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## *Imposing Aid: The Ethnography of Displacement and its Aftermath*

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*Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*

by Barbara Harrell-Bond

Oxford University Press, 400 pp. 1986.

### **Giving a Book its Due**

Books are generally reviewed soon after they first appear, long before it is possible to evaluate their impact upon a discipline or any larger audience. *Imposing Aid* by Barbara Harrell-Bond was published about 25 years ago in 1986. It is a good time to look again and consider why it was important in its time, what was new about it, and how, if at all, it affected subsequent work in the discipline of anthropology and among those employed by agencies created to give aid to refugees and other people dispossessed of home and community.

### **The Rise of an Ethnography of Displacement and its Aftermath**

By 1986, the study of displacement was anything but new, whether it was due to war, government oppression, the effects of climate change, or economic upheavals including the drive to capitalize land or increase the countable gross national product.

Arnold Toynbee (1934, 1939), for one, made displacement and its aftermath dominant motifs of his voluminous history of civilizations. Historians and sociologists had written of the migrations that overran the Roman Empire, the slave trade that forcibly exiled millions of Africans to the New World, the massive transfer of European populations to the Americas and Australia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the major population displacements associated with World Wars I and II.

But *Imposing Aid* was one of the first ethnographies to deal with a situation of chaotic upheaval. As late as 1945, research on forcible displacement and a search for asylum was barely within the anthropological domain, commonly seen in Britain and North America as properly comprising the ethnographic study of small scale societies viewed as having had stable cultural systems, though these might be on the point of vanishing forever. While anthropologists were aware that the people whose culture or social order formed their subject matter had been forced to move (sometimes in the very recent past), they paid little attention to the impacts of uprooting and resettlement. These were treated as incidental to the principal research focus, as when Evans-Pritchard in his classic study of Azande magic and witchcraft commented that he would say little about the recently resettlement of the Azande, imposed by the Sudanese government

as a means to control sleeping sickness. His description would be primarily based on practice prior to the move and would touch upon the move only where it affected Azande oracles and other such practices (1938:15).

Such indifference to uprooting was challenged first when studies of African labor migration were initiated in the 1930s and then by the emergence of a field of applied anthropology at the end of the 1930s. Both developments called for new agendas that emphasized movement and change rather than stability and stasis as phenomena crucial to an ethnography that dealt with the contemporary world, where the focus was on the emergent present and the future rather than on the past and perhaps the present. The shift in perspective was reinforced in the 1950s and 1960s when ethnographic research began to involve repeated visits to the same sites and so had to deal with longer time spans. With this, anthropologists simply could not dismiss as only incidental to their work the disruptions caused by encroachment of centralizing governments and international competition for economic and political resources. If people controlled land or other resources that could be capitalized, they were at risk of forcible removal. They were also set in motion by the civil wars and other disturbances of the late 20th century associated with decolonization and the international struggle for dominance misnamed the Cold War.

By the time *Imposing Aid* was published in 1986, ethnographic studies of the experiences of those uprooted by natural disasters, wars and the taking of land for development purposes or the testing of atomic bombs already existed (Colson 1971; Condominas & Pottier 1982; Hansen & Oliver-Smith, eds. 1982; Keller 1975; Lieber, ed. 1977; Loizos 1981; Mamdani 1973; Morgan & Colson, eds. 1987; Nowak 1984; Reining 1966; Stein 1981; Stone & McGowan 1980). This work put in question a good many assumptions underlying earlier ethnographic work, as did the growing involvement of anthropologists in the examination of the effects of official development projects, often associated with displacement and the creation of settlement schemes. The period after World War II saw large-scale clearances in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America to accommodate major hydroelectric dams, large agricultural schemes, mining ventures and national parks. Often these were in areas and among people with whom anthropologists had traditionally worked. Displacement happened before their eyes and the destructiveness to lives and livelihoods could not be ignored.

Anthropologists also became employable as technical specialists on areas and people pinpointed for development. They were expected to explain why projects held to be technologically exemplary were running into difficulties. Those planning and implementing a project assumed that if the technology was appropriate then the source of difficulty must lie in the irrational resistance of local people either because their understanding was distorted by something in their "culture" or because they were influenced by outside radicals who had political motives for intervening. As technical specialists on culture, anthropologists were expected first to identify cultural glitches and then help overcome cultural resistance by suggesting ingenious ways of fine-tuning projects to make them culturally palatable. Unfortunately for their continued employability, many went beyond this mission to examine the rationality and economic effectiveness of the proposed project, pointing out that it would exact a good deal of discomfort and hard work but in return offer little or no advantage, economic or

otherwise, to those expected to cooperate. They made themselves still less popular with employing agencies when they went even further and pointed to “cultural resistance” among those who planned and implemented without considering whether their own assumptions were valid elsewhere (Colson 1982; Fahim 1981 & 1983; Hoben 1980; Mahur 1977; Robertson 1981; Salisbury 1976).

