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## **Migration, Mobilities, and Changing Political Landscapes**

### **Demographic Engineering and Ethnic Erasure: The Lhotshampa Displacement in Bhutan**

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In this paper, we critically explore the profound and lasting impact of Bhutan's state-driven policies on its ethnic minorities, particularly the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa people. Through the enactment of discriminatory laws and policies, such as the Citizenship Acts, the "One Nation, One People" policy, and the deployment of military force, the state sought to reshape its demographic landscape, marginalizing communities that did not fit its vision of ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic homogeneity. These policies and legislations were not just administrative measures but tools of 'demographic engineering' designed to consolidate a singular national identity at the expense of pluralism and diversity. The outcome of these policies was the forced displacement of tens of thousands of Lhotshampa people in the 1990s who were living in southern Bhutan for generations. This mass displacement was not merely an unfortunate consequence of policy but a calculated strategy to redefine Bhutan's national identity by reducing the presence of ethnic groups that were seen as incompatible with the dominant Drukpa culture. At the same time, the government encouraged the resettlement of Drukpa communities in these vacated lands, reinforcing the dominance of the ruling ethnic group while erasing the historical presence of others. The pursuit of cultural uniformity came at a profound human cost, raising serious ethical and political questions about Bhutan's commitment to democracy, human rights, and social justice.

Using the theoretical underpinnings of demographic engineering, we explore two overarching questions: What strategies did Bhutan employ in managing its population? How did these strategies impact the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa people in Bhutan? For our data, we use publicly available sources such as academic literature, government and non-governmental reports, and grey literature. Using a content analysis as our data analytical approach, we theoretically examined the strategies and policies the Bhutanese state imposed to regulate demographic changes, focusing particularly on the historical, social, and political dynamics that have shaped population control measures. Through a content analysis of historical records, policies, and social dynamics, we explore the strategies and policies the Bhutanese state imposed to its population and reshape its demographic landscape, particularly their impact on

Lhotshampa people communities. Exploring these dynamics, our paper challenges the idealized perception of Bhutan as a peaceful and harmonious nation. We argue that true national unity cannot be built through coercion and forced assimilation but must instead emerge from a genuine commitment to diversity, equality, social harmony, and human dignity.