

Community Building in the Twenty-First Century



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Communities after Catastrophe

Reconstructing the Material,

Reconstituting the Social

Anthony Oliver-Smith

DISPLACEMENT IN THE LATE TWENTIETH AND EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

The twentieth century saw enormous numbers of people set in motion against their will. For example, in 1999, civil and international conflicts produced twenty-one million refugees who fled across international borders to escape violence. Uncounted in these numbers are millions of peoples uprooted by environmental upheaval and by natural and technological disasters, from sudden-onset earthquakes and hurricanes to slow-onset contamination by insecticides or groundwater pollution. In 1999 these internally displaced people numbered twenty-five million. That is a rough total of fifty-six million people uprooted in 1999 alone. To put those numbers in comparative perspective, fifty-six million is the equivalent of the population of Italy, the twenty-third largest country in the world. It is more than half the population of Mexico and twenty million more than the entire population of Central America.

In the present century, whole communities continue to be displaced, uprooted, and set adrift. The World Bank has calculated that

publicly and privately funded development projects—ranging in scale from the Three Gorges Dam in China (1.3 million to be uprooted) to roadway or building construction (uprooting sections of urban communities)—displace approximately ten million people a year. In addition, all these people suffer violation of their basic human and environmental rights: they have been uprooted against their will, and their communities have been destroyed, often before their eyes, either by human hands or by a nature made harmful by human organization and structure. Forces such as ethnic nationalism, global climatic change increasing storm activity and sea levels, and globalized forms of development such as tourism, hydropower, and urban renewal promise more of the same for the century we are just beginning.

RADICAL CHANGE AND THE REINVENTION OF COMMUNITY

In 1970, in an effort to characterize the conditions and challenges facing humanity in the late twentieth century, the psychiatrist and psychohistorian Robert J. Lifton coined the term “Protean Man” after the shape-changing figure of Greek mythology. Lifton (1970:43) was describing a consciousness that had become separated from “the vital and nourishing symbols of...cultural traditions—symbols revolving around family, idea systems, religions and the life cycle in general” and, I would add, community. Consciousness that is freed (or torn) from these traditional anchors of identity must engage in a continual process of radical reinvention of the self, drawing upon the kaleidoscope of imagery available in modern culture. Lifton (1970:43–44) stresses that such a psychological style is “by no means pathological as such, and in fact may be one of the functional patterns necessary to life in our times.” He does not address the possible pathologies of our times. He does, however, consider something he calls “psychohistorical dislocation,” referring to the forces of rapid economic and political change that often involve an uprooting from family and community far from familiar landmarks. These forces have, in many senses, dislocated all of us, obliging us to adopt the consciousness of the constant radical reinvention of the self. Because human beings are social creatures, the reinvention of the self is intimately linked to the reinvention of community as humankind’s principal form of social living.

MATERIAL AND SOCIAL DESTRUCTION

The causes of this massive dislocation, as well as the uprooting process itself, are nothing less than catastrophic for both the individual and the community. These forces—natural and technological disasters, political conflict, and large-scale development projects—are what I call “totalizing phenomena” in their capacity to affect virtually every domain of human life. Moreover, these forces all too often trigger and compound one another. For example, natural disasters have been known to trigger social conflict. War has frequently compounded displacement from violence by making the home environment toxic through the use of chemical defoliants and other ecologically destructive agents.

Millions of people face the partial or total destruction of the material and social expressions of community. In all three forms of displacement, the communities have some concrete material existence. In the majority of cases, this existence conforms to the traditional understanding of community as a site of residence and as a context of shared understanding. In disasters and wars, the material destruction may occur suddenly and massively. Mortality may also be high. In some cases, the physical community may have to be abandoned to the elements or to invaders. Because more people exist in vulnerable circumstances and are exposed to a greater variety of hazards, natural disasters inflict widely varying forms of destruction, from loss of productive resources to total destruction. Technological disasters can uproot communities by sudden destruction, as in the gas explosion of Guadalajara, Mexico (Macias and Calderon Aragon 1994), or by saturation of the environment with toxic substances, as in Bhopal or in Valdez, Alaska (Rajan 1999, 2002; Dyer 2002). Development projects produce material destruction that is more gradual but is frequently as devastating. The inundation of a community to create a reservoir constitutes as thorough a form of material destruction as a saturation bombing or an earthquake of 8.0 Richter scale magnitude. Development-induced resettlement does not usually cause immediate mortality, but higher morbidity and mortality rates do characterize populations that have been resettled by development projects (Cernea 1997).

Removing people from their known environments separates them from the material and cultural resource base on which they have

depended for life as individuals and as communities. Moreover, a sense of place plays an important part in individual and collective identity formation, in the way time and history are encoded and contextualized, and in interpersonal, community, and intercultural relations (Altman and Low 1992; Malkki 1992; Rodman 1992; Escobar 2000). "Geographical experience begins in places, reaches out to others through spaces, and creates landscapes or regions for human existence" (Tilley 1994:15). Resistance to resettlement reveals how important a sense of place is for the creation of an "environment of trust" that links space, kin relations, local communities, cosmology, and tradition (Giddens 1990:102 as cited in Rodman 1992:648). Removal from one of the most basic physical dimensions of life can mean removal from life itself. Disrupting individual or community identity and stability in place, resulting in resettlement in a strange landscape, can baffle and silence people in the same way a strange language can (Basso 1988 as cited in Rodman 1992:647). Culture loses its ontological grounding, and people must struggle to construct a life world that clearly articulates their continuity and identity as a people again. The human need for environments of trust is fundamental to the sense of order and predictability implied by culture.

