

Critical Issues in Forced Migration Studies and the Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia

Riwanto Tirto Sudarmo

Research Centre for Society and Culture
Indonesian Institute of Science, LIPI
Widya Graha LIPI, Lt. VI & IX
I. Gatot Subroto,
Jakarta 12710, Indonesia
Email: riwanto.tirto.sudarmo@lipi.go.id

Migration studies and the displaced population

As a field of social science Migration Studies is characterized by a broad division between the study of people who move for economic reasons on the one hand and the study of those who move for political reasons on the other. People who move for economic reasons are normally called *migrants*, while people who move for political reasons are called *refugees*, *asylum seekers* or are simply labeled *displaced people*. Economic migration is also often labeled as voluntary migration, while movement of people for political reasons is often labeled involuntary or forced migration. This categorization of migration behavior is a product of the interaction between the academy and the state and non-state institutions that are working in various areas concerned with the geographical movement of people.

This distinction between economy and politics as the separate realms and causes for migration reflects our academic simplification of the blurred and complex nature of human movement. Recently, population displacement from forced migration has become a focus of public attention. Displaced populations' affect those who are uprooted, the communities that feel the impact of their arrival, governments, and the international agencies which play a major role in dealing with displacement.

Forced migration has attracted different views and perspectives from different scholarly disciplines and practical interests. Forced migration has a strong attraction to state and non-state practitioners, as the phenomena of displaced people calls upon immediate humanitarian assistance to save lives and to normalize the displaced. Stephen Castles, for example, argues that forced migration as an interdisciplinary field within the social sciences should be seen as an integral part of the relationship between poor and rich countries in the current context of globalization and social transformation.¹ This implies that forced migration is not just a product of internal wars and local impoverishment, but is also closely linked to the fundamental economic and political structures and processes of the contemporary world. The consequence for forced migration studies, according to Stephen Castles, is the urgent need to understand the relationship between the local and global in every specific displacement situation.

While the movement of people is as old human existence, the meanings and implications of this movement are constantly redefined. In a thought provoking address as the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) President David Ludden recently illustrated how human movement is often perceived in relation to the changing construction of modern nation-states:

Modernity consigned human mobility to the dusty dark corners of archives that document the hegemonic space of national territorialism. As a result, we imagine that

¹ Stephen Castles, 2004, Introduction to the Study of Forced Migration. From *Collection of Global Course Syllabi Relating to Internally Displaced Persons*. The Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displaced Persons.

*mobility is border crossing, as though borders came first, and mobility, second. The truth is more the other way around*²

As we see today, the state's border is no longer meant to be a fortress for preventing us from external threats, or to exclude invading armies, but more for keeping economic migrants out from stealing our peaceful life and secluded welfare.

There are three dimensions involved in the act of human movement, namely its spatial, social and temporal dimensions. The spatial dimension is related to the territorial boundaries that are crossed. In modern times, these have taken the form of politico-administrative boundaries (villages, districts, provinces, prefectures, counties, states, countries, nation-states, regional groupings of nation states, i.e. EU, ASEAN, APEC, NAFTA) or political, economical or cultural constructions of geographical space (poor and rich countries, south or north countries, east and west, socialist or liberal democratic countries, developing, developed, industrial countries, Pacific Rim, etc). Coupled with this, distinct migratory patterns can be designated based on the period of time spent in particular group of countries that constitute a combination of sending and receiving countries that, at a certain stage of development, have established a distinctive migration system. Several categories have been created in conjunction with the characteristic of the boundary that is crossed. Conventionally, movement within a particular country is categorized as internal migration, whilst movement that crosses the boundaries of nation states is categorized as international migration.

Castles³ introduces the idea of migration systems to integrate factors in an overarching conceptual framework which facilitates analysis of the interactions which shape each migratory process. Such an approach implies a notion of the embeddedness of migration in broader processes of economic, demographic, social, cultural and political change. Migration in this view can be seen as an integral part of globalization and social transformation. The key indicator of globalization is the rapid increase in *cross-border flows* of all sorts: finance, trade, ideas, pollution, media products and people. The key organizing structure for all these flows is the *transnational network*, which can take the form of transnational corporations, global markets, international organizations, global criminal syndicates, or transnational cultural communities. Flows of capital and commodities are generally welcomed by the holders of economic and political power, but immigration and cultural difference are seen as potential threats to national sovereignty and identity. Yet the reality is that population mobility is inextricably linked with other types of cross-border flows.

