

Humanitarian logistics research for the care of refugees and internally displaced persons

A new area of research and a research agenda

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Abstract

Purpose – This “thought paper” is written by the special issue editors as a part of the five papers accepted and published in response to the special issue call for papers on logistics and SCM in the context of relief for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the *Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management*. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the special issue on “refugee logistics” and analyse the nature and challenges of displacement from a displaced person’s perspective. The paper also argues for a more critical appreciation of the role and value that research in logistics, operations and supply chain management (LOSCM) can play in the delivery of services and care for refugees and IDPs from the perspective of preparedness and logistics planning of humanitarian organisations. The paper further outlines basic challenges to undertaking innovative, boundary pushing valuable and impactful research on “refugee logistics” given the difficult ideological, political and policy context in which “refugee logistics research” will be undertaken. The paper also advocates for more critical research in humanitarian logistics (HL), that explicitly acknowledges its ontological, epistemological and methodological limitations even when ethically sound. The paper concludes by suggesting a future research agenda for this new sub-field of humanitarian logistics research.

Design/methodology/approach – Conceptual paper utilising viewpoints, literature reviews as well as original ideas and thoughts of the authors.

Findings – The new field of “refugee logistics research” is important. It has been neglected in humanitarian logistics research for too long. Hence, there needs to be more research in this sub-field of humanitarian logistics.

Research limitations/implications – This is a “thought paper”. It is the basic conceptual ideas of the authors. While it is not based on empirical work or data collection, it is based on a comprehensive literature research and analysis.

Social implications – This paper advocates for the universal human rights of IDPs and refugees and their dignity, and how LOSCM can contribute to upholding such dignity.

Originality/value – It contributes indirectly to logistics policy and refugee policy as well as logistics service quality and advocacy for human rights and human dignity.

Keywords Humanitarian logistics, Disaster relief operations, Humanitarian supply chain, Humanitarian operations, Not-for-profit supply chain, Refugees and internally displaced persons

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Background and introduction

Refugee studies, as a broad multi-disciplinary field of academic inquiry, have become a major focus of scholars and policymakers around the world (Cameron, 2014). This is because refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are statistically an important



issue, and can no longer be ignored (Cameron, 2014). The United Nations High Commission for Refugees in its June 2017 report (UNHCR, 2017) stated that forced displacement of persons worldwide is at its highest in decades. UNHCR's Annual Global Trends report indicates that an unprecedented 65.6 m people were uprooted from their homes by conflict and persecution at the end of 2016, a total bigger than the population of the UK.

Various crises have uprooted more men, women and children around the world than at any time in the seven-decade history of UNHCR according to the Annual Global Trends report. Increasing forced displacement is a growing problem. For instance, in each of the past five years, annual increases in the total global displacement arising from human-induced disasters such as conflict and persecution have been in the millions (UNHCR, 2017). Within this total figure are 40.3 m IDPs. IDPs are defined as people uprooted within the borders of their own countries (UNHCR, 2017). They have fled their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers, as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters (UNHCR, 2017). This figure is about 500,000 fewer than in 2015 (UNHCR, 2017).

In addition, the total number of asylum seekers globally was 2.8 m in 2016 which is also about 400,000 fewer than in 2015 (UNHCR, 2017). The total seeking safety across international borders as refugees (defined as those displaced outside their own countries) topped 22.5 m (UNHCR, 2017). This is the highest number of forcibly displaced persons seen since UNHCR was founded in 1950 in the aftermath of the Second World War (UNHCR, 2017). With regard to displacement from geologically and hydro-climatologically induced disasters, some reports estimate that there are more environmental or climate change refugees than political refugees fleeing wars and conflicts (EJF, 2017; Lister, 2014; Brzoska and Fröhlich, 2016).

A forcibly displaced person (or forced migrant) is any person who migrates to escape persecution, conflict, repression, ecological degradation and natural or human made disasters, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood (IOM, 2002; Forced Migration Online, 2012). Forced displacement as a research concept embraces a broad range of demographic movements such as flight, evacuation, displacement and resettlement. Forced displacement comprises of the movements of refugees and IDPs triggered by conflicts and natural or environmental disasters as well as by development projects (IOM, 2002; Forced Migration Online, 2012). The UNHCR estimates that people displaced by natural hazard-related disasters and climate change will increase to at least 50m by 2050 (UNHCR, 2016; Ahmed, 2018). Similarly, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) stated that around 144m people were displaced by natural disasters between 2008 and 2014, with many of such disasters exacerbated by climate change. In fact, climate change and associated incremental levels of extreme climatic disasters are now being widely predicted and accepted as an ongoing threat for humankind and a trigger for displacement in addition to conflict (Field *et al.*, 2014; Hulme, 2016; EJF, 2017).

