EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Invisible Displacement

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By directing our gaze, we also avert our eyes. It is widely recognized—though
the implications are rarely consistently analysed—that all perspectives are
partial, and that therefore by seeing, describing and categorizing social
reality, we also make people and processes invisible. This special edition dis-
cusses the many aspects of invisibility in refugee and forced migration studies:
at the conceptual level, from the perspective of forced migrants, in relation to
policy, and from the perspective of academic knowledge production.

A critical look at invisibility begs a series of questions. It asks not only who
or what is invisible, but invisible to whom, in what ways, and why. The 'who
or what' refers to various groups and processes that have long been part of the
experience of displacement, but which were only 'discovered' by academics and
policy makers as a new area of concern at a particular point in time. A well
known example is the category of internally displaced persons, but there are
many others. The question 'invisible to whom' reminds us of the range of
actors in displacement situations, where a group, such as IDPs, may have
been invisible to the United Nations and to 'refugee studies' academics, but
very visible to the International Committee of the Red Cross, local govern-
ments and residents of the areas into which people were forced to move.
Invisibility is therefore fundamentally relational; its impacts depend on the
power relations and interests connecting those who see and those who are to
be seen (or not). Invisible 'in what way' asks us to consider the categories we
apply to people and situations and the functions those categories fulfil. What
has been the impact of categorizing IDPs as displaced persons rather than
citizens, thereby making the same individuals visible and actionable to differ-
ent institutions, under different rules and with different outcomes?

The 'why' is particularly important, since it forces academics to consider
the process and politics of knowledge production, both within academia and

among the practitioners and societies they study. Keeping something or someone invisible involves power: the power to decide who receives resources, who has the legitimacy to make their voices heard, or who can be harmed or ignored without consequences. The process through which this power is wielded is itself rarely explicit—indeed, its influence lies in its being taken for granted and unquestioned. As Foucault stated: 'disciplinary power [...] is exercised through its invisibility' (1979: 187).

This Foucauldian understanding of the structural and elite politics of invisibility and visibility must also be matched with a perspective famously described by Scott (1985) as the 'weapons of the weak': the ways in which the vulnerable work to stay invisible to the 'powers that be' by hiding and obscuring identities and activities that the state or other powerful institutions prohibit (Kibreab 1999). Invisibility is therefore a survival resource for many displaced, including, for example, many urban refugees in Africa or 'failed asylum seekers' in Europe. In some cases, the state or other institutions are simply not present or powerful enough to 'see' all aspects of social life (Scott 1998), or they do not consider certain aspects of life important enough to regulate. In these cases, people and practices remain invisible to these institutions by default rather than by design. Nonetheless, even where, for example, refugee integration takes place in a social context which is largely autonomous of the laws and policies of the state (Adelkah and Bayart 2007), what Jacobsen calls 'de facto integration', such refugees may still face 'dangerous and unstable situations' on the whim of the distant state (Jacobsen 2001: 9).

The combination of survival and vulnerability inherent in such grass-roots invisibility raises ethical questions about studying refugee and migrant invisibility tactics. Academics who lift this veil in the name of illuminating 'creative livelihood strategies' or 'flexible identities' may inadvertently be alerting powerful states, the UN, or NGOs to the ways in which their rules are circumvented, and thereby reduce the space for life-saving creativity and flexibility in remaining invisible.

These issues—disciplinary invisibilities in displacement studies, the relational nature of invisibility, the functions and politics of invisibility, the process of knowledge production in creating invisibility, and the ethics of studying invisibility—are discussed further in the following sections of this introduction. The same themes also arise again and again, in different guises, in the other papers brought together in this collection.

A unifying concern in this discussion is the relationship between academia and policy—one of the most pressing and continuous debates in the forced migration and refugee fields. Should academics engage with the groups and categories of people defined by and acted upon by practitioners, or should we use different, theoretically informed criteria for deciding on whom to study (Bakewell in this volume)? Ethically, do academics have a responsibility to make previously 'unregarded' vulnerable groups visible to the state or to aid agencies, to resist their invisibilization by such actors (Gale and Hammond in

this volume), or sometimes to protect the vulnerable, and their subterranean means of survival, from discovery by the authorities by remaining silent about our findings?

