid attracted people to overflowing refugee camps, which precipitated health crises that "famine" alone did not, de Waal demonstrates the socially contingent nature of disaster and suffering (cf. Watts 1991). Shipton (1990) also explores many facets of famine and the "nascent literature" (1990:370), which he suggests could be enriched by further academic inquiry in this area.

Anthropology should thus revise its analytical emphasis on the enfeebling myth of comfortable order to include the despair and missteps that create an offbeat social rhythm, a dynamic collective order. Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992) argue that such a reformation would cause us to question the distinction between what is scientifically interesting and that which is politically relevant:

… the anthropology of 'maintenance,' and that is the comfortable anthropology which studies social structure and documents social organization, and the anthropology of 'repair,' concerned with issues of policy and intervention. To bridge the gap between the two kinds of anthropology requires the recognition that the causes of human suffering are essential features of all societies, rather than being unique to any particular case, or pathological per se (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992:9).

Explaining that social life is a constant social production in which events are as significant as more prosaic, repetitive cultural acts, Malkki (1997) enjoins anthropologists to scrutinize events typically reserved as fodder for journalists. As her primary fieldwork took place in refugee camps, she suggests that *accidental communities* not subject to the parameters of traditional fieldwork (in terms of boundaries) are appropriate subject matter. She expands the field of anthropological inquiry, like the aforementioned theorists, by stating that the transitory is as important as the durable; therefore, the painful memories inscribed by the refugee experience are perfectly suited to anthropological investigation. While there might be a movement afoot to give adequate coverage to all aspects of social life, Harrell-Bond and Voutira note that for anthropologists whose writings (in the 1980s) were based on fieldwork among refugees, the topic itself was accidental, an unexpected dividend of their intended project (Hansen 1982; Hirschon 1989; Spring 1982).

Loizos (1981) also equates a robust view of culture with those elements that, albeit painful, signify the collective nature of social life. In his work on Greek Cypriot refugees, Loizos finds that refugees bereave the loss of symbolic order and material possessions. He notes that Colson (1971) observed a similar phenomena among the Gwembe of Tonga who, when displaced, tried to re-establish their social organization with new neighbors and to "maintain the symbols of old identity in new and apparently inappropriate contexts" (Loizos 1981:203). According to Loizos, Colson attributed the Gwembe's previously harsh environment with giving them a flexible social system in which they could "substitute personnel or symbolic actions" (Loizos 1981:206) in order to tolerate non-closure. Out of insecurity and suffering, these theorists attest, comes the strength to persevere through creative application of cultural symbols.

Displacement as Social Contingency

Theorists would do well, however, to not get lost in displacement's symbolism. For, as Marx (1990) tells us, the evident social changes are as much about personal enterprise and movement as they are about collective meaning. He advises that anthropologists should study the events surrounding refugees' displacement, and to then utilize network analysis in order to then flesh out our view of their new social reality. He states that "we are now moving [from a closed system] toward an alternative image of an unbounded world society. In such a society each person or any other social aggregate becomes the center of a social world made up of the relationships and forces that shape his or their life" (Marx 1990:193). Like Malkki, he posits that it is time to cover *accidental communities,* but – unlike Malkki – he concludes that *accidental communities* and the new object of anthropological inquiry, the individual's network, are omnipresent. His definition of refugees appears more as a topical gloss: "A refugee is a person whose social world has been disturbed," (Marx 1990:189) so in a deterritorialized world, a refugee's travails might resemble those of his or her neighbors.

Unlike Marx's promotion of research examining social change from the individual's perspective and alterations to his or her personally disrupted world, Oliver-Smith (1996) suggests that anthropologists address social change through the heuristic of collective resistance. It is these movements, he concludes, that define the fin-de-sickle moment, stating that the entry of resistance movements into international debate over human rights, environmental protection, and preservation of local culture is part of a wider shift in world politics from "struggles over power and wealth toward struggles over normative issues" (Wilmer quoted in Oliver-Smith 1996:95). Resistance movements call into question not only local, environmental concerns, they also underscore reigning models of development, resource exploitation, and the state's right to control local territory (Oliver-Smith 1996:95). Oliver-Smith concludes that anthropological research of forced migration has recently shown the impact that a sense of place has on individual and collective identity formation (Low and Altman 1992; Malkki 1997; Rodman 1992).

