**A Short Note on Class-focused View of Forced Migration from the Lens of an Economist**

**Byasdeb Dasgupta[[1]](#footnote-2)**

This paper is an attempt to examine certain perceptions regarding what is dubbed today as *forced migration* in terms of class focused approach. The very idea of forced migration from the lens of an economist is tantamount to what Keynes in his The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money in 1936 termed as *involuntary unemployment*. The Keynesian concept of involuntary unemployment, which Keynes in the context of the Great Depression of 1930s described as that unemployment which is *generally* found in any money-using modern competitive market economy when an individual in the workforce of the country cannot find any employment at any money wage in the labour market irrespective of whether the particular individual searching for a job is skilled or not, educated or illiterate, or living in a rural or in an urban space of the economy. This in other words means that a person who is involuntarily unemployed is not unemployed out of his/her own choice. In fact, he/she has hardly any choice to make in the labour market with few exceptions in the present context of the global economy. Rather, he/she is not voluntarily unemployed. And in this regard the particular person, however rational he/she is as per mainstream neoclassical rationality postulate, does not have any choice to make between how much labour hours he/she will provide to the concerned employer and how much leisure hours he/she will have as per his/her own choice. So, this does not go hand in hand with the typical neoclassical tenet of an individual person’s (who is in the labourforce of the country) freedom to make a choice of trade-off between labour hours to provide at the prevailing nominal wage rate and the leisure hours to enjoy at his/her own disposal.

Similarly, forced migration is quite akin to Keynesian notion of involuntary unemployment. As in Keynesian notion of involuntary unemployment, forced migration by the very qualifying adjective “forced” means it is involuntary. The migrant population who are compelled to do so are not at all doing this migration out of their own voluntary choice. Secondly, there is uncertainty regarding the future which those who are forced to migrate always face. This uncertainty is akin to the post-Keynesian notion of uncertainty which to a great extent may be held responsible for the whims and fancies of capitalist money-using free market economy in terms of unpredictable nature of ups and downs in effective demand in the market and hence, an uncertainty in the generalized purchasing power of the commonplace in terms of holding money.

As said at the onset this paper is an attempt to understand forced migration in terms of class-focused approach. The basic question which this paper raises is whether one who is forced to migrate can be differentiated in terms of particular class process or not? Also, along with class differentiation our query is if the political process is equally responsible for forced migration of people occupying certain class process/processes? Our argument will be based upon the Althuserian logic of over-determination which is contrary to any deterministic/reductionist logical structure to which we are generally accustomed with. This can be explained in the following way. Let X and Y be two related economic variables. The deterministic logic would entail one as cause and the other as the effect of that cause. However, the logical structure posed by over-determination would hold both X and Y as the cause and effect of each other. In the deterministic logical frame the variable, which is cause of the other variable, is given or pre-ordained or exogenous to the system as if its determination is outside the system and hence, as cause it is given. For example, in the typical orthodox Marxist literature, economy is considered as the base of the social system whereas the political and cultural are the super-structure to this base. This in other words implies economy is the cause of political and cultural and hence, the political and cultural are the effects of the economy. Viewing in this manner economy is more important than political and cultural as the latter’s determination is caused by the base – the economy. Even in economy the relations of productions are ordained by the forced of production. So, forces of production are the cause and the relations of production are the effects of forces of production. In other words, forces of production are not determined in the economy. Hence, the logical sequence runs from forces of production which are already given. This is problematic in our understanding for two reasons. First of all, forces of production or technology, so to say, are continuously changing with the continuous changes in the economic space. So, relations of production and forces of production mutually constitute each other. No one is more important than the other. Secondly, political and cultural too influence the economic space. Therefore, economic, political, cultural and natural which constitute the sites of a society are equally important and hence, mutually constitute each other in the logical structure characterised by over-determination. Each one is cause and effect at the same time. This mutual constitution of economic, political, cultural and natural is a continuous process and hence, dynamic and in this mutual constitution there is contradiction as well *a la* Althusser. Throughout this paper while taking note of forced migration we will adhere to this logical structure of over-determination and will refrain from any reductionist or essentialist picturisation of the space of economy and also, that of society.