Critical appraisal of cultural gestalts, however, was alien to anthropology itself. Assessment or evaluation implies judgment about the suitability of both ends and means. Earlier, whether influenced by the functionalisms of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown or the cultural historicism of Boas and his followers, ethnographic studies were expected to be non-judgmental. They could remain so only as long as ethnographers could take for granted that those they studied shared a common consensus about basic values and agreed on appropriate means for reaching shared goals. Functionalism, moreover, was based on two assumptions: that the people studied identified themselves as forming a community and that a social order was an adaptive system whose elements worked together to meet its members’ basic needs. The job of the ethnographer was to discover how the observed phenomena met these needs and maintained the community. Occasionally an individual might be singled out as being more or less effective in filling a given role, but individual deviations were assumed to cancel themselves out over time. It was neither expected nor necessary for the ethnographer to take sides or pass judgment on what individuals thought or did. In fact, this went against the ethic of the discipline as it emerged in the first half of the 20th century. Societies or cultures had their own rationales. The job of the ethnographer was to discover these and explicate them so that they made sense to outsiders. As a discipline, anthropology believed firmly in the rationality of human kind and that people behaved rationally however weird their behavior might seem to an outsider.

This simply did not work when anthropologists found themselves studying situations in which people of very different backgrounds were expected to work together to achieve purposes about which they might well be in basic disagreement, especially if the outcome was either unpredictable or clearly disadvantageous to some of those involved, including instances of people being pushed aside by others who obviously did not see them as part of the same social universe. Where conflict of interests rather than consensus defines a situation, it is difficult to impossible to maintain the impartial observer stance, especially where contending parties have unequal access to national and/or international support systems. If anthropologists reported on such situations, whether as independent academics or paid evaluators, the temper of the times made it extremely likely that they would consider the possibility that those who planned and implemented needed to prove rather than assume that it would benefit those affected. While large-scale technological projects were not as suspect in the 1950s and 1960s as they came to be later, decolonization and the emergence of new states centered attention on political issues associated with the exercise of power and gave rise to a widespread questioning of the forms and actions of governance. Resettlement and other projects, even those desired by newly installed governments intent on rapid modernization of their economies, were seen as open to critique and not necessarily to be regarded as rational choices even though they relied on high technology. It became possible to ask whether a given project should be initiated at all, or whether a given project needed

radical changes if it were to be feasible. In other words, the fault might lie in the project rather than in the local people.

Anthropological interest in refugees began to emerge in the 1970s. When wars in Southeast Asia focused attention on the plight of those fleeing from violence, anthropologists, among others, began to bear witness to the disruption of lives. The ethnographic study of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian refugees was one aspect of the anti-war movement of the 1970s. Research was first carried out in refugee camps in Hong Kong, the Philippines or Thailand where people had recently found asylum, before the effects of long term containment was evident. Soon thereafter came studies of refugees in their role as new immigrants when people from the camps began to make their way to permanent asylum in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. But given their timing in relation to uprooting and immigration, again the emphasis was upon the impact of arrival and first adjustment.

Since the 1970s, the study of refugees has become a growth area in anthropology and the social sciences in general. There has been no dearth of new refugees for study as people have fled warfare, victimization and privation in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast and East Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, and taken refuge among local people or in camps established by international organization, or found themselves new immigrants in strange countries. There they have helped to create the diasporas so characteristic of the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third. In the twenty-first century, ethnographies continue to be produced of the newly arrived in the first stages of dealing with traumatic experiences leading to flight or encountered during flight, and during the early stages of arrival but such studies have now been supplemented by long-term research that follows the trajectory of the displaced and provides a better understanding of the long-term consequences of displacement for those who remain resident in camps that serve as permanent holding centers or have become immigrants of some years standing in countries of asylum, or have returned home to discover that home itself has become a strange country (Adelman, ed. 2008; Daniel & Knudsen 1995; James 2007; Loizos 2008; Peteet 2005; Sassoon 2009).

