

ISSUES OF FORCED RELOCATION AND MIGRATION OF CULTURAL GROUPS¹

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As a general theme, migration has received a great deal of attention by social scientists in the past few decades (Mangalam, 1968; Price and Sikes, 1974). Research emphasis has been placed on assessing adjustment patterns of persons migrating from rural to urban areas. Review of major themes in migration literature suggests that often the choice to move is voluntary, prompted by inadequate community services, dissatisfaction with living arrangements, or search for employment opportunities. Once settled, migrants undergo a series of adjustments that vary according to race, religious affiliation, ethnic background and socioeconomic status (Price and Sikes, 1974).

For purposes of discussion and illustration, it is important to specify classes of migration. Heberle (1955) prefers to classify migration as involuntary, voluntary and semivoluntary, appealing to a group's decision-making power as the main basis for movement. Petersen (1958) makes a useful distinction between

¹I am indebted to the following for their insightful criticisms and comments: Juris Draguns, Pennsylvania State University; Robert Kiste and Joseph Westermeyer both at the University of Minnesota; and Michael Wood and Michael Micklin at Battelle Human Affairs Research Centers.

"impelled" and "forced" migration--the former referring to migrants who retain the power to decide whether or not to leave and the latter when they do not have that power. It should be apparent that a thin line separates the two conditions. Groups may have decision-making power but often conditions exist where there is no alternative but to move. Furthermore, groups might be led to believe that they have decision-making rights when in fact the decision has already been made by an external agent.

The function or purpose of movement must be an additional consideration in delineating between impelled and forced migration. A number of factors affects forced or involuntary movements of groups, as follows:

- Groups may leave homelands simply because a dominant group no longer finds their presence desirable (cf. Rosenstock, 1955).
- Internal strife and war often lead to forced movements of people either out of fear or political orientations (Zubrzycki, 1959).
- Natural hazards such as earthquakes, droughts, volcanic eruptions, or seismic tidal waves force groups to move to areas of safety and never return because of damage and destruction to property (cf. Ketch, 1961).
- Urban poor have been forced to move to make room for demolition of substandard housing and buildings under the promise that new housing will lead to improvements in lifestyles and neighborhood conditions (cf. Fried, 1963).

- Rural families have been forced to move to make room for the construction of superhighways, hydroelectric dams, nuclear reactors, and fuel-related processing plants (cf. Chapin, 1954).

Forced movements of cultural groups may consist of isolated family units or may constitute a mass movement of an entire group. During the move families and significant segments of the group may be broken, in some cases never to reunite.

Removal of groups and their resettlement in a new environment, whether permanent or temporary, does not constitute a simple change of residence. The move itself is often a painful process as individuals may be leaving lands that have been occupied for generations by members of the same family. Sentiments, traditions and customs based on the nature of the region, lifestyles, to name a few, are broken and in some cases irretrievable. Most significant is the fact that groups undergo dramatic psychological changes which require development of new coping and adaptive strategies in order to survive in the new environment (Marris, 1974).

Voluntary migration requires similar adjustments. Individuals have made a commitment to move and usually recognize the need for developing new lifestyles and coping strategies. Moreover, voluntary migrants typically resign themselves to the notion that if their current lifestyle is to improve changes are necessary. A tacit commitment to change and to succeed is an underlying motive and tends to facilitate the total readjustment process.

Resettlement problems of forced migrants are confounded when groups move to regions where cultural traditions, customs, and language are different from their own. In most cases, resettlement areas are preselected by the activating agent, the group that initiates the movement. Underlying rationale for the choice is somewhat suspect and often reflects the interests of the activating agent rather than the migrant group. Migrants are often told that relocation to a culturally different region will facilitate their assimilation into a dominant group and hence improve their quality of life. Actually, activating agents tend to resort to the assimilationist argument when they want to obfuscate their responsibilities and commitments to the migrant group, as was the case with American Indians during the 1950's (Alfred, 1970; Ablon, 1971).

