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International Relations Theories

IR theory provides a set of tools for understanding and explaining the behavior of states and other actors in world politics. It emerges from a concern to theorize why states behave as they do and the conditions under which conflict and cooperation take place between states. Although there is a literature on the international politics of forced migration, there has been very little application of IR theory to understand the politics of forced migration. This is surprising since IR theory and forced migration have potentially great relevance for one another. Forced migration offers a relatively uncharted empirical terrain within which IR theory can test and develop its core concepts, while IR theory can contribute to explaining why states respond to forced migration as they do, while also shedding light on aspects of the causes and consequences of forced migration.

This chapter therefore sets out six of the main groups of IR theories and outlines their relevance for understanding different aspects of forced migration. In doing so it attempts to situate the existing literature on the international politics of forced migration within the main IR theories. The theories that are chosen are not intended to be exhaustive of IR theory but represent the main groups of theories and those with arguably the greatest relevance for interpreting the international politics of forced migration. The six groups of theories that have been chosen are: neo-realism, liberal institutionalism, analytical liberalism, the English School, constructivism, and critical theory.

Each group of theory makes a different set of assumptions about the main actors in global politics and the way in which they can be analyzed. They place different emphasis on which are the most important factors that shape world politics – for example, power, interests, or ideas; they take different levels of analysis as privileged – for example, inter-state relations, domestic politics, or trans-national relations; they make different assumptions about the most relevant actors in world politics – states or non-state-actors; and they

make different methodological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions about the study of world politics.

IR theory is useful for explaining and understanding the behavior of states and other global political actors – for example, toward refugees or other forced migrants. Because it can help to explain and understand, it also has relevance for knowing how to influence the behavior of states and other global political actors in a given area of world politics. Many IR theorists claim to “belong to” or to “be” part of a given school of IR theory. This is to miss the point. Although not all of the theories can be used simultaneously because of their incompatible assumptions, no one theory is universally “better” than the others. They simply serve different purposes and one may be better than another in a particular context and for explaining a particular problem.

This chapter suggests that the IR theories represent a set of tools, which can be used in order to explain and understand particular problems and issues from different angles. Theory can be considered to be analogous to a set of torches. Rather like a set of torches, the theories can be used to illuminate different parts of a darkened room. However, it will not be possible to use all of the torches simultaneously or to view all of the room at once. Rather, different torches can be used to shed light on different parts of the room. All of the torches have their uses; which one a person picks up depends upon which part of the room he or she is most interested in viewing. In other words, no one theory is all-explanatory or should be privileged for analyzing all aspects of world politics. Different theories can shed light on some aspects of world politics and are blind to others.

This chapter therefore sets out the theoretical lenses through which IR theory can offer an understanding of the international politics of forced migration. It explains each of the main IR theories, and then suggests how each of these theories would interpret the behavior of states and other political actors in relation to forced migration. Having done this, the chapter applies the different theoretical approaches to a specific case study – the historical emergence and evolution of the global refugee regime – in order to illustrate the different aspects of the case study that the different theories most clearly illuminate.

The Theories

The dominant academic debates in international relations have evolved since the middle of the twentieth century. The so-called First Debate, which dominated IR until the 1980s, was between realists and idealists, the former

believing that the prospects for international cooperation were limited and that states should therefore act in their own self interest; and the latter being more optimistic about the prospects for cooperation, peace, and the development of international institutions. The so-called Second Debate (the “neo-neo debate”), which emerged during the 1980s, was between neo-realism and liberal-institutionalism and revolved around whether states could be conceptualized as acting on the basis of a concern with their relative gains or on the basis of a concern for absolute gains, the latter implying greater prospects for international cooperation than the former. Finally, much of international relations has focused, since the 1990s, on the so-called Third Debate – or the “inter-paradigm debate.” This debate relates to the division between rationalist approaches to the study of world politics (mainly drawn from economics) and reflectivist approaches to world politics (mainly drawn from sociology). The former group includes neo-realism and liberal institutionalism and takes states as the main actors in world politics. It regards states as rational, maximizing actors whose identity and preferences are pre-determined and fixed. In contrast, the latter group sees states’ and other actors’ identities and preferences as constituted through the role of ideas and knowledge.

In explaining IR theories and their relevance to forced migration, it would have been possible to discuss more than a dozen different IR theory labels. However, only six groups of theories are addressed here. The choice of theories addressed by this chapter is not exhaustive. Furthermore, the division of theories is something that could have been done in a variety of ways. For example, “critical theories” could have been divided between neo-Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism or it could have included post-colonialism. Moreover, classical realism and classical liberalism could have been included as theories in their own right. However, in order to simplify the structure of the chapter, critical theories are dealt with together and classical realism and classical liberalism are addressed briefly as historical antecedents of neo-realism, liberal institutionalism, and analytical liberalism. While the intention of this chapter is to capture the diversity of IR theory it balances this against trying to explain the theories that are most often used within the mainstream of the subject. This section therefore explains each one of the groups of theories and how would they interpret states’ responses to forced migration.

Neo-realism

Neo-realism represents the most dominant contemporary theory of international relations. It is most commonly associated with the work of Kenneth

Waltz and John Mearsheimer. It places military power and *realpolitik* at the forefront of the study of world politics. It is the conceptual lens most commonly adopted by academics and policy-makers in the US to understand trends in world politics. Neo-realism has its roots in a long tradition of classical realist thought. The most articulate classical realist proponent was Hans Morgenthau who, in *Politics Among Nations* (1948), argued that all politics is essentially about power. Given that, for Morgenthau and other classical realists, human nature is inherently self-interested and power hungry, the great political challenge is to achieve order. For Morgenthau this represented a significant challenge at the domestic level, even where there is a sovereign authority in the form of a government. Yet, at the international level, this problem of pursuing order was compounded by the absence of a single sovereign authority. For classical realists, because of the absence of a world government – or a Hobbesian “Leviathan” – at the international level, the world could be characterized by “anarchy” – not in the sense of chaos or disorder but simply in the analytical sense of there being no world government.