## **Impact and Consequences**

*Imposing Aid* is based on intensive ethnographic fieldwork in the southern Sudan in the early 1980s when Ugandans were seeking refuge in Sudan. Its emotional charge derives from Harrell-Bond's eye-witness knowledge of what had happened and was still happening in circumstances of terrible and often unmet need, where all eventually felt victimized and she herself was helpless to prevent suffering. But its strengths come from her careful documentation of the way government and humanitarian organizations worked or did not work, when circumstances constantly changed and resources were never enough for what needed to be done, and of the ways that individuals tried to cope under conditions of extreme uncertainty that led to a breakdown of trust. The documentation is multifaceted, combining evidence drawn from official documents, interviews, participant observation, case studies, children's drawings, essays written by various actors, quantitative surveys, and the reflections of members of the survey team in the evening discussions after a day's work.

Harrell-Bond did not initiate anthropological research on refugees and others uprooted by onslaughts that we now associate with the commodification of land and the globalization of capital (Colson 2003; Marx 1990). What she did was refocus it so that refugees, their hosts, government at different levels, and the emerging order composed of international and voluntary humanitarian agencies came to be seen as mutually evolving through complex interactions which simultaneously defined and changed them all. She never forgot that the refugees she encountered in the southern Sudan in the early 1980s had gone through horrifying experiences that left many traumatized, but she also refused to equate “refugee” with “victim” or to think them best served by “one size fits all” responses. Many brought precious resources of professional skills and other knowledge or material possessions that made them potential assets to the peoples and countries that fostered them. But from the first days of flight through early attempts to provide for immediate needs and later attempts to provide long-term solutions, refugees became involved with a host of “others” whose own identities now depended on the contrasted category of “refugee.” She showed how these identities were socially constructed as various actors struggled for their own survival and advancement under conditions that encouraged disillusionment and cynicism.

In *Imposing Aid*, Harrell-Bond also broke new ground when she applied the ethic of critical appraisal, developed during earlier assessments of development projects, to programs for refugee assistance. She identified similar conflicts of interest and disparities in power characterizing various sets of actors and asked how practice could be changed so that stated objectives might be better served. This was new. Anthropologists already engaged in research among refugees had not defined their field of study to include other actors active in the refugee world: humanitarian agencies, their international supporters, local governments and host people. Harrell-Bond did so to the dismay of the humanitarian agencies created to provide assistance during periods of upheaval. They were not used to being subjected to ethnographic appraisal and did not like it, especially when it came as well documented as this and proved a precedent followed by subsequent fieldworkers.

While *Imposing Aid* is a case study of a particular time and place, Harrell-Bond’s approach was historical, inherently comparative and critical. Historical, because she kept in view how the previous history of this border area of Sudan/Uganda was implicated in the response of host populations and the expectations of the incoming refugees. Comparative, because she wrote against the background of her own earlier work on law elsewhere in Africa and in the assessment of development projects and her perspective was influenced by first-hand experience with self-governing refugee camps in the western Sahara. Moreover, as Malinowski had done much earlier in calling for studies of societies as functioning units, she centered her investigation on basic needs that must be met anywhere if people are to survive. These may be summed up as the need for food and shelter, for a legality that provides protection and security against attacks on persons and property so that the present is endurable and people can plan for the future, and for psychological support systems that enable trust in others to be reestablished and maintained. That same grasp on basic realities was at work in her creation and development of the influential Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford (founded 1985).

It is also the reason why *Imposing Aid* became something of an unacknowledged handbook for those whose work lies within a refugee context or with other displaced persons. Unacknowledged because, inevitably, it aroused the hostility of many who felt under attack when they saw their work exposed to public scrutiny in a critique they resented. While Harrell-Bond agreed that the Ugandans entering the Sudan needed various kinds of humanitarian assistance, including the provision of food and medical services, she brought to the work of humanitarian agencies the same kind of scrutiny already used in the study of development projects elsewhere in Africa. It might be much-discussed in-house knowledge that programs did not work well or failed and that some workers compromised the humanitarian ethic, but that made the scrutiny of *Imposing Aid* no easier to swallow. Many saw public discussion of their failures as an attack on their professional image and as endangering public support for humanitarian assistance programs that depend upon appeals to charity. Doubts about the efficacy of their programs put their agencies, their jobs and the assistance they claimed to provide in jeopardy. Whatever their private complaints, they could hardly endorse what they regarded as indecent and scandalous exposure.