Hence, this paper will make an attempt to indicate the following as far as the very nature of forced migration is concerned in this globalized socio-economic system of the day:

1. First of all, the paper will make an attempt to show that the forced migration of labour is not an abnormal phenomenon in a money-using market economy where money is non-neutral *a la* Keynes. The capitalism (global capitalism *per se*) requires the labour to be always in transition *forcibly*.
2. People who are forced to migrate do suffer from *money illusion* which goes a long way to decipher the typical political economy of the geographical space from where they migrate.
3. An economy *in general* witnesses two different kinds of forced migration – one from other areas and the other from this space to other places within and outside the country. In these two kinds of migration the people who have migrated did do so involuntarily as they were subject to abject poverty, political violence and displacement or dislocation from their occupations in the region either due to modern economic development and/or natural factors like river erosion, flood, earthquake and like.
4. A sense of uncertainty does prevail in the life forms of the people including those who have migrated and who have not migrated which propels/impels people living in the area to migrate and even not migrate then to continue with their economic activities which remain mostly hidden as the law of the land does not want them to be foregrounded. What is therefore foreclosed either in terms of forced (out) migration or forced (in) migration is the reality which forces people to take to these (illegal) occupations out of no choice for themselves and/or out of sheer money-illusion.
5. Finally, the unique point is the fact that those who are stressed to migrate out in seeking alternative earning opportunities elsewhere never want to cut their socio-economic link with their native places. This fact will facilitate to another dimension of political economy of the space and the forced migration that is happening persistently – especially since the onslaught of economic development at the dictate of the (global) capital.

Given these viewpoints, the paper will make an attempt to make a political economic understanding of forced migration vis-a-vis the neoliberal agenda of inclusive growth and development. The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 of the paper delves into an understanding of a class-focused economy and will construct a class matrix to indicate how heterogeneous may be the economic space unlike what is generally portrayed in the form of a standard macroeconomy. The following Section will involve an attempt to link this class matrix with the phenomenon called forced migration. The concluding section will sum up the major findings of this paper.

**Section 1 Class-focused rendition of economy:**

Class is a process of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour where surplus labour *a la* Marx is labour performed by direct producer in addition to his/her necessary labour required for his/her social reproduction of labour power. Viewing in this way class is a process and there is no binary division of class as is the case in the orthodox Marxist thinking – bourgeoisie and proletariat. In the binary division each class is homogenous group of people having same class interest and class thus viewed is defined in terms of ownership of means of production. Bourgeoisie class owns the means of production and proletariat class does not own means of production; rather this class is owners of labour power only. Marx conceived class in terms of his own category viz. surplus labour. And once viewed in terms of surplus labour there are plethora of class processes. Note that class is an economic process. And performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour mutually constitute each other – no one is more important than the others. Those who appropriate surplus labour take the decision of distributing it. If performer(s) surplus labour viz. direct producer appropriates surplus labour then the very class process is said to be non-exploitative. On the other hand, exploitation occurs when non-performers of surplus labour appropriate surplus labour. Then, the very class process is exploitative. Performance and appropriation of surplus labour constitute what is known as Fundamental Class Process (FCP, henceforth) and distribution and receipt of surplus labour form what is known as Subsumed Class Process (SCP, henceforth). FCP and SCP are overdetermined. Each is cause and effect of the other. Those who are in the SCP provide the necessary conditions of existence and reproduction of the concerned FCP. Surplus labour takes the form of surplus value through commodity exchange in the money-using market in M-C-C’-M’ circuit in capitalist class process.

The point to note at this juncture is the fact that broadly speaking there may be exploitative class processes as well as non-exploitative class processes at a time. By saying this we are differing from historical materialism dictated linear progress of history in terms of teleological journey of class formation from exploitative class to non-exploitative class at the end. History of class formation in the nineteenth and twentieth century does not tally with the propositions of historical materialism.

One individual may hold simultaneously several class processes. For example, a direct producer performing surplus labour in an exploitative class process may also act in the same enterprise as labour contractor and may thus belong to the SCP at the same time apart from being in the FCP. It is also possible for a full time worker in an exploitative class process as performer of surplus labour belonging to more than one FCP if he performs surplus labour in another class process which may or may not be exploitative. If one brings into fore the household economy then it is possible that any individual who is working outside his/her family occupies at least two class processes – one in the public domain of his/her working place (either in FCP or in SCP) and the other in the private domain of household (either in the FCP or in the SCP).

Viewing in this way the space of an economy is always heterogeneous. It is disaggregated and decentered in several class processes which are mutually interrelated. At a particular point of time one particular class process may dominate and we may term the economy as a whole in terms of that particular class process. For example, if capitalist class process dominates other forms of class processes then we can dub that particular economy as the capitalist one. This does not mean in a capitalist economy other types of class processes are non-existent. Rather, they do exist. This is more so global capitalism always produces the spaces of non-capital for its own sake. For example, global capitalism is characterised by ruthless continuous process of original accumulation which displaces and dislocates people and they are forced to migrate to the cities and town – the urban peripheries and their subsistence need compels them to become care givers mostly as domestic workers for urban middle and upper income families.

