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REFUGEES: WORLDWIDE DISPLACEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

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[Editors' Note: This article offers an anthropological perspective on one of the international community's most pressing moral and ethical dilemmas today: the massive forced displacement of large numbers of people to escape war, persecution, and natural disasters. The article offers definitions, analyses of causes and effects, case studies, and a discussion of international policies and dilemmas.]

Throughout history people have been forced to flee their homes in order to escape war, persecution, and natural disasters. The twentieth century has witnessed massive forced migrations. Political conflicts have been motivated by the widespread growth of ethno-nationalism, resistance to colonial rule, and the "Cold War" confrontation between capitalism and communism. Economic processes such as impoverishment due to development policies and global environmental degradation also have resulted in widespread population displacement.

Forced migration has been particularly affected by the emergence of "total warfare" in which non-combatants have increasingly borne the brunt of wartime violence. According to the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, 95% of the casualties suffered in World War I were combatants and only 5% were civilians, whereas in most current conflicts civilians often account for 90% or more of wartime casualties. Technology has also greatly increased the destructiveness of armed conflict thus causing greater displacement to occur.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

While attempts to assist uprooted people occurred throughout history, only in the twentieth century did international standards and institutions for protecting displaced people emerge. The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention defines "refugees" as "individuals who are outside their own country and are unable to return as a result of a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a social group." Refugees are entitled to safe asylum, education, and medical care, and to not be repatriated against their will. The rights of refugees also include freedom of thought, of movement, and freedom from torture or degrading treatment. The convention defines the duties of states to uphold these rights as a matter of international law. It also requires refugees to uphold the laws of their host countries and to be non-combatants.

It is important to understand that displacement is a process that includes but is not limited to those who meet the legal criteria for "refugee" status (often called "Convention Refugees"). In fact, the vast majority of those who are forcibly uprooted from their homes do not fit the criteria that would allow them to be categorized as "Convention Refugees." Some are internally displaced persons within their own countries (known as "IDPs"). Others have been forced to move for reasons other than those specified in the convention, such as natural disasters, environmental degradation, or extreme economic duress. The number of those who are displaced worldwide is thus three or four times larger

than the number of those who are officially designated as "Convention refugees." Those without "Convention refugee" status are not entitled to the legal protections that the Convention affords.

Moreover, those adversely affected by displacement often include people other than forced migrants themselves—such as the host populations in the impoverished third world nations where most uprooted people are re-settled. Thus the majority of those who suffer as a result of displacement do not benefit from the legal rights and entitlements afforded to "Convention Refugees" by international law.

Complex Causes and Effects

Displacement is one of humanity's harshest and most traumatizing conditions and thus constitutes one of the international community's most pressing moral and ethical dilemmas for the 21st century. Armed conflict has persisted sometimes for decades in many places throughout the world such as Angola, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Kurdistan, Colombia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Kashmir. In such contexts, displacement is not an exceptional interruption in the flow of "normal" life. Instead it has become an integral feature of social life that shapes all aspects of everyday routine. Anthropologists who strive to understand how social and cultural life are organized in these societies must examine how displacement affects many different dimensions of social life, including subsistence strategies, household formation, gender relations, and national identity.

In my own work with Mozambicans who fled their country's civil war, fifteen years of displacement resulted in radical changes in the way residence and marriage were organized. While leaving their wives and children in safe areas within Mozambique, many men migrated to South Africa to avoid being conscripted by the military. Because the war persisted for so long, many of these men eventually constituted second households by also marrying South African women. Although polygyny (men having multiple wives) was already a feature of these men's society, it had never before been "transnationalized" in this way. In this case long-term displacement created a new form of transnational community in which households, kinship networks, and economic strategies spanned

international borders. This form of social organization had not existed before the war but persisted after it.

Over the last three decades social scientists and policy-makers have begun to recognize refugees as more than simply the unfortunate by-products of conflict. They have started to study how displacement and forced migration affect broader processes of social change and international security. Some of the issues and phenomena that affect displacement and are, in turn, influenced by refugees are development, demographic change, immigration, ethno-nationalism, public health, the environment, and conflict resolution. In the social sciences anthropologists have played a leading role in investigating the causes, organization, and effects of displacement and have focused, in particular, on how displacement affects social relations, organizations, and identities.

