

Forced Migration and Refugee Settings from an Anthropological Perspective

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1 Introduction

In 2015, more than 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, disaster and insecurity, with 40.8 million people internally displaced within their own countries.¹

This chapter explores what forced migration means from an anthropological perspective, both within the framework of humanitarian action, specifically legal and political aspects, as well as from the perspective of affected communities. To analyse the consequences of displacement and its relation to notions of home and identity, I use the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal as a case study.

2 The Meaning of Forced Migration

Migrants, in many cases, lack citizenship of their host country, usually form part of a minority of migrants and refugees there and often live in circumstances of destitution, whereas their situation may originally have been very different, in their country of origin. According to Eriksen, a lot of anthropological research on migration has focused on aspects of discrimination and disqualification, strategies for the maintenance of group identity and the relationship between immigrant and majority cultures. George and Olwig add that attention has been increasingly geared towards the transnational relationship between migrants' communities of origin and

¹United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2016), Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>, p. 2.

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the sociocultural environment in host countries.² This way, diaspora communities that always originate from communities of origin give a sense of belonging to people in many different places of the world. Cultural identity is of major importance among migrants.

Authenticity and tradition can play a role within and outside minorities of migrant communities. In his study of a multi-ethnic English neighbourhood, Bauman found that options related to emphasising or using, for instance, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, community and neighbourhood in different contexts are highly different and subject to debate. Thus, multiple identities, roles and views can be used for different reasons and for various aims both within and outside a group.

The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) defines forced migration as ‘a general term that refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people (those displaced by conflicts) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects’.³

The study of forced migration is multidisciplinary and incorporates a wide variety of perspectives ranging from the academic, governmental and aid sector to local perspectives. Forced Migration Online (FMO) suggests a framework that can be used to address different types of forced migration and types of migrants. According to FMO, three types of forced migration can be identified⁴:

- *Conflict-induced displacement* concerns people who are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, civil war, violence and persecution on the ground of nationality, race, political opinion or social group.
- *Development-induced displacement* relates to people who are compelled to move as a result of policies or projects aiming to enhance development, such as dams, roads, mining and conservation reserves.
- *Disaster-induced displacement* refers to people displaced as a result of natural disasters (floods, earthquakes), environmental change (deforestation, global warming) and man-made disasters (industrial accidents).

Those researching or working with displaced groups often use different main terms to describe these groups. This distinction can be essential in determining which rights these displaced groups have and to what kind of protection they are entitled. Moreover, the background of these different groups can determine causes and needs when designing humanitarian interventions related to prevention and protection. IASFM distinguishes between the following types of people forced to flee their homes:

- *Refugees*: the legal definition of a refugee is enshrined in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1 of the

²Eriksen (2010), pp. 299 and 319.

³IASFM, <http://www.efms.uni-bamberg.de/iasfm/mission.htm>.

⁴FMO, <http://www.forcedmigration.org/about/whatisfm>.

Convention defines a refugee as a person residing outside his or her country of nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return because of a ‘well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a political social group, or political opinion’. A large number of states have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol, pledging to protect refugees and not return them to a country where they may be persecuted. Article 33 (1) of the 1951 Convention codifies the international law principle of non-refoulement:

No Contracting State shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Those recognised as refugees have a clear legal status and are entitled to the protection of the UNHCR.

- *Asylum seekers* are people who have moved across an international border in search of protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.
- *Internally displaced persons (IDPs)* are ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border’.⁵
- *Development displacees* are people who have been compelled to move as a result of policies and projects aiming to enhance development, such as dams, roads, mining, deforestation and conservation reserves.
- *Environmental and disaster displacees* are people displaced as a result of natural disasters (floods, earthquakes), environmental change (deforestation, global warming) and man-made disasters (industrial accidents).
- *Smuggled people* are migrants moved illegally for profit. They are part of an unequal commercial transaction. As it has become more and more difficult to cross borders as an asylum seeker, migrants have increasingly drawn upon services of smugglers.
- *Trafficked people* are moved by deception or coercion for the purposes of exploitation. The profit in trafficking people comes from the sale of their sexual services or labour in the country of destination. Trafficked persons may be prevented from leaving or be bound by debt or threat of violence.⁶

⁵Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2), 1998, Principles and Scope.