The psychological and sociocultural centrality of place in the formation of community as physical space varies cross-culturally. Liisa Malkki (1992:30–31) cautions against the application of what she refers to as a western "sedentarist metaphysic." This "incarcerates the native" in an ecological or territorial identity; the uprooting of peoples becomes "not only normal, [but] it is also perceived as a moral and spiritual need." Her work with Hutu refugees in Tanzania reveals that the true Hutu nation was imagined as a deterritorialized moral community formed by refugees and the land expanse called Burundi, as merely a state (Malkki 1992:35). Hansen's work with Angolan refugees in Zambia demonstrates a far greater sense of dislocation among refugees settled in camps than among those self-settled among co-ethnics in villages. In effect, the people who fled across the border but settled with co-ethnics never felt themselves to be refugees (Hansen 1992). In other words, culture and community are variously "rooted" in places; uprooting occasions varying levels of stress, depending on the circumstances. As well as place, then, the separation or fragmenta-

tion of community that frequently accompanies uprooting is a prime source of socially based stress and suffering. Conversely, as Hansen's and Malkki's work shows, communities that can maintain their cultural identity and social fabric are more resilient in the face of dislocation.

Uprooted people generally face the daunting task of rebuilding not only personal lives but also those relationships, networks, and structures that support people as communities. In some cases, survivors resettle themselves individually or as families in new environments, facing the challenges of integration. In the developing world, these event/processes set people on the road, often breaking up families and communities. Hurricane Mitch, which devastated Honduras in 1998, forced many people to leave their families to seek work in Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States. Thousands who remained behind were still living in provisional shelters more than two years later (Stansbury et al, 2001). In other cases, competition for aid exacerbates existing social conflicts or reawakens old enmities. For communities devastated by war, social destruction takes the form of individuals traumatized and disabled by atrocities, and communities fragmented by the violence of hostile internal factions. People who occupy sites that communities have fled because of threat or actual violence may resist the return of original occupants and owners. In refugee camps, often in foreign countries with culturally different host populations, very disparate peoples who are antagonistic to each other may be grouped in the same settlement (Payne 1998). Historically, people dislocated by development projects have had little recourse other than isolated migration to other areas, usually urban slums. Those resettled by the development project itself face graft, incompetence, and inadequate resources that produce social disarticulation of varying degrees, as well as conflict with host populations (Cernea 1997; McCully 1996).

All these event/processes endanger not only physical and social security but also confidence in one's culture and the social fabric. Such disruption and uprooting suggest the ineffectiveness of human effort and the fragility of the implicit contract that life will be reasonably predictable, that it will make some sense. Increasingly, those threatened with development-induced resettlement are undertaking significant resistance movements, but initially, at least, people confronting the state and international capital may feel unable to defend themselves

(Oliver-Smith 2001). Self-esteem and a sense of personal and community integrity may be eroded unless reconstruction aid and efforts are organized so that people can demonstrate renewed capabilities. In all three forms of displacement, communities are fractured by contending interests and allegiances regarding the distribution of aid and reparations and by differential perceptions of loss that often intensify original societal tensions into outright conflict.

These trying circumstances, as well as the enormous variation that these millions of people in their diverse contexts represent, test the resilience of real communities, the validity of fundamental social-scientific constructions about community, and the politics and methods employed to assist them in recovery. For the millions of uprooted peoples who have suffered these event/processes and for those who would support and assist them, the task is to reconstruct self, family, and community in material structures and processes and in social and cultural expressions. Indeed, when we examine the process of social reconstruction, we address the basic elements of the nature of society and the creation and durability of the essential social bonds that sustain community. The core elements of post-catastrophe reconstruction express the fundamental principles of community building that were central to the broader discussions of the SAR/SfAA combined seminar and plenary. The detailed discussions generated in this joint effort demonstrated that, although the process differs in detail according to culture, the specific means people employ in the process of social reconstruction after catastrophe articulate the essential foundational features of community and community building explored in numerous contexts by the authors in this volume.

In general, the process of reconstruction has been approached as a material problem. The aid and assistance marshaled to help these unfortunate people have largely focused on material needs such as housing, nutrition, and health care. There is no denying that the often excruciating material needs of the displaced must be addressed. The question that is often unsatisfactorily answered, though, is *how* these should be addressed. Material aid is mainly donor-designed as a transfer process that compounds the social and psychological effects of destruction and displacement, by undermining self-esteem, compromising community integrity and identity, and creating patterns of

dependency. Perhaps our most pressing need at this juncture is to achieve a greater balance between addressing the material needs of displaced communities and acting in a way that supports, rather than undermines, their struggle to reconstitute the social bases of their communities. We are beginning to make progress in conceptualizing this balance and putting in practice strategies that sustain and support social reconstitution, as well as material reconstruction, through greater community participation in both processes. As I shall show presently, communities themselves are our best guides in understanding this process.

THE DIALECTIC OF MATERIAL RECONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL RECONSTITUTION

An inextricable tie exists between material and social reconstruction, but the connection implies much more than being materially sustained while reconstituting the community. To be sure, prolonged, severe material deprivation in certain circumstances has been shown to erode the basic identities and interactions upon which community is based (Dirks 1980). To what extent is some basic level of materiality a necessary precondition for social reconstitution? Conversely, to what extent does social reconstitution in some form of cooperative action undergird and enable material reconstruction? No community can survive without a material base. And after basic elements are re-established, they must be continually reproduced through cooperation (which is not always based on material interest) if the community is not to sink into prolonged dependency.

