

Chapter 1

Dispossession, Placelessness, Home and Belonging: An Outline of a Research Agenda

Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

'Rethinking Displacement' is about the ways in which mobile subjects, shifting across borders and boundaries, experience their dislocation, recreate their homes and adjust and adapt to new places, and in the process construct new ways of thinking about places that give meaning to individuals and communities. By privileging the human experience of place and placelessness through grounded research, this volume contests the compartmentalised treatment in studies of displacement into exclusive categories such as 'development-induced' and 'internal' and 'external'. In the contemporary global order that is characterised by extensive and rapid movements of people, there is a need to explore the multitude of interconnected factors causing displacements that compel people to move, within their homelands or across borders. This book addresses this need by bringing together a critical examination of historical and contemporary accounts of the displaced through a variety of approaches ranging from ethnographic and qualitative research methods to document analysis and literary interpretations. We emphasise that although the forms and conditions of mobility are highly divergent, the lived experiences offer commonalities that encourage us to dwell upon and chart a new path in displacement studies. Each contribution to this volume adds new insights into the different configurations of displacement and placement, and offers fresh interpretations of forced migration and dislocation in today's rapidly changing world.

This collection of essays also demonstrates that everyday experiences of displacement and resettlement can potentially connect the various, often oppositional, strands that currently define this academic field. A number of researchers have challenged such categorisations, including researchers from the Global South and those who aim to engage with policymakers. Chimni (1998, 2009), for example, has consistently critiqued the imperialist nature of the 'Refugee Studies' project. He observes that the theory and conceptual framing of this interdisciplinary field has become the exclusive domain of scholars in the Global North, and that a sustained postcolonial or feminist critique has been conspicuous by its absence. This point is echoed in Scalettaris' (2007) call for attention to the inherent analytical weakness of defining people into fixed categories such as refugees, migrants, internally-displaced people, and so on. In order to carry out a rigorous analysis, this is a dangerous trap best avoided. Turton (2003, 2004) has reiterated that in trying to be 'relevant', the blind

adoption by academics of the categories and concepts employed by policymakers is likely to be 'downright unhelpful'. The questions of culture and history, and the personal narratives of home and the everyday shaping of belonging must never be elided in framing migrants by simplistic discourses of documentation, status and integration (Binaisa 2011: 4). Even the World Bank analyst Cernea (1996) observes that the literature on refugees coexists with that on 'oustees' or on 'development caused involuntary displacement', but hardly ever communicates or mutually enriches each other: 'Concepts and propositions are not inter-linked, and empirical findings are rarely compared and integrated' (Cernea 1996: 294). For instance, notions such as global and local mobilities, or displacement/placement, have increasingly appeared as interdependent categories as contemporary theorists such as Nolin (2006) have attempted to transform concepts of locality, community, and nationality. Adding conceptual depth to this critique, Ahmed et al. (2003: 1) observe '[b]eing grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached'. Indeed, both place and placelessness come to assume quite different dimensions when seen through the lens of subjective experiences of place and the spatial practices of place-making. These experiences of connecting and reconnecting to places then opens up the space to contest the notion that mobility is ungrounded or that homes are unconnected to change, to relocation, and/or uprooting.

One of the arguments this volume puts forth is that the boundaries of poverty-induced migration, development-induced displacement, and forced mobilities often intersect and are, hence, blurred. This overlapping is particularly so in the context of late modernity when place and personhood do not seem to be bound up and where there exists a 'generalised sense of homelessness' (Said 1979: 18, quoted in Kibreab 1999: 385). The resultant topophilia, defined by Tuan (1974: 4) as 'the affective bond between people and place or setting', cuts across the categories, boundaries and artificial space-time divisions emblematic of the current age. Epistemologically, a move beyond fixed categories is possible through privileging, in one's analysis, the human experience of this affective bond between people and places. In this context, Cresswell and Merriman (2011: 5–10) undertake this task by producing critical analyses of practices, spaces and subjects of mobilities; their 'mobile explorations' focusing on the human subject and their experiences of place. Binaisa's analytical framework (2011), on the other hand, privileges origins – the interstitial points at the transnational social field; the circulations, dynamism and fluidity that flow through transnational practices across these social spaces; and lastly, the networks and ties to think through notions of 'home' and 'belonging' for the displaced. The epistemological shift is possible through the recognition of forced and economic migrations as closely related and often interchangeable expressions of global inequality and societal crisis (as observed by Castles 2003: 17). The complex processes of decolonisation and increased integration of the world economy have set in motion large-scale population movements that render meaningless distinct categories of dislocations. It is through the deconstruction of various bureaucratic categories that both the