Causes of Displacement

Typically those fleeing wars and political violence have been designated "involuntary migrants" as distinguished from "voluntary migrants," a term reserved for those who migrate primarily to improve their economic situation. Increasingly anthropologists have questioned the sharpness of the distinction between political and economic motives for migration by showing that political conflict and economic well-being are often closely related. Researchers have pointed out that people who migrate because their economies or subsistence environment have been devastated by war are also "involuntary migrants," even if they have not been directly targeted by military violence. In places like the Sudan or Ethiopia, governments have forbidden the distribution of food aid in insurgent areas in an effort to starve populations thought to be harboring enemy troops.

Wars also can produce forced migration by constricting the options that people have for coping with adverse environmental conditions. During times of famine in Mozambique, rural peasants traditionally coped with food shortages by temporarily moving to urban centers where they could find short-term work, enabling them to purchase food. However, during the Mozambican civil war, the fact that the government held most of the urban areas while the

insurgency held rural areas made it virtually impossible to safely transit back and forth between the two. Intense drought conditions resulted in massive forced migration across international borders because the political conditions of the war impeded traditional mechanisms for coping with environmental hardship. Such examples demonstrate how economic, environmental, and political processes can be complexly interrelated in ways that make it difficult to reasonably distinguish "political" from "economic" motives, or migration as either "voluntary" or "involuntary."

Political processes such as nationalism and state-building can result in different forms of displacement. The Indonesian government has pursued a policy of forcibly relocating many of its citizens of the dominant ethnic group on the main island of Java to outlying islands in an attempt to influence the ethnic balance of power and cultural practices of ethnic minorities. This policy of "transmigration" is a deliberate attempt to build a unified national identity by "Javanizing" ethnic minorities. Unsurprisingly this policy has aggravated ethnic tensions and resulted in violent conflict that has produced displacement in its own right.

Development initiatives are another major cause of displacement. Colonial development projects often displaced tens or even hundreds of thousands of people to make room for settlers (as in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mexico, and the United States) or to complete projects such as building massive dams. American anthropologist Elizabeth Colson has conducted one of the most important studies of the long-term social effects of development-induced displacement in her fifty years of research on the Gwembe Tonga in Zambia. The Tonga were displaced as the result of a dam project. The ongoing construction of the massive Three Gorges Dam on China's Yellow River provides a contemporary example of a major development project that will eventually displace up to 10 million people.

Economic and applied anthropologists also have shown how prevailing macro-economic policies such as "structural adjustment" can affect social and political environments in ways that produce forced relocation. Structural adjustment economic policies generally oblige governments to reduce their public

expenditures, often resulting in the loss of jobs and public services. These policies also can produce cost-of-living increases as governments stop subsidizing the cost of food or other basic amenities. Anthropologist James Ferguson demonstrates the consequences of such policies in Zambia where people who have worked their entire lives in urban areas have been forced to relocate to less expensive rural areas and to pursue unfamiliar agricultural subsistence strategies.

More recently, environmental degradation also has been identified as a major cause of forced migration. Researchers working in Bangladesh and Africa coined the term "environmental refugees" to refer to those displaced because of environmental degradation or natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions. Although it is caused by natural events such as these, environmental displacement also is influenced by social, political, and economic factors. People who are economically and politically marginalized are more likely to have to live in areas vulnerable to catastrophic events and are thus more likely to become environmental refugees. Research is just beginning to consider the potential effects of worldwide environmental trends such as global warming on the potential future displacement of such marginal populations as those bordering the Sahel in Africa.