⁶FMO, <http://www.forcedmigration.org/about/whatisfm>.

3 An Anthropological Conceptualisation of Forced Migration

Anthropology can contribute to exploring variations in the behaviour of different groups of displaced people, as well as to the functioning of the humanitarian sector in settings of displacement, by contributing to a deeper understanding of the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes. The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford suggests that an anthropological conceptualisation of forced migration consists of four characteristics.

First, the anthropological approach is based on in-depth empirical analysis, providing insight into a displaced community or several subgroups within a displaced community.

Second, it focuses on the micro level, examining what various (political, economic) processes mean to displaced people within certain contexts.

Third, the anthropological approach analyses the perspective of the displaced and aims to understand what meaning people give to social phenomena.⁷

Fourth, the anthropological approach explores the humanitarian system and response to forced migration. An anthropological approach can give a nuanced contribution to the analysis of forced migration, adding to the legal conceptualisation that is often used.

A very significant anthropological debate in forced migration relates to the relationship between place, space and identity formation. These are essential notions in anthropology and even more so as regards forced migration and displacement.

Therefore, ever greater attention is paid to the changing nature of forced migrants' identity and the way they react with agency to their new environment. Migrant's agency is essential for their strategies, future plans and ability to settle in a new environment.⁸

4 An Anthropological Perspective of Forced Migration and Displacement

The anthropologist Colson's overview of forced migration and the anthropological response show that the study of forced migration is now a major research area within the field. Since the 1970s, anthropologists have increasingly studied the effects that the arrival of large groups of displaced people has on host populations. Other anthropologists have studied the humanitarian community as it exerts a

⁷International Summer School in Forced Migration Participant's Handbook, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford 2010, pp. 16–17.

⁸Molles (2013), p. 17.

strong influence on the experience of displaced people. Colson stated that, in addition to studying forced migration, anthropologists have attempted to ameliorate the situation of displaced people through the creation of agencies that give a voice to the displaced, such as the Refugee Studies Centre of Oxford.⁹ E.V. Daniel notes that an anthropological approach to refugee studies is relatively new, with the establishment of the Refugee Studies Centre being a major event linking the two research fields, and discusses the intersection between anthropology and the discourse surrounding refugees and displacement.¹⁰

The term refugee can have very different meanings in different settings, cultures and approaches. As Daniel argues, it is the anthropologists' task to navigate these different understandings.¹¹ Hence, anthropologists are charged with the responsibility to understand the life of a displaced person, to interpret what it means to have experienced traumatic events and betrayals of trust and to convey these experiences to the wider world.

4.1 Social Networks, Identities and Community Perspectives

An omnipresent component of forced migration and displacement is radical change and the loss of familiar circumstances, community structures and social networks. These processes affect former structures built on trust and reciprocity. The social fabric of a community, particularly displaced communities, is usually destroyed when it is affected by conflict. Pre-existing social structures may not function anymore, and time, coupled with active community level interventions, is necessary to rebuild the social fabric and a sense of trust and mutual understanding and agreement. The use of narrative theatre, for instance, may be beneficial in rebuilding a community. Such theatre can support the strength of people by stimulating a dialogue within the community. By discussing and addressing problems of the community in a theatre setting, creative and appropriate problem solving can take place, which may contribute to rebuilding trust and cooperation.

Narrative theatre focuses on conflict-affected communities, in which trust and dialogue may have diminished. Narrative theatre aims to create an environment where people can meet, discuss their problems and work towards realistic outcomes acceptable to all members of the community. This approach builds on the strengths and skills available in communities. In a *theatre setting*, facilitated by community workers, people dramatise and discuss problems leading to agreed solutions and actions. This way, dialogue is encouraged and trust can be rebuilt and strengthened.¹²

⁹Colson (2003), pp. 14–15.

¹⁰Daniel (2002).

¹¹*Id.*, p. 279.

¹²Sliep (2009), p. 7.