I would add, however, that these questions also challenge our methods and policies in dealing with such conditions. In effect, the material and social rebuilding processes must be mutually reinforcing; in some sense, they must be mutually constitutive. The built environment in which we live is a material instantiation of our social relations (Harvey 1996). It expresses and shapes our social relations. Nowhere does this relationship become more crucial than in the process of community reconstruction. Material reconstruction can support and express social reconstitution. Material reconstruction can confirm social reconstitution. It can also undermine the process severely, and very frequently has.

It is well known that the built environment can neither create nor re-create community. Also, we know from the experience of many millions—disaster victims, refugees, and people resettled by development projects and because of architects' and urban planners' failed designs—that the built environment can seriously work against or even prevent the emergence of community. The long, even rows of barrack-like structures built for the uprooted and resettled can aggravate the social tensions and conflict that often plague such displaced populations. Plans and structures are generally elaborated according to donor needs of efficiency and cost rather than the needs of the displaced to reconstitute community. The design, materials, and construction of such settlements often reflect elite constructions of the poor and the minority group more than any informed desire to assist. In the long run, the cost is greater because the settlements and houses are abandoned or destroyed and the social disarticulation these foster undermines productivity and self-sufficiency. To permit the development of community, the built environment must take a form that is both recognizable and appropriable in organization and substance in local cultural terms. If a planned settlement does not take a form that people can appropriate as their own, and add to and embellish, community recovery will be impeded and the settlement will fail.

Re-establishing Materiality

In material terms, the needs of individuals, households, communities, and the extra-local systems to which they belong, as well as the organized responses to these needs, are numerous, diverse, and interconnected. Needs in any uprooting crisis are urgent, and relatively adequate procedures have been developed to respond to these. A uniform standard has yet to be reached, though, despite the much debated Sphere Project (2000) guidelines for reaching such standards. Unfortunately, the procedures put in place to cope with emergency needs are rarely linked to key features of community organization. In the development of the longer-term rehabilitative system, these can very negatively impact the future viability of the community.

Homes and life-sustaining activities are the most deeply felt needs in establishing a long-term system for dealing with material necessity in the stress of uprooting and resettlement. Whether uprooted by sudden

disaster, civil violence, or the bad (or absent) planning of development projects, resettled people are frequently housed in “temporary” quarters. However inadequate and inappropriate, these quarters become permanent in all too many cases. Donor-driven housing and settlement designs endanger the connection that people establish with their built environment, violate cultural norms of space and place, inhibit the reweaving of social networks, and discourage the re-emergence of community identity (Oliver-Smith 1991).

The other great need to be addressed at the material level is employment for the uprooted. From both a material and psychological standpoint, economics drives the process of reconstruction. Employment not only provides needed income for personal and household needs not provided for by aid, but also enables people to become actors instead of disaster victims, refugees, or “oustees,” roles that are essentially passive. Uprooting causes many people to lose the means of production, whether it be land, tools, or access to other resources. Without these means, resumption of normal activities is impossible. There may be a difficult trade-off between reconstituting economic resources (especially land and property) and staying together for the social and cultural benefits. This is especially true in development-induced displacement when a project has opted for land replacement and the host population is dense. Settling a community on sufficient land may be difficult or even impossible. People may need to move far from extra-community networks in order to have sufficient land and avoid dispersal of the community (Koenig 2001). These choices create hard questions. Until people find employment, however, they must depend on external resources, and reconstruction remains incomplete.

Reconstituting Community

Before addressing this final and extremely complicated issue, we need to be clear about our understanding of community and the process of social reconstitution. I have no intention here to become entangled in the long, complex debate regarding the definition of community. For my purposes, the word *community* designates a group of interacting people who have something in common with one another, sharing similar understandings, values, life practices, histories, and identities within a certain framework of variation. A community also

possesses an identity (Cohen, 1985) and is capable of acting on its behalf or on behalf of those who have a claim on that identity. Social reconstitution, therefore, is the regaining of that capacity at the minimum. The word *community* does not connote homogeneity and certainly does admit differences within and among communities. More than anything else, community is an outcome, a result of a shared past of varying lengths.

The displaced tend to fall into a mindset that has been called "the wished-for former state," that is, idealized images of the community before the displacement, whatever the cause. This longing is only natural for people who have been thrust into conditions of uncertainty and want. Almost anything is better than what they have. If we want to address the issues of social reconstitution, however, we must recognize communities for what they were, are, and can become. We must avoid idealizing the lost community and must recognize its tensions, strains, and inequalities, for these will surely surface in the process of reconstruction.

We must also bear in mind that many displaced people will never be able to draw on the cultural resources of community, because they resettle as individuals or as families in totally alien surroundings. Many of the displaced after Hurricane Mitch in Honduras wended their way north as illegal immigrants to find work in the United States. When no resettlement plan or project was provided to thousands displaced by many early dams, they ended up living in the desperate slums of large cities (Cernea 1997). A similar fate has awaited those internally displaced by the decade-long but recently intensified conflict in Colombia (Partridge 2001).

Even displaced communities that manage to resettle as a group face serious challenges to the reconstitution of community. The stresses of displacement and discontinuity, particularly over time, tend to exacerbate internal perceptions of difference that crisis-induced solidarity temporarily submerges (Oliver-Smith 1999). In disasters, the differential perception of whether aid should address basic needs or compensate for loss can generate serious social divisions along socio-economic lines in stricken communities, impeding the reconstitution of community and the reconstruction of society (Oliver-Smith 1992). In development-induced displacement, the fragmentation of social

groups by resettlement programs causes the disintegration of mutual assistance networks, frequently producing serious social disarticulation and undermining the reconstitution of community (Cernea 1997). In political upheaval, people may flee their communities under threat of violence, cross international borders, and settle as individuals or families in completely new environments, where they must adapt to a totally different society. Where violence is widespread, refugee camps maintained by asylum nations or the United Nations High Commission for Refugees may group together large numbers of people of different ethnic identities, religions, geographic origins, and languages, all of which form effective barriers to the constitution of community. In all three contexts, individuals traumatized by loss and suffering, often hideous, may be unable to reconnect, to re-enter the weave of the torn social fabric that was their community (Maynard 1997; Cernea 1997; Cernea and McDowell 2000).