An example of the migration system is the movement of labor— mostly female domestic workers - between South and Southeast Asian countries to the Middle East. The migration system between the rich countries in Europe and the sending countries in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia could be different from the migration system in East Asian countries where economic factors seem more important than politics as underlying reasons for migration behaviors. Contemporary migration in the Americas also has different characteristics from European and East Asian systems.⁴

The social dimension is always embedded in the act of human movement because migration in itself is a social behavior that concerns an act of a human being within their environment. The social environment of migration is interpreted broadly as involving economics, politics and culture. An act of

² David Ludden, 2003, 'Presidential Address: Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia'.

³ Stephen Castles, "Migration as a factor in social transformation in East Asia", paper presented to a Conference on Migration and Development, Princeton University, 4-6 May, 2000.

⁴ Under the auspices of International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, Douglas Massey et al. produced a comprehensive study of international migration in 1998. In this study a number of migration experts were appointed to review both the theories and the evidences in all regions. The study could be seen as representing the latest state of the art of migration studies from the conventional approaches of locating migration in the spatio-geographical perspectives. See: Douglas S. Massey, et.al., *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium* (1998)..

human movement is therefore always a movement within the economic, political and cultural environments.

The last dimension of migration is the temporal dimension. Every movement is always a movement in a particular time in history. Although the act of movement tends to be confined to human movement within a geographical space, it could also involve a movement that might not involve the notion of space in a geographical sense but in a socio-cultural sense. In the last ten years or so migration studies has been significantly influenced by postmodern approaches that look upon migration as social constructions that evolve within the processes of globalization. In this new direction migration studies are no longer isolated in conventional spatial locations but are located in the wider perspectives of the politics of space.⁵ In conjunction with these new perspectives, the globalization of human movement has been considered as one of the important elements in the process of de-territorializing of the world - those circumstances that are sometimes popularly called 'a borderless world.' Other important new terms in the globalization literature that resulted from the significant role of human movement in the process of transcending nationalities and different cultures are trans-nationalism and cosmopolitanism, in which the post-Westphalian notion of the state and its sovereignty are perceived as obsolete⁶

A new perspective beyond the conventional 'Eurocentric' framework and approach should therefore be explored and formulated to explain the increasingly interconnected migration-security-development issues that are unfolding in the Asian region. As migration is a multidimensional notion, it is not surprising that it is a subject that has been studied in many academic disciplines, most notably demography, geography, sociology and economics. The literature on migration is therefore spread across many fields. It is therefore important to bear in mind that migration can be perceived in an eclectic mode that goes beyond any single discipline. Yet we should also make very clear that specific disciplinary studies of migration are very useful in our understanding of this crucial human and that any efforts in this field should not be discouraged.

Migration essentially remains very much the exception rather than the rule of human behavior. An overwhelmingly higher number of people stay at home compared with those who migrate. Why then does international migration suddenly loom so large on the international policy agenda? According to Kathleen Newman⁷, the director of Migration Policy Institute in New York, much of the answer lies in the domestic politics of migrant-receiving countries. Another factor is in the abrupt demographic transition that the major countries of destination are going through. Another element is concerned with the consequences of human-capital flight. These and other factors add up to a heightened consciousness about the importance of studying migration as a force of globalization and economic change.

The movement of people across geographical space can be self-motivated (voluntary) or as a result of particular circumstances that forced them to move. In migration literature an act of involuntary movement is also known as forced migration. The circumstances that prompted an act of forced migration can be ecological, social, economical and political. Political reasons for migration are particularly relevant to security issues as traditionally conceived by the field of refugee studies and security studies. A body of knowledge established under the rubric of refugee studies partly resulted from the need to find viable solution to the burgeoning numbers of dislocated population after the end of World War II – particularly in Europe. According to Newman (2003: 5-6) the convention relating to

⁵ Emerging topics such as diasporas, citizenship and transnational communities are very prominent. See for example Peter van der Veer's edited book on the politics of space in the South Asian Diaspora and Thomas Faist (1999) *Transnationalization in International Migration: Implications for the Study of Citizenship and Culture*.

⁶ See for example Ulf Hannerz, "Notes on the Global Ecumene", *Public Culture*, Vol. 1, No.2, 1989, pp.66-75 and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Kathleen Newman, "Migration as a Factor in Development and Poverty Reduction", *Migration Information Source*, June 1, 2003.

status of refugees were initially a temporary arrangements established in the context of Cold war politics that centered on a western maneuver to undermine the communist state by assisting people seeking refuge from communist countries. A conceptual challenge to the conventional understanding of refugee -- which is confined to people forced out of their countries for political reasons -- is the increasing number of people who are displaced within their own countries – the so called ‘internally displaced people’ or IDPs – that greatly outnumber refugees and asylum seekers.