Liminality: Concept, Condition, and Place

It is critical to understand the conceptual vector in which many anthropologists situate their work on displaced peoples. Despite recent calls for the construction of an analytical framework broad enough to address the various contexts for and consequences of displacement, no single paradigm has emerged to unify the field of refugee studies. However, the dearth of overarching theory does not mean that theorists' work is not conceptually linked in ulterior dimensions. A prominent bond, beyond the emphasis on social change, is the liminal space into which local social change deposits migrants, transforming their identity, and from which they are– on occasion– rescued. Turner (1967, 1969, 1974) conceptualized the concept of liminality (taken from the word *limen,* meaning threshold) as:

> a state where an individual moving from one fixed known status or circumstance into a new one becomes ambiguous, neither her nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state (1974:232).

In such a deterritorialized world as the late 20th century presents – with its expanding global, economic, technological, and communication links – cultural ground shifts are continuously reinvented, enlarging the potential for individuals and whole communities to fall into the liminal space of violent social change. Refugee camp life, Bousquet (1987) says, is a particularly apt example of the liminal state attributed to rites of transition, "where those involved in the rites are divorced from their past under conditions which break old patterns of behavior so that they may reenter their communities in new roles" (1987:34). Ressler et al. (1988) concur with Bousquet's depiction of camp as a liminal space asserting that, "The early use of camps provided a kind of moratorium between the past and future, and refugees seemed to benefit from a support group" (1988:171).

Contemporary anthropologists, invoking the concept of liminality to discuss forced migration, are also indebted to Douglas (1966). In *Purity and Danger* (1966), she used the dietary restrictions found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy to consider how society negotiates anomalies that spring from our habitual ordering of cultural categories. She says that such anomalies, which assume polluted or defiled qualities, are "cultural matter out of place" (Douglas 1966:51). Since ignoring the presence of aberrations would imperil the purity of cultural categories, she suggests specific ways to handle their emergence: (1) settling for one interpretation, thus reducing their ambiguity (i.e., international legislation defining the refugee's identity); (2) physically controlling the anomaly's existence (i.e., constraints on refugees' mobility); and, (3) labeling anomalous things as dangerous (i.e., refugees as threats to the nation-state and source of their expulsion or hosts). Douglas assures us that anomalies put humans in a cultural predicament from which they must regain control and order through the exercise of counter-tactics. Turner's postulation of social *liminality*, in conjunction with Douglas' work, anchors commentary on forced migration with an understanding that the consequence of the level of disorder prevailing in a world in which refugees proliferate is the inordinate amount of legislation and interventions on their behalf.

Contemporary anthropologists have, in a Foucauldian sense, uncovered the "subjugated knowledge" (Foucault 1977) of the pathologization of refugees' liminal status, which has – in some cases – been produced by their colleagues' efforts (see Malkki 1992). They have also combated the notion that refugees are a threat to the welfare of host populations (Black 1994; Hansen 1979a, 1979b, 1993; Kibreab 1996). Malkki (1992) asserts that, due to sedentarist assumptions about human attachments to place, contemporary refugee studies demonizes its subject. Through "discursive externalization" of the refugee from the national order of things, the refugee is rendered a problem that must be managed with "therapeutic interventions." Ruminating on the dialectic between sedentarism and displacement, Malkki notes that identity should be understood as processual in nature, "partly self-constructed, partly categorization by others," and thus a state of displacement is as natural as any other.