The quality of the resettlement project itself can foster community life or deter the community from recovering. Such projects are really about reconstructing communities after they have been materially destroyed and socially traumatized to varying degrees. We should approach the goals of reconstructing and reconstituting community with a certain humility and realism about the limits of our abilities. Such humility and realism have not characterized, to any major extent, the planners and administrators of projects dealing with uprooted peoples to date. Usually, the goals of such undertakings stress efficiency and cost containment over restoration of community. As Chrisman notes in chapter 7 of this volume, top-down initiatives have a poor record of success because these lack any regard for local community resources. Planners tend to perceive the culture of uprooted people as an obstacle to success rather than as a resource.

Normally, communities do not construct themselves—they evolve. Even purposive communities, self-organized around a common ideology and highly homogeneous, do not have an impressive record of success or longevity. Reconstructing or reconstituting a community means attempting to replace, through administrative routine, an evolutionary process in which social, cultural, economic, and environmental interactions develop through trial and error. Also, through deep experiential knowledge, a population achieves a mutually sustaining social

coherence and material sustenance over time. The systems that develop are not perfect, are often far from egalitarian, and do not conform to some imagined standard of efficiency. The kind of community that sustains individual and group life, never perfectly, is not a finely tuned mechanism or a well-balanced organism, but rather a complex, interactive, ongoing process composed of innumerable variables subject to the conscious and unconscious motives of its members. The idea that such a process could be the outcome of planning is ambitious, to say the least.

One of the best outcomes imaginable for resettlement projects is a system in which people can materially sustain themselves while beginning their own process of social reconstruction. The least we could hope is that resettlement projects not impede the process of community reconstitution. If the level of impoverishment experienced by most resettled peoples is any indicator, though, even adequate systems of material reproduction are beyond the will and capabilities of most contemporary policy makers and planners.

Notwithstanding these challenges, people can call upon many resources to reconstitute community, a fact that has been recognized for a long time but has begun to influence policy and practice only in the past decade. Moreover, resources of an essentially cultural nature, by aiding in the reconstitution of community, help the individual to heal as well (Maynard 1997:209; Oliver-Smith 1992). Community reconstitution and individual recuperation become mutually supportive processes in which the survival of community restores meaning to individual lives battered by circumstance. When those who would assist uprooted peoples understand the importance of these cultural resources, they support the process of community reconstruction and reconstitution. I would like to focus on the cultural or symbolic assets that enable communities to engage in the process of social reconstitution. In particular, I would like to suggest that such resources are mined from the history of the community.

The idea of a shared past becomes a key element in social reconstitution, as Schensul suggests in chapter 8 of this volume. For successful reconstitution of self and community, the displaced must master their grief. Loss of material possessions or personal or social relationships presents people with the difficult problem of how to hold on to

what was significant in the past and invest it in the present and future without living in the lost past. Grief thus involves a negotiation between allegiance to the past and commitment to the present (Marris 1975). Rituals of mourning enable the bereaved to integrate the loss into their lives, to come to terms with it, and, through the grieving process, to resolve the conflicts between allegiance to the past and healthy reconstitution of life. People also must grieve for their communities, homes, social contexts, and culturally significant places and structures. Over the past fifty years, Wallace (1957), Fried (1963), Gans (1962a), and others have shown us that people grieve for a community as they do for a person.

Community can be recovered through the commemoration of its loss. The re-enactment of rituals, such as celebrating various secular and sacred holidays, can help to reconstitute the community's social existence. The evocation of symbols, such as objects, places, or people that provided anchors to community identity in the past, also contributes to social reconstitution, though these will most likely be reinterpreted and perhaps reformulated to fit present circumstances. Physical features that previously symbolized community identity can be reconstructed. The methodology of community mapping that Hyland and Owens explore in chapter 5 of this volume is a valuable tool that people can employ on their own behalf in recovery and reconstitution. Churches, chapels, shrines, images, plazas, town squares, informal gathering places, forests, rivers, springs, waterfalls, mountains, and a host of other physical features have important symbolic meanings for community. Other kinds of common property, such as burial grounds and community and religious shrines and centers, also serve as social resources, tangible evidence of a group identity. These also may include economic infrastructure that creates a local identity, for example, a periodic marketplace, a bus station, or a crossroads. It is important to reconstitute these resources as well (Koenig 2001).

To discuss the challenge presented by reconstitution of community, I will briefly examine three cases, one from each of the three major dislocating forces. These cases are not meant to be representative, but rather to illustrate some of the problems communities face and some of the resources people employ to overcome the loss of home and community.

DISASTER-INDUCED DISLOCATION: YUNGAY, PERU

The first example comes from my own fieldwork in the disaster-stricken city of Yungay in the north-central Andes of Peru (Oliver-Smith 1992). In May 1970 an earthquake devastated an area larger than Belgium, Holland, and Denmark combined, killing approximately sixty thousand people and destroying 86 percent of the buildings in the region. One of the central tragedies took place in the city of Yungay, which was located below, and with a spectacular view of, Peru's highest mountain, Huascarán, at 22,190 feet. The earthquake shook loose an enormous piece of Huascarán's peak, more than 800 m wide and 1.2 km long, which dropped a vertical mile before colliding with a glacier and quadrupling in volume. This gigantic mass of ice, rock, and mud careened down the slopes of the mountain to engulf and devour the city of Yungay, killing 95 percent of its inhabitants and leaving only four palm trees from the main plaza protruding through the surface of the avalanche.