Effects of Displacement

Displacement has a broad range of political, economic, social, and psychological effects, which anthropologists and other social scientists have begun to focus their research attention on. The experience of displacement, particularly when it is prolonged, often leads to the forging of socio-political consciousness and national political identity. Millions of Palestinians, Rwandese, and Afghanis have been living in camps or other forms of exile for decades. In such cases, multiple generations actually have been born and grown up in conditions of displacement. Contrary to prevalent media depictions of refugees as merely passive victims of larger circumstances, anthropologists working with these populations have demonstrated how the experience of prolonged displacement can motivate people to politically organize and react against the perceived causes of their displacement. Not surprisingly, refugee camps in Palestine and Afghanistan have proven to be fertile recruiting grounds for military groups fighting against Israel and in successive conflicts in Afghanistan. Both the Taliban and the earlier anti-Soviet mujaheddin movements, which the Taliban ousted, originated within Afghan refugee communities in Pakistan.

Anthropologists working with refugees in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Macedonia, Turkey, Rwanda and Burundi also have examined how national political stability can be affected when massive population movements influence ethnic composition and balances of power within host countries. For example, during the international coalition's war against Iraq in 1990, Turkey feared that a massive influx of ethnic Kurds from Iraq would further strengthen the Kurdish resistance movement within its own borders. Turkey, therefore, refused entry to displaced Kurds attempting to flee the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The rapid arrival of large numbers of destitute and desperate refugees usually has significant, though often contradictory and socially differentiated economic impacts on host populations. Researchers in East Africa have demonstrated how the arrival of large numbers of refugees may drive down the price of labor in host areas. This may provide a boon, on the one hand, to more wealthy segments of the host

population who are in a position to hire labor. However, it may also drive down wages and increase competition for jobs with other poorer locals who also subsist by providing labor. Similarly massive population influxes may increase pressure on scarce resources such as land or fuel. The influx of Mozambican refugees into Zimbabwe during the 1980s eventually produced a popular backlash because there was already stiff competition for land within Zimbabwe, and Mozambicans were occupying more and more of it. Such effects can increase socio-economic differentiation (i.e. increasing the gap between the rich and poor) within host populations, creating new forms of social tension and conflict. These socio-economic impacts are particularly pronounced in many third world countries that bear the brunt of the world's refugee burden, and in which poverty may already be widespread.

These impacts are likely to be further pronounced if displaced populations do not settle in visible refugee camps or receive official assistance but rather "self-settle" in the midst of host populations. Anthropologists working in Africa and Latin America have provided most of the few in-depth examinations of these so-called "self-settled" refugees. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, there was evidence that many self-settled refugees were able to successfully integrate into local host communities in rural border areas, usually by drawing on extended kinship or ethnic ties that spanned these borders. Recent work by anthropologists points to the fact that an increasing number of the self-settled seem to be establishing themselves in major urban centers rather than in rural areas bordering their countries of origin. While it is clear that the self-settled comprise a majority of the displaced (some estimates range as high as 80% of all displaced), exact estimates are hard to come by. Since the majority of these individuals are technically illegal immigrants, they have a vested interest in concealing their national origins in order to avoid deportation.

Anthropologists have been particularly successful and pioneering in working with self-settled refugees because their fieldwork methods allow them better access to these populations. Through long-term interaction with their subjects, anthropologists are

able to build stronger, more trusting relationships than are possible through other methods. This report also provides for a deeper and more holistic understanding of the complex social effects of displacement. Many anthropologists have consequently become strong advocates for the refugee populations with whom they work. The precarious legal status of many displaced people and their traumatic histories force anthropologists to grapple with difficult ethical dilemmas and with the challenge of how best to protect their research collaborators.

Anthropologists have increasingly examined how displacement is a highly gendered process that reorganizes social relations and identities. In many refugee situations women and children comprise over 80% of the refugee population. There is also evidence that wartime violence and displacement often have more negative economic and social effects on women than on men. For example, refugee women are usually more vulnerable to predatory sexual violence than refugee men. A great deal of policy research has attempted to identify the most "vulnerable groups" within displaced populations, such as women-headed households, children, the elderly, and those with disabilities, in order to identify ways to provide greater assistance and protection.

