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# Displaced

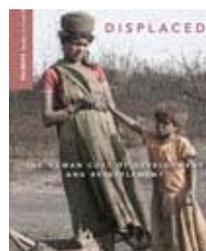
## Review Details

**Date:** 18 March 2013**Author:** Wendy Li**Publisher:** ForMHub**Owning Institution(s):** Swinburne  
University of Technology

## Book Details

**Title:** Displaced: The Human Cost of  
Development and Resettlement**Publisher:** Palgrave Macmillan: New York**Date Published:** 2012**Author/s:** Olivia Bennett  
Chrisopher McDowell

Over the last twenty years, social scientists have engaged in ongoing debates to extend the understandings of place in ways that move beyond the common-sense level ( see for example: Li, Hodgetts & Ho 2010). For instance, place has been explored within physical, socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts within which the individual's bond with place and his/her experiences are embedded (Heidegger 1958). Harvey asserts that "place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct" (Harvey 1996: 261). Place is indeed socially, politically and culturally constructed because the ways in which people experience place and the meaning people ascribe to it, come out of a socioeconomic, political and cultural milieu, which is in turn dominated by socioeconomic, political and cultural values. Social norms, values and practices give meaning to a place. The individual's feeling about a place which he/she inhabits is moulded by social ideologies as well as the individual's actions and relations to those social norms (Ahrentzen 1992). Important places are those in which events occur and that mark people's particular experiences in new or unique ways (Li & Chong 2012). Those experiences, either the positive or the negative, are considered as growth experiences because they are events that help move people's life journey forward. As Manzo (2005) concludes, places serve as markers in the individual's journey and become significant because of experience. Subjective experiences within particular places shape, and are shaped by, people's relationships to each other, society, and particular settings.



From those perspectives of place, researchers have suggested that experiences of involuntary migration and resettlement are the experiences of being out of place and displacement (Ankori 2003). The experiences of forced migration thus may be felt as sickness and discomfort (Gunew 2003). Li (2011) maintains that leaving home in forced migration is an experience in which people feel out of place and uncomfortable in their new place. These notions are reflective in the book *Displaced: The Human Cost of Development and Resettlement*, which explores the socioeconomic, political and cultural dimensions of involuntary migration and resettlement among peoples in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Kenya, India and Pakistan. The book argues that the

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rupture from ancestral lands has consequences. These consequences include loss of identity, feeling marginalised and displaced, loss of land, loss of families and role models, and being disadvantaged in their new places. These consequences extend far beyond mere economic loss, impacting mental health and wellbeing of the displaced population. As posited by the authors, “the sudden and uncompromising removal from what is familiar occasions a more profound unravelling of social relationships, which compounds the risks and hazards that confront displaced populations” (Bennett & McDowell 2012: 1). The book offers a detailed analysis of the risks of displacement and the effects.

The book is organised in nine chapters. Introduction, methodology and conclusion are presented in Chapter one, two and nine respectively. Chapter three to Chapter eight provide six case studies of personal narratives, which form the core of the book. These accounts touch upon themes such as land acquisition, displacement, compensation, resettlement assistance, and the experiences of rebuilding lives and livelihood in a new place. The stories illustrate the current scope and scale of state-mandated land acquisition in the developing world as a consequence of national development plans. Such plans demand increased hydropower production, the turning over of large areas of land to tourism and to biodiversity protection, the conservation of land for food production on an industrial rather than a subsistence scale, and the accelerating extraction of valuable natural resources to aid industrial growth. The displaced and resettled populations featured in this book are part of this economic and political process. For example, Chapter four interprets stories of people in Kenya, who were displaced at different times and by a range of development interventions, including government-sponsored large-scale agriculture schemes. Displacement results in distress and even shame to these people due to the change of their traditional way of life. Chapter seven explores experiences of a group of people living in Lesotho, South Africa. Different from narratives of people who had been displaced before they participated in the interviews and recorded in other chapters in the book, this group were still living in their highland community and would be removed from the land six months after the interviews.

Although the data presented in the book was primarily collected for broadcasting rather than for academic use, the methods of the data collection can stand up to academic scrutiny. The oral testimony approach used in data collection is a form of qualitative research which features individual voice and meaning of the testimony and stories. This method is consistent with Benoiel's (1984) definition of qualitative research that is “modes of systematic inquiry concerned with understanding human beings and the nature of their transactions with themselves and with their surroundings” (Benoiel 2012: 3). The focus of the book on individual voices assists the researcher to avoid a situation both Chamberlain (2009) and Valsiner (2006) described, where the researcher loses sight of the social phenomenon of interest and focusses instead on data collections and methods and where the persons and their worlds disappear from view.

This book makes an important contribution in addressing the complexity of displacement and resettlement in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Kenya, India and Pakistan, featuring the multiplicity of views. The accounts discussed in the book bring “the voices, experiences and perspectives of those most negatively affected by the development process into the political process” (Bennett & McDowell 2012: 3). However, it is disappointing that Chapter one does not explore the voices, experiences and perspectives of the displaced people by the involuntary resettlement of the Three Gorges Project in China. Instead, the chapter presents the Government accounts of displacement and resettlement. As stated in that chapter, the resettlement of the Three Gorges Project contributes to “accelerating the downsizing of the state sector, moving people to where markets can be established, and creating rapid social change a cultural shift in those ... dependent on the state ... to ... where self-reliance replaces dependency and accelerates incorporation into new systems of social relations” (Bennett & McDowell 2012:1). Reading the quoted passage, one is left with the impression that resettlement in China is successful and the displaced Chinese people do not experience the difficulties and struggles that other displaced people whose

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voices are recorded in the book have experienced. This “success” may not be valid in that the analysis is exclusively based on the Government account. The use of the Government account significantly weakens the comparable level between the Chinese case and the cases discussed in the rest of the book.

There are six photos in the book, of narrators and places that were significant to the narrators, which enable readers to see and to feel the stories told by the narrators. In contemporary social sciences, photography has emerged as an influential communication method (Li 2012). Soutter (2000) argues that a photograph “might function as a narrative if we recognize its visual codes as belonging to . . . a form dominated by narrative such as cinema, theatre or history painting” (Scoutter 2000: 3). Baetens and Ribiere define a photo narrative as “a set of photographs arranged to create a storyline within the constraints of a particular format” (Baetens & Ribiere 1995: 314). Unfortunately, the visual narratives in the presented book are not employed and discussed as a data collection method. Photography could have been used as part of the methodology because it is ideally suited to the study of the displaced people’s lives, providing a pictorial dimension of culturally meaningful objects and settings. Visual analysis can precede conventional verbal interviews, as demonstrated in the book, by visual materials that encourage readers to understand the world as defined by the displaced people because seeing often comes before words to establish people’s place in the surrounding world (Berger 1977).

Although the above-discussed limitations detract from what is essentially an impressive and comprehensive book of displacement and involuntary resettlement, the book, overall, contributes greatly to a better understanding of the human cost of displacement and forced migration as a result of development and resettlement. The depth and breadth of personal narratives covered in the book reveal the challenges the displaced people face, for example, the loss of cultural identity, and frustration caused by the process of resettlement and shifting social roles. This book will become a fundamental and crucial sourcebook for policymakers and researchers who attempt to understand the process of involuntary resettlement.

The book was reviewed by Dr. Wendy Li. Wendy Li is lecturer in the Department of Psychology, James Cook University in Townsville and research associate of the Maori and Psychology Research Unit at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. Her research is centred on and around ageing and geriatric mental health, migrant and refugee mental health, intergroup relations, culture and indigenisation in psychology, problem gambling and mixed method research.

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