Several months after the disaster, I began a study of recovery and social reconstitution in Yungay that was to last for ten years. The surviving Yungainos, grouped in a makeshift camp just north of the avalanche, faced the daunting task of constructing a new city and new material context and reconstituting a decimated community. For reasons of geologic safety, the government announced plans to resettle the survivors some 15 kilometers to the south in the town of Tinguá, which was intended to become the provincial capital. To the Yungainos, this relocation was the final blow, the potential death knell of Yungaino existence and identity. What nature had started, the government would finish.

The Yungainos met this challenge by re-creating a sense of meaning and significance that would enable them to continue living whole lives as individuals and as a community. Three culturally constructed elements—space, time, and people—came together to form an “ethos” of Yungay's survival. The word *ethos*, not used much anymore in anthropology, refers to a single theme that dominates a culture. Space, time, and people are three themes that became woven into a continuum, expressed primarily in terms of community. The Yungainos were intent upon reconstructing their past, their story, to restore what Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah et al. 1985:152–55) so aptly termed “a community of memory” in *Habits of the Heart*.

In terms of space, the Yungainos drew upon their links to the environment, both natural and built. Although Huascarán was a potential danger and often cursed as "an assassin" and "a vile traitor," the mountain overlooking the buried city was inseparable from the Yungaino survivors' image and identity of their old city and the new city to be constructed. Aspects of the old Yungay became equally potent elements in the forging of community survival. The barracks city constructed for the survivors soon displayed various symbolic expressions of survival and persistence in multiple references to Huascarán and the use of old Yungay's street names for the narrow alleys between barracks. Such images and phrases were symbolic actualizations of the determination to reconstruct the community. This little chapel, that saint's shrine, the cross at the town's entrance, that little plaza in the barracks city, all named for their lost counterparts in old Yungay, were means by which survivors expressed and reconstituted the centrality of place in their endangered individual and community identities.

The four lone palm trees in the midst of the avalanche scar symbolized survival and became a site for ritual renewal of the ties that every survivor maintained with lost family members and community. A small chapel of palm fronds and lashed logs was erected against the partially exposed top of the steeple of Yungay's church. This little chapel, the palm trees (symbolic of all survivors), and the cemetery mound further down on the avalanche were the most important ceremonial locations in the disaster zone and soon became national monuments.

The cemetery, perched on top of a pre-Incaic temple mound, was the city's principle expression of its link with the past and the dead. The relationship between the living and the dead, between the past and the present, has always held great importance in traditional Latin American cultures. The disaster forged an even stronger link with the dead, integrating time into a total continuum with shared realities and allegiances for the living. Ordinary time had been cleaved in two by the disaster. Non-ordinary, time-symbolic, eternal time joined the living and the dead in a unified whole in which parallel existence is a reality the living must consider while conducting their lives and the life of the community. The disaster strengthened the bond of past, present, and future in the continuing commitment to reconstruct and reconstitute the community.

Specific people were woven symbolically into the sense of community survival. A policeman who oversaw the burial of the thousands of dismembered bodies and subsequently suffered an emotional breakdown became a symbol of fidelity, endurance, and courage in the struggle for survival. A woman who was hit by the avalanche and carried for several kilometers, emerging grievously wounded and bereft of her family, returned after convalescence in Lima to a role as a symbol of Yungay's survival.

How did they move from this dense cluster of symbols and rituals, essentially founded in the lost past of a destroyed community, to the reformulation of a meaning structure for a changed and distorted present and, further, to action that ensured their survival as a community? The catalyst for this process was the government's plan to remove the survivors from their site close to the buried city. The announcement of the resettlement plan galvanized the survivors into a single body, united around a single theme—the rebirth of Yungay in its place next to the avalanche. The conflicts of loss and grief were transformed into conflicts of interest between the survivors and the government. In effect, the conflict between the survivors and the government created a politics of identity reformulation. In the Yungainos' furious resistance to relocation, they were forging continuity for their community and molding new, meaningful identities and purposes for themselves. Their misery in the aftermath acquired a purpose, the defense of their homeland, their place in the world, and the survivors could newly affirm and heal themselves in enacting this purpose and making it known in the world. The Yungainos' struggle against relocation gave them opportunity and motive to voice and give substance to the continued existence of a community called Yungay and, in the process, helped them to recapture a sense of meaning, to return from despair and to re-engage life. The survivors' final victory over resettlement was evidence of their healing process, which persists to this day.

After the battle against relocation had been won and community survival guaranteed, the focus of interests and identities returned again to the individual and his or her reference group. The social life of Yungay began to reflect the varying patterns of allegiance and identification that correspond to the challenges facing individuals and community in the process of permanent reconstruction. The people of

Yungay fragmented and coalesced numerous times around specific problems crucial to the survival of the individual and community. In effect, the separation and coincidence of individual and community concerns at different times became crucial to the survival of both. In short, once the community was assured of survival, people could attend to individual interests again, and the interplay of consensus and contention that characterizes life in any community emerged.

Today, Yungay is clearly no longer the provisional refugee camp of the early 1970s. It is the established capital of its province and one of the major cities of the region. Thirty-five years of national, social, political, and infrastructural changes have led to increased integration of the entire region into national political and economic life. Despite the many years and changes since the disaster, however, Yungay's ordeal and its triumph over death remain at the core of local community identity.

