

## REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY IMPACTS OF FORCED MIGRATIONS

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Although I have long pursued understanding of the politics of cultural pluralism, the social identity issues which have occupied my attention have for the most part not been those produced by forced migrations. This disclaimer is a necessary preface to classify these remarks as intellectual trespass upon a domain which is home terrain for many of the participants in this conference. As well, it may serve to remind us that, in the larger realm of identity politics in the contemporary world, those which issue from forced migrations pose an interesting and consequential subset of questions, which need to be anchored in the broader realm of comparative inquiry.

On my recent receipt of an invitation to offer these reflections, the first dilemma which crossed my mind was the precise definition of "forced migration". I sought clarification from the conference organizers as to what shared understanding of the boundaries of this notion might serve as subtext for the sessions, and was assured no *a priori* delimitation of scope was intended. Thus authorized to create my own definition, I concluded that "forced migration" might be construed to include all instances of coerced relocation, within or without the boundaries of a state unit, of significant numbers of a culturally defined self-conscious collectivity. Such groupings might originate in racial, ethnic and/or religious categorizations. Although my own field of regional specialization is Africa, I will indulge in more wide-ranging observations.

Although "forced migration" appears at first hearing like an obvious and singular type of phenomenon, on closer inspection an array of different forms come to mind, and the borders between coercion and choice are often blurred. Large scale group-influenced migrations may be virtually forced by coercive economic causes; such factors at least partly explain exodus to cities from parts of Africa where population densities limit land access, and the "great immigration" to North America from southern and eastern Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ecological crisis can also impel collective migrations; the slow southward creep of the Sahara produces a corresponding movement of populations at the desert edge, especially at moments when extended periods of exceptional drought destroy the precarious pastoral economies which permit survival in a hostile environment. The massive Irish emigration of the late 1840s was driven in good part by the potato famine. Political disorder and violence may join with other motives to produce mass population movements. Disorder in many Germany states in the early nineteenth century was among the triggers for the substantial emigration in those years. Only some Jewish communities in Russia actually experienced pogroms, but the fear spread by their occurrence was a major factor in the motivation of emigration by many Jews from Czarist territories. Political calculus of autocratic regimes may induce group transplantations with a pronounced involuntary strain. Stalin planted Russians around the marches of his restored empire to ensure the imperial hold. China has settled millions of ethnic Chinese in Tibet and Sinkiang, to resolve the "national question" by submersion. Many of the settlers are soldiers of national integration only by central fiat. Within a given community, social pressures for migration may achieve coercive proportions; the flight of the great majority of Jews from Arab lands after the creation of Israel appears to have been driven by a combination of a choice for solidarity, fear of the future in the new environment of intense hostility between Israel and most Arab states, and pressures for group conformity to choose migration.

Thus "forced migrations" proves a concept of porous boundaries. In these remarks, I would like to reserve the discussion for those instances, numerous enough, where a relocation of large enough numbers of a given cultural group to lend a collective character to the movement is driven overwhelmingly by force. Let me suggest five different categories of such forced migrations.

Firstly, the human drama which most vividly reflects the trauma of forced migrations is certainly the Atlantic slave trade and the African diaspora which it produced. The identity dynamics set in motion by the massive recourse to African slaves to meet labor requirements in the Western hemisphere produced the discourses of race which have played such a large role to this day, and diasporic solidarities constructed as a response to racism. Although leaving quite different social residues, over the centuries a forced migration of Africans also occurred across the Sahara and Indian Ocean. With the African slave trade mostly halted by the mid-nineteenth century, and slavery abolished in the British and French imperial realms, those engaged in forms of enterprise requiring large amounts of bonded labor (especially sugar) turned to south and east Asia for a supply of largely unfree workers, subordinated to indenture contracts and unable to flee. In contemporary times, unfree labor has been employed in war industries: Koreans coerced into dangerous mining enterprises in Japan (or women forced into sexual service), Jews, Ukrainians and others used in German war factories.

A second major form of forced migration, the obverse of the first, is ethnic cleansing. As the seminal 1995 Akbar

Ahmed article in *ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES* reminds us, although the term gains currency with the Yugoslav crisis, the practice is very old. Native Americans were subject to a prolonged process of ethnic cleansing of frequently lethal nature. Jews were expelled from England and other western European kingdoms in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and from Spain in 1492, joined by the Moors. Twelve million Muslims and Hindus were driven from or fled their homes on the wrong side of the 1947 partition line, with a million perishing in the process. Germans were expelled en masse from Poland and Czechoslovakia after World War II. Nigeria expelled without warning a million Ghanaians in 1982.