In the absence of a Leviathan at the international level, Morgenthau argued that states are (analytically) and should (normatively) be self-interested and concerned to maximize their military power. He suggested that order is possible at the international level but that it does not emerge from states being pacifistic or attempting to appease one another. Rather, for Morgenthau, states’ pursuit of power is itself the source of stability. Order, for classical realists, comes from the so-called balance of power. By pursuing military power and then informally grouping together with other states until the configurations of military alliances meant that all the potential adversaries had equal power, order could be maintained. So long as a state believes that another state has – independently or through its alliances – roughly equal military strength, it will be deterred from military aggression. Order will therefore follow from the balance of power. So long as the balance of power is not disturbed in some way, stability will endure. For Morgenthau, the logical corollary of this was that the righteous policy-maker should pursue a power maximizing strategy. Attempting to act “morally” through showing consideration for other states will be misguided and be likely to lead to perverse outcomes.

Neo-realism emerges out of Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). It builds upon this classical realist tradition. However, it rejects a number of core elements of classical realism. Firstly, it rejects the normative elements of classical realism, instead attempting to develop a purely analytical, scientific, and rigorous theory of international politics. Secondly, it rejects classical realism’s mixing of the domestic level and international

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level in its explanation of state behavior. For Morgenthau, state behavior is rooted in both human nature and the balance of power at the system level. For Waltz, on the other hand, these levels should not be mixed and neo-realism explains the behavior of states solely on the basis of the “system level.” Indeed for Waltz, theories of world politics might be developed at three levels: first-image theories (based on the behavior of individuals), second-image theories (based on politics at the domestic level), and third-image theories (based on the system level). Neo-realism is a distinctly third-image theory of world politics.

Neo-realism draws upon microeconomic theory to build a rigorous and universal theory of state behavior. In order to do so, it makes a number of simplifying assumptions about international politics. Firstly, states are the main actors in world politics. Secondly, states’ key concern is survival and self-help and they can be conceived as rational, self-interested power maximizers. Thirdly, states are concerned with *relative gains* vis-à-vis other states. Fourthly, states are only functionally differentiated on the basis of their capabilities. Fifthly, anarchy (as the absence of world government) is the key ordering principle in the international system. In summary, these assumptions create an image of a “black box” state whose identity is fixed and whose interests are pre-defined as being to maximize military power.

Based on these assumptions, neo-realism makes a number of analytical claims about international politics. It suggests, like classical realism, that order comes from the balance of power and that states’ primary and exclusive concern should be to maximize military power as a means to maintain their survival and uphold the balance of power. Furthermore, within this account of world politics, the prospects for international cooperation are extremely limited. States are amoral, self-interested power maximizers with very little scope for altruistic or moral behavior. Because they are concerned with maximizing their relative gains vis-à-vis other states, they will not engage in long-run cooperation but will simply engage in temporary alliances that enable them to “balance” against other states.

For neo-realists, the prospects for international cooperation are extremely limited. Because states are self-interested and concerned with their relative gains, international institutions will have little relevance to how states behave unless they are underpinned by power and coercion. The only circumstances under which a situation like international cooperation might arise is when a powerful state has such a significant self-interest in a given form of collective action that it would be prepared to underwrite the entire cost of unilaterally acting at the global level, and tolerate the free-riding of other, smaller states. In other words, for neo-realists, collective action at the global level can only be explained by self-interested hegemony. The view

that a powerful state may unilaterally act in the collective interests out of self-interest is referred to as Hegemonic Stability Theory (Gilpin 1975; Kindleberger 1973; Olson and Zeckhauser 1967).

Prescriptively, neo-realists adopt a range of views on how states should behave in order to maximize their interests. Waltz (1979) offers a “defensive realist” perspective, suggesting that states should engage in balancing. So long as the balance of power endures, peace and stability will be preserved. On the contrary, Mearsheimer (2001) offers an “offensive realist” prescription, counseling great powers to aggressively pursue power under all circumstances. Since other states will adopt this strategy, Mearsheimer suggests it would be naïve for any state to engage in power-satisficing behavior. If it were to do so, challenger states would be likely to overtake the preponderant power.

Meanwhile, Walt’s (1985) concept of the “balance of threat” offers an alternative neo-realist perspective. It suggests that whether or not a state is a threat is not solely reducible to its military capabilities. Rather, it depends on a range of factors – its aggregate strength, its geographical proximity, its offensive capabilities, and its offensive intentions. For Walt, in contradistinction to Waltz and Mearsheimer, states should balance not against power but rather against threat.

So what can neo-realism offer understanding of the international politics of forced migration? The answer is: not all that much by itself. For neo-realists, forced migration is simply not likely to be a particularly important element of global politics. It is partly for this reason, and given neo-realism’s dominance of IR, that there has been so little academic work on forced migration from an IR perspective. Neo-realism’s concern is with military power and the politics of war, peace and “hard” security, rather than with areas of “soft security.” Furthermore, the fact that neo-realism assumes states to be “black box” entities, and therefore does not look inside the state, excludes a number of important sources of explanation of the causes, consequences, and responses to forced migration. Indeed, in forced migration, the characters of the country of origin, host country, and other third countries clearly matter for explaining variation in outcomes. Similarly, domestic political processes are likely to matter, and the politics of forced migration is not reducible to the analyzing changes in the distribution of military capabilities at the system level.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that a neo-realist perspective has nothing to contribute to understanding the politics of forced migration. Rather, it will simply see the causes, consequences and responses to forced migration as a by-product of states’ wider concerns to maximize their military power and relative security. In particular, a neo-realist approach to the politics of forced migration might be based upon four significant claims or hypotheses:

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The sources of forced migration may be significantly attributable to changes in the balance of power. For neo-realists, international conflicts are the result of changes in the balance of power. Realist approaches to IR have their origins in attempting to explain how changes in the balance of power in Europe led to conflict in the First and Second World Wars (Carr 1946; Morgenthau 1948). So long as the balance of power holds, there will be stability in the international system; once there is a power vacuum or a shift, conflict will characterize the process of realignment. The process through which international conflict, state partition, and state creation took place in Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East in the first half of the twentieth century, for example, highlights how these processes often lead to significant human displacement – whether internal or external. From a realist perspective the refugee crises that gave rise to the creation of the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are a product of the shifts in the balance of power in Europe between 1914 and 1945.