Harrell-Bond may have foreseen this response, for she noted that employees of humanitarian agencies thought high purposes should exempt their actions and subsequent outcomes from public scrutiny. This clashed with her own belief that humanitarian programs should be appraised with at least the same rigor as programs initiated in the name of economic development so that mistakes could be identified and (she hoped) rectified. Others carrying out research on refugees felt free to follow her example and continued the critique though they did not always balance criticism of donor policy and action with the even-handed appraisal of refugee responses that was one of the strengths of *Imposing Aid*.

Harrell-Bond did not minimize the difficulties faced by agency personnel who had no easy task given the chaotic logistics of trying to provide for a constantly changing population in a region where movement was difficult. She also made it clear that they did not have a docile clientele gratefully accepting what was given them. Suffering, including the disorientation caused by uprooting and resettlement in a strange environment, is unlikely to develop saintliness or trust among those who suffer. Too many arrive already feeling betrayed by fellow countrymen and those encountered en route. They are unlikely to take at face value the good faith of people whom they do not know and whose motives in providing assistance they cannot evaluate. Relief workers in the southern Sudan in the early 1980s faced people burdened by the traumas of their flight, anxious about others who might or might not have survived, and disoriented in unfamiliar surroundings. Some may have become psychotic from the stress, and Harrell-Bond further noted that their food rations did not meet official nutritional standards. Some of the behaviors shown were similar to behaviors reported of experimental subjects on starvation diets. In camps set up for their reception, the refugees lived on inadequate, irregularly distributed rations. They were forced into close association with unknown others or with those they feared as enemies. Crowding people together does not make for instant community nor does hunger encourage generosity.

Relief workers and refugees had even less in common than refugees had with one another. They faced each other across multiple barriers including the lack of a

common language or agreed upon definitions of their various roles. Their lack of mutual understanding was exacerbated by the lack of institutionalized means of circulating official information so that people knew what to expect. Instead, rumor flourished and fed on itself, giving rise to unrealistic ideas about entitlements and suspicion that some were benefitting to the detriment of others.

*Imposing Aid* shows what living under these conditions does to those who are converted into refugees, but it also shows how their working conditions affected agency employees who came expecting to provide life-giving assistance. For many, it led to what came to be called “burn out.” On occasion, Harrell-Bond saw herself reacting in much the same fashion and she used her own experience reflexively in understanding what others were going through. She saw how good intentions gave way to irritation and even hostility as agency workers struggled with their own experiences of discomfort, betrayal of trust and failure in the presence of people they thought ought to be grateful but who weren’t. It was only too easy for them to blame their difficulties on those they had come to serve. Harrell-Bond argued that those working in such conditions were victims along with the refugees and that agencies needed to be aware of their likely responses when setting up relief programs.

Harrell-Bond went further in querying the rationality and validity of humanitarian programs as then organized. While accepting that international aid is necessary, at least if local resources cannot provide for the influx of a large number of refugees, Harrell-Bond did not take the existing system of humanitarian relief for granted and argued that how international resources are deployed within a region is crucial to the well-being of both refugees and their local hosts. She showed how the deployment of aid through competing international organizations failed to meet humanitarian goals and in some circumstances made conditions worse rather than better. She went on to suggest alternative ways of organizing aid, which, she held, would be less problematic. *Imposing Aid* is therefore both a critique of what she found and a prescription for the future.

Her solution was to place greater trust in existing governmental structures as agents of the international effort. This meant less reliance on foreign personnel and more involvement of local people, including refugees themselves. She also urged that international funds be used to purchase local inputs, thus strengthening local economies and local institutions to the benefit of both hosts and asylum seekers. She queried the common use of camps as vehicles for meeting refugee needs. Although her time in the Sudan allowed her to see only the short-term effects of camp life, she argued strongly that people should be allowed if possible to settle amongst the local population and be assisted there to find a means of gaining a livelihood while at the same time coming under local governance. This, she argued, would reduce the chance that they would become dependent on others and would ensure that they had some access to law through which they could argue their individual claims.

These recommendations, of course, conflicted with the interests that humanitarian agencies have in perpetuating themselves and improving their life chances. To this end they need access to charitable funding contributed by those whose sympathies have been aroused by the plight of those seen as victims. Against Harrell-Bond’s recommendation that host governments, given their local knowledge and existing infrastructure, are the appropriate agents to help asylum-seekers, agencies can plead that host governments

and their servants are corrupt and likely to divert funds raised for assistance to other purposes. In the 1980s and 1990s, when neo-liberals urged privatization of government services on the grounds that government bureaucracies were inefficient in comparison with private corporations, humanitarian and development agencies could also claim that as private corporations they were the most effective means to reach those in need. They ignored evidence that the proliferation of foreign agencies offering support on their own terms has helped to undercut the effectiveness of government in various African countries. Their preference for purchasing relief supplies and other goods outside the country where relief was dispersed also undercut local economies. There is no question but that corruption is rife in many countries of the so-called developing world, but one can also argue that equal or greater corruption is involved when funds given for relief purposes are used by humanitarian agencies to hire expensive expatriate staff rather than competent local people and to buy supplies abroad that can be purchased locally.