Anthropologists have shown that culturally-specific social systems play an important role in constituting vulnerability. Vulnerability is not merely a function of biological factors such as age or sex. It is primarily related to the ways in which social roles bind people to certain obligations and entitle them to certain rights. Social roles vary widely across different cultures. In my own work in Mozambique, I was able to show organizations assisting refugees that their assumptions that elderly widows were more vulnerable than elderly widowers was incorrect because it did not account for the way the local kinship system worked. In this particular social context, elderly women almost always were supported not by their husbands but by their sons and his wife or wives. Elderly men, on the other hand, depended on their wives for support. The loss of a spouse was therefore much more consequential for elderly men than for elderly women.



Lubkemann with Mozambicans in South Africa

Displacement also may have profound effects on the gendered distribution of labor, on the way gendered relationships like marriage or parentage are organized, and on how gendered and other social roles change in terms of the obligations and rights these imply. Thus, for example, in rural Mozambique, displacement had profoundly disempowering effects for women. It reconfigured gender relations and the social institution of marriage in very detrimental ways for many women. Displaced women who resettled in refugee camps were unable to engage in subsistence agriculture which was their primary economic activity and the basis of their social influence within their households. On the other hand, many men were able to continue their primary economic activity—labor migration. The fact that many of these migrant men took additional wives in their migration destinations also disempowered their Mozambican wives. These wives who remained behind in refugee camps found it difficult to claim their share of their husbands' earnings. Conversely, in other contexts, such as among Eritrean refugees settled in Canada, women have been able to assume new social roles previously unavailable to them, resulting in their relative empowerment vis-à-vis Eritrean men.

The experience of having to adapt to an unfamiliar social and cultural environment can make forced migration and resettlement particularly diffi-

cult experiences. It is important to realize that displaced people arrive in new societies with their own sets of values and aspirations. The maintenance of particular cultural differences may become crucial to refugee constructions of meaningful identities and life strategies in novel social environments. For example, several anthropologists who have worked with Hmong refugees from Cambodia in the U.S. have noted the critical role that religion has continued to play in organizing these refugee communities and in constituting a sense of social identity.

Differences between the cultural norms of refugees and those of host societies concerning appropriate codes of social behavior sometimes create tensions between refugees and the communities in which they have resettled. Exposure to new value systems and cultural norms can also generate conflict within refugee communities and households themselves. Men and women, or different generations, often have divergent views about which features of their own original culture should be maintained and which from the new host society should be adapted as their own. Anthropologists working with Afghani and Laotian refugees in the U.S. and with the Palestinians in Germany have taken particular note of intergenerational differences in how parental authority is regarded. For example, anthropologist Dima Abdulrahim has documented the disputes that arise within Palestinian refugee households in Germany over whether or not fathers should have the right to dictate whom their daughters should marry.

Those studying other groups such as the Sudanese or Ethiopians in the U.S., the Mozambicans in South Africa, or the Burundians in Tanzania have noted how internal tensions and arguments often emerge over changing norms in the way gender roles and relationships are defined. In my own work I found that Mozambican women who joined their husbands in South Africa often observed that there was a greater sharing of domestic tasks by men in South African households. They consequently began to question the gendered division of labor within their own households. Mozambican men resisted the erosion of their privileges. In many cases they eventually went out of their way to avoid having their Mozambican wives join them in South Africa in order to prevent them from exposure to new norms.

Effects on Health

The psychological effects of exposure to violence and displacement are attracting increased attention from mental health experts, including medical and psychological anthropologists. The trauma of displacement can make adaptation to new and unfamiliar social and cultural environments particularly difficult. Anthropologists have demonstrated how different cultural beliefs play a central role in the way individuals interpret and cope with traumatic experiences such as displacement. The challenges of adaptation may be further intensified by the uncertainty and insecurity of temporary status or a sense of being highly constrained in a refugee camp environment. Prolonged dependence on aid in long-term refugee camp situations can lead to diminished self-esteem and a sense of dependency and disempowerment.

One of the most fruitful recent areas of collaboration between researchers and organizations assisting refugees has been in understanding and improving humanitarian reactions to the health problems faced in complex emergencies. The catastrophic mortality rates in the Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) sounded a wake-up call within the humanitarian community that has since sparked greater collaboration with the CDC (Center for Disease Control), as well as research and training programs on refugee health at leading schools of public health such as Johns Hopkins and Columbia University.