The critical issues brought about by the plight of the IDPs, while humanitarian in nature, have further implications in relation to the legal systems that operate at the international level, especially concerning the mandate of the UNHCR. As Castles⁸ also notes, since the 1980s there has been a dramatic increase in the frequency and severity of humanitarian crises in many parts of the world. Such developments have led to criticisms of the arrangements that exist at the international levels to deal with forced migration. The international refugee regime developed in the context of post-1945 mass population displacement and the beginnings of the Cold War. There has been considerable change in the post-Cold War period and critics argue that some of the basic assumptions and structures no longer meet current needs. This has led to constant debates about the need for reform.

According to Castles, the international refugee regime consists of a set of *legal instruments*, a number of *institutions* designed to protect and assist refugees, and a set of *international norms* concerning the treatment of refugees. The core of the regime is the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines who is officially a refugee and what rights such persons should have. The most important institution is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but many other international organizations play a part. Many intergovernmental agencies are involved, including the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In addition, hundreds of NGOs play a key role. These include for instance Save the Children, OXFAM, the International Rescue Committee and Médecins Sans Frontières. States and their appropriate agencies as well as national humanitarian organizations may also be seen as part of the regime.

Recently, another kind of forced migration is entering the migration literature: migration where movement is a result of development programs or ‘development induced displacement’ or DIDs. This argument is most clearly articulated by Michael Cernea, who joined the World Bank in 1974 as its first in-house sociologist and worked as the Bank's Senior Adviser for Sociology and Social Policy until 1997. His books, among others *Resettlement and Development* (1998) and *The Economics of Involuntary Resettlement: Questions and Challenges* (1999) are the most comprehensive references on this topic. This perspective represents the World Bank’s response to criticisms about the destructive impact of the Bank’s population resettlement projects, under which people have been displaced by Bank funded development of big dams in developing countries. The World Bank and the IMF are the most important financial organisations that represent the interests of the rich industrialised countries in providing financial and technical-economic assistance in many developing countries. It is through these financial organisations that ‘globalisation’ has a clear and direct impact on most of the Third World population and in turn in the making of the burgeoning numbers of the displaced population in these part of the world.

Imposing security and migration-development nexus

As we enter the twenty first century, we are witnessing an alignment of security, development and migration issues in a more transparent and dynamic way than ever before. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 11 of September 2001, while certainly a very tragic event, has no doubt provided a galvanising impetus for scholars working on security related migration issues – in particular in the field of refugee studies – to seek a better understanding of the dynamics in the

⁸ Stephen Castles, 2004 “Global Perspectives on Forced Migration.

relationship between migration and security. The conventional conception of security, concerned mainly with the security of state, is largely a political construct based mainly on Western European experience.⁹ This heavily state-centered approach is currently under challenge as the architecture of world order changes profoundly following the end of the Cold War. This new structure is marked by the explosion of violent ethnic conflicts in fragile and failed states, the Israel-Palestine dispute, the Gulf War, and Al Qaeda's attacks on US embassies, the WTC and the Pentagon which prompted the declaration of the war on terrorism by the United States and its allies.

Power relations were a crucial underlying determinant in the bipolar world order of the Cold War era. Modernization theories became mainstream ideology in the social sciences and humanities in the 1960s, flowing into the poor countries through developmental aid packages delivered by the rich Western-liberal countries in order to stop those poor countries from falling into the hands of the socialist-communist bloc. In this bipolar world, development as an ideology as well as developmental aid packages were seen as part of the security strategy/framework of the Western liberal countries Chimni¹⁰, an international law expert critically views the power relations between rich and poor countries by framing the policy regimes in the migration-development discourse into three 'policy logics'. By 'policy logic' he means the assumption underlying sets of interrelated interventions by migrant-sending countries, migrant-receiving countries and international organizations, which in aggregate may be designed a 'migration-development regime'.

The emerging policy regimes recognize that migration and development are linked, but maintain the separation between migration policy and development policy. Under this logic, aid is, and should be, directed only to the explicit objectives of poverty reduction, democratization, sustainable development and gender equality. Interventions towards these goals take no account of the impacts on migration, whether positive or negative. At the same time, migration policy takes minimal account of the development needs of migrant-sending countries, though there might be some recognition of the impact of brain drain and needs related to repatriation, for example. Interaction between development and migration policy are therefore limited to where the interventions associated with them overlap, as in the case of highly skilled migration, and refugee outflows from poor countries in conflict.¹¹

Security is basically a state of being in which an individual or a community – or even a country -- feels free from any fear or threat. Feelings of security - or insecurity - are related both to the physical as well as psychological well being. According to Johan Galtung, security is one of the basic human needs, similar to food, air and freedom.¹² As a basic need, security is essential for the existence

⁹ Among the recent books on this theme is an edited book published by United Nations University Press 'Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State' (2003). This book directly focusses on the possible role of refugees and forced displacement – two forms of involuntary human mobility – on state and international security. A chapter on the discussion of human security by Astri Suhrke representing a new discourse on the security studies that attempts to shift the conventional security discourse from the state to the people is particularly interesting.