Twenty-five years after the publication of *Imposing Aid*, ethnographers who study the system of humanitarian assistance continue to corroborate Harrell-Bond's critique and further illuminate the overall deleterious impact of refugee camps. (e.g., Barrows & Jennings 2001; Terry 2002). Some of the international humanitarian agencies have listened and made minor changes, but overall the international system that provides assistance to the uprooted has remained resistant to critique. Humanitarian agencies continue to flourish and proliferate and refugee camps continue to exist, in some instances 50 years after their foundation. This demonstrates the fallacy of the old liberal assumption that knowledge is liberating and results in action. What anthropologists publish rarely provides a corrective to practice. This should not surprise them given what they know about the nature of social systems. The humanitarian world is as much a social system as any others encountered by anthropologists and shows the same resistance to interference in its workings, especially if this is offered by those who have no power to force change upon it. Neither anthropologists nor those designated as in need of aid are able to exercise this power since they neither employ nor fund those who offer assistance. These are dependent upon distant donors whose knowledge of local conditions is filtered through the humanitarian agencies that appeal for funds or the inconstant media in search of vignettes that appeal to audiences whose attention span is measured by days or at most weeks. Ethnographers who ask questions, query arrangements and discuss failures have influence only if they reach potential donors or the few in power who have the imagination to see that things can be done differently, the willingness to try something different and the authority to implement changes. It is not surprising therefore that the two and a half decades since *Imposing Aid* was published has seen a widening of the gap between purported humanitarian mission and achievement. Agencies have increased in numbers and grown more powerful. As channels of international relief, they have become the chief source of funding for both initial aid and long-term support for the millions who have fled the wars of the 20th and 21st centuries and they have gained new authority as de facto organs of government.

### **An Influence within Anthropology**

*Imposing Aid* was unfortunate in its time, for it was published during the 1980s when

many anthropologists turned away from fieldwork in favor of textual analysis and a querying of the possibility of factual description. For them ethnography became primarily “a style of writing” or a form of translation (Borneman & Hammoudi 2009), a stance that estranged them from those like Harrell-Bond who remained fully engaged with a rapidly changing world in which real people lived and prospered or suffered. It was a time of growth in anthropology as growing numbers of people entered the discipline. Predictably increasing numbers and the subsequent proliferation of publications led to a growing specialization. Those entering the field no longer expected to read widely. Rather they restricted themselves, reading what they saw as immediately relevant to their own field of enquiry. Since the 1970s it has been impossible to identify a “mainstream anthropology” in a discipline that channeled its practitioners into numerous narrow channels.

*Imposing Aid* thus attracted a readership largely confined to those trying to understand the causes and implications of the massive uprooting occurring throughout much of the world. These included sociologists, political scientists, geographers, historians, students of international and humanitarian law, as well as anthropologists. For them it became a landmark study within what is now a massive body of work examining displacement and local and international responses. Together with the Refugee Studies Programme (now Centre), founded by Barbara Harrell-Bond in 1985, it helped to set agendas for research on refugee issues and displacement in general. But no subsequent ethnography has provided as vivid a picture of the context in which assistance is provided when massive numbers of frightened people are arriving in search of safety and a chance to survive and reestablish their lives. They come uncertain of the fate of family members left behind or lost in flight and so are burdened by grief and guilt as well as rage and humiliation. The majority probably arrive stripped of possessions except for internalized skills and need immediate succor that may outstrip the provisioning capacity of the region where they take asylum.

