

EDITORIAL

In the early 1990s, approximately half of the ethnic Nepali population of Bhutan fled or were expelled from their villages in the south of the country. Twenty years later, an estimated 108,000 Bhutanese refugees were still living in bamboo huts in seven camps in south east Nepal. Despite numerous rounds of bilateral talks between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal, none had been repatriated to Bhutan and local integration in Nepal remained a very distant prospect.

In 2006, UNHCR and a core group of member states announced plans to launch a third country resettlement programme for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. This began in earnest in 2008, when the refugees became eligible for resettlement to one of seven countries: the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. In 2010, the UK belatedly added itself to this list. The process of third country resettlement is now well advanced, with over 63,000 former refugees resettled in a large number of locations scattered across the USA and smaller numbers in the seven other countries.

The arrival in countries of the global North of a large number of Nepali-speaking Hindu refugees from a country whose international profile is associated primarily with Buddhism and 'Gross National Happiness' raises a whole range of interesting questions. However, research on this very new Himalayan diaspora is in its infancy and most researchers are working in isolation. In May 2013 a workshop was convened at SOAS in London to provide researchers with an opportunity to share their understandings and perspectives. A seedcorn grant from the SOAS Faculty of Languages and Cultures and the generous financial support received for this initiative from the Foundation Open Society Institute enabled the convenors to invite contributors from Nepal, Canada, Australia, the USA and the Netherlands, and also to invite representatives of the UK resettled community in Manchester to share their perspectives. This special issue of the EBHR contains a selection of the papers presented at the workshop.

The content of these articles is largely empirical, reflecting the novelty of this field of research: the data that will provide the basis for theoretical and comparative work is still being gathered. Indeed, most of these articles are reports of work in progress in Australia, Canada, the

Netherlands, the UK and the USA, and we look forward to the completion of the longer term projects from which they emanate. None the less, they provide valuable information on many of the most important political, cultural and socio-economic aspects of Bhutanese refugee resettlement, and several also offer critical analyses of resettlement policies in the host countries.

This workshop was intended to lead to the establishment of an international network of researchers working on Bhutanese refugee resettlement. It is hoped that its success will provide a springboard for the development of further collaborative projects. Questions of cultural and political identity and generational change loomed large in our discussions, and I hope that these and other topics will become the focus for further research among resettled Bhutanese refugees in the years to come.

I am grateful to my colleague Tania Kaiser, and to Roz Evans and Nicole Hoellerer, for joining forces to scour the globe for people who might share our interest in this topic, and to Jane Savory and Rahima Begum of the SOAS Centres and Programmes Office and my erstwhile student, now Dr. Mona Chettri, for providing crucial administrative support. My thanks also to Heleen Plaisier for copy-editing and Arik Moran for another good set of book reviews.

Finally, a personal note. I visited Bhutan in 1992 when the so-called 'southern problem' was at its height and the camps in Nepal contained around 70,000 people. I first stepped into the camps in 1995, and went back three times between 1999 and 2001. My book on the subject, *Unbecoming Citizens*, was published in 2003. I often wonder what became of the group of men I met in Chirang in 1992, in the encounter I recounted in the introduction to my book. I was told by local officials that they had applied to 'emigrate' from Bhutan but had been persuaded to withdraw their applications. I strongly suspect that they ended up in Nepal and maybe they are resettled somewhere now. However, I was unable to discover their names, so I may never know. I do know that the woman I called 'Devi Maya', to whom I dedicated a whole chapter of my book, now lives in Tasmania. How strangely the world can turn.

– Michael Hutt