Such an approach was successfully employed in Burundi, where conflict had forced people to flee to neighbouring Tanzania. During their absence, other people sometimes claimed their homes and land. Once people returned to their villages after the conflict had ended, they faced problems related to their homes and lands. A Burundian NGO, in cooperation with an international NGO, introduced the narrative theatre approach in the communities. It turned out to be beneficial for communities and their returnees, to discuss the issues, search for solutions and rebuild trust again.¹³

In a setting of displacement, everything changes, including people's roles in life. This affects their identities. Since people define themselves in terms of the roles they play, *loss of role structures means that they cannot know who they are or who anyone else is until new roles are constructed and people assigned to them.*¹⁴

Identity also relates to membership of a group based on ethnicity and nationality. These types of identity are not fixed but are fluid and are part of a continuous process.

As Anderson has shown, nations must be seen as communities, which are 'imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.¹⁵ He further states that, nevertheless, people identify themselves with the nation as a community to such an extent that they are willing to fight or even die for this community.

Thus, a setting of displacement provides both challenges and opportunities. The result is often a redefinition of roles that community members assume due to their new surroundings. Even deeply entrenched roles, such as those attached to gender, may change, sometimes enhancing underlying difficulties. For instance, where women in refugee camps take on roles that were previously the domain of men, it may leave the latter depressed, feeling devaluated, which may lead to family violence. Issues such as old age and loss of family members further affect identities. For example, in the wake of the death of parents and a disruption of social structures due to displacement, it may happen that the eldest child of a household may have to take care of his or her younger brothers and sisters. In such cases, the child assumes the roles of both father and mother and takes on a new identity.

However, the notion of home is very important in terms of identity and belonging. Where displaced people have dwelt in camps for decades and identities are ruptured, they may create a shared history and, possibly, a myth of returning to their home one day, grounding their identity in memories of the past. For example, in Palestine and Lebanon, many displaced Palestinians have embraced the key as their common symbol. Many of them have guarded the keys of their Palestinian homes, believing that one day they will be able to return.

¹³Healing communities programme of the NGOs War Trauma Foundation and Centre Ubuntu.

¹⁴Colson (2003), p. 8.

¹⁵Anderson (1983).

4.2 *Refugees, Space and Place: The Micro Level*

Refugee camps form social and cultural complexities in which new identities crystallise, as Agier describes in his anthropological analysis of refugee camps as urban ethnographic cases.¹⁶ He suggests that the humanitarian system creates the social and political non-existence of aid recipients.

The recognition of refugees only as victims influences their identity. Refugee camps can thus be viewed as ‘non-places’, which are characterised by loss of memory, relationships and identity. At the same time, refugee camps also provide opportunities for reworking identities, influencing different classes, finding work and social positions.¹⁷ Agier has conducted ethnographic research in the UNHCR-administered Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, which hosts more than 300,000 refugees, predominantly of Somali origin, but is also home to Sudanese, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Ugandan nationals. Refugees are grouped into blocks according to citizenship, ethnicity and clan. Differences in activities and allocation of resources create social differentiations within the camps, which is exacerbated by the interventions of UNHCR and other NGOs. For instance, minorities can access loans for craft activities or as volunteers for NGOs. While some groups within the camps sometimes seek to remind these minorities of their inferior status, the opportunities present may also help minorities reach a new status. All of these dynamics are part of an ethnic chessboard within the refugee setting.

Anthropologist Malkki compared the situation of refugees in camps and in urban areas. She found that in refugee camp, community identity is reinforced, whereas ‘the refugees who settle individually in towns produce more cosmopolitan forms of identity and their ethnic attachment loses its mythico-historical roots’.¹⁸ By creating different forms of identity, both ethnic and non-ethnic, a camp does not manage to turn into a genuine space of urban sociability. Agier concludes that the camps, due to their character as emergency shelters, become spaces of waiting. Each refugee must redefine his or her place to retain a minimum of identity.¹⁹ The unfinished character of life in camps entails uncertainty and leads to incompleteness of the process of integration.

Bauman underlines that through his ethnographic work, Agier returns human subjectivity to the refugees, helping them regain control of their lives.²⁰ This ethnographic approach demonstrates that both anthropologists and refugees can provide perspectives, which add value to the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions.