Forced displacement often results in secondary crises. For instance, many refugees, while trying to reach Europe from Libya, have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, video footage has recently appeared in the international media showing auction of human beings as slaves in Libya. Similarly, reports of evidence of abuses by United Nations (UN) peacekeepers and some humanitarian organisations against vulnerable displaced persons have surfaced in the media in major crisis locations such as Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo (The Independent Website, 2018; News24 Website, 2018).

Forced displacement is not limited to Europe or Africa as it is a global phenomenon. Yemen, South Sudan, Syria and some Southeast Asian countries have their share of refugees, IDPs and associated problems. For instance, the plight of the 1m Rohingya Muslim refugees fleeing Myanmar for Bangladesh was vividly displayed on global TV screens in 2017[1]. There are also millions of IDPs and refugees arising from the Boko Haram crises in the Lake Chad Basin, an area at the intersection of Chad, Nigeria, Cameroun and

Niger. In short, the world is currently facing its biggest refugee and IDP crisis since the end of the Second World War (Hampshire, 2015; Weber, 2015; Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2016; Healey, 2016). As a result of this topical problem and research gap on this topic, the authors feel the time is right for a focused volume/issue on refugees and IDPs. We now discuss the special issue of the *Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management (JHLSCM)* focused on caring for IDPs and refugees as well as the overriding aims and objectives of the paper in Section 1.1.

1.1 *The special issue and the objectives of this paper*

Given the magnitude of forced displacement and the global refugee crises, this “thought” article and indeed the collection of five papers in the special issue of *JHLSCM* are exclusively focused on the logistics of caring for IDPs and refugees. The five papers briefly introduced below, and together with this “thought” paper lay the foundation for this new area of research in the field of humanitarian logistics.

The five papers in the special issue focus on:

- (1) international and local NGO supply chain collaboration in the Syrian refugee crises in Jordan, authored by Adem *et al.* (2018);
- (2) approaches to the design of refugee camps in Kenya, Ethiopia, Greece and Turkey, authored by Jahre *et al.* (2018);
- (3) development of a refugee camp performance indicator system used for assessing the impact of infrastructure and service investments on refugee self-reliance in a camp in Jordan by Schön *et al.* (2018); and
- (4) the role of goods-in-kind donations, cash transfers and local procurement by Polish humanitarian organisations in the logistics of caring for Ukrainian IDPs in Ukraine, authored by Piotrowicz (2018).

The fifth and last paper is a literature review and analysis of papers on supply chain management in the context of responding to refugees written by Seifert *et al.* (2018). Each of these five pioneering papers kick-off what we hope would be an interesting and rewarding area of humanitarian logistics research focused on refugees and IDPs. We also hope the five papers, and this “thought” article will push the boundary of scholarship in humanitarian logistics research and impact positively on practice. Therefore, bringing public benefit and making the world a better place for IDPs and refugees. The special issue is the first of its kind in any scholarly logistics, operations or supply chain management (LOSCM) journal. Hence, the objectives of the “thought” paper are as follows. The paper:

- (1) analyses the nature and challenges of displacement from the displaced person’s perspective;
- (2) advocates for more critical research and analysis of the strategic role of LOSCM in the care of refugees and IDPs; and
- (3) outlines some challenges to undertaking useful research, and outlines a research agenda.

As stated, the aim of the special issue and the journal is to trigger research that builds upon these five pioneering papers based on gaps in our knowledge. The special issue guest editors also suggest potential strategies for caring for the forcibly displaced. We structure the rest of the paper as follows: Section 2 analyses the nature and challenges of displacement from the displaced person’s perspective. Section 3 highlights the strategic role of LOSCM in providing assistance to refugees and IDPs. Section 4 briefly outlines key challenges to undertaking useful research in “refugee logistics”, and Section 5 outlines a future research agenda.