The lengths to which displacement has been pathologized is encapsulated in Simone Weil's comment that "uprootedness breeds idolatry," (quoted in Xenos 1996:241). Arendt (1958) suggests that the founding of the nation-state precipitated the construction of the "most symptomatic group in contemporary politics," refugees, the living outcomes of territory disputes and the demise of empires. Regarding this impairment, Stein (1981) asserts that "refugees are helped because they are helpless; they must display their need and helplessness" (quoted in

Malkki 1996:388). And, as Hodgettis states, "Refugees are torn from the land, and to them, this is like the loss of the limb. They are no longer whole people," so their state of infirmity has generated institutions to meet their needs, which consist of preserving their family and culture (Hodgettis 1983:3). Considering displacement a politicized expression of nationalism, Xenos comments that, "Their home is exchanged for the homeland which exists as an imagined necessity rather than as a lived historical contingency" (1996:240; cf. Malkki 1995). He notes that the concept of being rooted is "only partially a geographically centered notion," (Xenos 1996:241) and a "complex set of relations that make acting possible" (Xenos 1996:241) in the form of community. Xenos thus deconstructs the common supposition that our affinity for home is an organic motivation. He laments the dispossession of the notion of home as the activation of social relations for a politically rich, communally hollow entity, the nation-state.

Warner (1994) redresses the pathologization of refugees, observing that they are manifestations of humans' internal "rift," a rupture in our ontological make-up: vacillation between chance and fate. As metaphysical refugees, he implies, we too are "betwixt and between." The situation of the refugee is thus to be understood as the incarnation of homelessness that is part of our experience (Xenos 1993). Even if refugees have the capacity to "return," they will find the place changed, themselves changed and, possibly, even those left behind changed. Warner suggests that the fundamental nostalgia directing repatriation policy is shaped by illusion rather than fact:

> We can go back to a place, but we cannot go back in time. The durable solution of voluntary repatriation denies the temporal reality of our lives and the changes that take place over time. If voluntary repatriation confuses territory with home and community, it also denies the lessons learned from modern physics that equations are based on time and space (1994:171).

Long (1993) makes a more anemic stab at framing the ontological status of refugees than Warner's theoretically lofty (and solipsistic) formulation. She suggests that refugee consciousness is fixed in a tension between "being for oneself" or "being for

others," as they are anomalies pitied by the international community, but affirmative of their national stations. Long states that the imposition of refugee status serves as a marker of liminality that "allows us to see the mechanisms by which relations of dependency affect both individual and collective identity" (1993:7).

Examining how refugee identity is shaped, Long argues that it is ill-advised to stick to the psycho-analytic level many studies inspect because this focus diverts our attention from the socio-economic-political roots of refugees' displacement. She examines the refugee experience's liminality along three dimensions: the political-economic and legal construction of the refugee in an international system of nation-states; the socio-cultural which underscores the unique, human creation of the refugee camp; the cultural traditions through which refugees resist the imposition of their new status; and the psychoanalytic from which refugees access pivotal memories in order to make "individual interpretations of the experience" (Long 1993:9). Their liminal state, she says, is evident, not only in their ontology but in the gauntlet of unfamiliar social action they encounter:

> The [resettlement] interview is a rite of passage, marking the end of liminality of camp life and the transition to third country resettlement. The refugees' changing status is reflected in new languages, relationships, and orientations (Long 1993:156).

It appears that the cast of refugees' liminal state may change, evolving interminably. Their existence is that of a political vapor, temporarily contained and evanescent in form.

Zetter (1991) also analyzes the liminal features of refugees' socio-political action. He argues that the contradictory impulse behind refugees' actions represents the politicized content of their dilemma. They must perpetuate their liminal status as refugees so that the political dispute in which they are enmeshed does not disappear from the horizon of international attention. For example, he says, they may wish to put off integration into the local community to sustain a bid for repatriation. It is preferable to hover "betwixt and between" as recipients of international aid in border zones, he postulates, than to resign to a fate potentially worse than liminality.

Identity, Imposition, and Construction

Liminality's generative dimensions can be understood through reference to ethnographic work on personhood, derivative of Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic perspective, in which "socially powerful cultural discourse and practices both position people and provide them with the resources to respond to the problematic situations in which they find themselves" (Holland et al. 1998:31). As their liminal status is less a product of refugees' newfound mobility than international policy, which imposes a generic identity onto displaced individuals, with attendant assumptions about their helplessness (see Malkki 1996; Stein 1981), the institutionalized discourse surrounding their liminal status can be credited with negative encouragement for refugees to creatively respond to their unwanted, pathologized condition.

