

Book Review

Alexander Betts, *Forced Migration and Global Politics* (West Sussex, John Wiley and Sons. Ltd., 2009)

In the post Cold War era the resurgence of forced migration due to a conjuncture of events led most observers to rethink the problematic and its intensity thereof. It was once again recognised that the phenomenon of forced migration, whether due to conflict or due to fallacies of development or even vagaries of the environment, was here to stay. Interest in the issue increased and migration became a topic of much debate. In 2000 Hardt and Negri made a plea for the removal of all barriers to immigration much to the consternation of practitioners of global politics. Migration and its corollary, forced migration became important topics for discussion in haloed circles including corridors of famous universities. Oxford University among a few others led the way for inclusion of these issues in the curricula in the Atlantic world. With increasing interest in the study of forced migration there was a growing effort by social scientists to locate it within major discourses so that one could come to grips with this phenomenon. Gil Loescher, a leader in this field, tried to locate it within major theoretical debates on international relations. Following his lead Alexander Betts has tried to situate it within the discourse on global politics and this volume is the product of that effort. At the outset he said that the “book has been written primarily as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate courses in International Relations and Forced Migration. However, it is also intended to make a broader academic contribution to International Relations.” (p. 3) Betts began his account by stating that global politics had always had profound impact on forced migration. All catastrophic events of the twentieth century including the two world wars, cold war, ethnic conflicts in the post-cold war period and other subsequent events produced forced migration of people of enormous magnitude but nothing proved more shattering as the war against terror. It was terrorism that created the occasion on the one hand for making states most reluctant to accommodate forced migrants and on the other hand, increased the possibility of transforming more and more unwanted people into being forced migrants. This necessitated a new way of looking at the question. Driven by such concerns Betts has tried to look at forced migration from the perspective of global politics to locate possibilities of theoretical interventions in favour of the vulnerable. This has motivated him to situate the question in different

IR theories from neo-realism to critical theory. Betts is of the opinion that the great stress on neo-realist approach highlighted the way in which refugee regime evolved in the twentieth century on the basis of the strategic interest of the major powers. A liberal institutional approach would have emphasized the mutually beneficial aspects of designing an institutionalized international cooperation in handling the refugee question. An analytical liberal approach would look at the role of the domestic politics in shaping how the states have defined their evolving interest in the international refugee regime. A constructivist approach would have pointed out how ideas and norms shaped the statist question. A critical theory approach would portray how the refugee regime evolved to serve the interest of the powerful states.

In trying to critique the behaviour of the states in shaping the question of forced migration Betts draws on the issues of sovereignty and security. He says that questions of sovereignty and human rights stand in contradiction to each other. "On the one hand human rights imply that states have universal obligation towards their citizens; on the other hand, sovereignty implies that states have unambiguous authority within their own territory." (p. 53) In trying to explain a growing state interest on the question of IDPs Betts draws on Krasner's thesis of *organized hypocrisy*. He is of the opinion that the powerful states in handling the question of forced migration have diverted their attention and funding towards IDPs as that would stop the migrants from spilling over to their territory. As for security studies the author says that "they can be used to make transparent the basis of normative claims to security and the interest and power relations that underlie those claims" (p. 79). The author invokes the Foucauldian concept of bio-power in trying to rationalise how states view the forced migrant body.

The other issues that according to Betts have serious impact on forced migration are north-south political economy, globalization and regionalism. He forwards Mark Duffield's contention that humanitarian and development assistance are all part of a northern hegemonic strategy. (p. 133) He draws upon the work of B.S. Chimni and his usage of the Gramscian definition of hegemony whereby Chimni argues that "ideas and knowledge can reinforce the dominance of capitalist elites over the marginalized proletariat." (p. 137) In addressing the issue of globalization the author says that this phenomenon has eased the whole process of migration and yet the states to their fallacy try to deal with the issue of forced migration within the outdated Westphalian rubric leading to enormous complexities. The book ends with a chapter on regionalism as an important tool to understand global politics and forced migration thereof. The book has much merit. In the first chapter itself it surpasses being a mere text book. The author does a wonderful job in unravelling complicated theoretical concepts of global politics and showing how forced migration can be fitted into them. However, there is one problem in the discourse that the author was unable to circumvent and that is the northern

propensity of reducing everything of the third world to the African experience. The experience of the developing world is much more varied than the truism culled out of Africa. Probably it is time to move beyond the paradigm of Africa and look for solutions in a much more variegated framework, otherwise important experiences will be sacrificed.

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