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Re-casting Societies in Conflict

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Abstract:

Complex forced migration crises of the last 15 years have unfolded against the background of substantial shifts in the humanitarian discourse and in the wider geo-political order—indeed they have contributed to these changes. Associated with this new configuration have been new thrusts in several fields of policy and practice that relate to forced migration—including development, humanitarian action, migration management and security. A new concern with weak, fragile, failing and collapsed states that confound development, breed conflict, generate humanitarian emergencies and forced migration, and spawn security problems, crime and terrorism has provided the impetus to bring together these diverse fields. The upshot has been that an interpenetration of policy fields addressing security, migration management, humanitarian action and development has occurred. The new approach to conflict and post conflict societies is decidedly interventionist in character. The paper explores how societies in or emerging from conflict have been re-cast in the interpenetrating fields and discourses. In the new perspective, conflict and displacement are seen not only as destructive, but as holding the potential for the transformation of the economy and society. The paper asks what the outcome will be of the interpenetration of policy fields and the recasting of conflict-torn societies. Will these policy changes make life better for forced migrants and other people affected by conflict?

Keywords: conflict, post-conflict, refugees, forced migration, humanitarian regime

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This paper offers reflections emerging from involvement in two collaborative research projects which looked at policy approaches to forced migration. The first, entitled 'Complex forced migration emergencies: towards a new humanitarian regime', involved researchers and analysts from the US, UK, Denmark, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Colombia[1]. The project started from the premise that many recent humanitarian emergencies – in the Great Lakes of Central Africa, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Sudan, the Horn of Africa, the Caucasus, West Africa and so on —feature complex movements of refugees, internally displaced people, war-affected populations, returnees and others. These categories are not mutually exclusive and forced migrants may belong to more than one group, either concurrently or over time. For some time it has been widely accepted that the current "humanitarian regime" is not up to the task of dealing with these diverse categories of people who are forced to move, and who in aggregate make up what we might call "forced migration complexes".

The second project was commissioned by the UK's Department for International Development to help develop DfID's policy approach to refugees and internally displaced people. It involved Stephen Castles and others at the RSC and myself at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS): the outcome was a review of recent forced migration trends and policies and a set of recommendations for DfID's policy approach in line with the department's poverty reduction mandate (Castles and Van Hear 2005).

The two projects, which spanned five years, showed how much has changed in the global security, forced migration, post conflict and development fields in recent times. The forced migration complexes of the last 15 years have unfolded against the background of substantial shifts in the humanitarian discourse and in the wider geo-political order—and indeed they have contributed to these changes. Associated with this new

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[1] The collaborating institutions were the Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM) at Georgetown University, Washington DC; the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford; the Project on Internal Displacement at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC; the Centre for Development Research (CDR, now incorporated into the Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS) in Copenhagen, Denmark; the Centre for the Study of

configuration have been new thrusts in several fields of policy and practice that relate to forced migration—including development, humanitarian action, migration management, and security. These fields are inter-related but distinct, and have different constituencies, interests and values.

Perhaps the most obvious and important shift in the geo-political order is that the challenges of the post Cold War period have given way to a bleaker era dominated by security concerns and the "War on Terror". The events of September 11, 2001 transformed the global security scene and cast weak, fragile, failing, collapsed and war-torn states that have produced complex forced migration in a new and sinister light. The new security push is manifested in concern with these fragile and failed states as breeding grounds and bases for terrorism and crime and as sources of unwanted migrants who might spread these scourges. The recent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are the clearest manifestations of this new order, but other conflict societies are candidates for a similar approach (Donini et al. 2004).

Partly as a result of security concerns, but also driven by domestic political pressures in western states that are the destination for migrants, a raft of proposals have been floated that attempt to address forced migration in comprehensive ways: these include the UK's "New Vision" for asylum and migration, UNHCR's Convention Plus, and initiatives from the European Union and other quarters (Oxfam 2005; UNHCR 2004a). While very mixed in their motivations, collectively these initiatives may presage the emergence of a new forced migration paradigm, which seeks to contain both conflicts and forced migrants in their regions of origin. This new configuration can be seen as part of a wider "migration management" push whose purpose is to reduce the numbers of unwanted migrants who reach western countries, by a mix of prevention and containment (Crisp 2003).