In 1999 the National Research Council Committee on Population created a Roundtable on Forced Migration to assess and encourage research on the demographic effects of displacement. Research on refugee mortality and morbidity represents only the first step in a much needed examination of the broader demographic effects of forced migration. It is worth noting that Africa is the continent with the greatest number of IDPs (internally displaced persons), the world's highest fertility rates, fastest urban growth, and highest rates of HIV. Remarkably, however, the relationship of forced migration to these important demographic processes has scarcely been examined to date.

The Anthropology of Humanitarian Action

Anthropologists working on refugees have focused largely on how displacement affects and is affected by social organization. Increasingly many of us see the necessity of also focusing on the larger political-economic systems and organizations that intervene in the lives of the displaced. The humanitarian regime consists of those organizations that assist or interact with displaced populations, the systemic relationships among these organizations, and their institutionalized set of practices. The anthropology of humanitarian action focuses on the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape those practices and the relationships of power among those organizations.

The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), created in 1950 after World War II, following post war reconstruction in Europe, continues to play the leading role in international efforts to assist and protect refugees and displaced people worldwide. Throughout the last decade of the twentieth century, the number of "persons of concern" to the UNHCR rose from 14.92 million to 22.26 million.

Regional international bodies such as the OAU's (Organization of African Unity) and the OAS (Organization of American States) extended the definition of refugee to include individuals and groups forced to flee their countries because of conditions of generalized violence and insecurity rather than because of individual-specific persecution. At best these criteria only have been applied within these regions. Unfortunately countries throughout the world increasingly have followed the lead of Western European and North American governments in pursuing more restrictive asylum granting policies that limit the number of refugees allowed to settle within their borders.

Such policies are a reaction by the governments of industrialized nations to two decades of rapid growth in immigration. This flow has been caused by people fleeing deteriorating political and economic conditions in developing countries such as Haiti, Mexico, and Nigeria and in former communist bloc countries, such as Romania and Nicaragua. Such people come seeking greater opportunity in the West.

The globalization of mass communication has increased awareness of the opportunities available in many industrialized nations. The development of international transportation systems has facilitated transcontinental travel. These aspects of globalization have played an important role in motivating international migration.

The UNHCR only can advise individual states on how to interpret the Refugee Convention's criteria when applying these to individuals seeking asylum within their own borders. Consequently governments always have been able to restrict whom they accept as refugees in ways that serve their political and economic interests. Fears of the negative economic effects of excessive immigration have led industrialized nations to interpret the convention's criteria in ever more restrictive terms. Thus, for example, in several cases in North America during the 1990s, courts recognized that asylum seekers fled their countries of origin because of a legitimate fear of violence but still denied them refugee status, because it was determined that they were being persecuted for "non-political" reasons (such as sexual orientation or gender).

Governments also have developed ways to provide temporary relief for those fleeing insecurity without incurring the legal obligations implied in granting "convention refugee" status. Throughout Europe and North America, different forms of TPS (Temporary Protection Status) have emerged that provide an interim solution to populations fleeing generalized violence until it is safe for them to return. Initially put forth as a short-term measure, TPS does not usually provide the social benefits to which refugees are entitled, such as education and employment or the possibility of seeking asylum or permanent resettlement. However, the prolonged insecurity and challenging conditions in countries such as Liberia and Guatemala have led to annual renewals of TPS status in the U.S. for displaced populations from these countries for up to a decade.

My work with Liberian refugees in the U.S. has shown how the TPS status has had mixed effects. On the one hand, it has constrained people's economic mobility and social integration into American society. The constant uncertainty over whether TPS will

be renewed serves as a disincentive for longer-term social investment in their host communities. On the other hand, the threat of TPS termination has mobilized Liberian community members around a common cause as they lobby for permanent residence status. This has allowed them to transcend longstanding ethnic and socio-economic divisions that played a significant role in causing the Liberian civil war in the first place.