DEVELOPMENT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT: THE VILLAGES OF YONGJING, CHINA

The second example is drawn from a recent article by Jun Jing (1999) in the *American Ethnologist*, titled "Villages Dammed, Villages Repossessed: A Memorial Movement in Northwest China." His analysis illustrates how memories of defeat and suffering arising from dislocation, economic loss, and political persecution can be transformed into a collective force of recovery. The case of Yongjing shows how a life can be destroyed and how a grassroots movement to commemorate that destruction and its associated suffering can facilitate what she analyzes as "repossession." Repossession is about reclaiming history and identity. It is about setting the record straight. Jing uses the concept of repossession to evoke the activation of a silenced voice of resentment, of a damaged livelihood, of a ruined religious landscape in Yongjing in the context of emerging freedoms of expression in provincial China.

Since 1949 the development strategies of the People's Republic of China have promoted construction of large hydroelectric projects, resulting in the displacement of 10.2 million people (Human Rights Watch/Asia 1995:10 as quoted in Jing 1999:326). In the early period, the vast majority of these people were resettled involuntarily, with major economic losses that the government largely concealed by glorifying the benefits of large dams. The case of Yongching province in

Northwest China fit clearly into this pattern. A major government plan involved building forty-six dams on the Yellow River to control flooding, provide irrigation, and produce 110 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year. Three of those dams were constructed in Yongchong province, the last being completed in 1975. The dams affected 101 villages and displaced 43,829 people after 7,900 hectares of farmland were submerged.

The original plan for the region was to resettle people in remote areas, but the affected villages protested. Government officials realized that resettling people in distant regions would be too costly, so they consented to relocate people in the local area, but on lands of lesser quality and with less access to water. When villagers discovered that resettlement entailed serious declines in welfare, they protested again but were quickly silenced. The Communist Party ejected those who complained, sending one leader to a labor camp. All overt resistance was suppressed during the "big manhunt" of 1958 (mid August to mid September). The government equated resistance to resettlement with resistance to the Great Leap Forward and preemptively arrested 855 people, including landlords, leaders of dissent groups, and organizers of religious societies. Public executions of twenty-one people effectively ended overt resistance for decades.

The peasants lost their homes, ancestral tombs, religious monuments, lands, and spiritual and economic well-being. Even after post-Mao economic reforms began to improve the economic lives of people in rural China, the peasants of Yongchong continued in poverty because they had been resettled on inferior land without compensation for their losses. After the dissolution of collective farming, as Yongchong peasants experienced greater local autonomy and personal freedom, low levels of protest and resistance to the state began. People refused to pay taxes in groups or interest on loans they had received from state-run banks. Ironically, to voice their complaints with the Communist authorities, the peasants employed the Communist practice of the "recalling bitterness tradition" that was used to generate hostility toward the old pre-Communist system.

In 1981 a memorial movement began, commemorating the losses and persecution people suffered in the displacement and resettlement, to force the authorities to acknowledge their plight and to demand

reparations. The movement employed three basic forms of collective action: the staging of public, frequently ritualized protests to evoke the grievances suppressed in the past, the circulation and submission of petitions insisting on adequate compensation for the loss of the means of agricultural production, and the documentation and reconstruction of lost temples and tombs of the families of the displaced. The kinship and lineage system normally provided the organizational basis for the development of resistance networks that carried out these strategies of collective action.

The staged protests often consisted of carefully orchestrated narratives of suffering that emphasized and compressed two separate events—the dismantling of homes and the flooding of villages—into one sudden, unexpected assault. These cataclysmic narratives were designed to rewrite the history of the resettlement period, obliging the authorities to recognize that the people had sacrificed a great deal in the name of national development. The protests also made clear that the state had not fulfilled its promises to the people. Through petitions to the government for economic reparations, the movement addressed the material losses. Even twenty years after the resettlement, villagers were still so poor that they depended on emergency food rations. The villagers organized sit-ins at government offices and submitted 322 petitions for financial restitution. Although the government refused to pay reparations, it did provide low-interest loans and free irrigation equipment in an effort to alleviate the poverty. The peasants further rejected the bureaucratic label *shuiku yimin* (reservoir relocatees) applied to them by the government, employing the local term *kumin* (reservoir people) to mean, through tonal change, “embittered” or “embittered people.”

In the search for transcendental meaning in the trauma of political persecution and loss, people recovered their religious tradition and identity through two strategies: they created memorial texts and new genealogical records, and they reconstructed village temples. The displacement had destroyed one hundred village temples and forty-four thousand family tombs. Temple reconstruction and reconstructed temples became centers for unofficial, sometimes secret, networks of religious association. The rebuilding of mosques was equally impressive. In Yongjing, sixty-three mosques were rebuilt for a population of only

twenty thousand Muslims. Plaques on reconstructed temples criticized Maoist policy on resettlement. Newly written texts memorialized the importance of deities' statues to community.

The Yongjing case indicates that the social reconstruction of memory and the assertion of that memory's relevance, through resistance, are crucial to recovery after displacement. In Yongjing, individual memories of suffering that had been suppressed by the government were transformed into a collective consciousness of rights that provided a moral justification for resistance and for protest of old and new grievances. Their main goal was to hold the government to its word. They argued that the government had reneged on its promise to compensate the losses they suffered in the name of national development. The movement combined invoking rights of public expression, the "recalling bitterness" tactics, and open but controlled confrontation with government authorities for recognition of Yongjing's losses.

The memorial movement publicly undermined the notion of people's indebtedness to the party. By commemorating the experiences of resettlement, hunger, and political persecution—in demonstrations, petition drives, temple reconstruction, and recording the destruction of family tombs—the villagers were able to reconstruct the official doctrine of popular indebtedness to the party; they demonstrated that the party was indebted to them. The path chosen by the villagers of Yongching is increasingly seen elsewhere in China. Village religious life and organization are emerging as an alternative base of power and authority precisely because this base is closely linked to the re-emergence of kinship organizations, temple associations, and village autonomy.