Perhaps more positively, the debate since the 1990s over the "gap" between humanitarian action or relief on one hand and development on the

other has seen the emergence of new mechanisms attempting to bridge the divisions among UN agencies and in other relief and development spheres. The coordination thrust in the humanitarian sphere is driven by the need to handle crises increasing in number and complexity, and by the proliferation of agencies, NGOs, umbrella bodies and funding mechanisms that have emerged to deal with such crises. A discourse on societies in transition has emerged, refining previous perspectives on the aspired-for continuum between relief and development (UNDG 2004).

Meanwhile, in the development arena, a new sense of purpose has been galvanized with the setting of the Millennium Development Goals for achievement by 2015, focusing on the eradication of poverty (UN 2002). While there are serious concerns about the likelihood of their achievement by the deadline set, the MDGs have emerged as the policy framework for thinking and action on international development. Conflict and forced migration were largely absent from the initial MDG framework, but in so far as conflict and forced migration obstruct the attainment of the MDGs, there is a growing recognition that they have to be dealt with in development instruments associated with the MDGs, such as Poverty Reduction and Country Strategy documents.

The Interpenetration of Policy Fields

The new concern with weak, fragile, failing and collapsed states that confound development, breed conflict, generate humanitarian emergencies and forced migration, and spawn security problems like crime and terrorism has provided the impetus to bring together these diverse fields—security, migration management, humanitarian action and development. The upshot has been that in recent years these fields have not so much merged, as some

have argued for development and security for example (Duffield 2001), but that an *interpenetration* of these policy fields has occurred.[2]

In effect, each of these fields has spread into others, so we see an interpenetration of development and security, of development and humanitarianism, of development and migration management, of migration management and security, of humanitarianism and security, of humanitarianism and migration management, and so on. We have witnessed a so-called "merger" between the development and security fields, the aspired-for "continuum" between humanitarian relief and development, and the highlighting of links between development and migration management. Migration management has in turn been linked into the security field, which has also spread into the humanitarian arena, seen in the interpenetration of humanitarian assistance and military intervention, with often dangerous and sometimes fatal consequences for humanitarian workers (Donini et al. 2004).

The interpenetration of these fields is evident both in terms of vocabulary and at the level of strategy. For example, it can be seen in the popularity of the notion of "human security" in which the humanitarian, development and security fields are combined (Commission on Human Security 2003). It is evident in the term "humanitarian intervention", used to describe military involvement in humanitarian crises (Donini et al. 2004). It is seen in the notion of the "migration-asylum nexus" (UNHCR 2004a; Crisp and Dessalegne 2002), the perception that flows of migrants moving for economic purposes are mixed inextricably with those of people seeking protection or escaping conflict: here the migration management and humanitarian fields connect, as do to some extent the development and security arenas. A term for a new species of countries has been coined—Low Income Countries Under Stress or LICUS—which include societies in conflict but also those undergoing other severe shocks, and on which the concerns of the interpenetrated fields are focused (World Bank website 2004; World Bank 2002).

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[2] Coming from a different perspective, Betts (2005) has drawn attention to the possibility of exploiting 'linkages' between policy fields as holding potential for the governance of forced

Strategies that combine fields are in vogue, such as UNHCR's "Targeting Development Assistance for Refugee Solutions", developed under its Framework for Durable Solutions (UNHCR 2003; Betts 2005). As the name suggests, the idea is the judicious use of development assistance to promote integration in the country of asylum or reintegration on return. The approach combines the development and humanitarian fields, and security in the sense of refugee protection too.