To be clear, the aim here is not to argue for the desirability or possibility of unbiased, 360-degree vision. Partial, targeted, disciplinary, situation- and function-specific perspectives are inevitable and indeed necessary, especially when analysis is intended to lead to practical engagement and action. What is crucial, however, is a critical awareness of how every perspective selectively obscures as well as illuminates.

Disciplinary Invisibilities

Every academic discipline or field of study is defined, at least partly, by core topics of interest so that the people and processes which make up social reality are reflected through a disciplinary prism. As a field of study, 'refugee studies' or 'forced migration studies' is still defining its boundaries (see Hathaway 2007 and responses) and is likely to continue doing so, concerning the kinds of people, experiences, institutions and processes that should be the focus of analysis. Already, in its relatively short life, the field has undergone several shifts in focus, often in response to previously 'invisible' groups and processes becoming recognized and studied, and to the changing political environment surrounding forced migration. As noted above, many of these groups and processes have always been there, but they were simply not codified, documented or studied under the rubric of 'displacement'.

Some examples of such previously 'invisible' groups include non-European refugees, European minority refugees (such as Roma), internally displaced persons, self-settled refugees, and urban refugees in Africa. When the international refugee protection regime was established after the Second World War, the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was explicitly limited to Europeans; an institutionalized blinker which was maintained until 1969 in spite of widespread, indeed greater, displacement related to the Second World War and conflicts of decolonization in other parts of the world. The academic study of 'refugees', therefore, also started out with a euro-centric bias, which has, arguably, been maintained to this date (Hyndman 2000). Even once the geographical and temporal limitations on refugee recognition were removed through the 1969 Protocol to the UN Refugee Convention, one of the largest national groups of displaced persons—Palestinians—has remained excluded from the broader framework for a complex combination of political interests in visibility and invisibility (see Feldman in this volume).

Since the 1970s, no specific national or geographical groups have been legally excluded from the refugee regime in the same way as Palestinians, but other categories of forced migrants were long overlooked by policy makers and academics alike. Internally displaced persons, for example,

have only been officially counted since 1982 (see the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre at http://www.internal-displacement.org) and they have been considered a part of the 'international displacement protection' regime since 1998, when the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* were adopted. Virtually all the academic reviews of IDPs within the field of 'forced migration studies' have been published since the late 1990s (Cohen and Deng 1998; Davies 1998; Korn 1999). Self-settled refugees in the global South are also more rarely studied than those 'captured' by official state or international interventions such as refugee camps, even though the call to pay attention to such refugees dates back two decades (Rogge 1985). In 2001, Jacobsen noted that there had not been a review of local integration studies since 1986 (Jacobsen 2001: note 6).[1] A sub-group of self-settled refugees, those living in urban areas (particularly in Africa), were almost entirely invisible to both practitioners and academics until around 2001 (Landau 2004), when they suddenly gained increased currency in terms of intervention and study.

It is striking that these previously 'invisible' groups are not numerically small. Indeed, they are often the vast majority of displaced persons. IDPs, as counted by UNHCR, outnumber cross-border refugees 13.7 million[2] to 11.4 million (UNHCR 2007) and camp-based refugees are by far the smallest group of refugees by location. In UNHCR's own 2007 statistics, out of a total of 31.7 million persons of concern, only 12 per cent globally are camp or settlement-based, with 17 per cent rural/dispersed, 27 per cent urban and an astonishing 44 per cent in 'unknown' locations (*ibid.*). We are therefore not talking about the invisibility of small groups at the margins of a stable and well-documented disciplinary core. The inclusion of these previously overlooked groups doubles, triples or quadruples the number of people that forced migration studies as a field is concerned with. It also multiplies exponentially the locations and situations in which forced migrants find themselves, all fertile ground for our field of study.

Clearly, looking at 'groups' of people studied—the 'who'—is only one way of defining a discipline, and a limiting one at that. Social science disciplines are generally more defined by their focus on particular processes and core concepts (e.g. power, society, culture, etc.)—the 'what'. Lubkemann argues in his contribution to this volume that the very way the core concept of 'displacement' has been defined, which lies at the centre of forced migration and refugee studies, contributes to making key experiences and people invisible. The insistence on movement as a pre-requisite for displacement, he argues, and the conflation of movement with disruption and immobility with stability, limits our understanding of the ways in which 'involuntary immobility' in times of conflict can create profound vulnerability, while the maintenance or indeed expansion of peace-time mobility can enable war-time opportunities and benefits.