¹⁰ B.S. Chimni, "Aid, relief and containment: The first asylum country and beyond", Expert Working Paper, prepared for the Centre for Development Research study Migration-Development Links: Evidence and Policy Options, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2002.

¹¹ According Chimni, the three migration-development regimes and related policy logics are: 1. Closure and containment, aimed at control of migrants and refugees; 2. Selectivity towards immigration and development support; and 3. Liberalisation and transnationalism in the fields of labour mobility, diaspora activities, and refugee protection.

¹² Galtung provides a thought provoking talk in a workshop on 'human security and area studies', organised by Research Institute of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, in Tokyo, 10 January 2004. According to Galtung the discussion on human security is in fact has long been started when the UN introduced the concept of basic human needs but this concept has lost its significance as many states are not interested in moving toward more fancy concepts, such as sustainable development and later to human security. Yet, this human security concept, according to Galtung, is again made irrelevant in the wake of the U.S. invasion to Afghanistan and Iraq that reflects the fragility of human security in the face of violence committed by strong states towards people in the weak states.

of human beings. Communities and countries also need security in order to function effectively, as is the case with a sovereign state.

An important feature of security studies is the *perception* of threat that arouses *feelings of* insecurity. These threats can be real or imaginary. In most cases the perceived or imaginary threats – that bring with them potential or probable consequences - can be immediately transformed into real threats when the impact of the threat is felt or experienced. The task of security analysis is to assess the probability of the transformation of perceived threats into real threats. The notion of perception is becoming very important in security assessments, because what is perceived as a security threat very much depends upon the various factors that influence the perception. This can differ from one person, or state, to another. They can be related to differences in individual characteristics or personal preferences and interests, such as age, gender and education; or differences in the feature of the communities such as economic structures and class, political ideologies, social norms and values, religion and faith and historical experiences.

Security is conventionally understood as the security of the state or country in relation to the real or perceived threats from another state or country.¹³ Recently, the vocabulary of security has been greatly expanded to include human security and homeland security, as well as territorial security. So-called traditional security threats have been added to by new forms of threats that are defined as non-traditional in nature. While Asian scholars and governments moved toward these new security discourses and practices, governments of Western industrialized nations tend to be preoccupied by conventional notions of security, including the influx of refugees and asylum seekers which they see as threatening the tranquil and affluent life of their citizens. Yet as the process of globalization has simultaneously eroded the state's sovereignty and fostered emerging awareness of global citizenship, scholars have begun to seriously question the fundamental principles of various policies and regulations concerning refugees and asylum seekers that are knocking on the door of the rich-industrialized countries.

Mervyn Frost, for instance, strongly argues from an ethical point of view that migrants (ranging from tourists to asylum seekers) have the right to move about globally.¹⁴ He also argues that migrants who have had their citizenship eroded in their home state ought to be seen not as supplicants deserving charity but as people “*whom we need to establish as citizens in democratic free-states in order to secure our freedom*”. Significantly, Frost's arguments highlight the ethical flaws underlying the assumptions of most western countries' current policies and regulations on immigration. However, it is still beyond imagination that his arguments will be adopted in the near future because national interests still prevail in the most developed countries.

It is very interesting therefore to observe the policy direction of many Asian countries that quickly adopted the so-called non traditional security concept. The political gestures of the governments of Asian countries reflect their seriousness in realizing their new security approach. For example, the joint declaration between Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji and ASEAN leaders on cooperation in the field of non-traditional security issues during the Sixth China-ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 4 November 2002. This change reflects the responses of security experts towards the changing architecture of international, as well as transnational relations, particularly after the Cold War and Al Qaeda's attack on the US on 11 September, 2001. It is very clear that the 11 September attacks have drastically shifted the American conception of national security. And this has

¹³ For useful reference on the impact on globalization on security in East Asia before the event of 11 September, 2001 see among others Peter Van Ness 'Globalization and Security in East Asia', in *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1999, pp. 315-342.

¹⁴ Mervyn Frost, "Thinking ethically about refugees: A case for the transformation of global governance", in Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm (eds.), *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2003), pp. 109-129.

had a profound impact on the perceived architectures of world and global security, shifting further away from traditional or conventional perceptions of security and threats.¹⁵

The discourse on security is closely related to the discourse about violence, and therefore about peace. Peace is the ultimate state of being where insecurity and violence are absent. In the discourse of violence, Johan Galtung differentiates between what he calls personal and structural violence. According to Galtung we shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct, and to violence where there is no such actor as structural or indirect. There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.¹⁶ Galtung's conception of violence as an indication of the absence of peace is useful in relation to a conception of security that is more people-centered. In this regard, the new jargon of human security does not, in fact, provide any new understanding as far as the concept of violence and peace is concerned.

