

Summer 2007

Response to Deng - 2

Dianna J. Shandy
Macalester College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl>

Recommended Citation

Shandy, Dianna J. (2007) "Response to Deng - 2," *Macalester International*: Vol. 19, Article 14.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol19/iss1/14>

This Response is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Global Citizenship at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Macalester International by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.

Response

Dianna J. Shandy

It is my great pleasure to serve as a respondent to Francis Deng's essay. I was first introduced to his work nearly twenty years ago when I read his classic ethnography of the Dinka for an anthropology course.¹ While an undergraduate at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., I pursued both African Studies and Russian Area Studies. Many found it odd that I combined these seemingly disparate geographic regions and likely suspected that I belonged to that group of students at Georgetown whom we referred to, only half jokingly, as being "pre-CIA." Yet viewing Africa in relation to the Soviet superpower actually made a lot of sense in the late 1980s, and when the Berlin Wall came crashing down during my senior year (throwing a wrench in not just one but both of the senior papers I was writing), little did I know that events set in motion by the end of the Cold War would so profoundly shape my scholarly interests in Africa in the years that followed.

My work subsequently took me into the area of forced migration studies, a field that did not crystallize until the 1990s. Professor Deng's writings have been vital to shaping the literature that has defined this field, and the essay we are discussing at this Roundtable continues his tradition of lucid, grounded, and meticulous scholarship.²

This article uses Dr. Deng's work as the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons from 1992–2004 as a lens through which to understand the crisis of internal displacement and the response of the United Nations to it. He advances his path-breaking notion of sovereignty as a positive concept of state responsibility for its citizens, while noting that should states fail to discharge that responsibility, "the international community has the right and the responsibility to intervene."

Deng's essay makes many contributions to our understanding of issues of forced displacement and humanitarian responses, as he takes us inside the world of the United Nations and its response to problems of internal displacement. Here I focus on only two. Deng's essay can be viewed as a sort of informal *travaux préparatoire*, or drafting history, allowing outsiders *insight* into behind-closed-doors processes. This in itself is a significant contribution. Humanitarian aid coordinator J. Millard Burr and historian Robert O. Collins, writing about Sudan as a complex humanitarian emergency, note that the majority of documents

that they used for their book, *Requiem for the Sudan: War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile*, will likely never be made public.³ Partial views and restricted access are intrinsic problems in the study of contemporary conflict settings and the populations affected by them. The methodological transparency in developing the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* apparent in Deng's essay not only provides direction in interpreting the document, but it allows others, such as the African Union, to build on the work that already has been done concerning internally displaced people.

While he does not go into this point at great length, Deng acknowledges the importance of seeing "IDPs [internally displaced persons] not just as victims of humanitarian crises, but as citizens with rights who are capable of resourcefully responding to their situation." This is an essential point and it illustrates how the *Guiding Principles* were not the product of bureaucratic exercises carried out in boardrooms in Europe and North America but, rather, that they emerged through the on-the-ground input of those affected by displacement, both those who were managing displacement issues and those who were themselves displaced. In my view, this is an instance in which Deng's dual training in both law and anthropology makes itself apparent in the skillful way he engaged with the thorny intersection of internal displacement issues and the very real problems they represent for affected individuals and the realm of national sovereignty sensitivities.

In this part of my response, I shift gears to address concerns raised by his essay. I doubt that I could bring up *any* issue related to IDPs that Deng has not already considered and likely written about in some venue. Therefore, I will frame my concerns in more general terms of questions for consideration that I hope will further future discussion.

First, I turn my attention to an assertion that is made several times in the paper: IDP issues are "inherently internal." Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo argue that refugee flows, and I would extend this observation to IDP flows, can only be understood in light of regional and global contexts.⁴ Moreover, despite on the surface seeming unpredictable, forced migration can indeed be traced to broad historical processes.⁵ By seeing IDP issues as inherently internal, what are we missing? Do we unfairly place a burden on African nations that should be shouldered by a broader community? African nations inherited many of the conditions giving rise to internally displaced people today. By asserting that IDP issues are an internal affair, are we setting African governments up for failure? What are the power

dynamics embedded in asking for assistance? When I tried to come up with an analogy, it seems appropriate for this notion of “sovereignty as responsibility” to come with a rider attached, like an insurance policy exempting pre-existing conditions. African states struggle with the legacy of colonialism and Cold War politics, but also with contemporary economic realities and the global asymmetries of power those relationships engender. This discussion then feeds directly into the larger question of whether IDP issues, despite the achievements of the *Guiding Principles*, are an example of a global problem that requires more effective mechanisms for global solutions than currently exist—case in point, as has been noted, Darfur, Darfur, Darfur.