In the most extreme cases, industrialized nations have resorted to more severe measures to prevent the influx of forced migrants. European Union states have refused entry to asylum seekers on the grounds that they already had passed through "safe countries" en route from their countries of origin. Heavy fines have been imposed on airlines that transport asylum seekers who do not already have visas. Even more draconian and legally dubious measures have involved intercepting refugees before they arrive on host country shores and turning them back without asylum hearings. This was the U.S. government's policy towards thousands of Haitian boat people who sought to land on American shores during the 1990s. This package of increasingly restrictive measures represent a policy of "containment," often described as an attempt to create "fortress" regions that make access to forced and other migrants more difficult.

Such policies have not stemmed the rising tide of forced migrants. Instead they have produced greater levels of clandestine immigration into industrialized nations. Moreover they have placed the economic burden of displacement on other less-industrialized countries, which are even more adversely affected by massive refugee influxes. Meanwhile the levels of financial assistance that industrialized nations provide to international organizations and developing nations to assist refugees also has diminished. Unsurprisingly, the willingness of governments everywhere to host refugees has eroded. In this environ-

ment refugees throughout the world have experienced rising levels of violence and hostility from host populations and governments. Even governments that have long proven to be generous hosts to large refugee populations such as Iran and Tanzania undertook large-scale forced repatriations during the late 1990s and closed off their borders against further refugee flows.

The restriction of asylum also increasingly reduces the options for the displaced in ways that subject them to greater risk of violence. One example is the creation of so-called 'safe zones' within conflict areas as an alternative to allowing refugees to cross international borders. European Union countries already overwhelmed by massive population influxes that resulted from the fall of the Berlin Wall urged the creation of "safe zones" in Bosnia-Herzegovina because of their reluctance to receive refugees from the former Yugoslavia. However, insufficient military means for ensuring their safety led to notorious calamities in 1995 when the safe zones in Srebrenica and Zepa were overrun, and thousands of Bosnian civilians were massacred.

Restrictive immigration policies do not prevent forced migration because they fail to address the root causes of migration—namely the precarious political and economic conditions that compel people to move. The growing worldwide reluctance to accept refugee resettlement and the increasing trend towards civil (as opposed to interstate) warfare has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of IDPs worldwide. The appointment in 1992 of the first UN Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons represented a critical step in institutionalizing international concern for this issue.

The nature of post-Cold War conflicts presents considerable new challenges to organizations that want to assist the displaced. Many civil wars—such as those in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda—have been



driven by ethno-nationalist sentiments aiming to create ethnically homogeneous countries. In these conflicts military forces have directly targeted civilian populations in an effort to eliminate or forcibly uproot minorities—a process called “ethnic cleansing.” In such cases humanitarian efforts to assist the displaced do not serve the interest of warring parties and are often hindered. Long-term solutions to the displacement produced by ethnically-driven violence may be particularly difficult to find. Repatriation attempts that bring ethnic groups back into contact often spark further violence, “revenge killings,” and new displacement—as was most recently the case in Kosovo.

In other situations warring parties have developed an interest in the persistence of conflict. The “blood diamond trade” in Sierra Leone and narco-trafficking in Colombia are cases in which the targeting of populations and ongoing displacement help perpetuate the conditions of violence, instability, and insecurity upon which illegal profitable activities thrive. Finally, in places such as Somalia, humanitarian aid itself has been increasingly appropriated by combatants. In these cases, ironically, assistance is transformed into a means for supporting the conflict that is producing displacement in the first place!

The problems of IDPs and the fact that fortress policies do not successfully contain forced migrations has led the international community to consider how to prevent displacement in the first place, by addressing its root causes. In the 1990s the international community took unprecedented steps by intervening in the internal affairs of Iraq and Serbia (Kosovo) in order to protect displaced people but also to prevent forced migration flows across international borders.

Ultimately, however, there is still reluctance on the part of most states and international organizations to challenge the principle of national sovereignty by interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. In conflicts that have produced large numbers of IDPs such as in Sierra Leone, Iraq, Chechnya, Colombia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, assisting displaced populations has presented new challenges to policy-makers. The UN is an organization premised on the sovereignty of its members. Moreover the

UNHCR can only act at the request and with the permission of sovereign governments. These realities have made it difficult for the UNHCR to provide assistance in some of these cases. The international NGO (non-governmental organizations) community remains divided on this issue. Some organizations have taken positions in cases such as Sudan and Sierra Leone that clearly prioritize assistance at the expense of considerations of national sovereignty.