diversity and similarity of people's experiences can be exposed. These categories often render invisible gendered experiences of forced migration, which in turn have been compounded by neoliberal globalisation. Neoliberalism, with its focus on structural adjustment programmes, has resulted in reduced social spending, leading to impoverishment and eradication of social, welfare, and educational provisions to people in developing nations. Resistance to poverty cannot be separated from political resistance and persecution; thus, turning the political refugee into an economic migrant. In addition, millions of people are displaced each year as a result of various development programmes and policies.

Furthermore, the persistence of stable categories of the displaced as internal and external marginalises feminist analysis and gender politics. That gendered power relations are played out in place and is not revealed unless a diversity of disciplinary approaches and subject matters, seemingly unconnected and from widely separated parts of the world, are brought forth together. In attempting to highlight the fluidity and diversities of displacement experiences, this volume contests the universalisations of 'home' and belonging, 'migrants' and 'refugees'. A feminist reinterpretation also necessitates the rethinking of whose experiences are privileged and why. Indeed, women are underrepresented in refugee determination processes, in claims for asylum and in resettlement (Hyndman 2010). For this reason, there is an urgent need to explore women's shared experiences as refugees, as displaced and as mobile subjects. Feminist analyses, such as the one by Walton-Roberts and Pratt (2005), through testimonies based on extensive fieldwork, can unsettle the clubbing together of all transnational women into the simplistic category of 'economic migrants' and problematise the cultural politics of 'recovering' migrant experiences in quotidian ways. Moreover, to say that the experience of displacement demands a gendered analysis because the majority of displaced persons and refugees in the world are women and children, is only one side of the coin. Even in instances, as Bannerji (2010: 100–1) has shown, where men comprise those who actually *physically leave* one place for another, women redefine what the home comes to mean and what it means to belong to this contested site. This volume, thus, aims to also converse with the growing field of gendered politics of displacement.

The chapters in this book are, in most cases, based on ethnographic and empirical research carried out in countries across the Asia-Pacific region. They present multidisciplinary scholarship by bringing together diverse approaches, and engage in a dialogue with a number of separated 'fields' such as migration studies, refugee studies, transnationalism, and displacement studies. Paying particular attention to incorporating the voices of the dispossessed, they highlight the experiences of uprooting and resettlement of individual women and men. The chapters examine various forms of displacement that are taking place and uncover the causes underpinning forced movements of populations. They also demonstrate the difficulties associated with establishing the difference between environmental, economic, and political factors. They aim to show that the category 'environmental refugee' can obscure the very complex reasons underlying environmental disasters.

They highlight the relationship between forced migrations on the one hand and the chosen path of development followed by the state on the other.

One of the biggest challenges in analysing the experiences of the displaced is the ongoing tensions between highlighting the powerless status of victims, who are excluded and marginalised, and that of the valiant struggle underpinning contestation of their marginality. The contributors in this volume continually address these dualisms and lay emphasis on the agency of the displaced. While some chapters focus on aspects of suffering and injustice, others pay particular attention to the resilience and renewal of communities that were initially formed by forced relocation and victimhood. Therefore, the creative formation of diaspora and efforts to rebuild communities are a significant component of this volume.