In a very useful discussion on human security, Astri Suhrke persuasively argues that as a social construct "human security" is open to multiple interpretations and those promoting it are still struggling to formulate an authoritative and consensual definition.¹⁷ Suhrke suggests that if the aim is to build a normative and policy-oriented model that places the interest of the displaced population at the centre, a better starting point is "vulnerability". This does not evoke the same conflictual connotation as "security".¹⁸

Refugee Crisis and the Failure of Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia

In a criticism of the conventional approaches to the study of Southeast Asia, Jan Aart Scholte (1997: 29) argued that this region should be seen within a context of world relations:

[G]lobalisation has been a primary fact of contemporary history in insular Southeast Asia, deeply affecting the politics, economics, culture, psychology, and ecology of the population. The growth of global networks of social relations has been most pronounced in recent decades, but the trend can be traced back at least to the middle of the nineteenth century. The Malay-Indonesian world, for example, does not today exist, and indeed has never existed, apart from wider world interconnections. The student of modern-island Southeast Asia, therefore, faces a task of discovering and assessing the interlinkages between international, national, and local circumstances that have shaped the course of social history in this region.

Scholte (1997: 30) further argues that:

¹⁵ The change in American perceptions and attitudes towards security has meant that threat assessment, proactive law enforcement, and risk management have been augmented so as to eliminate as much vulnerability as conceivable. This new, expansive philosophy began to take shape immediately after September 11 attacks and has culminated in the newly creation of the Department of Homeland Security. See Jonathan Stevenson, "How Europe and America Defend Themselves", *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 2003, p. 78.

¹⁶ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research* 6, (1969): 170-171.

¹⁷ Astri Suhrke, "Human security and the protection of refugees", in Edward Newman and Joanne van Selms (eds.), *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2003), p. 100.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the concept of human security was first introduced by a task force led by Canadian's Foreign Affairs Minister that focused on the freedom of fear but since 1997 had been re-conceptualized – mostly by Asian countries – into the freedom from want. The idea of human security rapidly attracted many interpretations and there was practically no consensus on its fundamental conception. Among the good review on the contending perspectives of human security can be seen for example from Kanti Bajpai 'The Idea of Human security' in *International Studies*, February 2003 and Roland Paris 'Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?' in *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Fall 2001) pp. 87-102.

This blind spot in the study of island Southeast Asia appears to reflect the power of one of the main structures of contemporary global social relations: namely, the nationality principle. As noted earlier, concurrently with the trend of globalization over the past century and more, social life in -- gain taking an example of the Malay-Indonesian world -- has also become heavily nationalized. That is, at the same time that global interconnections have intensified in the region, national units with boundaries of previously unknown rigidity have also emerged, in the form of 'Indonesia' and 'Malaysia'. Nationality has become a key ordering principle of world politics (e.g. in terms of national state), world economy (in regard to national currencies, national taxes, etc.), world culture (in regard to pervasive national symbols and invented national traditions), world geography (in terms of national territories), world psychology (with notions of 'national characters'), so on. The two tendencies, globalization and nationalization, are perhaps not so contradictory as they may seem at first. From a world-historical perspective, the pursuit of nation-hood might be appreciated as a means by which people have attempted to maintain a sense of identity, community, and control of destiny in a globalizing social circumstance that has tended to undermine pre-existing frameworks of collective identification and communal solidarity.

In a different vein Wang Gungwu (2001; 19) also argues the need to see the region as an integrated area rather than separating it into different entities:

With very few exceptions, the scholars avoided portraying the local reality as integral parts of the unique border-less maritime world of the Malay Archipelago. In that world, people were mobile and migratory to a greater extent than we realized. It was a world of commerce, including trade over long distances. The trade was not only among the Malays themselves, but one that, continuously and for centuries, attracted maritime neighboring peoples from the west and the north, including those from mainland Asia

The author certainly is not alone in longing for new light to be shed on studies of the region. As Benedict Anderson (1998: 7) from a different angle has argued:

No other region of the world-not Latin America, not the Near East, not Africa, and not South Asia-had this kind of alarming profile. The new hegemon was determined that it not be "lost" like China. Out of this, in 1954, came SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), formed in American Manila, and later headquartered in Bangkok, which was designed to save the whole postcolonial region from the communist specter. In the following decade, two different attempts were made by local governments in Southeast Asia to create regional organizations less wholly dominated by outsiders; both proved abortive. Only in 1967, after Sukarno had been driven from power in an orgy of mass murder, was a more permanent institution created: that Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which recently -- after a thirty-year interval-admitted Vietnam, Burma, Laos, and will probably incorporate Hun Sen's Cambodia and Xanana Gusmao East Timor one day.