Insistence on simplified and dichotomous conceptions of displacement may not only contribute to making entire communities invisible to policy makers,

but can lead to massive and completely contrived over-counting. Kronenfeld, for example, has documented how out of an estimated two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan in 2001, 3.5 million refugees were reported to have returned to Afghanistan in the following years, while census data showed that nearly 2.5 million remained in Pakistan. Kronenfeld's answer to this seeming paradox is that the complexity of refugees' movements was obscured by the institutional need to distinguish categorically between refugees and non-refugees (Kronenfeld 2008).

Finally, the broad sedentary bias of the international refugee policy regime remains firmly in place, although it has been critiqued many times (Malkki 1992, 1995; de Haan 1999; Scalettaris 2007). This brings with it assumptions about 'returning home' and 'durable' settlement which guide interventions and policies around the world. Apart from making nomadic peoples invisible to state and aid authorities, or making nomadic ways of interacting with sedentary state and aid structures seem deviant (Sigona 2003), this bias also hides and/or pathologizes other forms of mobility, such as 'irregular (read 'illegal') secondary migration' of refugees to a third country; 'mixed migration' flows where those fleeing conflict or political instability also wish to work; or post-conflict transnationalism instead of repatriation.

Relational Aspects of Invisibility

Invisibility is a relationship between those who have the power to see or to choose not to see, and, on the other hand, those who lack the power to demand to be seen or to protect themselves from the negative effects of imposed visibility. Neither visibility nor invisibility are inherently routes to empowerment—the impact depends on the relationship between actors and the functions which visibility plays (see below and Polzer, this volume). Politicized refugee groups and refugee advocates aim to increase their visibility to powerful institutions whom they see as potential allies in order to increase their access to resources and legitimacy (see Feldman in this volume). Often, however, powerful institutions such as the state aim to impose categorizations and labels which are against the interests of individuals. From this perspective, visibility equals being controlled, and even those who choose invisibility for themselves are disempowered, for they use their invisibility as a protective shield when true legal, political and social protection is not forthcoming. As many as 30 per cent of IDPs in Colombia, for example, are estimated by the government to have chosen not to register themselves as being displaced for fear that their official status may make them more vulnerable to exploitation by parties to the conflict (Refugees International 2006; see also Riaño-Alcalá 2008). On the other hand, 'strong political and security interests of key actors striving to prevent the [Colombian] conflict and the protection of its victims from becoming international' have completely eclipsed the existence of cross-border refugees from the embattled country (Gottwald 2003: 1).

The study of invisibility thus requires the researcher to ask a set of probing questions: who are the actors with the power to decide who is visible? How are these determinations made and whose interests do they serve? In what ways do those who are invisible respond to their status—do they try to subvert or resist it, or do they use their invisibility to maximize their access to protection or economic resources? What are the consequences of the choice to make a particular group visible or invisible—for those in power, for those with less power?

Let us take UNHCR's category 'persons of concern' as an extended example. In 2007 this category referred to various types of forced migrants in addition to refugees. These included IDPs who were conflict-affected and 'to whom the Office extended protection and/or assistance'; returned refugees who had returned within the past year; returned IDPs 'who were beneficiaries of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities and who returned to their areas of origin or habitual residence between January and December 2007'; stateless persons; and 'other groups or persons of concern', defined as 'individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of the groups above but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds' (UNHCR 2007: 3–4). This definition of the category of 'persons of concern' is significant in that it is markedly more inclusive than definitions used in previous years, particularly during the 1990s when the agency's focus was more exclusively on legally recognized refugees.

However, it is also significant in its exclusion of many others whom researchers and advocacy groups might place within the ambit of the forced migrant label: refugees and IDPs not displaced by conflict or not receiving UNHCR assistance; people who returned more than one year ago but who still have not achieved self-sufficiency or integration with the return society (i.e. for whom no durable solution has been reached—see Gale, this volume); and those who have been affected by disaster but have not, for whatever reason, been the beneficiaries of UNHCR assistance. In practice, those who receive protection or assistance from UNHCR are often persons who are living close to or among refugee or conflict-affected IDP communities. Several of the contributors to this volume focus on groups who fall outside even this more inclusive definition of forced migrant (see Gale, Feldman, Hammond, Polzer, and Lubkemann).