Overview: Mobility as a Central Category in the Study of Displacement

In the contemporary global order, the systemic violence of modernity broadly and neoliberalism in particular against those who do not conform to their logics seems to be expanding. People are treated as infinitely moveable and uprootable, with displacement of people becoming an accepted by-product in the production of wealth and the creation of various forms of public order (Bauman 2004, Escobar 2003, Siu 2007). As this tendency gains pace and begins to command more attention from researchers, Malkki's (1995) insight is pertinent in that traditional analytic categories of 'refugee studies' are not sufficient to recognise the complex nature of the situations that give rise to displacement, the differences between them, and the differential effects they have. Significantly, it has been noted that the framing of mobile populations who flee violent situations as archetypal victims not only serves to obscure the agency of the displaced, but completely neglects the position of those who have been unable to flee – people whose mobility has been constrained (Lubkemann 2008, Malkki 2005). When we consider this in connection with the fact that the mobility of those who have been displaced is constrained in various ways – from experiences of discrimination and persecution by local populations to the rules and regulations imposed by nation states – movement becomes a key concept in analysing the situation of those who have been subject to this form of systemic violence. In considering factors such as the differential impacts of displacement on men and women, various factors lead to the confinement of displaced women to the domestic sphere, providing them with less access to employment and services through which they could improve their condition (Daley 1991, Meertens and Segura Escobar 1996, Manchanda 2004). The field of border studies conceptualises movement as involving both mobilities and entrapments. In this regard Cunningham and Heyman (2004) provide a number of important theoretical tools, which prove highly useful in understanding the experiences and opportunities available for those subject to displacement.

Lubkemann's (2008) consideration of 'involuntary immobility' provides an important starting point for this perspective. He begins with the observation

that most approaches to the study of displacement have brought only mobile populations into their analysis (2008: 456):

[A]n entire interdisciplinary subfield (most often termed ‘refugee studies’ or ‘forced migration studies’) has coalesced and developed around the largely unquestioned propositions that migration is a requisite aspect of ‘displacement’ (i.e. to be displaced one must always have moved) and that displacement is inevitably the product of movement under crisis conditions (i.e. if you migrate in a crisis context you will suffer displacement).

Lubkemann delinks migration from displacement in order to better understand their relationship. Drawing on the case of the Mozambique war, which resulted in significant displacement, he shows how forced migration did not always have the anticipated effects of meaning exclusively disempowerment and loss. Those who did not leave were confined to their villages by both government and insurgent forces. This not only had the obvious adverse consequence of exposing them to war, but the constrained mobility prevented access to agricultural lands. In the context of an intense drought, to rely solely on local food production made survival precarious. On the other hand, while female migrant populations were found to be adversely affected by being physically displaced, male migrants, many of whom had extensive prior experience as migrant labourers, did not find the process as unsettling, and indeed, found many new opportunities in their forced relocation – opportunities not typically associated with ‘displacement’, which is taken to mean only disempowerment and loss. Drawing on this example, Lubkemann points to the importance of investigating prior experiences of mobility in understanding impacts on migrants.

Modernity, Neoliberalism, and Displacement

Official discourses justifying displacement are often framed in the name of development. This raises some unique issues. Oliver-Smith (2009) highlights some of the unique features of development-induced displacement. Unlike the effects of war or natural disasters, development is not officially recognised in negative terms. Indeed, development is seen as something beneficial, being ‘in the national interest’, rendering invisibility to the sufferings of the displaced people. Furthermore, there is usually no possibility of returning home after such kind of a displacement. Development, as a cornerstone of the modernist project, raises key questions about the relationship between modernity, development, and displacement. This relationship has been explored from a number of angles, as is considered ahead.

In a review of literature on development and displacement from the 1990s and early 2000s, Dwivedi (2002) identifies two distinct schools of thought. The first, which he terms the ‘reformist-managerial’ school, views development as necessary, and displacement as an unintended but inevitable outcome of the development

process. The focus of research here is on the consequences of displacement, with the intention of developing procedural means by which the negative consequences of displacement can be removed or ameliorated. For the most part, this approach is favoured by planners and managers. This approach has been associated with the work of Cernea (2003). Dwivedi (2002) refers to the second school of thought on displacement as the 'radical-movementist' approach. This perspective, which often informs social movements against large development projects, views the phenomenon of displacement as a symptom of a development model in crisis and is the outcome of 'structural biases' within the dominant development paradigm.