States see forced migration through the lens of security. From a neo-realist perspective, forced migration only matters insofar as it has a relationship to national security. This is one of the reasons why the majority of mainstream IR work on forced migration has examined the relationship between refugees and national security. In particular, it has examined the role of refugees as combatants and refugee camps as sanctuaries for combatants during internal or inter-state conflicts (Lischer 2005). In a Southern state context, refugee camps may be sites for wider trafficking in arms or offer succor or refuge to combatants (Crisp 2003). Alternatively, the mere presence of refugees on the territory of another state may indirectly undermine national security by creating tensions of competition for resources with the local host population (Milner 2008). More recent work has explored the relationship between refugees and terrorism and whether protracted refugee or IDP situations might represent potential sources of recruitment (Juma and Kagwanja 2008).

States will contribute to providing protection and solutions for forced migrants for exclusively self-interested reasons. From a neo-realist perspective, states are unlikely to engage in altruistic or ethically oriented behavior. Rather, the assumptions of the theory suggest that states will act purely in a way that maximizes their own interests and power. Consequently, neo-realism would predict that states' engagement with forced migration, and their attempts to contribute to protection, solutions, or addressing root causes would not be underpinned by an altruistic concern for the welfare of the displaced. Rather, a neo-realist perspective would expect states'

responses to be highly selective and based on wider interests. For example, during the Cold War, refugees were given asylum and resettlement because of strategic Cold War interests (Loescher 2001). Offering asylum to defectors from the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries was seen as a means to discredit Communism. Throughout the history of UNHCR, states have selectively earmarked their contributions to UNHCR in accordance with their own strategic and security interests. When states do not have an interest in contributing to protection and solutions, international institutions will have little impact on their behavior. They will be purely led by attempting to maximize their wider interests – whether security-based or economic.

International cooperation in relation to forced migration only takes place when there is hegemony. From a neo-realist perspective, the prospects for international cooperation to address the root causes of displacement or to provide protection or solutions are extremely limited. States will act on their own self-interests and will not wish to be constrained by long-term institutionalized cooperation. The only time when collective action will take place is when a hegemon has a sufficiently strong interest in addressing issues related to forced migration that it will either unilaterally underwrite the costs of addressing the problem or enforce compliance from other weaker states. For example, when the US had a strong interest in addressing the refugee crises in Europe after the Second World War and the Indo-Chinese mass exodus after the 1970s it was prepared to underwrite a significant proportion of the resettlement and the financial costs of the burden-sharing initiatives (Suhrke 1998).

Liberal institutionalism

Liberal institutionalism emerged in the late 1970s from the observation that there was increasing international cooperation between states, which neo-realism was simply unable to explain, and which was not reducible to the role of a hegemon. It attributed this increasing cooperation to the proliferation in international institutions, which enabled states to acquire mutual benefits from international cooperation (Keohane 1984). Liberal institutionalism makes the same assumptions as neo-realism except for one crucial difference: states are concerned with *absolute gains* rather than relative gains. Other than this changed assumption, states remain rational, self-interested power maximizers. Yet, this single altered assumption is important because it dramatically alters the prospects for international cooperation. If states are concerned with absolute gains then cooperation can offer opportunities for

mutual gain and world politics becomes a positive-sum rather than a zero-sum game.

Given that states can mutually benefit from international cooperation, international institutions can play an important role in facilitating that cooperation. In particular, they overcome collective action failures by creating the regulatory framework within which states can be assured that other states will reciprocate over a longer term time horizon. Where for example, states would be better off acting collectively but do not act collectively because of a suspicion that other states will free-ride or not reciprocate, an institutional framework can change these incentives. For example, Keohane (1984) identifies the role that international institutions can play in reducing the transactions costs of cooperation, reducing the likelihood of states “free-riding” through surveillance and information, and facilitating issue-linkage in bargaining to ensure that cooperation can be mutually beneficial. In other words, institutions can enable states to be better off acting collectively than they would have been acting in isolation.

Liberal institutionalism has particularly been applied to highlight the role that international institutions can play in the provision of so-called global public goods. As with street lighting at the domestic level, global public goods are goods, once provided, the benefits of which are non-excludable and non-rival. In other words, the benefits of global public goods extend to all actors irrespective of whether they contribute to provision and are not diminished by another actor’s enjoyment of those benefits. Examples of global public goods include climate-change mitigation, the development of a polio vaccine, and international action to address meteorites (Barrett 2007). The problem with global public goods is that no individual state has an incentive to be the provider and all states have incentives to free-ride. Collectively, states would be better off if they shared the costs of providing; individually their rational response is to shirk responsibility. Institutions can overcome this problem by creating the conditions under which states reciprocate in providing global public goods.

Liberal institutionalism has particular relevance for the international politics of forced migration because it can help to explain the conditions under which international cooperation takes place in relation to different aspects of forced migration. It can offer insights into when and why international regimes such as the global refugee regime have emerged and when they are effective. On the other hand, the main limitation of liberal institutionalism is that, like neo-realism, it takes states as undifferentiated black-boxed actors and also looks at international politics purely at the inter-state level. A liberal institutionalist approach to the international politics of forced migration would have a number of characteristics:

States created and maintain international institutions relating to forced migration for reasons of mutual self-interest. From a liberal institutionalist perspective, states agreed to create the 1951 Refugee Convention because they believed that its existence would serve their own interests. They believed that the regime would: i) offer security by reintegrating the displaced within the state system; and ii) fulfil a humanitarian function. Even though providing asylum imposes a cost on an individual state, the existence of the regime provided these benefits and so states were prepared to cooperate provided others reciprocated. The regime created the conditions for this reciprocity to take place. A similar logic could be applied to analyze why a regime has begun to emerge in relation to IDPs. States recognize the long-run benefits of international cooperation and so have begun to work to create an international regime that can build long-run confidence in reciprocity.