Anderson's comment on the politics of modern Southeast Asia is a reminder of how the region will always be arena for global powers and their interests.

The nation-states in Southeast Asia emerged from a combination of nationalist movement and the negotiation among the former colonial powers strongly influenced by the United States as the major superpower after the Pacific war. Following the contestation between the superpowers in the Cold War that clearly manifested in the Vietnam War was perhaps the first major forced population displacement in Southeast Asia, in which many Vietnamese decided to leave their countries to seek

refugees in other countries. The forced migration event that is epitomized by the so called 'boat people' could be seen as the beginning of refugee crisis in Southeast Asia. The flows of Vietnamese refugees into their neighboring Southeast Asian countries provoked international agencies and western countries to deal with this major humanitarian issue. Again, the north-rich countries have played a major role in solving the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia, resembling the experience of solving the displaced population in Europe after the World War II.

While the experience of Vietnamese boat people showed the critical role of the west in solving the crisis, the role of Malaysia and Indonesia in assisting resettlement to western countries (USA, Canada, Australia) also has to be recognized. Today, the displaced populations of the upper Mekong states are almost unprotected by any states and are therefore becoming very vulnerable. Human trafficking is one of the major problems experiencing by these displaced people. Forced migration is clearly constantly lingering in the life of the people that take refuge in the Thai-Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos border regions.¹⁹

While Thailand seems enjoy a perception of being a nation-state that has not experienced western colonialism, its east and northern border regions have become the sanctuary of people that fleeing from persecution – most notably from Burma. The unresolved internal political problems stemming from the unsettled nation building process in Burma has become the source of protracted conflict between the military junta and the opposition group led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the secessionist minority ethnic groups based in the border areas of Thailand. At present, thousands of displaced persons residing in Thai-Burma border areas and constantly calling for both humanitarian assistance and political solution. The Muslim Rohingas also escape and taking refuge in Malaysia from political persecution in their home Burma. The Malaysian government seems more tolerant toward Muslim refugees, especially the Rohingas, and to a lesser extent the Acehnese and Patanis. The unfinished project of nation building in the post-colonial states of Southeast Asia also flare up in the Southern Philippine of Mindanao islands, Indonesia's West Papua and Aceh, and recently in southern Thailand. These conflict hot spots have produced both refugees and internally displaced populations that strongly reflect the failure of Southeast Asian states in dealing with their own domestic politics and their inter-state issues, especially with regard to the problem of cross border forced population movement.²⁰ The Southeast Asian border areas now represent a specter of forced population displacement arenas in which various refugee related issues such as the statelessness, citizenships, human trafficking and identity politics are calling for better rigorous academic understanding and viable policy options.

The discourse on the so-called 'internally displaced populations' in the region is relatively new. In the Indonesian and Philippine language, for example, the terms that are used is 'pengungsi' (Indonesia) and 'bakwit' (Philippine) or 'refugee' if we translate into English language.²¹ While in the international community the term 'refugee' constitutes a totally different meaning to that implied by the phrase 'internally displaced population', in the Indonesian context 'pengungsi' is used interchangeably, meaning people that are taking refuge in a (temporary) safe place if they were forced to move from their usual residence. The reasons for their move range from natural disasters (earthquake, eruption of the mountain) or man made disasters (flooding, development projects, and governments' eviction from public areas, communal conflicts, and war). The forcefulness of circumstances that instigate the movement constitute the main characteristic of the 'pengungsi' phenomena. Looking from this broader understanding of the causes of movement, the so-called

¹⁹ See Anh Dang Nguyen, 2004, "Forced Migration in Vietnam: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives".

²⁰ The latest incidence in mid January 2006 concerning the arrival of 43 peoples (36 adults and 7childrens) of West Papuans by boat in Far North Queensland seeking asylum in Australia is case in point. Australia as the signatory of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees is obliged to process the future refugee status of these people. The case however will likely to be handled by the Australian very carefully to avoid the irritating reaction from the Indonesian government.

²¹ On the 'bakwit' and the displaced population in Mindanao, The Philippine, see an interesting study by Canuday, 2004.