Refugees in camps must learn to live in the here and now. They find themselves in a transitory stage, which does not lead to a socially defined state.

¹⁶Agier (2002), pp. 317–341 and 318.

¹⁷*Id.* pp. 322–323.

¹⁸Malkki (2002), pp. 351–360.

¹⁹Agier (2002), p. 337.

²⁰Bauman (2002), pp. 343–349.

Malkki describes displacement as a problem of organisation. Refugees are staying in camps where order is provided. Refugee camps, in this sense, are devices of care and control. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees are guaranteed freedom of movement and the right to asylum, but this is often considered as unrealistic in practice, given geopolitical realities. Malkki questions the construction of ideal-typical figures of the refugee camp and the refugee. Depending on the specific situation, a refugee may experience his or her refugee status as either providing protection or posing constraint.²¹

Many refugee communities have resided in camps for decades, up to 20 or 50 years, awaiting conflicts in their home regions to subside or the outcome of political negotiations to bear fruit, not able to stay or return, not knowing what will happen to them, unable to make plans for the future. In order to bring an end to this so-called *warehousing* of refugees (a situation where refugees are housed in one place for years on end due to lack of agreement or decisions on how to resolve the situation), the international community has established voluntary resettlement programmes to third countries. On the one hand, these programmes offer an opportunity for a new start in the United States, Australia or Europe for families and a future for their children. On the other hand, embarking on this road entails many new challenges, including leaving the region and social context in which people have lived for a long time. It is particularly challenging for elderly people to leave everything behind, move to a new country with whose culture or language they are often unfamiliar. Moreover, in many cases, family members who stay behind place high expectations on the resettled family members to find work or study, which these people often cannot meet, especially in a short time frame.

In many disaster-affected regions, family and community ties are very strong, which can pose extra challenges to families scattered over the world.

4.3 *The Humanitarian Sector Related to Displacement*

There have been increasing calls from anthropologists and also from the humanitarian sector (for example, during the World Humanitarian Summit 2016) for greater involvement of the beneficiaries of aid in determining their fate and the way humanitarian aid is provided. De Waal argues for a democratisation of the aid encounter, placing decisions on use of aid in the hands of recipients.²² This means talking with beneficiaries instead of about them.

The situation of Ethiopian refugees in a camp in neighbouring Sudan during the Ethiopian famine in 1985 provides an illustrative case. These refugees went on a hunger strike, demanding permission to leave the camp and return home to the Ethiopian highlands. At the time, aid workers were puzzled as to why refugees

²¹Malkki (2002).

²²de Waal (1997), pp. 623–639.

would wish to return to a difficult and dangerous situation. It has now been understood that the refugees wanted to return to their homelands, which would have enabled them to cultivate the land attached to their homes for the coming year and return to a degree of normalcy. This example emphasises the importance of fieldwork-based anthropology in relief and development contexts.²³

Anthropologist Harrell-Bond has analysed interactions between helpers and refugees, addressing political forces. She stresses the need for a rights-based humanitarianism. This requires a shift from the approach of charity, which often portrays refugees as victims, to recognising them as survivors who demonstrate strength by pursuing their lives.²⁴ Harrell-Bond concludes that it is encouraging that NGOs begin to rely more on codes of conduct and minimal standards in the delivery of aid but stresses that it is essential to have systems of accountability towards refugees in place and to aim for capacity building driven from the grass-roots structures themselves.

5 The Case of Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal

The following summary of an exemplary case is based on the article ‘Psychological support for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal’.²⁵ For more than 20 years, thousands of Bhutanese refugees have lived in refugee camps in Eastern Nepal, in an uncertain and challenging situation. Now, the possibility of resettlement is bringing even more challenges into their lives. In recognition of this situation, a local NGO (TPO Nepal) provides psychosocial support to this group in collaboration with UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies.