At the same time, similar strategies and vocabularies are deployed across different policy fields. One such manifestation of interpenetration at the level of policy implementation is the increasingly popular notion of "partnerships". In the development field the emphasis is on partnerships between developing and developed countries for the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2002). At the same time, in the migration management field, the notion of "migration partnerships" between migrant-receiving and migrant-sending countries has come to the fore—with development assistance as a component of such partnerships (Oxfam 2005).

This interpenetration of policy fields has notably found expression in the notion of societies in transition—those moving from war to peace, from relief to development, from refugee flight to refugee return, and so on. For the UN, "transition refers to the period in a crisis when external assistance is most crucial in supporting or underpinning still fragile cease-fires or peace processes by helping to create the conditions for political stability, security, justice and social equity" (UNDG 2004: 6). Such societies need particular attention so that they stabilize and do not regress into a dangerous condition; but more than this they are seen as opportunities for transformation into societies with a liberal demeanour, both economic and political. The policy notion of transition, combining the humanitarian and development fields but also other policy fields, has spawned a whole series of budgets and funds earmarked to handle such circumstances (UNHCR 2004b).

Above all, the interpenetration of policy fields is also seen in the expanding objectives of development assistance, which has moved well

migration.

beyond economic development to include governance, democracy, human rights, the development of civil society, conflict resolution, managing conflicts, and much else besides (Bastian 2003).

These new approaches to transition and the expanding ambit of development assistance raise questions about the kinds of societies that will emerge out of conflict under the tutelage of relief and development agencies.

Transforming Whole Societies?

The new approach is not just palliative, preventive, or fire-fighting: it is no longer simply shoring up societies in parlous straits while halting the export of terrorists, criminal and unwanted migrants from them. It goes beyond this palliation, embracing the notion of the opportunity to transform whole societies. The new approach to conflict and post-conflict societies is decidedly interventionist in character. The remainder of this paper explores how societies in or emerging from conflict have been re-cast in the interpenetrating fields and discourses outlined above. In the new perspective, conflict and displacement are seen not only as destructive, but as holding the potential for the transformation of the economy and society. This is a perspective promoted particularly by the World Bank. [3]

The destructive, anti-developmental effects of war and displacement are self-evident. Conflict, violence and displacement break down the underpinnings of the economy, reduce predictability and confidence in the future, and disrupt markets, distribution networks, and banking and credit systems (World Bank 1998). Trust in institutions and the legitimacy of government is weakened. Civil life becomes militarized and social cohesion is undermined. Displacement obstructs access to previous livelihood practices, and new forms of livelihood practices are created—many of which are

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[3] The following paragraphs on the World Bank's evolving position on conflict societies draw on a background paper by Lars Buur and Helene Kyed of the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen (Buur and Kyed 2002).

informal or even criminal and detrimental to liberal economic and social order. Forms of identification like gender roles and family units become altered or are broken down. Conflict resolution mechanisms—which often mediate the distribution of land and other resources—break down and other social organizations adapt in unconstructive ways to the conflict situation.

However, the outlook is not unremittingly grim, because in the new thinking, conflict and post-conflict situations can be used as opportunities for the restructuring of political, social and economic systems. As an overview of the debate prepared for the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) put it, "Post-conflict situations often provide special opportunities for political, legal, economic and administrative reforms to change past systems and structures which may have contributed to economic and social inequities and conflict" (Mehler and Ribaux 2000:37). Such a perspective echoes the sentiments of many development aid donors, which since the mid-1990s have taken on a key role in conflict and post-conflict management and reconstruction (Doornbos 2002; Moore 2000). But it is not only post-conflict situations that create special opportunities. Conflicts themselves are now evaluated from a different vantage point: "The collapse of states in crisis need not be prevented, since a 'better state' cannot emerge until that collapse has taken place" (Mehler and Ribaux 2000:107). While conflict was previously seen as regressive (Duffield 2001), causing a rupture in the "normal" linear development pattern of a given society, it is now presented as an opportunity for a society's social, political and economic transformation.