A third type of forced migration is a product of civil violence., the major factor which has produced in contemporary Africa the largest concentration of refugees in the world. The epicenter at the moment pivots around the African great lakes, with hundreds of thousands of fugitives from the lethal ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan in particular. The substantial Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora in Europe and North America is also a product of the terrible dislocations of a civil war beginning in 1983 with no end in view.

A fourth kind of coerced movement can occur by way of political punishment. Stalin carried out such policies on a large scale during World War II, when entire nationalities alleged to be disloyal (Chechens, Ingush, Crimean Tatars, among others) were deported to Central Asia. A fifth category is political escape: Hungarians in 1956, Cubans in 1961 and thereafter, Laotians, especially Hmong, in 1975.

If "forced migration" on reflection proves a phenomenon of wider variation than I at first imagined, then the corollary thought occurs that the range of identity outcomes in the site of relation may be considerable as well. By way of speculative suggestion, let me propose an equivalent roster of factors which may shape the forms of consciousness taken by coerced diaspora communities. Following from the preceding analysis, the first such determinant would be the nature of the forced migration itself.

For example, African slave communities, of widely diverse ethnolinguistic antecedents, were placed in a crucible of nascent solidarity by their shared oppression, the difficulties of maintaining intact the forms of consciousness and cultural expression at the moment of capture, and the assigned categories of racial identity imposed by the dominant society. At an opposite end of the spectrum might be the forced flight of the 1956 Hungarians, into a wide range of host countries. As fugitives from Communism, they generally received substantial assistance in resettlement, were generally welcomed in the host society, and were not subject to demeaning categorizations. Once having made the choice for flight, for nearly a quarter century the choice seemed irrevocable, dissolving any diasporic dream of return. The punished nationalities in the Soviet Union, in contrast, were generally parked in distant and hostile circumstances, never lost hope of a collective return, and had neither incentive nor inclination to absorb into the society of internal exile.

A second factor lies in the nature of the site of relocation. The slave plantation was well characterized by Orlando Patterson as bringing social death: difficulty if not impossibility of maintaining a sense of ancestry and powerlessness over the dissolution of family and descent by sale and transfer. Those locked for extended periods into refugee camps develop peculiarly intense patterns of consciousness. As the work of Liisa Malkki with Hutu refugee camps in Tanzania shows, camp leadership tends to fall in the hands of those articulating a particularly irreconcilable interpretation of identity, and the social debilitation and despair associated with such confinement is conducive to identity intensification. Similar processes are observable in the Palestinian refugee camps. In contrast, the Sudetenland Germans summarily expelled from Czechoslovakia found themselves in a host society which assured prosperity and was identity home ground; although Sudeten organizations exist, they offer a low\_intensity form of identity expression.

Thirdly, the context of the receiving society matters. A given societal environment provides particular modes of identity classification, which shapes and limits the options available. In the United States, for example, those Asian immigrants of refugee origin find themselves commonly assigned to the Asian\_American category, and the object of solicitation from solidarity\_builders operating under this label. Central American refugees from civil war in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua discover themselves classified as Latinos by the dominant society. The discourses of racial classification, and umbrella categories of categorizing an incoming "other" interrogate and inform identity choices amongst forced migrants.

Fourthly, the choice structure available in a host society varies. In North Africa, for example, though the African infusion through the trans\_Saharan slave trade, was substantial and is phenotypically visible, active articulation of black consciousness is rarely heard. The option of full incorporation was largely available through religion, language, and often kinship clientelism across a couple of generations; phenotype may influence status to some degree, but is not the source of well\_defined social collectivities. The millions of World War II displaced persons in Europe, over time, eventually found a place for relocation, by processes which privileged individuation and

acceptance of the cultural parameters of the host society. In the case of the Palestinian diaspora, the choices open in the Gulf States or Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan are strikingly different. Even more distinct are identity options in more distant host societies (southern cone of Latin America, North America).

A last factor to mention is the trans\_generational one. For successor generations for whom the ancestral land is an abstraction, and the trauma of forced migration was not directly experienced, patterns of diasporic socialization and organizational expressions of group consciousness can play a major role. As well, an ongoing social or economic role for diasporic affinity can help preserve it (the Chinese diaspora).

In sum, the ongoing constructivist dynamics across time can produce diverse identity outcomes. Eventual absorption is one pathway (blacks in North Africa, Sudeten Germans, 1956 Hungarians). The elaboration of a powerful diasporic identity, resonating and reconnecting with the homeland, is another; the crosscurrents of consciousness reverberating through the African diaspora is a major case in point. Yet a third outcome is the reaffirmation of the original identity, intensified and primordialized by the nature of the forced migration itself as well as subsequent contextual factors; examples here are Hutu and Tutsi in central Africa, or Palestinians. The nature of force, the vagaries of destination, and the catalytic agents of new location all play their parts in determining the consequences of forced migrations.