Anthropologists have yet to come to terms with some issues raised Harrell-Bond. The book broke with anthropological tradition in its treatment of those subject to the ethnographer’s gaze. It was once axiomatic that anthropologists as ethnographers must like and respect the people whose way of life or culture they studied. Harrell-Bond pointed out that under some conditions people are not lovable and behave in ways they themselves would not respect given better conditions. She argued that it was necessary to understand why people acted as they did and this applied to refugees, hosts, and those who were sent to provide aid. Relative goodness had nothing to do with the matter. It was also part of the credo developed in the 1970s that the anthropologist’s first obligation is to protect those who are subjects of the research and that what is reported must in no way endanger them. Much that an ethnographer learns therefore is likely to go unreported and some argue that more of it should be so in order that people not be embarrassed by having their private matters made public. *Imposing Aid* challenged such assumptions, both for writing about those in powerful positions and those dependent upon assistance. Harrell-Bond wanted to improve conditions for those uprooted and this, she held, meant honest reporting, warts and all. The test of a good ethnography was not whether those written about liked and approved the critique.

Honest reporting, such as Harrell-Bond undertook, continues to be rare, though

it is sometimes approached in ethnographies of warfare (Nordstrom & Robben 1995; Richards 1996). Moreover, despite the call for reflexivity, few ethnographers have been as honest about the impact of being there upon themselves. They have chosen rather to distance themselves in their writing, defining themselves as field workers or appraisers rather than implicated in the provision of help or resistance. But implicitly they have also usually identified themselves with some particular category of actors rather than providing an overall view of the field of action. Here they have not met Harrell-Bond's challenge that good ethnography should consider the interplay of a multitude of actors. What they have been able to do, that surpasses Harrell-Bond's original work, is to look at what happens over time, in the years after the first influx and to look at the trajectory of refugee experience (James 2007; Loizos 2008; Peteet 2005).

In doing so, most have focused on those officially defined as refugees or displaced persons, i.e., those displaced who remain within the borders of their own countries. They may be housed in official camps or self-settled in the area of first refuge (Hitchcox 1990; Malkki 1995). Others have become immigrants in further countries of asylum where their adjustment is scrutinized by anthropologists and other social scientists who use ethnographic methods to examine the fortunes of a particular ethnic group within a new locale, as Nuer in Minneapolis (Holtzman 2000) or Tamils in Norway (Fugelrud 1999) or Kurds in Finland and the United Kingdom (Wahlbeck 1999) or the Greeks from Asia Minor whose initial resettlement in Greece occurred almost a century ago (Hirschon 1989; Karakasidou 1997). Others have looked at those who have returned home, either willingly or forcibly repatriated (Black & Koser 1999). A few ethnographers have chosen to focus less on refugee communities than on the agencies through which international aid is administered or the evolution of international law dealing with asylum and human rights. A considerable literature now exists on the way asylum is being politicized in the countries of Europe, North America and Australia, and on the institutional structures created by host countries to repel or receive and assimilate asylum seekers (e.g., Gilad 1990).

Less attention has been given to the study of impacts on host populations, whether these are in countries of first reception or countries of later asylum, of the nearly simultaneous arrival of a large number of foreigners who must be accommodated. In some regions the influx consists both of asylum seekers and their followers, the representatives of competing humanitarian agencies who offer assistance but become both gatekeepers and the locus of an administrative alternative to existing local governance. Anthropologists have left it to others disciplines to examine the consequent hardening of restrictions on immigration as national and local governments try to prevent the arrival of incomers seen as threatening to ethnic homogeneity and governance based on shared values and understandings.

Finally, despite demands that ethnography be theorized, few recent ethnographers have linked their findings as securely to the basic underpinnings of anthropological thought. *Imposing Aid* deals with a particular situation in which violence and abnormal behaviors might be expected and condoned. Harrell-Bond raised questions about the nature of human sociability when she queried expectations that arriving refugees would rapidly form themselves into new communities whose members would respect each other's rights. "What I had failed to anticipate was both the extent to which the demands

of individual survival undermined social values, and the time it takes for new supportive social units to establish themselves in the absence of kinfolk” (283). She pointed to the dependence of social order upon a means to link people together and she found in exchange the essence of sociality.

Part of her critique of the assistance programs deals with their definition of “needs” as the biological requirements of an individual human being without thought being given to what is required if people are to deal with one another as members of some kind of social order. One of the most important passages in *Imposing Aid* is where she writes, “Aid is not applied to maintaining social institutions. Refugees are expected to cope by being appropriately “social,” but they are denied the resources to re-establish the real bases of social life, the exchanges and rites which make a truly sociable and co-operative life possible” (292-93). She went on to say that they needed resources to exchange with each other and with their hosts and to provide for the rituals that honored the dead and so the human condition. She thereby invoked Mauss (1954) and reciprocity.

Iconoclastic as it is in many ways, *Imposing Aid* continues the anthropological search for the bases of sociality, and it does so by treating those studied as human beings in their own right who can and must deal with the world as they find it.

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