In terms of only performance and appropriation of surplus labour one can form at least six different class processes which are shown in the table below in terms of what is dubbed as class matrix. Here A denotes a single individual who is performer of surplus labour. B denotes too a single individual who is non-performer of surplus labour but appropriator of surplus labour. C denotes a group of people or community even who may be performers of surplus labour and also, non-performers of surplus labour viz. appropriator of surplus labour. AA denotes a class process where the performer of surplus labour himself/herself can appropriate his/her surplus labour. This class process is non-exploitative as the performer and appropriator of surplus labour is the same person. This class process is dubbed as self-exploitative or independent or ancient class process. One can find plethora of example from today’s urban and rural life forms where a self-employed person is both performer and appropriator of surplus labour. He does not engage anyone as an employee under him. AB denotes a class process where the non-performer of surplus labour (B) appropriates the surplus labour performed by A. This is an exploitative class process. Suppose, a landowner employs a wage-labour in his farmland but he himself does not perform surplus labour then it is an exploitative class process which may be feudal or capitalist. This will be a capitalist class process when the commodity exchange in the money using market takes place. Note that this type of (feudal or capitalist) enterprise is a small or even tiny one. With the onslaught of big capital whether such enterprise can sustain its existence over time is a big question given the nature of competition between large and small in today’s globalised market economy. AC denotes a class process where the surplus labour performed by a single individual (A) is appropriated by the community (C), of which A is also a member, through joint decision making process. Hence, AC is a non-exploitative class process and is termed as communitic class process. This type of class process may be found in tribal economy. Some produce of this type of class process may be sold in the money-using market to procure some commodities which are not produced in this production process to satisfy the need of the community or the individual A belonging to the community C. CA is a class process where a group of people perform surplus labour and the decision to appropriate and distribute surplus is bestowed upon one among them (A) and hence, it is a non-exploitative class process. This A may be democratically elected or nominated by C. This type of class process can be found in workers’ cooperative based production process. The produced good may become commodity if it is sold in the market to procure the other goods for the community to satisfy some consumption need of the community including A. This class process may also be dubbed as communitic class process and to distinguish it from AC class process we term AC as communitic-I class process and CA as communitic-II class process. CB is an exploitative class process as the performers of surplus labour (C) and appropriator of surplus labour are different persons. This *generally* signifies large production process. B may signify group of people as in a corporate firm. This class process may be serf-based class process if it is based upon serfdom. It may be feudal if the surplus labour is not converted into surplus value through commodity exchange in the market and the production relation between performers of surplus labour and appropriator of surplus labour is based upon certain personal bondage including kinship. It may be large capitalist production process if there commodity exchange in the money-using market economy and the necessary labour of the performers of surplus value takes the wage-form. These types of capitalist class processes dominate today’s neoliberal globalised economic system – not in terms of their numbers but in terms of their money power and political power (which too stems from the money power). Lastly, CC is what we dub as communistic class process where performers and appropriators of surplus labour/value also appropriate their surplus labour/value. This may also take the form of workers’ cooperative which is distinct from the state-supported cooperative or even some private cooperatives (like sugar cooperative formed by sugar barons in India in Maharashtra). The essential feature of communistic class process is the continuous democratisation of the labour process and hence, production process. Note here C as appropriator of surplus labour/value may be a subset of performers of surplus labour/value (C) who are elected/nominated by C to take the decision to appropriate and distribute the surplus on behalf of C for practical reasons.

**Table 1**

**Class Matrix**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| AA | AB | AC |
| CA | CB | CC |

Note here that these six class processes can be identified in terms of performance and appropriation of surplus labour, not in terms of distribution and receipt of surplus labour. Hence, these six different class processes are formed in terms of FCP, not in terms of SCP although those who appropriate also belong to SCP as distributors of surplus.