Studies have demonstrated that individual migrants have shown a high rate of psychiatric disorder.² Odegaard (1932) found a high degree of morbidity among Norwegian migrants in Minnesota. Similarly, Malzberg (1964), in replicating Odegaard's work, found high rates of psychiatric disorders among migrants in New York. More recently, Wintrob (1967) identified stresses experienced by migrants who returned home after a sojourn in the United States.

Different ethnic groups appear to react differently to the relocation process. Psychosis rates were found to be unusually high among Polish and Irish migrants and low among the Irish and Swedes (Malzberg, 1964). High rates of alcoholism and

²Joseph Westermeyer of the University of Minnesota provided me with much of the information discussed in this brief section.

negligible depression have been found among Irish migrants and almost the opposite for Jews (Roberts and Myers, 1959). Bagley and Binitie (1970) recorded similar observations of Irish who returned home after a stay in the United States.

Mental health problems stemming from migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, are variable from group to group and individual to individual. No stable predictable pattern exists (cf. Price and Sikes, 1974 and Mangalem, 1968). It's not firm, but personal first hand reports indicate that forced migrants tend to suffer more personal hardships and accompanying emotional stress than voluntary migrants. Data surrounding this issue is unclear, variable, and assuredly need more substantiation.

Psychosocial issues associated with forced movements of cultural groups has been the subject of a great deal of discussion by historians. Analysis of the slave trade between New World colonies and Africa during pre-revolutionary times and mass movements of Jews from Germany and Russia during and following World War II are a few examples. Indeed numerous examples abound. One wonders, however, if the knowledge and issues generated from the mass of historical information on the subject is taken seriously in the light of contemporary instances of forced migration.

To the point, a number of brief scenarios are provided that merit serious consideration, particularly as they related to the deplorable consequences that have resulted to groups forced to move because of overriding interests of dominant institutions.

Mazatecs and Chinetecons of Southern Mexico

In the late 1940's, the Mexican government under advice from the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources (SRH) began construction of two large dams in the Paploapan Basin in Southern Mexico. Construction of the dams resulted in the permanent relocation of approximately 80,000 Mazatec and Chinantec people (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1973).

Prior to resettlement fertile lands immediately surrounding the eventual dam were distributed to sugar refineries, lumber and paper factories, and industrial concerns which rely heavily on hydroelectric power. Native groups were given second choice. Many Mazatecs refused to move so the SRH "... provided a taste of its power by opening the dam's floodgates" (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1973, p. 7).

According to accounts, readjustment experiences of relocated Mazatecs were comparable if not worse than those who resisted removal. Irrigation, electricity, and safe, passable roadways were denied. Many have no deeds to their lands. Barabas and

Bartolomé (1973) estimate that some 200 died of depression.³ And obligations were placed on them that eventually put most in debt. At last reports, alcoholism has increased considerably while traditional ceremonial life has faded rapidly.

In addition, the Mexican government resettled Mazatecs, Chinantecs, and Mestizos in the same communities in hopes of promoting assimilation. As a result, violence and intergroup hostilities emerged adding to the already destructive elements associated with forced migration.

Relocation of Mazatecs and Chinantecs has added another segment to the growing number of Mexico's impoverished groups. Prior to relocation both groups were self-sufficient and had developed an economy and a means of subsistence that provided for the needs of community members. In a matter of a decade that has changed largely due to the exploitative character of

³I was reminded by Professor Juris Draguns of Pennsylvania State University that instances of psychogenic death have been recorded, however, depression is not usually thought of as a state that could produce a lethal outcome by itself. The attribution to death through depression is that of Barabas and Bartolomé (1973). I can only surmise that they have investigated their claim through observation of relocation outcomes. Whether depression was the sole cause of death is moot. Quite possibly individuals probably ceased survival efforts. Certainly, this claim and others like it merit more systematic exploration. I have personally known persons to simply give up after the tragic loss of a loved one. Their choice led to their death despite futile attempts to intervene.

industrial concerns and government policy. Moreover, both tribal groups must now attempt to rebuild what remains of their culture in an atmosphere of violence, confusion, bewilderment, and inequity.