UNHCR's power to determine who is made visible as a 'person of concern' carries with it the power to decide who receives both direct material resources as well as indirect access to protection and resources through legal and political recognition by states and NGOs. Yet on what basis are some groups included and others excluded? From UNHCR's perspective, the determination of who falls into the category of being 'of concern' has to do, at least in part, with a willingness to be accountable. Those determined to be of concern must be those for whom protection and assistance can be extended. Assistance to these groups should also, in theory, be monitored so that the

agency's work can be evaluated—although with regards to returnees, in particular, evaluation of integration is often not done in any meaningful way. Thus hesitation in widening the definition has hinged on the extent to which UNHCR, in this instance, should take responsibility or be accountable for persons not traditionally within its mandate. As donors have become more willing to support activities to support this wider caseload, UNHCR's flexibility on the definition has increased. Visibility therefore is both a result and a function of actionability. Actionability, in turn, is determined primarily by the interests of donors rather than the needs of the displaced.

When seen from outside the institution, this argumentation, however attractive the rhetoric of accountability, is tautological and self-serving. Defining 'persons of concern' as 'persons who can be reached' means that an institution cannot be held accountable for not extending its services to persons in similar situations of need (according to some kind of principled definition of need) but who are currently not 'reachable' (and are therefore invisible) because of financial or political limitations.

Clearly there need to be some criteria for delimiting populations of concern, both for reasons of being able to extend protection and services to those in need, and also to define a population for whom UNHCR, with its fixed resources, can realistically respond. The point here is not to criticize the agency for using such a definition—such is the realpolitik of UN agencies—but rather to point out that the categories used may, and indeed must, differ from those that would be most appropriate and useful for researchers or even for NGOs operating in areas affected by other kinds of forced migration. (For more on the use of categorization and inclusion/exclusion, see discussion below and Bakewell this volume.)

Those forced migrants who remain outside of the institutional 'visibility field' (see Feldman this volume) often try to resist their neglect. They do this through direct action—staging demonstrations and mounting advocacy campaigns (sometimes with the help of sympathetic groups),[3] co-opting symbols and commemorating their experiences (again, see Feldman). Their resistance may also take more subtle forms. Scott's 'weapons of the weak' (1985) famously shows how disempowered citizens (in his case not displaced) seek to carve out space and gain access to resources without necessarily changing the parameters of visibility. In this volume as well, Lubkemann's 'immobile displaced' used historically established mobility strategies to withdraw into the bush lands, where they could pursue a wider range of survival strategies than those interned in government villages. The Sierra Leoneans in Gale's account use their invisible status to exploit the economic opportunities offered by living in Guinea and are (admittedly marginally) better protected by continuing to live in the unserviced camp that aid agencies had abandoned than they would be if they returned to Sierra Leone. At the same time, they are able to access social and economic networks in Sierra Leone. More affluent and integrated Mozambican refugees in Polzer's case study of a rural South African borderland, simultaneously resisted overt classification

and ghettoization as 'Mozambicans', while negotiating visibility and inclusion as 'South Africans'. Finally, in Bakewell's case, Zambians opted to forgo official refugee status for a variety of reasons that included being able to access land and move freely outside the camps.

The decision to make a particular group visible or invisible is made more difficult by proximity. The agency or government body that is able to avert its gaze from those with less power tends to be that which is able to maintain some distance from its (non) subject. For this reason, local level officials are often less likely and less able to invisibilize than their national counterparts (see Hammond). Global headquarters make determinations of categories more easily than those who operate in the 'field' and who see the implications of invisibility on a daily basis (see Kronenfeld's example of counting Afghan refugees cited above). Conversely, in some cases, when visibility carries risks with it, local actors are more likely to be able to recognize them and to see the advantages of facilitating continued invisibility (see Polzer). The key here, for researchers, policy makers, and assistance providers, is to try to understand the costs and benefits of visibility or invisibility, and to try to frame their categories in ways that minimize people's vulnerability in the face of unequal power relations.

The Functionality of Invisibility: Whose Interests are Served?