**Section 2 Forced Migrations in the Light of Class Focused Rendition of Economy:**

Forced migration to our understanding is akin to Keynesian notion of involuntary unemployment. Like an individual who is involuntarily unemployed an individual is forced to migrate after encountering uncertainty in his/her present state of life form for various reasons – some of which are absolutely economic, some political and some are mixture of both economic and political. The analogy of forced migration with Keynesian notion of involuntary unemployment is in terms of two factors described below:

1. Like involuntary unemployment the choice to migrate is involuntary in nature. The migrants do not have any freedom of choice to make regarding whether to migrate or not. They are forced given the stress and strain in their present occupation and/or in their present habitat. The common human psychology is not to leave ancestral habitat although exceptions are there in terms of voluntary decision making. The stress and strain to continue with the present occupation and/or with their present habitat may stem from several factors – some of which are economic in nature, but mostly political economic as the experiences of both internally displaced persons (IDPs henceforth) and the refugees suggest. For example the Partition of India as a political process generated the political economic signifier for forced migration of the Hindus as well as Muslims to and from India and from and to Pakistan (including Bangladesh) in 1947. The decision to migrate for saving the physical existence and to eke out livelihood somehow for bread and butter in the host economies was involuntary as there was no choice left for the migrants/refugees other than to leave their ancestral places. As a person in the working age *in general* does not want to remain unemployed the same is true about those who experience forced migration in their lives. Both unemployment and migration are therefore mostly involuntary in nature. There are exceptions. However, these exceptions in which some voluntariness to remain unemployed and to take to migration do not dominate the scene for both majority of labour and the majority of *free* flow of labour from one economic space to another (either as IDPs or as refugees). Here involuntariness signifies certain stress and strain for those persons who are forced to migrate and to remain unemployed. There is a threshold limit upto which any individual can tolerate this stress and strain. And beyond which with they turn out to be so vulnerable in their present political economic setting that they do not have any option left. In technical term we can say the opportunity cost to migrate is nil or very low or put it differently the opportunity cost of not to migrate is very high. Therefore, forced migration is not a free decision made by the migrants; rather, there are push factors responsible for such migration.
2. Also, forced migration occurs for the people who migrate thus become victims of involuntary unemployment. This victimhood which renders them involuntary unemployed in their own economic spaces displaces them violently from their own environment. Hence, there is a close relation between forced migration and the Keynesian notion of involuntary unemployment. Involuntary unemployment is defined as that unemployment when the job-seeker is seeking jobs at any wage rate in the economy but cannot find one. The relation between involuntary unemployment runs from involuntary unemployment to forced migration. There are certain events (economic or political) force the people to become involuntarily unemployed in their own environment including their economic spaces and when confronted with such unemployment they are forced to migrate for two interrelated reasons. First they may face life risk at their own environment due to these certain events like religious riots, large scale land acquisition for industrialisation, natural disasters and like. Second they may find it difficult to earn their bread and butter in their own environment in the face these events/incidences in their own places. This triggers what we call forced migration. As migrants they may be IDPs when the migration takes place within the migrant’s own country or they may become refugees when the migration is from one country to another country. It is thus the occurrences of certain economic/political incidences which make it difficult, if not impossible for them to continue with their present occupations as their labour-service providers in the spaces to which they actually belong and thus compels them to leave those spaces so as to (i) save their lives and (ii) eke out their livelihood somewhere else just for mere subsistence. Hence, this forced exodus is closely interrelated with Keynesian notion of involuntary unemployment.

Now, the pertinent question is how forced migration is related with the class matrix that we have developed in the preceding section. Is there any relation at all? Are people belonging particular class processes are more prone to forced migration? To our understanding there is strong connection between forced migration and class processes which we have indicated in our class matrix in the table above.

First of all, it is the performers of surplus labour who, *in general*, are more susceptible to forced migration when confronted with the incidences that render them involuntarily unemployed. The reason is simple. Let us understand it in terms of a real life example. The example is set in the context of a communal violence to which Indian society is highly experienced since the days of Partition on religious line. With the turbulent time characterising the Indian subcontinent at the time of Partition, it was quite impossible for any performers of labour who are Muslim by religion to stay in India and were forced to migrate to Pakistan. Similarly, it was impossible for any performers of surplus labour who are Hindu to stay back in Pakistan and was forced to migrate to India. The petty performers of surplus labour always do fall prey to forced migration and the incidence like communal violence following Partition of India led to large exodus of population from India to Pakistan and from Pakistan to India as well. The majority of these migrant population belonged to low-income performers of surplus labour. This is not to say that forced migration did not afflict other income groups or class of people. However, it is the performer of surplus labour, who lacks both money power and political power except possessing labour power, becomes the easy victim of such incidence and forced migration in their lives becomes almost part and parcel of their destiny.

Secondly, those workers who are not performers of surplus labour but workers in the SCPs are also victims of incidences like Partition. They may belong to low income group or to middle income group. Like the performers of surplus labour these groups of people also in general do not have money power or political power and when Partition like events occur they cannot continue with their present jobs and also, face life risks not only about themselves but also for their family members and are forced to migrate therefore. Hence, workers either as performers of surplus labour or as workers in the SCPs are the foremost victims of incidences like Partition of India and forced migration afflict their lives thus.