2. Nature and challenges of displacement

Human mobility—urbanisation, migration, and of course forced displacement—remains a socially, ideologically, morally and politically controversial topic if not corrosive and divisive (Adelman, 1988; Harrell-Bond, 2002; Miller, 2016, 2017). Whether refugees in the Rohingya crisis, or refugees in the recently shut down Australian-run refugee detention centre on Manus Island (a remote South Pacific Island in Papua New Guinea), the reception, welfare and integration of refugees and associated logistics are always nested in a complex backdrop of dynamic multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary issues and service. For instance, human rights, politics, healthcare delivery, nutrition, gender, child protection, livelihoods and so forth.

Such issues and service delivery are often approached from a broad spectrum of analytical perspectives for example, economic, religious, ethnic, moral, political, security, identity and ideological perspectives to mention a few (Lavanex, 2017). For instance, since 9/11 there seems to have been a political shift in western countries in the discourse on international human rights law regarding protection of refugees to increasing concerns about border security, and religious and ethnic homogeneity (Joly, 2016; Lavanex, 2017). The agenda of social cohesion and related policies and programmes, narrowly framed in terms of constructing harmonious communities based on adherence to fixed national values, seems to have become dominant. Even, the US government now seems to be separating immigrant and refugee children from their parents (Reuters, 2018; NY Times, 2018), while the European Union is thinking of off-shoring refugee processing to third countries (The Guardian Website, 2018). These examples signals a shift from earlier discourses grounded in humanitarianism, altruism and benevolence as well as full recognition of the rights and dignity of all displaced persons under the conventions of international law. It seems that previous benevolent approaches were valid only when immigrants and refugees and associated refugee issues do not emerge within national borders. This pattern is similar to the Not in My Backyard syndrome, a colloquialism signifying one's opposition to the locating of something considered undesirable in one's neighbourhood (Dear, 1992; Burningham, 2000).

The nature of displacement in itself is such that displaced persons are said to be in the “twilight zone”, where their social interactions are decreasingly disciplined by state law, and formal employment and conventional social norms (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016; Landau and Achiume, 2017). Displaced persons are at the boundary of belonging according to sociologists (Landau and Achiume, 2017). Connections—social, economic and familial are often broken resulting in economic marginalisation and social distance (Landau and Duponchel, 2011).

Prior to displacement, such social and economic connections are objects in their own right, and they constitute elements of broader socio-economic and political formations that confer legitimacy on individuals embedded within their own communities (Landau and Duponchel, 2011). Refugees and IDPs suffer a loss of such connections and legitimacy. However, given human beings' intrinsic need for social recognition, acceptance and intimacy (see Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory), displacement speaks to an ontologically unsettling social and economic reality associated with ongoing social fluidity and economic precariousness arising from loss of livelihood, delegitimisation, and the downgrading of skills (Baban *et al.*, 2017; Vecchio and Gerard, 2018). Imagine independent self-respecting and self-sufficient individuals with their own livelihoods suddenly finding themselves in situations of massive precariousness and unpredictability in a foreign land. They are often at the mercy of the public, governments, politicians and even freelance vigilantes (Fulvi, 2017; Baban *et al.*, 2017; Vecchio and Gerard, 2018; Gardenier, 2018).

Given the inherent precariousness of displacement, the constant search for safety and protection as well as economic opportunities, and other resources that are often taken for granted by un-displaced persons, displaced people often need to remain transient and mobile within cities and regions (Fawaz, 2017; Gomes *et al.*, 2017). As they move, they

continually meet fresh challenges and reshape their responses from day to day (Fawaz, 2017; Gomes *et al.*, 2017). Flexibility, agility, creativity and resilience are, therefore, necessary survival traits of displaced persons.

The instabilities associated with the daily life of a displaced person are often influenced or exacerbated by each displaced person's own ambitions and trajectories (Landau, 2018). For many, the locations they occupy are stations in an ongoing journey of displacement rather than a final destination (Fawaz, 2017; Gomes *et al.*, 2017). Such onward movement often limit host communities' proximate financial and emotional investments in providing assistance to displaced persons. Therefore, resulting in displaced persons being in a kind of indefinite temporariness and invisibility (Kihato, 2013; Landau and Freemantle, 2016). It may, however, be argued that displaced persons while vulnerable still possess agency and a measure of autonomy. Hence, the nature and challenges of displacement need to be taken into account in logistics planning for responding to IDPs and refugees as well as in associated humanitarian logistics research and scholarship. We now broadly analyse the strategic role of refugee logistics and SCM, and associated scholarship.