This realization has been clearly manifested in recent policy shifts within the World Bank concerning conflict and post-conflict societies. While it was formed after the Second World War as part of the Marshall Plan to rebuild "post-conflict" Europe, the Bank had no comprehensive operational policy for post-conflict situations in the developing world until the later 1990s. Indeed, the Bank avoided countries embroiled in armed conflict in favour of those undergoing what it regarded as more conventional development -- though these countries often experienced conflict and upheaval short of civil war.

This changed when the Bank set up its Post-Conflict Unit (PCU), operational by 1997, and established a Post Conflict Fund which aimed at supporting countries in transition from conflict to sustainable peace and economic development. The *Framework for World Bank Involvement in Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (World Bank 1997) set out the Bank's thinking for intervention in the post-conflict field. The PCU—which transmuted subsequently into the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, reflecting an expanding remit—was placed in the Social Development Department, which indicated that post-conflict operations were to be an integral part of the overall framework for social development.

The Bank's reorientation was cast both as a return to its original mandate—the reconstruction of Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War—and as an expansion beyond the rebuilding of physical infrastructure:

> Since its creation in 1944, the World Bank's role in reconstruction has moved from rebuilding infrastructure to a comprehensive approach which includes the promotion of economic recovery, evaluation of social sector needs, support for institutional capacity building, revitalization of local communities, and restoration of social capital, as well as specific efforts to support mine action, demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants, and reintegrate displaced populations. An increased premium has, furthermore, been put on preventing the onset, exacerbation, or resurgence of violent conflict (World Bank 2004).

The new emphasis meant that the Bank now embraced use of post-conflict situations to promote economic adjustment and recovery and to build institutional capacity. Lending operations now had post-conflict targets such as de-mining, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and displaced people (World Bank 1998). The Bank has cooperated with other agencies engaged in post-conflict activities in which forced migration issues are prominent, notably through the Brookings Process, a partnership between the Bank, UNHCR and UNDP initiated in 1999; this was later revived

in 2002 as the "4Rs" initiative—Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction—as an integrated inter-agency "relief to development" approach for countries in transition from conflict (Lippman 2004).

The new emphasis on post-conflict situations resulted in the Bank engaging much earlier in conflict countries than before. Its strategy involved a number of steps (World Bank 1998). First was the creation of a "watching brief" in countries or war areas where there was no active Bank portfolio. This was followed by preparation of a transitional support strategy, so that reconstruction could be initiated when a resolution of conflict was reached. Then came early reconstruction interventions in the form of small-scale activities—often in combination with UN agencies and NGOs—that aimed at alleviating the effects of war for vulnerable groups by creating social safety nets, restoring administration systems and so on. This was followed by post-conflict reconstruction, leading eventually to a resumption of normal operations. The World Bank now engaged earlier because: "time is of the essence in post-conflict situations. Often, there are windows of opportunities within which significant progress is possible. But these windows can quickly narrow or close" (World Bank 1998: 29). The reasoning was that if the Bank was not present in war-torn societies the scope for action was restricted when the opportunity for intervention was possible.

Critics are wary of this new approach to conflict by the World Bank and other powerful donors. For the critics, such agencies see "the terrain of post conflict situations as ripe for implementation of their kind of state, economy and society" (Moore 2000: 14). "The wake of war leaves the 'level playing field' so beloved by….neo-liberal discourses" (ibid 13). Post-conflict and even conflict conditions offer opportunities for market-friendly interventions. In this perspective, pre-conflict social and economic structures which governed property, labour and other economic factors may well have been impediments to the development of markets: if these structures have been destroyed or fatally undermined by conflict, the foundations can be laid for individual property rights and other dimensions of market-friendly "good governance" (Moore 2000: 11). The dispensers of humanitarian relief can be

enlisted to join with those implementing reconstruction and development for these market-friendly purposes. Money is on offer to humanitarian agencies through the array of transition budgets and reconstruction funds, which are increasingly attractive as other sources of humanitarian funds are on the decline.