International institutions relating to forced migration can influence states and facilitate international cooperation by creating rational incentives for states to behave differently. The creation of international agreements and international organizations to oversee those agreements generates incentives for rationally acting states to adjust their behavior. For example, even though the refugee regime has no enforcement mechanism, it has an influence on how states respond to refugees. The surveillance and monitoring function of UNHCR in Article 35 of the 1951 Convention means that states can be identified and highlighted as violators if they breach norms such as *non-refoulement*. This international institutional framework means that it is in states' long-run self-interest to comply with the regime because they a) value the existence of the overall regime, and b) know that if they do not comply they will be identified as free-riders and other states may also cease to cooperate.

Analytical liberalism

Most international relations theories (neo-liberalism, liberal institutionalism, and liberal constructivism) analyze world politics at the “system” or inter-state level. They thereby bracket the role of domestic politics. One of the great challenges for international relations has been how to conceptualize the relationship between domestic and international politics. Rationalist approaches have struggled to reintroduce the “unit-level” of analysis into IR without compromising the rigor and parsimony of the system-level theories. The main contribution of analytical liberalism is to reintroduce domestic politics into IR while not undermining the possibility of retaining a theory of inter-state relations.

Analytical liberalism builds on the legacy of idealism and classical liberalism (Angell 1910; Kant 1795). These theories build on the legacy of the

Wilsonian values that led to the creation of the League of Nations. They argue, against classical realism, that international cooperation and enduring peace in international relations could be possible. They further argued that one of the main factors that determines how a state behaves in its foreign policy is the character and domestic politics of that state. In particular, classical liberal thought argued that liberal democratic states are less likely to go to war with one another than non-liberal democratic states. This so-called “Democratic Peace Theory” formed the basis of much of liberal theory in the second half of the twentieth century. (Doyle 1997; Russett 1993).

However, one of the main criticisms of classical liberalism is that it was more ideology than theory. In positing the claim that liberal democratic states behave in “more desirable ways” it made strongly normative claims about how the domestic character of states should be, and had less to offer in terms of being a generalizable and analytical theory of world politics. In response to this, the work of Andrew Moravcsik (1997) has attempted to develop an analytical theory based on the legacy of classical liberalism. While abandoning many of the normative and ideological claims of classical liberalism, Moravcsik develops an account of the way in which domestic politics matters for a state’s foreign policy.

Moravcsik argues that the “national interest” emerges from the aggregation of domestic preferences. In particular, foreign policy emerges from interest-group formation and lobbying within the state. Meanwhile, events at the system level matter only insofar as they feedback into domestic preferences. Moravcsik argues that his theory is compatible with neo-realism and liberal institutionalism because its analysis of the “unit-level” determines the conditions under which neo-realist or liberal institutionalist assumptions then apply at the “system-level.” Where Moravcsik diverges from classical liberalism is that the specifically “liberal” character of a state no longer matters; what is important is the domestic character of the state and domestic politics, irrespective of whether the state is liberal, authoritarian, capitalist, or socialist.

Analytical liberalism has not been applied to analyze the international politics of forced migration. However, it has great potential because of the way it allows international politics to be explored on “two levels” and for domestic politics and preferences to be reintroduced to the analysis. Indeed, when states provide asylum or refugee protection, or take humanitarian action in relation to IDPs, this behavior is significantly influenced by the domestic politics and character of the state. Public opinion, electoral politics, interest groups, the decision-making procedures of the state, and that state’s core political values all matter for how it responds to refugees and

IDPs. In particular, an analytical liberal approach to forced migration might make three core claims:

Domestic politics significantly influences states' responses to refugees and other forced migrants. Analytical liberalism sheds light on the fact that the way in which states relate to forced migration, not only within their own territory, but also abroad, is strongly influenced by domestic political process. In liberal democracies, elections, interest groups, and lobbying all matter for how relatively closed and communitarian or open and cosmopolitan a state's policies are at a given time. For example, in the "crisis of asylum" since the 1990s in both North and South, domestic politics, conducted through the media, electoral campaigning, and public information campaigns, has shaped asylum and refugee policies. In the North, the media and politicization have contributed to a backlash against asylum seekers. This has contributed to the development of foreign policies designed to securitize refugees and IDPs by limiting their access to spontaneous-arrival asylum channels (Crisp 2003).

Interest groups in domestic politics shape states' international responses. At various stages, states have adopted more or less generous and open policies toward refugees and asylum seekers on the basis of interest-group formation and lobbying. Where diaspora groups have been particularly active within a country's domestic politics, they have often been able to lobby effectively for greater resettlement or humanitarian assistance for a particular group of displaced people. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, for example, the Vietnamese diaspora in the US mobilized to influence the US Government to provide significant amounts of resettlement to Vietnamese refugees as part of the international community's response to the so-called Indochinese "boat people" (Robinson 1998).

The character of a state will shape its response to forced migration. Not all states respond to forced migration in the same way. Historically, some states have adopted particularly generous humanitarian responses to refugees and IDPs. Canada and Norway for example have consistently made disproportionately large contributions in humanitarian and development assistance. Meanwhile, during the 1970s and 1980s, Tanzania had a reputation for being one of the most generous asylum states in Africa. From an analytical liberal perspective, the character of a state and its domestic decision-making procedures will matter. For example, liberal, democratic states may have certain values which will make them respond in restrained, pacific, and sometimes humanitarian ways (Steiner 2003). On the other hand, however, an interesting paradox emerges in many developing countries in which

liberalization and democratization, in the context of structural adjustment policies, appear to have made states less generous and hospitable toward refugees. Structural adjustment has increased competition for resources between citizens and non-citizens while democratization has enabled citizens to express their grievances about this through the electoral process. In many cases, it seems that African states were able to be more generous toward refugees as authoritarian states than they are as democracies (Crisp 2003; Milner 2008).

English School/international society

The so-called English School of international relations is closely associated with Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society* (1977). In terms of its position along the spectrum of IR theory, it can be situated between classical realism and constructivism. As with (neo-)realism, anarchy and the balance of power are important. As for Waltz, international politics is characterized by anarchy, states are the main actors in world politics, and order emerges as a result of the balance of power. However, unlike for neo-realism, anarchy and the balance of power are social institutions rather than universal, scientific laws. For Bull, international politics can be characterized by an international *society* rather than an international system. In other words, rather than inter-state relations being characterized by strategic interaction between pre-defined units, it is characterized by a social interaction in which norms and institutions emerge and define how states behave.