My second set of queries builds from this point and revolves around Deng’s observation about the ascendancy of the NGO community in Africa. What are the implications for citizens when their government cedes responsibility for their welfare and the humanitarian regime moves in? From Sudan⁶ to Sri Lanka to Iraq, we have examples of humanitarian aid as a competing, contradictory, and agenda-driven enterprise—at best an imperfect solution.⁷ Students in my first-year seminar, Refugees and Humanitarian Response, have been grappling with the observation made by some scholars that contemporary humanitarian efforts, when juxtaposed with elements of the Christianizing and “civilizing” mission of a century ago, can look startlingly similar. In the case of internally displaced persons, under what circumstances might the humanitarian regime be seen as “spoilers” and not “saviors,” to borrow language from 19th-century Sudan, when the British colonial forces attempted their version of a humanitarian intervention?⁸

My final point relates to an emerging issue regarding the categorization of different kinds of forced migrants. In his article, Deng makes clear the legal distinction between internally displaced people and refugees, noting that refugees (unlike IDPs) have crossed an international border. It is generally accepted that it is better to be designated a refugee than an IDP. A humanitarian aid worker who had spent time in Sudan once told me that a commonly heard observation there was, “If you’re going to run, head for the border.” David Keen describes the contrast between resources allocated to internally displaced people and refugees who have crossed a border: foreign aid spent on displaced persons in Sudan amounted to only \$2.15 per capita, but \$557 per capita was spent on refugees fleeing other countries to live in Sudan.⁹ Many scholars have described the bleak conditions under

which southern Sudanese IDPs live, particularly in squatter settlements on the outskirts of Khartoum.¹⁰

In a peculiar twist, then, refugees can be seen as elites among forced migrants. Deng's analysis is too attuned to the nuances of this particular issue to fall into the trap of pitting one vulnerable population, in this case refugees and IDPs, against one another. Yet many who study forced migration do precisely that. Deng more appropriately locates IDP issues within the U.N. domain of human rights and not refugees.

Here, I address the risks to conflating IDP and refugee issues and feed back into Deng's work. First, as legal scholar James C. Hathaway notes:

The net result of advocating a merged regime to address the plight of what are, legally and logistically, two distinct groups of at-risk persons will be simply to drag the protective standard for refugees toward the lowest common denominator of what is presently possible to secure for the internally displaced. This would not be a victory for fairness, but rather a lost opportunity to guarantee protection.¹¹

More pointed, yet related, is an emerging issue that might be called *protection and containment*.¹² To cut to the chase, it suits the global North to manage forced migration *in situ*. The United States and other nations, for a host of reasons—not the least of which are security and terrorism concerns along with a heavy dose of domestic anti-immigrant sentiment—are quite supportive of any initiative that affords them the option of throwing money at a problem in Africa from the comfort of an air-conditioned office in Washington (or London or Paris), rather than admitting the so-called “problem” onto our own shores. What are the human rights implications of funding efforts that strive to maintain, and de facto contain, IDPs at a minimum standard in their home countries? It would be much more of a burden on the North if people showed up as asylum seekers in Europe, the United States, or Canada because they would have far more rights under international refugee law. This brings me to my final concern regarding refugee resettlement. It is useful to point out that Convention refugees, or those that fit the definition of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, can be divided into three categories. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes three options, or what are called durable solutions, to address the situation of refugees in the world. The first and most desirable is voluntary repa-

triation to the country of origin when conditions permit. The second is integration into the country of first asylum. In other words, people flee conflict, cross an international border, and are incorporated into that country of asylum. The third and rarest of UNHCR's durable solutions is third-country resettlement. (By rare, I mean that about .06 percent of refugees in Africa are resettled in the United States in any given year, for example.) This is the category I would like to focus on now.

In the spirit of full disclosure, at one point in my research with Sudanese refugees in the U.S., I might have been supportive of an initiative to better assist more refugees in Africa rather than choosing a select few for resettlement opportunities in the United States. I don't know if Professor Deng recalls this, but we spoke about this very issue in his office at the Brookings Institution some eight years ago, when he so kindly met with me to discuss my doctoral research. When the Nuer refugee population, with which I work, first started arriving in the United States in the early 1990s, they were facing a very uphill struggle in terms of adapting to and being incorporated into U.S. society—taking jobs Americans thought were too dirty or dangerous, being victimized by violence, struggling to make ends meet in every sense of the word, and even taking their own lives when they were unable to cope.¹³ I was deeply concerned by the conditions into which these newcomers were incorporated into the United States, where race and low education levels coalesced to situate them on the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.