On the 'reformist' end of the spectrum, Cernea (2003) has been developing a model for appropriate resettlement of the displaced that acknowledges the challenges faced by people in re-establishing themselves economically. He views displacement as a 'pathology of induced development' (2003: 37), but also recognises the indispensable nature of projects which produce great public benefits, and that these will inevitably, in some instances, involve the displacement of people. Further, he assumes that the numbers of such projects can only increase with increased populations and urbanisation. What he finds unacceptable is the fact that the situation most people face in the post-displacement context is impoverishment. One cannot justify projects in the name of poverty reduction, if they simultaneously give rise to poverty for others. Looking at the reasons why the overwhelming majority of displaced people end up in a worse condition than they were in prior to their displacement, Cernea finds that the principle of monetary compensation for losses in assets has proven to be grossly inadequate. It is not only the case that corruption and administrative flaws prevent people from receiving the compensation that is due to them, but also that a monetary payment cannot be considered equivalent to the loss in security of employment and of opportunities for growth that may have occurred had the displacement not taken place. As such, Cernea's alternative model places emphasis on the need to invest in the accelerated development of displaced communities, such that they have appropriate livelihood opportunities and are not left behind the wider economy in the time it takes for them to resettle.

Unlike Cernea, many scholars see development-induced displacement as not a merely accidental feature of 'development gone wrong', but as an inherent story of modernity in general and of neoliberalism in particular. This is explicitly discussed by Zygmunt Bauman in his book, *Wasted Lives* (2004). In this book, Bauman argues that the production of wasted humans occurs through displacement, an inevitable by-product of modernity. Thus even before today's globalisation, displacement has been a part of the project of colonial modernity. In its endeavour to create universal, rational order, modernity inevitably excludes those who are, for whatever reason, unable to conform to any designated place within that order. There will always be some people who cannot fit within the bureaucratic categories designed for the creation of social harmony. The issue is compounded by the modernist commitment to 'economic progress' (read, perpetual growth), which in its drive for ever greater efficiency renders traditional livelihoods redundant,

uncompetitive, and systematically devalued. In many instances, displacement is intrinsic to development itself. For example, in postcolonial India, the state pursued a dualistic development agenda comprising large-scale manufacturing and agricultural modernization together with the promotion of small-scale enterprises (Jha 2001). The initial strategy, influenced heavily by the Gandhian legacy of rural empowerment, was to be achieved through the creation of village committees or panchayats (Gupta 1989). Yet the valorisation of small-scale enterprises was to prove merely symbolic devoid of concrete programmes to achieve empowerment of millions of artisans as intended originally in the Gandhian framework. Ultimately, those who benefited were large-scale manufacturers in the modern sector, displacing those in traditional occupations. The outcasts of modernity and development are those dispelled from their traditional life-worlds. However, occupational displacement is an important area that is often overlooked in studies of forced relocations.¹

Rarely are the struggles of artisans to maintain a steady income from the production of traditional artisan goods satisfactorily met with by policies that ensure maintenance of their cultural heritage and identity through such crafts. Although governments in developing countries may attempt to assist small-scale enterprises, the structure behind the strategies implemented is usually insufficient in that artisans are unable to compete with large factories in the formal sector. Several case studies from countries such as Bolivia (Eversole 2006; Wethey 2005), India (Ganguly-Scrase 2013; Knorrirga 1999), Mexico (Cohen 1998; Cohen and Browning 2007), Ecuador (Koroykin 1999), and Costa Rica (Wherry 2006) demonstrate the necessity for appropriate support for traditional craft producers in the form of effective government policy. Without the implementation of structured, efficient strategies, artisans face the dangers of displacement becoming impoverished in both their economic livelihoods and cultural practices.