This means that although international politics may be characterized by anarchy, and order may emerge from the balance of power, these are not inevitable. Order represents the current dominant value of international society, but it is conceivable that justice may, in future, become the dominant value. The English School approach therefore draws attention to the need to place world politics within a broader historical context and to recognize how the institutions of international society shape what states regard to be appropriate conduct for a given identity. For English School theorists, international society is in the process of evolving from a pluralist society, in which sovereign states hold different sets of values, to a solidarist international society in which common cosmopolitan values are emerging in a way that is creating institutions that are increasingly based on not only order but also justice (Wheeler 2000; Wight 1977).

The English School has been largely sidelined from mainstream North American international relations. However, it offers a useful interpretive approach to understanding world politics because it places international politics within a broader historical context, shedding light on the historical

contingency and specificity of particular norms of state behavior and the contexts in which they have emerged. It therefore allows the international politics of forced migration to be situated in broader institutional structures relating to sovereignty, the state system, and the emergence of international law. An English School approach to forced migration might advance two main claims:

Patterns of forced migration and states' responses need to be seen in a broader context of historical change. The English School highlights that states' responses to forced migration are strongly influenced by the institutions that shape state behavior in the international society. In turn, it highlights how these institutions have emerged in a specific historical context. In particular, it suggests that the very concept of a refugee cannot be seen in isolation from the historical creation of the contemporary system of nation-states. For Haddad (2008), it was the creation of the Westphalian state system that brought into existence the notion of the refugee and also created the inevitability of refugees. She argues that there is an important and mutually constitutive relationship between state, citizenship, and refugees. Prior to the creation of the Westphalian system, she argues, refugees could not have existed as a meaningful category in the feudal, religiously divided Europe without clearly delineated nation-states (Haddad 2008). Furthermore, the categories of forced migrants and the international institutional responses to them have evolved within the broader context of changing notions of state sovereignty and emerging institutions relating to human rights.

How states see forced migration is the product of the dominant international institutions. The English School highlights the importance of institutions in shaping how states define their interests. The institutions of the state system, the balance of power, mutual respect for treaties and norms, for example, shape how states behave in all areas of world politics including forced migration. Since states are part of a society of states, their behavior, like that of people in a society, will be shaped by social norms. One of the reasons why states will adhere to social norms is that, like people, they pursue legitimacy. Although states pursue economic and military power, this, by itself, is not particularly useful. A far more efficient means to wield influence in world politics is through holding authority, which can be considered to be "power plus legitimacy" (Hurrell 2007). The English School sheds light on the way in which states pursue legitimacy as a means to acquire authority. One of the main means by which they can do so is through respecting international norms and institutions. From an English School perspective, the pursuit of

legitimacy is a central part of explaining why states adhere to, for example, the core principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention. It also contributes to explaining why normative taboos in forced migration such as the non-deportation of citizens are generally upheld in international society (Gibney 2008).

Constructivism

Constructivism is distinct from rationalist approaches to IR in terms of what is often referred to as its “ontology.” Ontology relates how actors – whether people or states – are understood to exist. Rationalist theories assume that the identities of states are fixed; they are determined by the assumptions of the model and do not change through states’ interactions with one another. In contrast, rather than assuming that states’ identities and interests are fixed, as neo-realism and liberal institutionalism do, constructivism recognizes that states’ identities are constituted and changed through their interactions with one another. In other words, states’ interests are a product of their identities which, in turn, emerge through social interaction. This idea that states’ identities and interests are not fixed but can be changed introduces a key role in world politics for norms and ideas. It implies that states can be persuaded, through ideas or argumentation to view issues or problems differently and so change their behavior over time on the basis of holding different perceptions.

In Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) he suggests that “anarchy is what states make of it.” In contrast to rationalist approaches to IR, he argues that even though there may be no world government, there is no inevitability to the type of behavior that follows from this. Even if it is analytically correct to identify “anarchy,” states can adopt a variety of different behaviors and responses to this. While the structural conditions of the international system may be defined in a certain way, states have agency to respond to those structures and, over time, the interaction between the structure of the international system and the units that comprise it will lead to change in the structures and the identities of the actors.

Wendt’s (1992; 1999) approach to world politics has in common with neo-realism and liberal institutionalism that it is a system-level theory of international politics. In other words it does not open up the “black box” of the state to include an account of domestic politics or incorporate analysis on non-state actors. Nevertheless, other constructivist writers have gone beyond these rigid assumptions to apply a constructivist ontology to explore the role of non-state actors and trans-national actors in world politics. For example, constructivism has explored the way in which international

human rights norms become embedded within domestic politics and, in turn, feedback and shape international politics (Risse et al. 1999). It has also analyzed the way in which non-state actors have played an important role in shaping norms and ideas in ways that have fundamentally altered the behavior of states over time – in areas such as colonialism, slavery, and human rights (Crawford 2002; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Constructivism has a great deal to offer the study of the international politics of forced migration. It opens up the possibility that the politics of forced migration is not exclusively defined by interests and power but that ideas and norms also matter. It suggests that non-state actors such as IOs and NGOs can make a difference and that the current practices of states are not inevitable but can be changed through persuasion and argumentation. Two core elements of a constructivist approach to forced migration would be:

The refugee regime and IDP regime have socialized states in a way that shapes their values and interests over time. From a constructivist perspective, norms and institutions matter, not because they constrain rational, self-interested actors but because they constitute and shape how those actors see the world and understand their interests. In other words, they socialize states and other actors into holding certain perceptions about who they are and what they value. Despite having no enforcement mechanism, the basic norms of the 1951 Convention have broadly been upheld. From a constructivist perspective, this can be interpreted as being because states have internalized those norms over time, institutionalizing them within domestic legislation in ways that have then shaped their behavior and interests in relation to asylum and refugee protection. As a result, core norms such as *non-refoulement* have become increasingly established. Furthermore, constructivism would argue that the emergence of norms relating to IDP protection has begun to change states' perceptions of IDPs and led to a gradual acceptance that IDPs have a legal status and states have obligations to engage in the protection of IDPs just as they do refugees.