While the critique has some substance, the degree of "neo-liberalism" attributed to the World Bank and other donors in such critiques is overstated. The "Post-Washington Consensus" (Stiglitz 1998; Maxwell 2005) is certainly still market friendly, but acknowledges the need for means to counter the harm done to people by the market and by "market imperfections". The popularity of the notion of social capital, much touted by the World Bank (Fine 2001), is in part simply recognition that relations and dimensions outside the market matter—although admittedly for the World Bank the point is that they matter for successful functioning of the market. For humanitarians and progressives, social capital and relations outside the market matter for different reasons, not least as means of welfare or social security for the poor and conflict-affected. It is thus the nature, scale and control of such social security mechanisms and social capital, and more widely the nature of "development" (among other things the form and regulation of markets) that are the real terrain of argument, rather than the desirability of the market itself. As one critic puts it, "the debate is not really about 'relief' or 'development', but *what kind* of development in war-torn societies and indeed in the rest of the periphery" (Moore 2000: 17). This remains a salient question for the societies and communities embroiled in or emerging from conflict and related forced migration consequences.

Re-casting Conflict Societies: Outcomes and Prospects

What will be the outcome of the interpenetration of policy fields and the recasting of conflict-torn societies as described above? Will these policy changes make life better for forced migrants and other people affected by conflict?

In part the interpenetration of policy fields, for better or worse, is a consequence of pressure by practitioners and scholars for greater coordination and coherence in relief and development efforts. The call for better coordination is in part a response to the great proliferation of agencies in the humanitarian field, including new actors like the military who have not until recently been part of that field. Advocacy of coordination and coherence in the humanitarian field has almost become a mantra. There have indeed been improvements in the institutional architecture in respect of coordination, although more at the international level and in the capitals of conflict countries than in the field. The benefits of improved coordination are yet to make tangible impressions at the ground level among forced migrants and other war-affected people.

More widely, it has been argued here that conflict societies involving complex forced migration have been cast in the current interpenetrated humanitarian–development–security–migration management discourse as both threats and opportunities. On the one hand such societies are seen as the source of unwanted forces, trends and people—troublesome refugees, truculent fundamentalists, incorrigible criminals and intractable terrorists—which are to be contained as far as possible. On the other hand such societies, with previous economic, political and social encumbrances swept away or fatally undermined, present opportunities for re-moulding or wholesale transformation. The former perspective seems unremittingly bleak, and liable to promote the very forces that it seeks to contain—if indeed containment is possible, which is questionable. The latter perspective is liable to accusations of neo-imperialism or re-colonization as societies are remoulded in market-friendly, western-oriented ways.

However, the two perspectives are in some ways compatible with each other, since transformation of conflict societies into stable and sustainable communities where people can live reasonable lives could remove some of the forces impelling migration, thereby helping to achieve the outcome desired by western states anxious to reduce the numbers reaching their shores. Indeed, the interpenetration of the relief, development, security and

migration management fields signals efforts towards both such ends -- although agencies within these interpenetrated fields have very different priorities. Some have seen the exploitation of 'linkages' among these different fields as holding potential for improving the governance of forced migration (Betts 2005). The question is whether the policies currently being pursued will promote a positive outcome, contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, for example, or whether they will make fragile states and societies still more insecure, and increase the likelihood of more forced migration.

The best outcome from a humanitarian perspective and for forced migrants themselves would be improvements in living conditions or human security in places that are now sources of forced migration and displacement, so that migration becomes matter of choice rather than necessity. Relief and development assistance and migration management policies should be directed to that end. Humanitarians and progressives then should not just monitor the human rights and human security dimensions of the policy thrusts identified in this paper, but also try to ensure that any societal transformations that unfold do so in conditions of equity and consistent with notions of global justice. This means supporting the consolidation of a market economy tempered with robust means of social and human security, strengthening an enabling, developmental state, fostering democracy from below, and encouraging the emergence of a vibrant civil society. Above all it means supporting the efforts of forced migrants and other war-affected people in such endeavours.

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