History and memory become the means by which community members oblige authorities to acknowledge their losses and injuries and to redress these through reparations and reconstruction. As their material losses are recognized and validated, people feel validated, which furthers social reconstitution. Not only are land and buildings repossessed, but also the history and identity of the community. Protest and resistance, even twenty-five years after the displacement and resettlement process, enable people to create a politics of identity and to undertake processes of recovery that are meaningful in terms of fidelity to local cultural tradition (based on Jing 1999:324–343).

**POLITICAL VIOLENCE-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT:
THE REFUGEE CAMP OF TONGOGARA, ZIMBABWE**

Displacement due to political upheaval can present significant challenges for the reconstitution of community, in part because resettlement takes a variety of forms. In some instances, refugees are resettled as individuals or families in totally new environments into which they must be assimilated, thus eradicating any possibility of community reconstitution. In other instances, refugees are resettled in camps that may exist for months or for decades. Although refugee camps frequently attempt to create forms of community organization based on the spatial density and nucleation of camp settlements, diversity can challenge the reconstitution of community. The need to cooperate often forces refugees in camps to form networks for mutual advantage, but ethnic, religious, and class barriers, or the temporary nature of the camp, may impede the establishment of community.

The Tongogara Refugee camp in Zimbabwe eventually became home to fifty-two thousand people displaced during the guerrilla war waged against the government by the National Resistance Movement (RENAMO) in Mozambique (Mabe 1994). After its independence in 1975, Mozambique participated in the struggle against white minority rule throughout southern Africa, giving shelter to the guerrillas of the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU). In response, Rhodesia created RENAMO, although it was primarily armed and financed by South Africa in the 1970s. After the fall of Rhodesia and the independence of the new nation of Zimbabwe, RENAMO, now fully under the South African Military Intelligence Directorate, turned its attention to Mozambique in order to inhibit any possibility of challenge that the emerging nation and its plentiful resource base might present to South African hegemony in southern Africa (Nordstrom 1992; Ball and Barnes 2000). RENAMO embarked on a guerrilla war in Mozambique that killed more than half a million people, destroyed the government, and drove millions to seek refuge in Malawi and Zimbabwe from the terror of village massacres, torture, and the destruction of homes, crops, and livestock (Mabe 1994:79). Because Mozambique had provided Zimbabwe's independence fighters sanctuary during their struggle, Zimbabwe felt a special sympathy and an obligation to assist the refugees.

The Tongogara Refugee Camp was run by a thirty-four-member staff of social workers, nurses, and administrators appointed by the government of Zimbabwe. The refugee population was divided into seventeen largely self-managed "base camps." Tongogara was relatively close to the border, so residents often returned to Mozambique to bring friends and relatives to safety. When refugees arrived, the camp administrator interviewed them to establish their cultural background and lineage identity. Four major languages were spoken in the camp: Shangani, Ndaou, Chinyungwe, and Sena. All the cultures represented in the camp were related to Shangani, a cultural system drawn from Zulu and the MaShona culture of Zimbabwe. The camp administrator himself was a descendent of a prominent Zulu lineage, which provided him with a source of traditional authority. On the basis of this interview, the refugees were given a tent and assigned to a base camp whose population shared a similar regional and cultural background.

Tongogara base camps were organized around traditional patrilineages and administered through traditional law. Base camp leaders were village leaders charged with settling disputes, judging criminal offenses, and reporting problems and needs to the camp administrator. Shangani society is patrilineal and patrilocal, with clan and lineage elders holding authority based on the respect accorded their age. Leadership of the base camps emerged from the assignment of people of the same clan or patrilineage to the same camp. Because kin must always be accepted into the group that takes responsibility for them, ties of mutual obligation automatically linked new and established residents (Mabe 1994:83).

The organization of the base camp as a lineage-based settlement was not complete, however, without establishment of contact with the ancestors. Unless contact is established with the ancestors, the lineage (as community) will lack protectors and counselors. The ancestors also act as mediators between the creator and the people. Ancestors select their own spirit mediums, through whom they speak to the people. The process of choosing a spirit medium is lengthy and involves signs, often in the form of misfortunes that befall an individual. Traditional healers interpret these signs as the power of the ancestors at work. Once chosen, the spirit medium carries out the rituals that communicate with the ancestor who is essential for maintaining the continuity of the community (Mabe 1994:88).

The camp structure would be difficult to maintain without the validation of the ancestors who provide continuity through the customary law and ritual of the Shangani and related ethnic groups. Among the important symbols in ancestor rituals, snakes are seen as the messenger animals of the ancestors. The low-lying plain where the camp was located is also home to poisonous and nonpoisonous snakes. The python, in particular, is regarded as the emissary of the creator; its presence is a sign of great importance and power. That pythons actually visit the camp is also a sign that it is protected by the creator, as well as a reminder to the people of proper behavior during crisis (Mabe 1994:93).

In effect, the people view the occasional visits by pythons in the camps as completing the re-establishment of the lineage by bringing together all kinsmen, living and dead. The presence of pythons in the immediate environment, as well as in the camps, assures the stability and continuity of lineages and communities. When the pythons visit the camps, the Shangani refugees from Mozambique interpret this as a blessing and confirmation that they, as a community and as individuals, have a duty to continue. Thus, their survival acquires a purpose beyond the individual; life in the camp takes on meaning, and the continuity between the past and present, the living and the dead, and of the lineages forms the basis on which community is reconstituted.