The Role of NGOs

Over the last three decades international NGOs, including CARE, OXFAM, the International Rescue Committee, Doctors Without Borders, Catholic Relief Services, and Save the Children, have come to play a pivotal role in organizing and providing assistance to displaced and war-affected people worldwide. Many of these organizations work with UNHCR, doing much of the operational work on the ground. Increasingly they have influenced policy-makers and national governments by bringing the plight of displaced people to the attention of the global media, as in the recent cases of Rwanda and Kosovo.

Policy makers and humanitarian organizations have increasingly moved beyond merely providing assistance to protecting those assisted and those assisting from violence. Some organizations in the international humanitarian community have started to place a greater emphasis on promoting the human rights of the displaced. Thus the NGO, Doctors Without Borders—recipient of the 2000 Nobel Peace Prize—publicly denounces human rights violations,



even if this insults a government and thereby prevents them from carrying out assistance activities. In some situations in which assistance has been diverted to serve the interests of combatants (such as in the Rwandan refugee camps in Eastern Zaire), or where human rights violations have been particularly grave (such as the Taliban's mistreatment of women in Afghanistan), some NGOs have ceased their assistance activity altogether. Other organizations such as the International Red Cross have chosen not to comment on human rights violations and remain politically neutral in order to continue providing assistance, even if it is diverted or has unintended and undesired consequences.

Humanitarian Action

Anthropologists have increasingly examined the activities of the organizations that provide assistance to refugees. Barbara Harrell-Bond's landmark study, *Imposing Aid* (1986), confronted humanitarian organizations with research demonstrating that their activities were often more responsive to external pressures such as funding and inter-organizational rivalry than to the needs of the refugees themselves. My own work with the Humanitarianism and War Project showed how NGOs in Mozambique are primarily accountable to the interests of the government agencies that fund them rather than to the people who receive their services. As a result, decisions are often made that do not create sustainable solutions to the problems that are most important to locals. Instead assistance often serves to promote the international visibility or political agendas of donors.

Anthropologists also have shown that humanitarian assistance that does not create sustainable solutions or use local capacities causes considerable harm rather than helping refugee or other war-affected populations. In Mozambique my work demonstrated that the unwillingness of modern medical doctors to work with traditional medical practitioners created local suspicion and hostility that proved detrimental to public health. Locals tended to visit traditional medical practitioners first because they were less expensive. Since these practitioners had been alienated by the hospital doctors, they rarely referred sick patients to hospitals but instead would refer them only

to other traditional medical practitioners. Consequently, patients often would arrive at hospitals only after a disease had progressed to a degree at which the costs for curing it were exceedingly high.

There have been important, recent collaborative attempts to improve humanitarian action and advocacy. The establishment in the mid-1990s of INTERACTION—a coalition of over 165 associations involved in humanitarian work—and the SPHERE initiative, to establish a voluntary charter with standards and ethical principles for humanitarian action, represent important developments in this direction.

Refugees and displacement are increasingly recognized as only one aspect of a set of interrelated political, economic, and military problems constituting what have come to be called "complex emergencies." Humanitarian assistance is only one component necessary for the solution of these challenges and by itself cannot solve the problems that displaced people face. International humanitarian assistance continues to gradually expand in scope to provide assistance to all populations affected by displacement (including IDPs, hosts, and even those left behind by forced migrants in devastated war zones—the "displaced in place"). However, it has become increasingly evident that humanitarian action only can be effective if the more fundamental political and economic roots of displacement and conflict are addressed. Anthropologists will continue to play an important role in studying the experiences of the displaced and the effects of displacement. However, they also have an important role to play in understanding the international political systems within which displacement occurs and in identifying the social factors that constrain and shape responses to displacement.

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[A list of journals on refugees is included in the museum's web version of this article.]