‘internally displaced population’ could be something that is nothing new in Indonesia (before and after independence).²²

The sense of newness that is invoked in the recent discourse on ‘internally displaced populations’ is perhaps related to intervention by international agencies, particularly the UN offices in state’s capital, that attempt to deal with the vastly increased numbers of ‘pengungsi’ as a result of political conflicts. In the beginning of 1992 Frances Deng appointed as a special secretary to the UN secretary general on IDPs. Since then the idea of IDPs has quickly entered public discourses as various institutions, both foreign and local, begin to follow the UN’s steps in ‘capitalizing’ the plight of ‘displaced people’ that flourishes as communal conflicts become one facet in the wider canvas of ‘political transition toward democracy’ in Indonesia.

IDPs (in the international usage) or ‘pengungsi’ (in local or national usage) have attracted ‘development practitioners’ both from within and without ‘official circles’ adding into a long list of so-called vulnerable groups that have long been part of the vocabulary in the development discourse and practices in Indonesia. Again, in this context we have noticed the development of a particular term that is closely related to the internationalization of the concept and the interconnected events which occur at the global level.²³ Yet, we also notice the strong connotation of bureaucratic tones embedded within the concept and the terminologies that are used. Such circumstances should therefore be critically analyzed as the programmatic approaches that follows can be actually remote from what is genuinely needed by the displaced people.²⁴ The displaced people -- regardless of the causes that force them to migrate -- are basically people that live in vulnerable economic, social and political circumstances. The critical feature in this event, however, is the process of how human beings are compelled to be dispossessed – of their material as well as social and cultural belongings. The dispossession process in fact is the heart of any form of forced displacement.

While the pressing needs of displaced people always have to be given immediate priority, there are several more fundamental matters that should be given serious attention both by scholars and practitioners if long-term and viable solutions are to be reached in dealing with displaced populations in Southeast Asia. The forcefulness of circumstances that produce displaced populations should be seen as part of the longer processes of as yet unfinished and perhaps failed nation-state building, whereby some groups of people are firstly dispossessed then secondly displaced. As the displaced constitute a dispossessed group of people, then the more fundamental issues are therefore related to the needs in recovering what have been lost: their political rights, their property rights and their cultural rights. Looking from this broader perspective what we should envisioned is perhaps an approach that could genuinely provide room to convey the creation of *these displaced people’s own perspectives*. In order to facilitate the creation of such a perspective, the discourse on refugees and displaced peoples in the Southeast Asian region should be critically assessed and shifted from the current heavily adopted programmatic approaches. As Nordstrom and Martin (1992: 15) correctly note, ‘social scientists, no matter what their field of study, will in all likelihood confront some instance of sociopolitical violence in the field’ and they need ‘viable field methodologies and theoretical frameworks’ if they are to understand the processes that involve them as possible victims as well as observers.²⁵

²² See Hugo’s (1981) types of conflict initiating refugee movements, with examples from South-East Asia (mainly Indonesia). According to Hugo there are nine types of conflict initiating refugee movements: 1. independence struggles, 2. Ethnic conflicts with autonomy/separatist dimensions, 3. internal ethnic conflict not related to separatist/autonomy struggles, 4. class conflict, 5. inter-elite power struggles, 6. state-intervention conflicts, 7. international wars, 8. religious-based conflicts, 9. colonial-based conflicts.

²³ Indonesia is one of the country in which the UN gave special attention, see report on the Seminar on ‘Internal Displacement in Indonesia: Toward an Integrated Approach’, co-organised by the UN and several national and international organisations, June 26-27, 2001.

²⁴ On the critical analysis of the dominant official discourse on internally displaced people, Sorensen (2002) provides a useful example based on her anthropological study of displaced population in Srilanka.

²⁵ Quoted from Shanmugaratnam et.al., 2003, *In the Maze of Displacement*.

Concluding remarks

In the aftermath of the Cold War era, the movement of people has entered a new phase. Interstate wars have produced displaced populations, many spilling into neighboring countries or oscillating within border areas. In these new political circumstances studies on population movement can no longer be based on the narrow conventional theoretical framework emanating from modernization theories and approaches. The increasing magnitude of forced displacement as people escape from violence (that in many instances resulted from a state's failure in conflict resolution) critically challenges the conventional study on migration that has generally neglected political and security issues. The previous study on forced migration, mainly devoted to refugee issues, is also critically challenged as displaced populations exist within state borders. While the movement of people from the south to the rich-north countries constitutes a combination of forced and economic migration, it has become more complex as identity politics becomes entrenched. The increasing terrorism targeting the United States and its allies reflect a complex mixture of global migration, inequalities based on different cultural identities, and security. The tightening state's border control and the intensifying of surveillance of immigrant groups and foreign workers constitute the new complex nexus of migration, security and global politics.