The question of who is invisible to whom, and in what ways, compels us to unpack the process of what we might call 'invisibilization' to determine the interests served by such partial sight. This section looks at the functions of invisibility in the policy arena, while the next section on knowledge production discusses it in the academic context, as well as the relationship between policy and academia.

Logistical considerations, such as financial shrewdness or convenience of implementation, as discussed above, play a role in shaping the blinkers of operational agencies. Determinations of where categories lie in the policy arena may also reflect more political interests, such as the rejection of responsibility for providing protection or assistance. Fears of the (often unsubstantiated) burden of immigration, as Puggioni points out in relation to the Italian state, define a field of state action whereby

> the concept of remaining invisible represents ... the way in which the presence of refugees was understood by state institutions. They were invisible, in the sense that their presence, survival strategies, rights and access to services were not approached as issues concerning political institutions, but rather the social network (Puggioni 2005: 331).

The manipulation of official statistics to make certain groups invisible is also a common means of legitimizing a lack of protection or service access. The last several years have seen asylum application numbers in many European countries fall dramatically. While governments use these statistics to claim a

reduction in asylum need, they actually represent a shift in categorization of people from 'asylum seekers' to 'illegal immigrants' on the basis of restrictive government policies, thereby excluding the same individuals who might previously have qualified for rights-based protection and/or assistance. Similarly, Gottwald records how Panama, Venezuela and Peru received negligible numbers of Colombian official asylum seekers (but high numbers of illegal immigrants) in 2000–2002 compared with Ecuador's 9,000 asylum applicants, purely because of their differing asylum policies (Gottwald 2003: 10).

There is also a question of whether the intentions at play are deliberate or not. While much invisibility clearly is the result of inadvertent (or necessary) framing to enable institutionalized action, rather than a desire to cause harm, in some cases there is a deliberate intention to exclude certain groups from services, rights or protection on the grounds that those excluded are undeserving, not in need, or do not fit into the legal categories being used to define inclusion. The urban slum eradication processes in major African cities (see, for example, Macharia 1992; United Nations 2005), not to mention criminalization of panhandlers in New York City (Vitale 2008), are manifestations of a desire to 'vanish' the poor. Hammond (this volume) argues that the relocation of the poorest farmers to remote parts of Western Ethiopia can also be understood as an example of deliberate vanishing of the poor for reasons of national pride and to salvage a crumbling international reputation.

As Hammond, citing Biehl (2005), points out, these 'technologies of invisibilization' are often carried out alongside very public efforts to address social problems such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, urban regeneration or national food insecurity. Returning to the case of Colombia, neighbouring countries such as Panama and Venezuela sought to 'reconcile concern over their international image with their national interest of preventing the Colombian conflict from spreading to their territories and keeping refugee movements invisible' (Gottwald 2003: 10). They therefore

> presented national refugee legislation to the international community as evidence of their compliance with international obligations, [but] in practice they refrained from applying the laws; denying that refugees were crossing into their territories (*ibid.*).

Loud developmental rhetoric and overt displays of activity can be the most effective means of silencing and hiding exclusion.

But are visibility and invisibility merely things that happen to people, merely institutional tools of power? As several papers in this volume point out, different levels of visibility and invisibility may be useful for displaced people themselves, who become active architects of their own visibility or invisibility. Feldman argues, for example, that for Palestinians, 'visibility practices' have been central to the project of articulating national identity and are often a prerequisite for the justification of political claims; these practices may be monumental or mundane, and she points out that 'it is

sometimes mundane forms of visibility that prove more durable' (see Feldman, this volume).

Even those who do not explicitly embrace invisibility may, however, be compliant or complicit in their invisibilization. Hammond's account shows how the successful invisibilization of people through a government-sponsored and implemented resettlement scheme depended on a small number of people actually believing in their relocation as a key to improving their economic and political security, i.e. believing it to be functional for them personally and for their families. This is not so different from the approach of many other forced migrants who move thinking that they will be better off, only to find themselves further marginalized and at risk due to their invisible status and/ or discriminatory policies that seek to discourage people like them from immigrating.