Much of the refugee-related literature grapples with the issue of displaced persons' legislated identity and its confirmation in political discourse. This issue opens the way for substantial reviews of how, despite constraints, refugees exhibit the agency they have retained and upon which their survival depends. I wish to frame this discussion of actors' agency in relation to an encompassing system, with reference to Arendt's (1958) definition of it as the "capacity to take initiative, to make beginnings" (quoted in Sokefeld 1999:424) within the parameters of a given environment.

Zetter (1988, 1991) addresses the implications of labeling displaced peoples as refugees. He posits that the imposition of a label or stereotype translates into bureaucratic assumptions that handicap vulnerable populations with a further loss of control. Because of the presumption that refugees must be controlled, Zetter says, a disaggregation of identity occurs through institutionalization and program delivery. The labels marking refugees, he asserts, assume politicized meanings for both the labeled and the labelers. Zetter (1991:40) points out that this labeling process is flawed from the start, as "There is extensive empirical evidence to illustrate that refugees conceive of their identity in very different terms from those bestowing the label (Harrell-Bond 1986; Mazur 1986; Waldron 1988)." It is extremely difficult, he states, to establish a normative meaning for a label as "malleable and dynamic as refugees" (Zetter 1991:40). Zetter concludes that the transition from individual to refugee client is a *non-participatory* affair in which designation of a new identity is institutionally authorized; the bureaucratic

nature of the process gives it the appearance of a neutral act (1991:51). While refugees are in need of assistance, provisos accompanying its delivery create ambivalence on the part of refugees to the agencies providing services. Zetter posits that compliance with refugee policies is "counterbalanced by [refugees'] pathological attempts to delabel" (1991:53) and influence the process, possibly through the rejection of parts of aid packages. Long imbues her subjects with increased agency, suggesting that the construction of the refugee identity is mutually constructed by institution and refugee. She states that subjugated peoples respond to and manipulate standing local, national, international, and ecclesiastical networks to their "own political advantage" (Long 1993:193).

Van Hear (1998) also addresses this dialectic between the refugee system and the displaced person, recognizing the degree of human agency involved in migrants' relocation (cf. Hansen 1979a, 1979b, 1993). He states that the degree of choice and compulsion conditioning migrants' movements could be charted on a continuum, a sliding scale (i.e., outward movement, inward movement, onward movement, or staying put). The degree of coercion is encapsulated in their "complex migration biographies" (1998:50). Such life histories confer "migratory cultural capital" (1998:50) – the ability to negotiate economic, social, and bureaucratic trials.

In his oft-cited article "Rural Refugees in Africa: What the Eye Does Not See," Chambers (1979) triggered the movement to reflect on how refugee institutions efface migrants' agency. He considers the way rural refugees, who self-settle, are overlooked in terms of the provision of services, and the "relative disadvantages of this group when compared to urban refugees" (1979:381). Chambers asserts that rural refugees elude exposure due to urban and elite biases, project bias, dry season bias, political and diplomatic factors, remoteness, low profile, and political impotence. If anthropology restored agency to the Third World peasant by emphasizing decision making power at the level of individuals (Turton 1998), then it might, indeed, be able to do the same for international migrants repudiated and labeled as refugees.

Turton (1996) recently highlighted four weaknesses in the international refugee network, including a propensity for labeling, an institutionalized syndrome of stereotyping that clouds the specific issues surrounding displaced persons'

plight. For example, noting that displacement implies the severing of naturalized roots – territorial bonds – due to environmental stress, Turton argues that the movement undertaken by a segment of Ethiopia's pastoral Mursi population in response to agricultural needs is consonant with their historic self-identity. Therefore, he implies the application of the term displacement, which has a pejorative connotation (i.e., uprooted from a natural state), to what they perceive as a culturally appropriate action reveals a sedentarist bias. He also asserts that it is not useful to distinguish internally displaced persons from refugees when they might experience similar trauma.

Like Turton, Malkki (1996) criticizes the international refugee network for disqualifying refugees themselves from contextualizing their predicament. Stemming from her research with Hutu refugees from Burundi in Tanzania (since 1972) and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Malkki demonstrates the gulf between Hutu refugees' perspective of their exile as a *historicized* and *politicized* process and the relief administrators' discursive practices, which mark them as *exemplary victims*/objects for technocratic management and international assistance. As the universal refugee has been categorized institutionally since WWII, its implicit position of weakness and need in the international order operates as a foil to the omnipotent management practices of the western "other."