Non-state actors such as International Organizations can play an important role as actors in world politics. Constructivism opens up the possibility that non-state actors – such as IOs, NGOs, and academics – can exert independent influence on world politics. From this perspective, for example, UNHCR can be viewed as having had an independent influence on state behavior through persuasion and moral authority (Loescher et al. 2008). Its own organizational dynamics have also been important for the international politics of refugee protection, shaping how it has responded to states' interests and how it has used its autonomy to shape the politics of refugee protection

(Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Constructivism also highlights an important role for NGOs in the politics of forced migration. In the area of DIDR, significant normative change has taken place, largely because of the role of trans-national civil society. For example, the resistance of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) movement to the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in India, and its links to civil society outside India, contributed to changing awareness and understanding about DIDR. Moreover, this contributed to the development of new international norms through changing World Bank lending guidelines and influencing the creation of the World Commission on Dams, created in 1998 to examine the impact of the construction of big dams in developing countries (Khagram 2004).

Critical theory

Critical theory approaches to international relations represent a broad spectrum of different theories. They have in common the view that theory and concepts are not neutral and objective but are themselves political. In Robert Cox's words "all theory is for someone and for some purpose." He distinguishes between "problem-solving theory" which "takes the world as it finds it," and critical theory, which questions how knowledge is created and whose interests it serves (Cox 1981). Critical theories can be divided into neo-Marxist, Frankfurt School, and post-structuralist approaches.

Neo-Marxist approaches to IR identify capitalism as a major driving force in world politics. The starting point for understanding neo-Marxist approaches to IR emerges from the Leninist claim that "imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism." Once capitalists exhausted domestic opportunities to extract surplus value from labor, Lenin claimed, they would need to go abroad to seek alternative sources of labor and raw material to which to apply their capital. Dependency Theory and World-System Theory build on this by arguing that inter-state relations are defined hierarchically according to states' position in the global division of labor. For Wallerstein (2004), the world divides into core countries (the economies of which are mainly based on the service industry), semi-periphery countries (the economies of which are mainly based on creating manufactured and semi-manufactured products to export to the core), and periphery countries (the economies of which are mainly based on primary products that are exported to the semi-periphery). For Wallerstein, this hierarchy shapes how states, as the vehicle for capitalism, relate to one another. Much of critical theory builds on this Marxist foundation. For example, Gramsci (1971) built on Marx's notions of base (as the relationship between capital and labor) and superstructure (as the culture that supports the relationship between capital and labor) to

argue that the concepts and ideas that shape people's perceptions of the world themselves reinforce power relations. For Gramsci, hegemonic forms of knowledge emerge which shape how the world is seen. These hegemonic forms of knowledge lead to dominant ways of seeing the world that uphold existing power relations. In other words, knowledge is linked to power and the liberal frameworks through which people interpret the world are themselves part of the prevailing power structures.

Related to this, the Frankfurt School of writers, such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), have argued that culture and knowledge shape how people see the world. Concepts and categories are not neutral but contribute to shaping what people regard as possible. The dominant knowledge structures limit the possibilities for reflection and for conceiving alternatives. However, the Frankfurt School attempted to conceive a Critical Theory project designed to emancipate people from the hegemony of dominant forms of knowledge. For example, Habermas's (1993) notion of "discourse ethics" suggests that through dialogue people from different cultural perspectives can dialogically uncover a universalist, cosmopolitan truths. Linklater (1982; 1998) applies the Frankfurt School to IR to argue that the Westphalian state system creates a dominant and totalizing form of knowledge which defines how people see and categorize themselves. However, drawing upon Habermas, he argues that the state system inherently contains contradictions within it that offer possibilities for emancipation. He argues that the fact that citizenship exists at multiple levels – state, regional, local – represents a contradiction that allows opportunities for people to move beyond the communitarian logic of the nation-state and instead realize an international cosmopolitanism.

Post-structuralism has in common with the Gramscian and Frankfurt School approaches that it identifies that there is a relationship between power and knowledge and that categories, concepts, and ideas are not neutral and objective. Where it differs is that it sees these knowledge structures as deeply entrenched and constitutive of social actors. Hence most post-structuralists are more pessimistic about the prospects for an emancipatory project that can liberate people from hegemonic knowledge. Post-structuralist approaches look at the world as made up of "discourses" – or dominant practices – that are internalized by and constitute social actors, their behavior, and world view. The most common post-structuralist approach in IR draws upon the work of Foucault to argue that the concepts and knowledge categories that make up the practice and language of world politics are inextricable from power relations. Because these discourses constitute all social actors, there is no neutral or objective vantage point from which to view or understand the discourse from outside. IR theory for example is far from

neutral. Instead, it has a relationship to power and shapes the practice of world politics. Just as Foucault analyzed how social sciences such as criminology, psychology, and psychotherapy shape notions of normal behavior and lead to action to ensure control, conformity, and “normality,” so too IR theory or Forced Migration Studies might be seen, from a Foucauldian perspective, as normalizing discourses that shape practice in the real world. For Foucault, the prospects for emancipation lie in using the intellectual tools of archaeology and genealogy to identify and expose how discourses have emerged and been normalized.

The various strands of critical theory invite academics to problematize the dominant categories and concepts that exist in academia and practice, and to explore how, why and for whom such concepts and ideas have emerged and become dominant. The concepts are diverse and differ in terms of their methodological and analytical implications. Nevertheless, a critical theory approach to forced migration might have two core elements:

The labels and categories of forced migration themselves represent and uphold power relations. Forced migration is conventionally divided into policy categories: “asylum seekers,” “refugees,” “IDPs,” “project affected persons” (in the case of DIDR). These labels are often treated as unproblematic and represent the basis on which research and academic analysis are shaped. However, labeling is not neutral but has important practical and political effects (Zetter 1991). When the policy categories lead and guide research they shape it. The labels are not neutral or necessarily based on analytically substantive differences between people’s circumstances. Yet, from a critical perspective, they have been created for someone and for some purpose. Critical theory invites exploration of how, why, and for whom the labels and categories of forced migration exist in the ways that they do. From a Gramscian perspective, for example, Chimni (1998) has examined the role of UNHCR in contributing to the creation and dissemination of hegemonic knowledge which works to serve the interests of Northern states rather than those of refugees or developing countries.