Knowledge Production and Invisibility

Academics also have interests, and framing devices and categories fulfil certain functions in the process of knowledge production. One of the central debates in the field—whether or not to use and uphold legally and institutionally defined categories in academic study—revolves largely around the relative visibility of certain experiences and groups over others. This debate was recently exemplified by the exchange between James Hathaway and others in this journal (Hathaway 2007a and b; see rebuttals and commentary by Cohen 2007; Adelman and McGrath 2007; and de Wind 2007). The argument centred around the perceived danger that considering refugees as just another kind of forced migrant would obscure (i.e. make less visible) the very real fact that refugees, unlike other kinds of migrants, are without the protection of the country of which they are a citizen, and thus require protection by international law (although as Cohen (2007) points out, many IDPs are in the same situation). The advocacy case for IDPs has gained considerable strength from its association with refugee and the wider forced migration studies, and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) borrow heavily from international refugee law in seeking to compel countries, through the establishment of customary law and promoting a culture of accountability, to recognize their obligations to those displaced within their borders. 'Balkanizing' the field as 'refugee' studies only, some feel, may weaken the case made by advocates of IDP rights.

The concerns that lie behind this debate are valid: enlarging the analytical lens does run the risk of obscuring the particular needs of a subset of the forced migrant category. But how do we preserve the protection of these subsets while at the same time situating them within a continuum of forced migration studies that also stresses their commonality? Do we really need separate kinds of researchers to work on each subset? One would hope not, though clearly many of those who have weighed in on the forced migration vs. refugee studies debate do believe this to be the case.

The use of institutionalized categories in academia is not only a question of explicit strategy and well-intentioned advocacy goals among academics, however. Chambers, for example, has documented the ways in which less high-minded factors such as logistical, professional and personal biases among development practitioners (e.g. tarmac road accessibility, dry season accessibility, the need for projects, kinds of communication, disciplinary blinkers) make certain groups and processes 'unobserved' (1983: 13–22). Similarly, the logistical accessibility of refugee camps over scattered self-settled refugees, or the administrative control of camps which makes them inaccessible or only partly accessible (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007: 285), the project biases of governmental and international agency staff (and many students), and the language and time constraints of many researchers also affect which displaced people are more likely to be studied.

These biases are often exacerbated by the prevalence of 'policy-relevance' tied funding for displacement-related research, and the importance of consulting in the income structures of many refugee experts. This can lead to a kind of 'embedded' research culture which has either internalized the questions and categories of governmental or international agencies (e.g. on trafficking, 'irregular' migration or remittances), or is so dependent on them (including for future consulting work) that critical analysis is stymied. Alternatively, research which is critical, or simply independent, of governments who wish to keep refugee issues hidden (as described for research with Palestinian refugees in Egypt by Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007: 286), may be dangerous for the researcher; a personal cost which many academics understandably try to avoid.

Bakewell, in this volume, argues against the dependence on policy-based categories by academics because they constrain 'the type of questions asked, the objects of study and the methods and analysis adopted' (see also Scalettaris 2007). Bakewell shows how an understanding of self-settled refugees is particularly hindered by classical policy categories such as 'integration' and 'repatriation'. Polzer's paper takes this argument further and shows how the process of placing individuals into categories, even in academic or social contexts that are not necessarily about policy interventions, tends to obscure refugees who have successfully integrated with the host community. She calls not only for a critical awareness of knowledge production by policy actors, but the same critical awareness of local social knowledge production and self-reflection of academic categorization.

The key point here is that no representation of refugees, or of any other 'object of study', is power-neutral. In Chambers' portrayal, powerful professionals imagine the rural poor either as extensions or as caricatured opposites of themselves, thereby entrenching their own comfortable notions of themselves and legitimizing the continuation of interventions that act in their interests (Chambers 1983). Chambers does not suggest that this is necessarily a conscious or malicious imposition of power, but that it flows from individual and institutional logics that are rarely interrogated. In the field of forced

migration studies, there are clearly similar implicit but nonetheless powerful logics at play which contribute to the regular under-representation of certain groups and processes in academic literature.