Bauman (2004) emphasises that the twin processes of creating a universal rational order and of economic progress are amplified within the context of neoliberal globalisation. In reducing the restraints on transnational corporations, states have lost their power to control and regulate their displacement-causing effects. The commitment to perpetual expansion of opportunities for profits has meant that workers have had to accept a position of permanent precariousness (a condition which Bauman had previously referred to as 'liquid modernity'), giving rise to a greater number and diversity of 'economic refugees'. States have become powerless to prevent displacement from occurring, and are left simply with the task of managing the flow of people that it causes. Bauman notes the irony that displaced people from developing countries, who are forced to seek asylum in more developed countries, often become targets of those suffering from the same form of precariousness. Having been associated with transnational criminals, refugees are also treated as effigies for crime phenomena, which are completely beyond the capacity of states to control. With reference to the contemporary

1 See Scrase, this volume.

condition, Bauman emphasises that while displacement has always been a part of modernity, neoliberal globalisation has made the issues it generates more serious and inescapable. Previously, modernist countries were able to push their outcasts into other parts of the world. Now, there are no longer any such 'dumping grounds'. There may be physical space into which people may be pushed, but there is no social 'outside' anymore, as modernity has become ubiquitous. Consequently, finding the means to manage the 'human excess' produced by modernity has become an increasingly prominent feature of governance.

Evidently, much of the development-induced displacement today is characterised by the changing nature of the state. Over the past two decades globalising economies have been characterised by market liberalisation in the form of free flow of goods and capital. Subsequently, nation states have implemented policies of privatisation and deregulation. In this volume we will address this theme in number of chapters.

However, one should be careful in treating neoliberalism's grasp as a homogenous reality, experienced in the same way in diverse contexts on the one hand, and on the other unquestioning acceptance of the 'powerlessness' of the modern state. Here, the respective insights of Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008) and Randeria (2003) assume critical significance. The former suggest that in some anthropological studies, neoliberalism has become a 'buzzword', used uncritically to describe an abstract and totalizing entity which imposes itself on populations in a relatively unproblematic way. Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008: 188) highlight the need to see neoliberalism instead as an ongoing process, and as one subject to various forms of limitation and resistance in being applied locally. They stress the fact that while neoliberalism may have 'totalising desires', these are never realized because the social, cultural, and economic terrains are always heterogeneous. Focusing on factors such as subaltern resistance, limits to the process of subjectivisation, and the irreducibility of existing institutions to neoliberal logics helps to situate and problematise the neoliberal project. Randeria (2003) notes in the context of neoliberalism, the state (particularly in the developing world) behaves as a 'cunning state', using its perceived powerlessness with respect to international institutions on the one hand, and pressure from its own constituents on the other, as a way of behaving cynically and acting in its own interests.

A major source of displacement in the contemporary world order is large-scale development projects. Gellert and Lynch (2003) outline the breadth of displacing effects that such 'mega-projects' can have. They emphasise that displacement should be seen not only in terms of those who are immediately displaced by the imposition of the project itself. Large projects also have major *physical* displacing effects, disrupting soil, hydrological flows, and biodiversity. These physical displacements may have considerable impacts on people's lives and livelihoods, giving rise to *secondary human displacements*. Since the physical effects of mega-projects are so difficult to determine in advance, secondary human displacements are somewhat unpredictable, and, thus, more difficult to manage. This situation is not helped by the fact that, as Gellert and Lynch note, those who are most

influential within decision-making organizations and groups are often informed by reductive modernist ideologies, which render invisibility to these secondary physical and human effects of development.