Claiming that the social reality of Hutu refugees in exile is conditioned by their "narrative memory of relationships and antagonism located in the past in Burundi" (1996:383), Malkki marvels at how international agencies continue to overlook the opinions, policy critiques, and discursive practices of their target population. Overlooking their narrative accounts in favor of visible markers (physical traits) and statistics, administrators and the media corroborate each other's accounts without consulting refugees as individual actors. Malkki asserts that refugees are thus stripped of agency, a dangerous act that ignores an important body of self-knowledge. For example, UN administrators and the media concurred that the repatriation of Hutu refugees from Zaire to Rwanda should be executed swiftly as internal conditions were favorable. Refugees countered that such policy would further endanger them, but their protestations were ignored and chalked up to specious, rumor-mongering. They were needlessly proven correct, as evidenced by a large number of post-repatriation executions (Malkki 1995). Malkki advocates that international humanitarianism be

reformed through consideration of the trenchant narratives circulating among refugees themselves in order to acknowledge their "narrative authority, historical agency, and political memory" (1996:398).

Refugee Studies' Intervention Mode

Anthropologists are now emboldened to provide empirically-based critiques of refugee policy in order to remedy its shortcomings. As Haines (1993) states, "public policy is driven by sentimental and ideological constructions in host societies and international organizations… concerning who qualifies as a refugee" (quoted in Camino 1993:203), so who better than anthropologists to proffer reforms? Waldron (1988) and Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992), posit that anthropologists should act as cultural brokers, informing refugee administrators with a more keen understanding of their target population's needs.

In the 1990s, reform-oriented critiques are commonplace (see Allen 1996; Allen and Morsink 1994; Black and Khoser 1999; Malkki 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997; McDowell 1996; Turton 1997; Weist 1992). However, just over a decade ago, Harrell-Bond's *Imposing Aid* (1986) marked a watershed in intervention-motivated refugee studies. Her work among Ugandan refugees in Sudan focused on the infantilization of refugees under the aegis of UNHCR care and protection. As the UNHCR lacked a system to monitor the quality of its refugee programs (Harrell-Bond 1986:375), Harrell-Bond devised a system to "assess the quality and effectiveness of an emergency assistance program" (Harrell-Bond 1986:375), which she published with ethnographic detail.

Social science critiques regarding UNHCR policies and international aid now proliferate. For example, Rogge (1994) observes that although repatriation has been defined as a "durable solution," the UNHCR has conceded this it is not a trouble-free solution to refugees' predicament, as demonstrated by the fact that its implementation is something of a novelty. And Warner (1994:191) states that while voluntary repatriation is accepted as the preferred "durable solution," there has been "little investigation of its implications (Cuny, Stein, Reid 1992:9; Rogge 1992:109; Rogge and Akol 1989:183; UNHCR 1985:4)." Rogge postulates that further research on repatriation is needed because most of the literature centers on politico-legal technicalities and not "the socio-economic dimensions of repatriation or its

human and psychological implications" (1994:15). Reviewing the UNHCR's "durable solutions," Rogge states that for African citizens, resettlement in a third country is not possible because of the "continuing consensus among most Western governments, and by extension also of most of the international agencies … that Africa's refugees are an African problem best resolved in Africa by Africans" (Rogge 1994:20), a sentiment manifest in the meager number of African refugees that have been resettled in the West (35,000). According to Hyndman (1999), African refugees' wishes cannot be accommodated by the increasingly isolationist policies of the West. She observes that "As resettlement targets decline, the allotment of places for African refugees is already disproportionately small. African refugees comprise 36 percent of the world refugee population, yet in 1995-1998, the US allotted just 6.3 percent of its resettlement openings to African refugees" (Hyndman 1999:108). Rogge furthers his work's utility by enumerating several research directions and giving reasonable criteria for evaluating refugees' needs.