Ultimately, however, when the scope of my research with diasporan Nuer expanded to look at the transnational ties between refugees in America and those who remained in Africa, I perceived things differently. Third-country resettlement has material and other impacts on refugees and IDPs in Africa beyond the small numbers that actually board the plane and set off for a new land.¹⁴ Remittances flowing from the global North to the South are the principal means through which this occurs. Despite critiques of the mechanism by which so-called *authentic* refugees are identified among the masses applying for this status, I see value in maintaining this migratory pathway from Africa to the United States and other countries in the North. What I find intriguing about this particular linkage between refugee and IDP issues is the possibilities presented by the impact of cash trickling directly into the hands of ordinary people, in contrast to aid flowing in through the usual cast of governmental or NGO characters to be doled out as they deem fit. This is an example of the importance of looking at issues of

localization that Deng raised in his comments at the Roundtable. If we pushed this a bit further, we could see examples of “globalization from below” that would contribute to our thinking about how we see states, questions of sovereignty, and who comprises the participants in those networks that Professor Stein mentioned in her opening address.

In conclusion, Deng’s article adds to our discussion of the future of the United Nations Organization by providing us with a richly detailed and concrete example of one of its seminal accomplishments. In particular, by highlighting the incremental nature of progress, the sensitivity and delicacy with which new initiatives must be undertaken, and the importance of diplomatic skills and genuine leadership in bringing such measures to fruition, his essay allows outsiders insight into the complexity of global governance issues.

Notes

1. See Deng 1972.
2. See, for example, Cohen and Deng 1998; Deng 1993, 2005; Deng and Gifford 1987.
3. J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins 1995, p. xi.
4. Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo 1989.
5. Colson 1987, p. 4; Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989.
6. Scroggins 2004.
7. See also Terry 2002.
8. Pitya 1996, p. 291.
9. David Keen 1992, p. 31.
10. Bok 2003; Hutchinson 1996; Loveless 1999.
11. James C. Hathaway 1997, p. 88.
12. Bennett, n.d.
13. See Shandy 2007.
14. Shandy 2003, 2007.

Bibliography

- Bennett, Jon. n.d. “Internal Displacement in Context: The Emergence of a New Politics.” Published online on the Norwegian Refugee Council Website: http://www.nrc.no/global_idp_survey/rights_have_no_borders/bennett.htm.
- Bok, Francis. *Escape from Slavery: The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity—and My Journey to Freedom in America*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003.
- Burr, J. Millard, and Robert O. Collins. *Requiem for the Sudan: War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1995.
- Cohen, Roberta, and Francis M. Deng. *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998.

- Colson, Elizabeth. "Introduction: Migrants and Their Hosts." In *People in Upheaval*, edited by Scott Morgan and Elizabeth Colson. Staten Island, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies, 1987, pp. 1–16.
- Deng, Francis M. *The Dinka of the Sudan*. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1972.
- . *Protecting the Dispossessed*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1993.
- . "African Renaissance: Towards a New Sudan." *Forced Migration Review* 24 (2005): 6–8.
- Deng, Francis M., and Prosser Gifford, eds. *The Search for Peace and Unity in the Sudan*. Washington, D.C.: The Wilson Center Press, 1987.
- Hathaway, James C. "Is Refugee Status Really Elitist? An Answer to the Ethical Challenge." In *Europe and Refugees: A Challenge?*, edited by J.Y. Carlier and D. Vanheule. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1997, pp. 79–88.
- Hutchinson, Sharon. *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War and the State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Keen, David. *Refugees: Rationing the Right to Life, the Crisis in Emergency Relief*. London: Zed Books, 1992.
- Loveless, Jeremy. *Displaced Populations in Khartoum: A Study of Social and Economic Conditions*. Denmark: Save the Children, 1999.
- Pitya, Philip L. "History of Western Christian Evangelism in the Sudan, 1898–1964." Ph.D. dissertation. Boston University, 1996.
- Scroggins, Deborah. *Emma's War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.
- Shandy, Dianna J. "Transnational Linkages between Refugees in Africa and in the Diaspora." *Forced Migration Review* 16, no. 3 (2003): 7–8.
- . *Nuer-American Passages: Globalizing Sudanese Migration*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- Terry, Fiona. *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Zolberg, Aristide, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo. *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.