Fernandes (2007) has further explored some of the effects of these mega-development projects, with reference to several projects in India, but in particular the district of Singur, which had been the proposed site for the Tata Nano factory.² The evidence he has collected demonstrates that the number of people displaced by such large projects often greatly outweighs the number of employment opportunities created and that the jobs that are created are often inaccessible to the displaced themselves as they require technical skills (with training opportunities for the displaced rarely being offered). Looking at the situation of those who have been displaced, Fernandes finds that the average income post-displacement is approximately half that of pre-displacement, that people often have to resort to desperate and unsatisfying forms of employment, and that compensation (let alone rehabilitation) often never comes, or does not come in the appropriate form. Considering these factors the fact that the project at Singur was to take place on productive agricultural land, which, under previous legislation, could not be appropriated, Fernandes argues that the sole criterion for whether or not these mega-development projects are to go ahead has become their capacity to generate private wealth.

This example shows that, at least at a social level, the benefits of development-induced displacement are being outweighed by the costs, a point which a number of authors have explored. Escobar (2003) asserts that the gap between the system's need to displace people and its capacity to manage the effects of displacement, not just in terms of rehabilitation, but also to the provision of infrastructure and services to manage the movement of such great numbers of people, is increasing. The growth in this gap, he argues, is a function of neoliberalism, and its need for more intensive forms of accumulation. However, although he sees the gap increasing, Escobar does not see the problem of displacement itself as being particularly recent; rather, he stresses that it is an *inherent* aspect of European capitalist modernity, and not a merely incidental managerial failure. Capitalist modernity depends on the capacity to uproot populations in the endeavour to gain control over resources and respond efficiently to market demands. In order to achieve this, it is necessary that even in cases when people are not *physically* displaced, displacement still occurs *culturally*, by severing people's cultural connections to place and community, ensuring that they remain in a condition of being always potentially moveable.

² Following extensive agitations, however, Ratan Tata eventually withdrew his proposal for construction at Singur, instead turning to Gujarat. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7657005.stm>

Representation

Dwivedi (2002) suggests that the division within the literature has had considerable consequences in the way in which issues are framed and goals conceptualised. Where the 'reformist-managerial' camp does not investigate or question the assumptions of the dominant development paradigm, the 'radical-movementist' camp is openly critical of it, and advocates alternative development paradigms. Where the reformists are optimistic about the possibility of good rehabilitation outcomes, radicals typically view adequate rehabilitation as impossible. This openly critical stance often means that those taking a more radical stance are kept at a distance from policy and decision-making circles. Furthermore, Dwivedi suggests that when used as a means for informing policy, the 'reformist-managerial' approach impedes adequate conceptualisation of the holistic nature of the problem. Specifically, Cernea's top-down managerial approach to conceptualising 'risk' leads to a simplification of the experience of displaced people. Projected risks relate to loss of assets and sources of income without due sensitivity to more complex experiences of deprivation, such as lack of autonomy within the process and the loss of social bonds and traditional homelands, which are, strictly speaking, invaluable. This issue is compounded when, through lack of participation of local people, those who make the decision to take a risk are in a radically different position to those who bear the risk (a distinction made by the World Commission on Dams).

The consequence of this division in knowledge can be quite serious for displaced people themselves. This can be seen in Amita Baviskar's (2005) book *In the Belly of the River*. She explores the way in which the issues affecting those displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam project were articulated by the state and by activists within the Narmada Bachao Andolan [Save the Narmada River Movement], respectively. The state emphasised the necessity of development, the duty of the local people to accept the 'sacrifice' they would be making towards development and the official authorities that they would have to appeal to in order to achieve compensation. In contrast, the Andolan insisted that compensation would not be received or would not be adequate and that the project itself was based upon a flawed model of development, and, therefore, should be opposed outright. The people of the Narmada valley, caught between these two discourses, ultimately had no recourse but only to compensation, with the Andolan becoming a lengthy case in the Supreme Court to oppose the construction of the dam outright, rather than providing them with a voice in their struggle for rehabilitation.

Trade unions have often provided poor or contradictory representation for displaced people. In a study on migrant workers, Trimikliniotis et al. (2008) observe that trade unions in South Africa often express sympathy for migrant populations, while in practice support policies that restrict their open movement. Explaining this apparent contradiction, they suggest that unions saw the state and employers using migrants as a tool to divide the union movement, and to prevent this divisiveness, publically expressed their support for migrant labour.