Hansen (1993) broadens the scope of anthropological critiques of international refugee policy, observing that while the international code of human rights guarantees individuals the right to seek and obtain asylum in other countries (and to move freely within a country), refugees are excluded from such legislation. Hansen argues that the prevalence of refugees in Africa is evidence of the routine denial of human rights to individuals who would elect to change their status through processes of naturalization or integration into a host society. Whereas the UN considers voluntary repatriation the preferred "durable solution," Hansen considers it the least preferred as circumstances that catalyze refugees' movement are not typically altered in a reasonable period. He further counters standard arguments that impoverished, local hosts cannot afford hospitality for refugee populations by stating that despite arbitrary, national borders, refugees prefer to self-settle with "kin" in ethnically related areas, sustaining a modicum of personal control over their situation (cf. Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992). With evidence from his work among Angolan refugees in Zambia (Hansen 1979a, 1979b), Hansen demonstrates that self-settlement permits faster immersion into the host population than do sanctioned settlement schemes.

Black (1998), Bousquet (1987), and Long (1993) show that camps are plagued by a host of problems, despite the fact that host countries prefer them to permitting spontaneous settlement. The most adverse effect of residence in refugee camps is that there is an "all too common link between refugee ill-health and camps" (Borght and Philips quoted in Black 1998:1). Such a well-established correlation, Black says, is overlooked by international agencies who appreciate the practical advantages of camps "from the standpoint of service delivery, accountability, identification of individuals, physical access, cost effectiveness of the relief operations, and monitoring of both the refugees' status and received assistance" (1998:2). In addition, host governments appreciate the degree of containment and security offered by camps. He recommends that the UNHCR devise better site plans, limit settlement densities, provide an improved infrastructure (i.e., health clinics and water sources), and enable refugees and locals to participate in project design). Hyndman (1999) alerts us that "camps are becoming long-term responses to unresolved conditions of human displacement" (1999:108).

Anthropological Theory as Shape-Shifter of Refugee Policy and Interventions

In addition to proffering refugee policy and administrative reforms, forced migration researchers have suggested the need for a general theory of forced migration which would bridge the separate types of displacement (i.e., development displacement, environmental displacement, conflict-induced displacement, etc.) (Black 1993; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992; Loizos 1981; Marx 1990). I propose that the adoption of identity politics as the centerpiece of forced migration analyses could establish a universal model which would not inhibit representation of the dynamic current behind social change that is virtually transparent within all varieties of displacement. Scrutiny of refugees' negotiations of the infrastructure that attempts to define their existence may reveal how *accidental communities* (see Malkki 1997) are formed, function, and resolve or perpetuate conflicts therein. The *identity fractal* in which conflict, negotiation, and the potential for resolution is perpetually in motion speaks as much to a general, social experience as it does to circumstances of displacement; its strength, however, is that it brings into sharp relief the dynamics consistent with the international, national, and local debates over how individuals and communities grapple with displacement. If we are to persist with the fundamental humanitarian notion (and I think we should) that interventions can mitigate the ill-effects

of forced migration, than our panoply of services must be conditioned with an open eye as to how and why we perceive refugees, local communities, nation-states, as well as interactions between these bodies, as we do.

Notes

1. Jim Schechter is a Ph.D candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Jim Schechter was the recipient of the Annual Gottfried "Friedl" and Martha Lang Award based on this paper.

2. According to the UN Mandate codified 1 January 1951, a refugee is someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR 1997:51). For a detailed review of the history of the refugee see Marrus (1985).

3. According to Ralph H. Abraham (1993), "Fractal is a word invented by [the mathematician] Mandelbrot to bring together under one heading a large class of objects that have [played]... an historical role... in the development of pure mathematics... structures that did not fit the patterns of Euclid and Newton. These new structures were regarded... as pathological... kin to the cubist paintings and atonal music that were upsetting established standards of taste in the arts at about the same time. The same pathological structures... turn out to be inherent in familiar objects all around us. By definition, fractal objects have fractal dimension. According to Mandelbrot, they are broken, irregular, fragmented, grainy, ramified, tangled, strange, wrinkled. These wrinkled structures may extend over space, over time, or over both: fractal space-time patterns. For our purposes, a single example will suffice to characterize a fractal: the sandy beach" (1993:53). In my work, it is not the refugee who is anomalous or pathological but the irregular varieties of debate at every level which condition their fluid identities.

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