Because of this social, political, and cultural foundation, as Mabe (1994:94) indicates, refugees in Tongogara lived in *villages*, not camps. The political sympathies of the host government and the cultural similarity of the host society in the surrounding villages also supported the establishment of viable, working communities instead of the disarticulated, violent refugee camps that have, unfortunately, become the standard elsewhere. When the war came to an end and peace was re-established in Mozambique, refugees were free to stay in the villages of Tongogara or return home. The vast majority returned home. The Tongogara Refugee Camp still exists today, although the population now totals fewer than two thousand from all over Africa. The camp is the site of a successful sustainable-farming project (ReliefWeb 2004), even though the cultural diversity of the refugee population initially impeded participation—an indication, perhaps, that the formation of village communities when the Mozambican refugees were in residence will not be forthcoming. Furthermore, there is some concern that

increased pressure from urban refugees seeking relocation to Tongogara will put a significant strain on resources, services, and facilities (UNHCR 2004:5).

The value of culturally sustained restoration of social relationships as the basis for community among political refugees is supported by further evidence. When refugees are able to self-settle with culturally similar groups, the result is eventual integration, as in the case mentioned earlier of Angolan refugees in Zambia who resettled with co-ethnic Luvale villages or the case of the deterritorialized moral community of Hutu refugees (Hansen 1992; Malkki 1992). When refugees are repatriated, the cultural resources I have discussed become more relevant, particularly when the major sociocultural challenge is the re-establishment of trust. The violence and uncertainty of civil conflict undermine trust in the larger society as much as in the community itself. Research on rebuilding social capital in the post-conflict regions of highland Peru and Guatemala suggests that a prior process of re-establishing trust through specific social networks furthers the process of community reconstitution (Bebbington and Gomez 2000).

CONCLUSION

Over the past thirty years, the role of applied anthropologists in working with the uprooted peoples of the world has expanded significantly. Initially, anthropologists were primarily engaged in applied research on displacement and resettlement. The post-war concern for the welfare and fate of the enormous numbers of refugees in World War II inspired the research on displacement. The pioneer document is Alexander Leighton's (1945) *The Governing of Men: General Principles and Recommendations Based on Experiences at a Japanese Refugee Camp*. Although his research was based on a case of politically forced relocation, Leighton introduced many issues—particularly in the realms of stress, social organization, and resistance—that would become central to the concerns of anthropologists undertaking research with people variously displaced in the 1950s (for example, Colson 1971; Firth 1959; Scudder 1973; Wallace 1957).

Subsequently, anthropologists have become involved in an extremely wide array of activities and domains in their work with displaced peoples, activities as diverse yet related as applied research, pol-

icy formation, theory building, evaluation, planning, implementation, and resistance. Anthropologists were among the first to recognize and report on the impoverishment, social disorganization, and violation of human rights that occurred among uprooted populations. Applied anthropologists have worked in many dimensions of post-conflict social reconstruction, including troop demobilization, repatriation, refugee camp organization, and refugee resettlement. Among people uprooted by natural and technological disasters, anthropologists have worked on social reconstruction issues in the areas of hazard vulnerability analysis, urban planning, housing, post-disaster aid programs, and, very recently, policy formation.

Unquestionably, anthropologists have been most active and influential in the area of development-induced uprooting. Within multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, applied anthropologists have played major roles in developing more appropriate policies for planning and implementing resettlement projects. They have authored the guidelines for best practices and procedures that require compliance by borrower nations. Often, as consultants to these and other institutions, anthropologists have carried out the applied research necessary for informed planning and implementation of humane and developmentally oriented resettlement projects. Throughout the lifetime of projects, anthropologists have also evaluated performance in restoring incomes and enhancing social re-articulation among the resettled for individual and community recovery.

Anthropologists have also been actively engaged in advocacy work with all kinds of uprooted peoples. Currently, anthropologists are in leadership roles in NGOs that work at many levels to assist communities facing resettlement in gaining better conditions in various reconstruction and resettlement projects. Working closely with groups and communities, anthropologists have also joined resistance efforts against development-induced resettlement. They are part of the larger community of activists and scholars who keep close watch on policy formulation in both national and international organizations dealing with the displaced, as well as those international lending institutions that fund development projects that uproot communities. The participation of applied anthropologists in all the activities associated with social

reconstruction will take on increasing importance as the environmental vulnerability, social conflict, and large-scale infrastructural development that displaced so many people and communities in the twentieth century continue in the twenty-first.

The findings of researchers and practitioners alike over the past quarter century reveal that, even under the most harrowing of circumstances occasioned by natural, social, or (for lack of a better term) administrated violence, communities are not without significant cultural resources to regain and re-establish meaningful places in the world, even when they have been permanently torn from their homes. As other chapters in this volume reveal, the local resources, or assets, come in many forms: skills, voluntary organizations, institutions, natural and physical resources, and economic power. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on local cultural resources and the power of cultural tradition to mobilize people facing the destruction of community. Rather than clump these varied traditions under some abstract construct of social capital, I prefer to explore the substance of the resources articulated and acted on by people themselves in the process of recovery and reconstitution of community life, as revealed in the cases discussed in Peru, China, and Zimbabwe.

This is not to say, however, that poorly informed reconstruction and other social policy cannot render vital resources useless. The wreckage from uprooted communities around the world is as much due to poor policy as it is to the violence to which they have been subjected. Nonetheless, as we enter the early years of the twenty-first century, we are undeniably the protean creatures that Lifton spoke of, but not to the degree that we can do without such elements of the self as place, kin, and community. The displaced around the world teach us that, when torn from these fundamental elements, we draw on the cultural constructs of space, time, and people to re-create them again and again in theme and variation. The displaced reveal to us the adaptive capacities of individuals and peoples and also the centrality of the grounding concept of community to the human sense of self and society.