3. Analysis of the strategic role of refugee logistics and SCM

The nature of possible LOSCM research in general and humanitarian logistics in particular seems limited by the challenges of measuring classical key performance indicators (KPIs) such as logistics service quality, customer service, and service operations management (Mentzer *et al.*, 1999, 2001; Stock and Lambert, 1992; Stank *et al.*, 2003; Oloruntoba and Gray 2009; Heaslip, 2015). These are difficult to measure in such challenging research contexts. Notwithstanding, what is important is the pressing need for new conceptual tools and access to empirical data that can help LOSCM researchers think more clearly and systematically about providing effective humanitarian aid and protection for refugees on the move or in temporary and permanent shelters. This "thought" paper and the five papers in the special issue are a platform for scholars, practitioners and activists to exchange views, and develop potential LOSCM best practice towards contributing to resolving IDP and refugee care issues.

That said it is not important to distinguish between people displaced by war and persecution and those displaced out of their homes by flood, volcanic eruptions, fire or flood. The role of humanitarian logistics and the responsibilities of logisticians in charge of responding to and caring for displaced persons do not differ based upon where displaced persons came from, where they are going, or what caused their displacement (UNHCR, 2015a, b). The challenge is to find a way to provide immediate and longer-term succour, whether food and water for immediate sustenance and relief, or longer-term integration and acculturation into host communities (UNHCR, 2015a, b).

As previously discussed, the challenge of delivering a timely logistical and supply chain response is nested in a cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach that interfaces with moral, political and ideological paradigms. Meeting the needs of international refugees and IDPs through logistics and SCM will have to include taking into account complex security and political contexts, continuous physical movement and mobility of the refugees and IDPs, and their constantly variable demand patterns, whether in sudden emergencies with high peaks or steady protract ongoing situations. In addition, the wide scope of possible logistical response is challenging. For example, search and rescue activities, triage, first aid, hospitalisation if necessary, feeding, sheltering highly mobile beneficiaries, and resettling beneficiaries already settled in camps to new locations that are more permanent. Finally, researchers also need to consider longer-term social and economic settlement all of which multiplies the challenges of this type of logistics and associated humanitarian logistics research.

4. Challenges to undertaking useful research

4.1 Government policies

Useful research is research that is relevant for practice, that is valid and answers a research question that matters to society (Gallien *et al.*, 2015). While LOSCM research and practice is crucial to the physiological sustenance and welfare of displaced persons, logistics and SCM cannot protect displaced people, or force assisting governments to creating policies that respect the dignity of individuals (UNHCR, 2015a, b). Such a goal is beyond LOSCM. This is because various government policies in powerful destination countries are often the direct cause of forced displacement elsewhere. Hence, the goal of protection and guarantee of the human rights of displaced persons under international law is firmly in the realm of political leadership, politics, public policy, international politics and international relations. These are well beyond the scope of LOSCM. However, such is the policy context in which LOSCM strategies are planned and executed. Hence, there is a limit to what LOSCM can achieve if the larger political will, policy, diplomatic and political issues highlighted are not conducive. Nevertheless, this “thought” paper still argues that it is worthwhile for humanitarian logistics scholars to engage in such research despite the challenging and controversial context.

4.2 Forced displacement and the Media

The movement of refugees has been the subject of much emotional, ideological and philosophical coverage and debate, thanks to the global TV media (Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2016). While such intensive and extensive coverage has been useful in drawing the attention of researchers to the issue, it has at the same time also raised the ethical risk of “over-research” of vulnerable refugee communities (see Clark, 2008; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2013; Block *et al.*, 2012; Abaza, 2013; Pascucci, 2017). Media coverage and associated framing has also triggered “knee jerk” ill-thought decisions and policies by governments and others such as the building of walls in Hungary and the rise of refugee hunting vigilante groups in Italy (McDonald, 2018; Perrino, 2015).

A related conundrum is the range of labels the media has given to these vulnerable groups, and the labels are often uncritically imitated and used even by researchers (Cameron, 2014; Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2016). They include for example the terms, “refugee”, “expellee”, “exile”, “displaced person”, “IDP”, “economic refugee”, “humanitarian refugee”, “stateless person”, “tsunami refugee”, “development refugee”, “environmental refugee”, “government assisted refugee (GAR)” and more. All of these terms carry with them certain assumptions that have consequences and implications for the welfare of such groups, and the logistics of caring for them (Cameron, 2014; Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2016).