From a narrow academic perspective, the displaced population is divided into three broad categories. The first is related to violent conflicts; the second is caused by state's development policy and programs, and third results from massive natural disasters. Although different labels apply differently to different categories, this typology basically represents forced migrant populations that take refuge in a safe place outside their habitual residence. In Southeast Asia, internal conflict that has produced internally displaced populations and refugees that fill or cross state borders often mirrors the conflict between local elites or different factions in the national government, implying tensions in grassroots levels. The involvement of a state's security apparatus in areas of conflict show that the state is in fact becoming part of the problem or even the major source of the problem. This situation makes the resolution of conflict very problematic, as the state will not be able to distance itself to the problem. In this regard the role of the third party or regional and international organizations has become instrumental in solving the problem. The recent successful peace agreement between the Aceh rebels (GAM) and the Indonesian government, mediated by former Finnish president Maartti Ahtisaari is a case in point.

In many parts of Southeast Asia refugees and displaced people mostly represent the victims of states failures in providing security for its people. The recent securitization of migration clearly indicates the continuation of prevailing state-centered security hegemonic discourses that will further increase human vulnerability. The establishment of regional cooperation in the form of ASEAN is only serving the need of the ruling elites of the ASEAN member states while failing in securing their own people that live in the border areas where conflicts occur. The current dominant perspective and hegemonic discourse on the study of forced displacement, refugee protection and humanitarian assistance are institutionalized in the UN system, international and national NGOs as well as government organizations. These perspectives and discourses have directed the way the treatments are carried out and the perception toward displaced people as social problems and security threats is maintained. There has never been a more pressing need for a new perspective beyond the 'Eurocentric' framework

References

- Anderson, Benedict, 1998, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*, London and New York: Verso.
- Anh, Dang Nguyen, 2004, "Forced Migration in Vietnam: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives", paper presented to International Conference on *Toward New Perspectives on Forced Migration In Southeast Asia*, organised by Research Centre for Society and Culture (PM) at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford, Jakarta, 25-26 November 2004

- Bajpai, Kanti, 2003, 'The Idea of Human security' in *International Studies*, February.
- Canuday, Jose Jowel, "The Power of the Displace", paper presented at the International Conference on *Toward New Perspectives on Forced Migration In Southeast Asia*, organised by Research Centre for Society and Culture (PM) at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford, Jakarta, 25-26 November 2004
- Castles, Stephen, 2004, Introduction to the Study of Forced Migration. From *Collection of Global Course Syllabi Relating to Internally Displaced Persons*. The Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displaced Persons.
- Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller, 2003, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Third Edition). London: MacMillan.
- Castles, Stephen, 2000, "Migration as a factor in social transformation in East Asia", paper presented to a Conference on Migration and Development, Princeton University, 4-6 May.
- Cernea, Michael, 1996, "Bridging the Research Divide: Studying Development Oustees", in Tim Allen (ed), *In Search of Cool Ground: War, Flight and Homecoming in Northeast Africa*. London: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Africa World Press and James Currey.
- Chimmi, B.S., 2002, 'Aid, relief and containment: The first asylum country and beyond', Expert Working Paper, prepared for the Centre for Development Research study Migration-Development Links: Evidence and Policy Options, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Frost, Mervyn, 2003, 'Thinking ethically about refugees: A case for the transformation of global governance', in Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm (eds.), *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Gungwu, Wang, 2001, 'Continuities in Island Southeast Asia', in Jomo, K. S. (ed.) *Reinventing Malaysia: Reflections on its Past and Future*, pp. 15-34. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Ludden, David, 2003, 'Presidential Address: Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 4 (November), pp. 1057-1078.
- Newman, Edward, 2003, 'Refugees, International Security, and Human Vulnerability: Introduction and Survey', in Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm (eds.), *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Newman, Edward and Joanne van Selm (eds.), 2003, *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Newman, Kathleen, 2003, 'Migration as a Factor in Development and Poverty Reduction, Migration Information Source, June 1, MPI.
- Paris, Roland, 2001, 'Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?' in *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Fall.
- Shanmugaratnam, N. et.al., 2003, *In the Maze of Development: Conflict, Migration and Change*. Hoykoleforlaget-Norwegian Academic Press.
- Scholte, Jan Aart, 1997, 'Identifying Indonesia', in Michael Hitchcock and Victor T. King (eds.) *Images of Malay-Indonesian Identity*, pp. 21-44. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Stevenson, Jonathan, 2003, 'How Europe and America Defend Themselves', *Foreign Affairs*, March-April.
- Suhrke, Astri, 2003, "Human security and the protection of refugees", in Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm (eds.), *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Van Ness, Peter, 1999, 'Globalisation and Security in East Asia', in *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 23, No. 4.