The nation-state should not be taken as the unproblematic starting point for analysis. Much of the analysis of forced migration takes the nation-state as an unproblematic starting point for analysis. Concepts such as refugees and IDPs are defined in relation to the nation-states and it is assumed that the Westphalian system is unchangeable and fixed. Within analysis of the international politics of forced migration, this can lead to a tendency to reify the nation-state in ways that exclude from analysis important non-state or trans-national actors. For example, if the state is not disaggregated, important

interests and power relations may be excluded from analysis of politics. As neo-Marxist approaches to IR highlight, a purely state-centric approach risks ignoring the role of the international political economy in shaping the politics of forced migration. Similarly, assuming the state system to be immutable may exclude contemplating alternative conceptions of reality that might address or identify some of the underlying causes of forced migration. Critical theory approaches therefore invite post-Westphalian conceptions of the theory and practice of forced migration.

Case Study: The Evolution of the Global Refugee Regime

As was explained in the introduction, an international regime has evolved over time to regulate how states respond to refugees. A “regime” can be defined as the “norms, rules, principles, and decision-making procedures that regulate actor behavior in a given issue-area” (Krasner 1983). The refugee regime has emerged gradually and changed over time. Its historical evolution is something that the different IR theories can help to explain. However, no single IR theory can fully or adequately explain its evolution. Instead, different theories account for it differently and can explain different aspects of the process. This section briefly explains how the refugee regime has emerged and evolved in order to demonstrate what aspects of that process each of the different theories outlined above are able to shed light on (Loescher 2001; Loescher et al. 2008).

The origins of a global refugee regime emerge in the aftermath of the First World War when the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (LNHCR) was created in 1921. The LNHCR did not set out a universal definition of a refugee but worked to achieve situation-specific agreements in relation to specific groups of refugees, initially those fleeing the dissolving Russian and Ottoman empires and by the 1930s those fleeing Germany and Austria. In order to enable people to move across borders, the Office provided refugees with so-called “Nansen Passports” to allow them access to flight to League members. The LNHCR’s effectiveness declined as the League lost credibility in the 1930s and the Great Depression led to anti-immigration sentiment in the US and Europe (Loescher et al. 2008; Skran 1995).

The Second World War and the resulting massive displacement in Europe led to the revival of the regime. In order to ensure that repatriation of the displaced under Allied control took place, the US led an initiative to create the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) in 1943. It was 70 percent funded by the US and lasted until 1947 before becoming

the International Refugee Organization, which the US used as a means to coordinate post-war resettlement for Europe's displaced populations. By 1950, however, the US had little interest in an unlimited multilateral commitment to refugees. It instead wished to focus its political attention and resources on the Cold War, seeing refugee movements and defection as a means to discredit the USSR and channeling financial resources into Marshall Aid and NATO to bolster Western Europe's security as a bulwark against the USSR.

With the end of the IRO in 1950, UNHCR was created by the international community in order to address the plight of the remaining post-War refugees in Europe. Alongside it, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees was negotiated as a means to create an agreed definition of who would be recognized as a refugee and what rights they would be entitled to receive. The initial scope of UNHCR and the 1951 Convention was restricted to Europe and displacement which had its origins prior to 1951, its mandate was temporary, and the Office would have to rely upon annual voluntary contributions for funding. The highly restricted mandate parameters of the 1951 Convention and UNHCR were largely dictated by the interests of the USA. Nevertheless, the enduring core mandate of the Office, to provide protection and solutions for refugees, was formally defined and continues to be the basis of its work today. For the first five years of its work, UNHCR's small staff therefore focused almost exclusively on providing limited legal protection to Europe's post-war refugees.

It was not until 1956 that UNHCR began to establish itself in the eyes of the US. The suppression of the Hungarian Revolution by the Soviet Union, and subsequent exodus of 200,000 Hungarian refugees to Austria and Yugoslavia in 1956, marked the turning point. In this context the Office managed to use its mandate skilfully, interpreting the exodus as having its origins prior to 1951, proving its usefulness to the US in the Cold War context. From the late 1950s, the work of UNHCR therefore began to expand with US support, offering informal support for Chinese refugees in Hong Kong and for Algerian refugees in Tunisia.

In 1967, the international community agreed on a Protocol to the 1951 Convention. The 1967 Protocol removed the time and geographical limitations of the 1951 Convention and was signed by a number of states, including the US, which had not signed the 1951 Convention. Nineteen-sixty-seven, and the US backing for the Protocol, marked the beginning of a truly multilateral refugee regime, in which the international community committed itself to working toward protection and solutions for refugees on a global scale. UNHCR subsequently expanded its work to provide protection to refugees in the post-colonial context and in a number of

Cold War proxy conflicts throughout Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. During the 1980s, as a number of refugee situations became increasingly longstanding, UNHCR's role began to extend beyond simply offering legal protection to engaging in the management of refugee camps and settlements in the developing world. It was financially supported by the US in accordance with its strategic interests in relation to containing and discrediting Communism.

With the end of the Cold War and the "New World Order," UNHCR expanded massively under High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, and its mandate incorporated a growing range of functions including a greater role in repatriation and humanitarian relief. Even though the formal mandate of UNHCR did not change, it began to interpret its mandate in ever broader and more creative ways. One of the primary reasons for this was to try to make the Office more "relevant" to states in the context of the end of the Cold War, given that the US no longer held an obvious geo-strategic interest in refugee protection. With the end of a number of Cold War proxy conflicts and the emergence of new peace deals, UNHCR engaged in major repatriation operations to return refugees to their countries of origin, such as Cambodia, Mozambique, and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, new intra-state conflicts began to emerge, particularly in the Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa. In this context, UNHCR was called upon by states to provide humanitarian relief, and offer care and maintenance to the displaced, not only in first countries of asylum but increasingly to IDPs within countries of origin (Loescher 2001).