The relationship between the northern Bhutanese (Drukpa) and southern Nepali-speaking Bhutanese (Lhotshampas) populations was relatively free of conflict until the early 1990s. At that time, more than 80,000 Lhotshampas were forced to flee to Nepal from Bhutan, following the introduction and enforcement of restrictive citizenship laws, and a ‘One Nation, One People’ government policy.²⁶ Bhutan claims that this group left willingly and denies that they were ever citizens. The refugees, however, claim that they were forced to leave Bhutan because of their ethnicity. As a consequence of this process, many people lost their nationality and are currently stateless. The government of Nepal, concerned about the implications of the refugee influx for national security, has been unwilling to allow refugees’ permanent residence. Yet, even though Nepal is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee

²³de Waal (2002).

²⁴Harrell-Bond (2002), pp. 51–85.

²⁵Based on Reiffers et al. (2013), pp. 169–179, http://www.interventionjournal.com/sites/default/files/Psychosocial_support_for_Bhutanese_refugees_in.5.pdf.

²⁶Hutt (1996), pp. 397–420.

Convention, the government has allowed the refugees to *temporarily* stay in refugee camps.²⁷

From 1993 until today, there have been 14 bilateral negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal to find a suitable solution, but none has produced results.²⁸ Due to increasing international discussions on the *warehousing* of refugees, as well as donor fatigue, some members of the international community have agreed to facilitate a process of resettlement to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.²⁹

Under the resettlement programme, which was launched in 2007, more than 50,000 refugees from Bhutan have now left Nepal to start a new life elsewhere. The UNHCR and partner organisations continue to seek solutions for the remaining 60,000 refugees. According to UNHCR, more than 49,000 people among the remaining refugee population have expressed an interest in resettlement. Other refugees, however, prefer to either repatriate to Bhutan or stay in Nepal. The international community hopes that Bhutan and Nepal will allow these smaller groups to either remain or return as humanitarian interventions are to be phased out after the conclusion of the resettlement programme.

In the meantime, international and national humanitarian agencies continue to provide services related to health care, education and other needs within the Nepalese refugee camps. There were originally seven camps, but due to the resettlement process mentioned above and the ensuing decrease of the refugee population, the camps are now being consolidated. Conditions in the camps remain challenging; they are overpopulated and prone to security risks related to conflict and violence. Continuing uncertainty about the future and a protracted stay in the camps have also fuelled frustration and distress, which in turn impact psychosocial well-being. In order to offer the refugee community psychosocial support, TPO Nepal has designed a programme with the aim of improving psychosocial well-being and reducing psychosocial distress among Bhutanese refugees. This programme is implemented in close coordination with UNHCR and camp-based organisations (CBOs) from the refugee community to provide a range of psychosocial support to address psychosocial distress, with attention to cultural values.

A needs-based assessment among Bhutanese refugees in the camps showed that they experience various stressors related to basic needs and shelter, as well as resettlement opportunities and procedures.³⁰ According to this assessment, 'fear and insecurity, conflict in the family, confusion, substance abuse, stress and anxiety, worry about culture and religion, fear of separation and suicidal ideation are some of the key psychosocial problems prioritized by respondents'.³¹ Another assessment identified suicide as a major problem and confirmed that the number

²⁷Adelman (2008).

²⁸Sharma (2009), www.ksl.edu.np.

²⁹Loescher and Milner (2005).

³⁰Luitel et al. (2009).

³¹Ibid.

of suicides among Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is disproportionately high.³² Living in a refugee camp for 20 years, after having gone through difficult experiences and without any clarity in terms of the future, creates many challenges.

While there are educational and medical facilities in the camps, and refugees have been able to organise themselves within various forms and contribute to activities, rendering life meaningful has proved to be difficult. Additionally, refugees are not officially allowed to work and therefore unable to provide for their families. Even so, some of them do work as farmers, tradesmen, tailors or teachers in the informal sector, or within the camps.

Resettlement to third countries provides an opportunity to study and work, and brings hope. This new dimension, however, has created complex situations for families. Young people are eager to start a new life and create a better future for themselves and their children. However, many elderly people have no wish to migrate again and prefer to wait for an opportunity to either return to Bhutan or stay in Nepal. Within families, this has created tension and conflict resulting in some people either migrating or staying against their wishes. Families can be separated for years because part of a family may be eligible to resettle, whereas others may need to wait for the completion of a long process due to complicating factors, such as severe (mental) health problems, divorce or mixed marriages between refugees and local people from Nepal or India.