Moreover, some commentators see the 'capture' of academic voices by policy makers as a more sinister and conscious process of 'manufacturing consent' (and therefore obscuring dissent) around powerful interests (Herman and Chomsky 1988), such as inciting a moral panic about the movement of (black) poor bodies into western spaces and globalizing responsibility for the prevention and control of terrorism. Especially the spread of the trafficking agenda has been criticized in this way (Gould 2006, 2007), as well as the attempt to place responsibility for the 'control' of 'irregular migration' with African and Asian governments (Rodier 2006). There are also national policies which clearly attempt to use 'research' to justify repressive, disempowering or simply ineffective interventions. Several of the papers in this volume analyse examples of such policies, including a poverty alleviation 'relocation' project in Ethiopia (Hammond), the closure of a refugee camp in Guinea (Gale), and a government amnesty for Mozambican refugees in South Africa (Polzer).

This critical view of the interests of policy makers stands in radical contrast to the widespread assumption, including among many academics, that refugee or anti-trafficking legislation, for example, is fundamentally a progressive framework for protecting the rights of the most vulnerable. These two perspectives have radically different ethical implications for the role of researchers and questions of invisibility. In the latter case, identifying vulnerable individuals and groups and making them visible to the law and to the authorities is an ethical imperative since it will serve to protect their rights. On the other hand, where official policies are seen as attempts to control and limit rights, rather than expand them, researchers must consider whether they are contributing to entrenching this control.

Invisibility and Ethics

Because the visibility or invisibility of individuals or groups to institutions is always a question of power within a relationship, as discussed above, the researcher is never a neutral bystander. Researchers are always active in the relationship of invisibility—by using and therefore legitimizing categories that obscure, or by criticizing them; by 're-presenting' the perspective of the powerful or of the weaker party. This means that a consideration of 'invisibility effects' becomes part of the researcher's ethical duty.

As with many ethical dilemmas, this is not always an easy call. Almost inevitably, when studying a 'vulnerable group', something about that group's survival strategies will go against either the assumptions or the interests of powerful institutions. Especially given the increasingly regulated formal avenues for legal movement between, and residence in, safe countries, many asylum seekers or other migrants find ways of surviving which require

hiding from or evading the surveillance of authorities: marrying for documents, accessing fraudulent papers, working illegally in the informal sector, helping relatives and friends negotiate borders and asylum interviews, 'shopping' for NGO assistance, trading in—or buying multiple—ration cards, etc. Studying and documenting these 'weapons of the weak', on the one hand, illustrates the limitations and false bases of the institutional restrictions and recognizes the migrants' 'agency'; on the other hand, it might provide the same restrictive institutions with ammunition for tightening their systems even more. For academics who are motivated even in part by contributing to 'improving the situation of refugees' in the broadest sense, the common rejoinder that 'practitioners don't read academic journal articles anyway' is too easy an evasion. Firstly, as this journal has demonstrated, this is not necessarily true, and secondly, the argument invalidates any implicit or explicit claim of practical impact through critiquing the system.

Conclusions

Good academic enquiry is about making conscious and reflected decisions about what to study and how to study it. An awareness of invisibility is therefore an integral part, indeed the necessary flip side of the coin, of decisions on what to see: in defining the research question, the conceptual framework, the study population, the methodology. Even for academics who explicitly distance themselves from immediate policy-relevance and who justify their research as building theory (for example about governmentality and resistance, or identity formation), their work remains linked into, and is not separately observant of, real relationships of power. These relationships are reflected in what is included in the 'mainstream' and what is considered 're*vision*ist'.

An analysis of invisibilities is also not predominantly about pushing back the frontiers of knowledge, or seeing what no-one has seen before. It is rather about an awareness of the power relationships inherent in the act of making someone or something visible in a certain way, often without that person's input, permission or knowledge of how they are being portrayed.

Acknowledgements

1. On the other hand, even while refugees in camps and European detention centres are highly visible as a group, Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) have recently pointed out that in practice, official restrictions and gate keepers often make it difficult for researchers to access them, thereby making details of camp-life or deportation processes invisible.

2. As discussed later, this only includes conflict-affected IDPs who have received some form of protection and/or assistance from UNHCR activities, and thus is an underestimate of the global IDP population. Other large groups of IDPs include those displaced by natural disaster, human rights violations that are not conflict related, and environmental damage (see Cohen 2008).

3. Examples are the advocacy of the US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants with regard to refugee warehousing, focusing on refugees who have lived in camps for more than five years, and Refugees International's work on statelessness (see www.uscri.org and www.refugeesinternational.org).

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