Removal of natives from traditional lands is a policy that is likely to continue according to Beltran, Mexico's leading authority on indigenismas. He states, "It is necessary to change their (the natives) cast-like position to a class position where the possibility exists that the Indian may enter a group in this case the proletariat" (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1973, p. 16).

Incidents in South America

Much of South America's interior is still wild and untamed. The native inhabitants of much of the area live much like they have for centuries. Within the past few decades, particularly the past five years, South American governments coupled with foreign interests in timber, oil, uranium and unknown energy-related reserves have begun massive explorations in the vast unexplored territories. The presence of small aboriginal groups has proven to be a small barrier since most are relocated to government sponsored reserves or to major urban centers. Where resistance was met government troops in general were sent in to squelch the dissidents.

Hundreds of tribes have been forced to move from homelands. The tales and accounts are indeed tragic and remind one of what happened to the North American tribes a little

over a century ago. A few incidents will assist in emphasizing the point.

Paraguay. Development interests of the Paraguayan government in the eastern sector of the country have led to systematic enslavement, extermination, and relocation of Aché Indians, present occupants of the desired lands. Münzel (1973) vividly portrays awesome accounts of government attempts to remove the Aché and resettle them on government reserves. Reserves are likened to concentration camps where food supplies, health care and adequate living conditions are at bare minimums.

Although recent improvements in reservation conditions have been reported the future of the Aché is bleak particularly since they may never be able to return to their lands.

Brazil. Space does not permit an indepth elaboration of the numerous instances of forced migration of tribal groups from native lands to government reserves. Monumental efforts have been underway to stave off eventual destruction of a number of tribes by the Villas Boas brothers at Xingu National Park (cf. Fuerst, 1973; Junqueira, 1973). Nevertheless, remote tribes who resist movement have been subject to coercive efforts of the Brazilian government, including imprisonment if natives refuse to relocate.

Colombia. Near Bogotá the Gualubo tribe was reportedly being hunted and killed by the Colombian army and white settlers who believe there is oil beneath the tribe's lands. Apparently well over 170,000 acres have already been taken leaving the 7,000 Gualiboes with little in the way of subsistence. Informants report extremely high rates of tuberculosis, venereal diseases, and malnutrition. In an effort to control sporadic outbreaks the Colombian army sponsors "Indian drives" considering the tribe's attempts at mere survival to be actions against the government. One official stated, "The white settlers are even more militant. There will not be any peace in this region until the Indians are dead" (Akwasasne Notes, 1972, p. 26).

Venezuela. There is an extensive tract of land situated along the upper Ventuari River of the Amazon Federal Territory. Up until February 15, 1971, the land was almost exclusively inhabited by the Yekuana Indians, also known as the Makiritare. Despite hostile relationships with other tribes and "colonialists" they have managed to remain unscathed and culturally cohesive. But on that fateful day, outsiders, initiated the dispossession of the Makiritare lands. The Makiritare protested claiming that the "invasion" was illegal. A statement, which appeared in the Caracas daily newspaper, El Nacional, summed up the government's position, "It would be absurd to say

that 3,000 Makiritare...have the right to a surface of 100,000 km..." (Coppens, 1972, p. 6). Heated court battles ensued with the government essentially evading the real issue and refusing to take sides.

According to Coppens (1972, p. 17) the real motive of the government was not to develop the land as a "cooperative" but a "pretext to seize surreptitiously the...region," and a smokescreen to openly and arbitrarily colonize (cf. Siverts, 1972).