Ongoing uncertainty and family conflicts may also lead to various psychosocial problems, such as depression or suicide. There are very regular reports of attempted or committed suicides by refugees who see no other way out. Difficulty in giving meaning to one's life, or dealing with problems, can result in other negative impacts, such as substance abuse or increase in domestic violence.

The psychosocial care programme aims to enhance community resiliency at the grassroots level with wider participation of the refugee community in the design and implementation of activities. The programme includes awareness raising to increase mental health literacy in the community; psychosocial counselling; classroom-based interventions in which children from vulnerable families are involved in after-school activities related to music, dance and play in order to learn to communicate differently and gain more self-esteem; and group interventions, such as women's empowerment groups. For interventions on specialised mental health care, people are referred to other specialised aid agencies. A group of psychosocial counsellors participated in a training course on psychosocial issues and support. They now provide psychosocial counselling in counselling centres in the camps, or in people's huts. The counsellors are supported and supervised by clinical psychologists. In order to strengthen early identification of psychosocial problems, ensure timely referrals and provide suitable care, members of the refugee population have also been trained to work as community psychosocial workers (CPSWs) or classroom-based intervention (CBI) facilitators. They provide basic

³²Schinina (2011).

psychosocial services. Their presence helps create a continuous flow of knowledge and support into the camps.

Counsellors are involved with psychosocial counselling, psycho-education and awareness-raising campaigns, assisted by the CPSWs. They support people in dealing with their problems and assist them in finding new ways to cope. The main components of psychosocial counselling include problem solving in the family or community, symptom management, psychological education, emotional support in relationships and development of personal skills. Family-oriented supportive counselling is provided through home visits, with a focus on parental capacities and psychological-education sessions, aiming to increase the well-being of families.

For the coming years, it is recommended to continue the psychosocial services at the camp level and to create or link these to existing psychosocial services in host communities. Refugees remaining in Nepal can then also benefit from the shared care facilities, which is essential as the ones who stay behind are often the most vulnerable, such as the elderly and people with severe illnesses or mental disorders. Involvement of the host community can contribute to the creation of a social care network for both communities. Developed interventions in support of the refugee community should ideally be integrated and embedded into existing care interventions and structures in the region, taking into account both culturally acceptable and international standards.³³

It would be helpful to explore possible linkages with psychosocial organisations in states where refugees resettle in order to develop a system of handing over cases and sharing experiences, as well as support. This is of particular importance for suicide prevention and strengthening the (psycho)social situation of vulnerable refugees who might need support in the process of becoming citizens and fully engaging in their new home.³⁴

6 Conclusion

Today, enormous amounts of people find themselves displaced, away from home, in a humanitarian disaster setting. Such situations affect them in many ways. Due to displacement, insecurity and uncertainty, people's identity and well-being are strongly affected while they try to give meaning to the world around them. This is where the anthropological perspective is important in terms of supporting people to identify their views and needs, conveying them within the humanitarian sector.

Displacement often incurs radical change; people lose their community structures, social networks and homes, which can have physical, psychological and

³³Jordans and Sharma (2004), pp. 171–180.

³⁴Reiffers et al. (2013).

spiritual effects. Further, people may experience loss of identities and roles, posing both challenges and opportunities to them.

Being displaced places many challenges on families, such as the Bhutanese families who have resided in camps in Nepal for more than 20 years. Resettlement programmes to third countries can provide solutions for some families. However, many families are also challenged by leaving their homes again, by processes that tear apart families and by relocating (elderly) people into new place contexts where everything is different and a sense of belonging needs to be found again.

An anthropological perspective of the humanitarian sector stresses that decisions on aid should more often be placed in the hands of aid recipients, in consultation with beneficiaries, instead of decisions about them. With that, it is essential to aim for capacity building to be driven from the grassroots structures themselves.

Ethnographic research and views can support people in getting back to managing their lives again. Anthropologists and affected people can provide a view of the situation and perspective of people in humanitarian settings, which is of paramount importance for the appropriate design and implementation of any humanitarian interventions.

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