Let us now think about forced migration concerning each one of the six class processes mentioned in the table above. First let us consider the independent or self-exploitative class process AA. This particular class process may be found in small/marginal farming activities or small enterprises with a self-employed person. This class process is most susceptible to forced migration when push factors (mostly economic) create space for such migration.

AB class process is an exploitative class process which may be feudal or capitalist. But the enterprises representing these class processes are small enterprises. So, one cannot compare B – the appropriator of surplus labour/value in these production processes with large corporate capitalists. One may find plethora of these types small or tiny enterprises (both in rural and urban areas) where the appropriator of surplus labour/value is different from the performer of surplus labour/value. Any push factor (mostly economic) may render these types of enterprises unsustainable and therefore, may lead to forced migration of A – the performer of surplus labour. It is more likely that A will migrate if he is landless/asset less signifying lack money as well as muscle power to resist the push factors responsible for forced migration.

AC class process is communitic and non-exploitative. In case of push factors (mostly economic) becoming quite stronger these class processes may become unsustainable and it is quite likely that the entire community (represented by C) may migrate. Another reason for forced migration of some members of C (say, A) may be the fact what they receive to reproduce their labour power socially is not sufficient and the push factors which may reduce their receipts further may trigger forced migration of some members of the community who are performers of surplus labour as well. Same is true about CA class process which is also communitic.

CB *generally* stands for large scale production. Example may be a capitalist farm in a rural area or a corporate enterprise in an urban area. If the push factors in the form of land acquisition in the rural area where the capitalist farm is located then entire group of performers of surplus labour may be forced to migrate to seek an alternative mean of subsistence for themselves. Of course, the presumption here is that C consists of landless wage labourers in the capitalist farm. It is to be noted here forced migration is directly associated with Marxian concept of original accumulation. It is highly unlikely that B will migrate. If at all B migrates he/they will do so voluntarily which cannot be clubbed together with migration of C.

CC is the communistic class process. It depends on the circumstances whether the push factors (say land acquisition for industrialisation) will displace C here and force them thereby to migrate. If C succeeds in resisting the land acquisition then no question of forced migration arises. However, if C which may represents money-power-wise poor group of people and fails to resist the statist repression for land acquisition then, the entire C may migrate – the migration which is then involuntary in nature. Note as push factor (economic) we have considered here only the incidence of land acquisition for industrialisation. There are many other economic push factors other than the original accumulation of capital. If C represents group of economically poor households in class-focused sense and fails in its contest with big capital to receive a share of social surplus then, C may migrate leaving the CC process as what they receive is not socially sufficient for them to reproduce their labour power viz. their bare minimum subsistence. In such case, the migration will be a continuous process, not just a step function of some large and strong push factor like land acquisition.

**In Lieu of a Conclusion:**

Summing up our main arguments in this short paper we can conclude that workers, either as performers of surplus labour or as members of SCPs are the worst sufferers as far as the forced migration is concerned. So, the class positions of people do matter. But few things need to be kept in mind while making a class-focused view of forced migration as delineated below:

1. The worst victims in terms of forced migration *generally occupy the exploited or oppressed class positions*.
2. The money power too matters in forced migration. If the money power in the space works in favour of those who are likely victims of forced migration, then migration may not occur. This is true especially if barring political risk factors the potential migrants are not landless or assetless.
3. Finally, in this paper as push factor for forced migration we have considered only some economic factors like land acquisition and try link it up with our class matrix. However, these are not the only push factors. There may be non-economic push factors which exert their influence on the economic space and may change the economic cartography of the space from where the forced migration (either in the form IDPs or refugees) takes place. One notable of such factors is political. The political power relations in the space do matter in generating forced migration. But no doubt this power relation may take different violent forms including communal violence on religious, ethnic and colour lines, mass killings or genocide and direct political violence as is the case today in rural West Bengal. When political dominates over economic it is likely that only individual households with some money power may survive in the particular geographical space where the political push factor originates. Otherwise, people irrespective of the fact whether they are performers of surplus labour or workers in the SCPs or petty appropriators of surplus labour will fall victim of such political turbulence and may be forced to leave their native land.
1. The author is a Professor of Economics at the University of Kalyani in West Bengal, India. The contact email id is byasdeb@gmail.com. The author remains grateful to CRG for its intellectual support to conceive ideas pertaining to forced migration. The usual disclaimer applies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)