In the early twenty-first century, increasing political concern with migration and security in the context of globalization and the so-called "War on Terror" contributed to an ever-less hospitable climate for refugees. States were more reluctant than ever to provide asylum or resettlement. In this context, states continued to overtly propound the integrity of the 1951 Convention and the basic tenets of the refugee regime but simultaneously worked to circumvent incurring its obligations. The creation of an IDP regime, attempts to develop the basis of international cooperation in relation to migration and human mobility, and a growth of unilateralism all began implicitly to challenge the foundations of the refugee regime. In this context, UNHCR once again defined its mandate in ever-broader terms, formalizing its role as the UN agency with responsibility for IDP protection in 2006.

This brief summary illustrates that the evolution of the global refugee regime has taken place in the context of much broader changes in world politics, and has been greatly influenced by the politics of the inter-war, Cold War, post-Cold War, and post-9/11 eras. Different IR theories would

offer different accounts of the reasons for the evolution of the refugee regime, placing different degrees of importance on different factors, and telling the story in slightly different ways. Arguably, each of the theories has different strengths and weaknesses in interpreting the evolution of the refugee regime and can shed light on different aspects of the process.

A neo-realist approach would highlight the way in which the refugee regime has evolved according to the strategic interests of the major powers. From a neo-realist perspective, refugees would not have been of particular interest to those powers for their own sake. However, refugees would have been important for states in the context of their broader concern with issues relating to security and the balance of power. A neo-realist account of the regime would need to explain its emergence and endurance in relation to the extent to which it has met the strategic interests of the US. Most neo-realists would be skeptical about the prospects for multilateral cooperation but would interpret the emergence of the regime through the lens of hegemonic stability theory. Insofar as the regime served the interests of the US, it would underwrite the costs of maintaining the regime. A neo-realist account therefore sheds light on the centrality of the US's wider geo-strategic interests for the regime. At times when the regime enabled the US to enhance its relative position vis-à-vis the USSR, the regime was strong; at times when it served no obvious strategic interest for the hegemon, the regime was weak.

A liberal institutionalist approach would emphasize that the emergence of institutionalized international cooperation took place because it was mutually beneficial for states. It would suggest that states collectively recognized that they could benefit from mechanisms that ensured that reciprocity would take place to overcome common problems. For example, it would suggest that the ad hoc agreements of the League of Nations era, the creation of UNHCR initially to overcome displacement in Europe, and the global regime created in 1967 were all based on the recognition by states that they would all be better off with international cooperation than with unilateralism, free-riding and shirking responsibility. A liberal institutionalist perspective would suggest that the endurance of the refugee regime is difficult to explain by neo-realism's emphasis on states' short-run interests but once an institutional framework guarantees reciprocity it is in states' long-run interests to continue to comply with the basis of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol even given changing political circumstances.

An analytical liberal approach would look at the role of domestic politics in shaping how states have defined their evolving interest in the regime. In the post-war context, for example, the Jewish lobby in the US and Europe played an active role in ensuring political commitment to resettlement.

Furthermore, during the Cold War, domestic politics mattered for how refugees fleeing Communism and the “red terror” were perceived and welcomed in the US. Diaspora groups and former colonial links have also influenced the selective engagement of the US and European states in refugee crises in the South. For example, the US commitment to Indochinese refugees, which was a defining feature of the refugee regime between 1975 and 1996, was partly underpinned by the role of the Vietnamese diaspora in the US.

An English School approach would emphasize broader historical trends in the evolution of the refugee regime. It might emphasize that, alongside the emergence of the refugee regime, there has been a broader shift from a pluralist international society toward a more solidarist international society. Where at the start of the twentieth century sovereignty was absolute, states held vastly different values, and there were few international institutions, a different form of international society emerged with the creation of the League of Nations and then the United Nations. A range of cosmopolitan values have emerged in relation to human rights. Although a concern with global order has certainly motivated the emergence and principles of the refugee regime, this has been tempered by values relating to justice.

A constructivist approach would point to the way in which ideas and norms have shaped states’ identities and interests. Indeed, ideas have played a central role in the evolution of the regime. At crucial turning points in the regime, states’ decisions have been underpinned by a broader ideational framework. In the post-war context, the creation of the UN was influenced by ideas relating to multilateralism. In the aftermath of the Cold War, UNHCR’s expansion was aided by a similar ethos that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked “the end of history” and ushered in a New World Order. Similarly ideas relating to security have been central to how states have interpreted their interests in the context of concern with terrorism after 9/11. A constructivist account also draws attention to the reasons why the refugee regime has endured in spite of dramatic changes in the international system. Indeed, from a constructivist perspective, once norms such as the 1951 Convention are created, they socialize states over time. For instance, international norms become domestically internalized and embedded on how states respond at the international level. A constructivist approach also draws attention to the role that UNHCR has played as an autonomous actor in world politics. For example, how at different stages, under Lindt in 1956 and Ogata in the 1990s, UNHCR has taken advantage of wider political contexts in order to make itself “more relevant” and ensure either its institutional survival or expansion.

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A critical theory approach would highlight how the regime has evolved to serve the interests of the powerful. With each change in the regime, it would ask “whose interests did it serve?” For example, it might explain the evolution and expansion of UNHCR’s mandate since the 1990s in the context of the security and “containment” agenda of UNHCR’s powerful Northern donor states. During the 1990s, UNHCR took on a growing “humanitarian” role in countries like Bosnia and Zaire. From a critical theory perspective, one might argue that these operations did not have exclusively positive outcomes for the displaced but they did serve to contain the effects of insecurity and conflict and to divert attention from the international community’s failure to engage in addressing the underlying causes of conflict and displacement.

Conclusion

IR theory offers a range of different lenses for viewing and interpreting world politics. The theories explained in this chapter are not exhaustive of the range of IR theories but offer a starting point for thinking through different problems relating to forced migration and its relationship to global politics. Each one sheds light on different aspects of the international politics of forced migration. Which theoretical framework is most relevant depends on what questions one is asking and what aspect of the politics of forced migration one is looking at. Different questions and different problems will require a different theoretical framework.

The theories outlined in this chapter set the groundwork for the book’s subsequent chapters. The remaining chapters in the book address specific themes in forced migration. Each one draws upon and explains a range of conceptual tools that are relevant to those specific themes. However, many of the concepts that are explained and illustrated have their intellectual roots within the main bodies of IR theory that are outlined in this chapter.