As of late 1972, the colonists withdrew and the land was being incorporated under the jurisdiction of the National Agrarian Reform. Ultimately this will enable colonization to "officially" take place, with the intent to fully assimilate the Makiritare and bordering tribes. All of this is occurring in an area that Venezuelans once considered "tierra baldia"-- uncultivated waste land.

Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands⁴


In 1946, the small community that inhabited Bikini Atoll in the northern Marshall Islands, United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, was relocated when its ancestral homeland was selected as the United States first nuclear test site in the

⁴ I am especially grateful for Robert Kiste, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, for providing me with of the information contained in this section.

Pacific. Prior to relocation, the Bikinians were an isolated people with relatively little contact with outsiders. Since 1946, they have experienced multiple relocations which have altered both their social and physical environments. The Bikinians' first resettlement on another northern atoll ended in disaster after two years when it became known that the new location did not provide an adequate subsistence base. As an emergency measure, the islanders were evacuated to a military base in the Marshalls where they were compelled to compare their own culture and society with the part of America represented by the United States Navy. After several months, the islanders were moved to a small single island (not an atoll) in the southern Marshalls, and ecological zone that differs greatly from that of the north. This resettlement also brought the Bikinians into frequent interaction with more acculturated Marshallese (Kiste, 1968, 1974).

During the course of their successive relocations, Bikinians were always under the impression that they would eventually return to their atoll. Within the past year, negotiations between Bikinians and federal officials were finalized and plans were underway to permit rehabilitation.

Unfortunately there is still one major problem that Bikinians must contend with--portions of their atoll contain dangerous levels of radioactivity. Since the atoll is relatively small, 2.3 square miles, it will be difficult to restrain islanders from roaming about in the danger zones, particularly children.


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There are other problems. Soil compositions have been altered as a result of nuclear bomb tests making it difficult to cultivate basic food sources. Moreover, a number of younger Bikinians have never lived on the atoll and are not familiar with basic skills required for daily survival. Perhaps most alarming is the grim possibility that Bikinians, like American Indians, may become wards to the extent that livelihood and quality of life will be totally derived from federal government provisions.

Summary and Conclusions

Forced relocation of cultural groups is an issue that has far-reaching psychosocial implications. Historians and cultural anthropologists have consistently reminded us of the impact of forced movement on maintenance of traditional cultural lifestyles and values. To the contrary, there are those who favor assimilation through forced movements and argue that it protects groups that might otherwise be victimized by unscrupulous and incidious land developers and colonists.

In some instances forced movement is necessary particularly when a group is faced with the awesome effects of natural hazards. However, the examples discussed earlier offer illustrations where forced movement has occurred as a result of self-serving interests of government agencies. In each and every case the outcomes have produced dramatic and unalterable changes in quality of life.

Understanding of the problems of groups pressured to migrate must begin by assessing the manner in which an


activating agent relates to the group. Trimble (1974) suggests that four basic characteristics summarize relationship between governments and groups forced to move from traditional lands, as follows:

- tendency towards the prevalence of destructive rather than constructive thinking;
- use of fear as an intervening variable to motivate groups to relocate;
- prevalence of the absence of the right of due process for the cultural group; and
- prevalence of the denial of information.

Information gained from an assessment of these characteristics provides one with a basic understanding of the nature of intergroup relationships. The pressing issue, however, is the consequences produced by forcing a cultural group to relocate. The following questions are but a few from a potentially lengthy list of major concerns.

1. What steps will be taken to assist groups to eventually develop a self-supporting economy?
2. Will adoption of western ways introduce forms of social deviancy, such as alcoholism, delinquency, unemployment, depression, etc.?
3. What prevention measures can be developed to reduce the possible emergence of social deviancy?
4. What adjustments will be made by groups and how will they effect daily living patterns?

Issues of forced migration are of extreme importance to understanding the causes and consequences of future population movements in this country as well as other areas of the world. Psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have largely ignored full-scale investigations of forced migration as research topic. New perspectives need to be developed to offer better understanding of the personal and social significance of forced movements of culturally distinct groups.

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