

Racism as a Biopolitical Bordering: Experiences of the Lhotshampa People Displaced from Bhutan

Authors : Karun Karki

Abstract : The Lhotshampa are Bhutanese people of Nepali origin who have been in Bhutan since the early 1600s. A significant number of these people migrated to Bhutan in the nineteenth century. The 1958 Nationality Law of Bhutan granted citizenship to many Lhotshampa people; however, in the late 1970s, the government of Bhutan introduced a series of laws and policies intended for the socio-political and cultural exclusion of the Lhotshampa due to their ancestry. These exclusionary policies and ethnic and racial injustices not only removed the rights and citizenship of the Lhotshampa but also forcibly displaced thousands of families with no choice but to seek refuge in Nepal. In this context, racism becomes a biopolitical tool designed to govern and regulate populations in a way that determines who may live and who must die. The governance and the management of the population, what Stephan Scheel terms as biopolitical bordering, depends on boundaries between residents and non-residents, citizens and non-citizens, and emigrants and immigrants. Drawing on Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necropolitics, this paper argues that the concept of racism should be examined within the context of political discourses because it is intertwined with the colonial project, enslavement, and diaspora. This paper critically explores ethnic and racial injustices the Lhotshampa people experienced and the ways in which they negotiated and resisted such injustices in their resettlement processes, including before displacement, in refugee camps, and after the third-country resettlement. Critical examination of these issues helps shed light on the notion of racial difference that justifies dehumanization, discrimination, and racist attitudes against the Lhotshampa people. The study's findings are critical in promoting human rights, social justice, and the health and well-being of the Lhotshampa community in the context of trauma and stressors in their resettlement processes.

Keywords : lhotshampa people, bhutanese refugees, racism, dehumanization, social justice, biopower, necropower

Conference Title : ICRDFM 2024 : International Conference on Refugee, Displacement and Forced Migration

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : June 20-21, 2024