While refugee logistics research has had no attention in academic LOSCM research and this special issue is the first of its kind, the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *Forced Migration Review*, *International Migration Review (IMR)* and others have studied refugees and related social science issues for decades (Journal of Refugees Studies Website, 2017; Forced Migration Review Website, 2017; International Migration Review Website, 2018). However, these academic journals tend to focus on sociological, anthropological, political, social, economic, security and gender perspectives (*Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2017; Forced Migration Review Website, 2017). *IMR* on its website claims to:

[...] study of all aspects of sociodemographic, historical, economic, political, legislative and pastoral aspects of human mobility [...], [...] regarded as the principal journal in the field, facilitating study of human migration, ethnic group relations, and refugee movements. Through an interdisciplinary approach and from an international perspective [...] (*IMR*, 2018).

Nevertheless, the media coverage of the crisis can be said to have increased awareness of the need for more scholarly LOSCM research into the crisis from a logistics perspective—getting

the right goods and services to the right people at the right place at the right time at the right costs and using the appropriate logistics performance measures (see Oloruntoba and Gray, 2009; Heaslip, 2015).

4.3 Data accessibility, human agency, research framing and history

There are often challenges with getting access to subjects to seek their views and collect authentic data. Access to research sites and subjects in disaster and conflict zones (mostly in developing countries) have been difficult to achieve given that many researchers are based in developed countries, and are understandably not often keen to travel overseas to areas with perceived security challenges, and for various other reasons.

On another note, many researchers approach research from the singular perspective and framing of powerful dominant actors such as humanitarian organisations, donor governments and the humanitarianism agenda of powerful first world countries (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Cameron, 2014). The dilemma within the study of refugee logistics, and indeed humanitarian logistics research in general is the diminished ability to remain critical or objective when utilising such standard conventional top-down approaches to choice of perspective, and framing of research. Likewise, there is likelihood of diminished ability to remain critical or objective while maintaining close (funding) relationships with humanitarian organisations, government-funding agencies, and other grantors in developed countries. In fact, there is scant published humanitarian logistics research from researchers residing and working in developing countries where much more of displacement occurs and where the need for humanitarian logistics and allied research is greatest (Collinson *et al.*, 2013). Also, we seldom hear the voices of or see the agency of refugees and IDPs themselves in humanitarian logistics research. Neither do we involve developing country humanitarian organisations who are locally embedded and thus closest to the displaced, physically and culturally (Bealt and Mansouri, 2018). As a result, current research can be argued to be lopsided, if not narrow and parochial. Such challenges of how research is framed and conducted thus have significant impact on the nature of research questions asked, methods adopted and used to conduct such research, and how findings are interpreted and reported (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Vigneswaran and Quirk, 2012; Collinson *et al.*, 2013).

In addition, dominant framing of research tends to ignore the individual voice and agency of the refugee and IDP (Vigneswaran and Quirk, 2012). Hence, narrow framing provides a narrow limited view. Nonetheless, such framing is in itself not an insurmountable problem as long as the epistemology and ontological starting point of researchers is openly disclosed (and this includes quantitatively inclined work). Overall, we argue that it is useful to have research that is interesting, innovative, critical and comprehensive. Research which takes into account the views of refugees, IDPs and local humanitarian organisations themselves in addition to those of conventional actors. Such research is in high demand and welcome going into the future. Finally, it is noteworthy that humanitarianism and migration policies of many developed countries are often influenced by history and impacted by legacy. These policies often have deep roots in historical and legacy issues of colonialism and imperialism with long-lasting impacts.

5. Suggested future research agenda

The study of refugees and IDPs from a LOSCM perspective is a relatively new field of research and this pioneering special issue blazes the trail. However, there are conceptual issues of scope that need to be resolved in building up the theory. There are also issues of definitions, of labels, and of conceptualisation that need resolving urgently as the sub-field develops and grows within humanitarian logistics research. Thus studies that clarify these issues are in demand and welcome.

In the three journals of refugee studies previously mentioned, traditional refugees and IDP studies have tended to focus on sociological, anthropological, political, social, economic, security and gender perspectives (Cameron, 2014). Such perspectives are evolving, and scholars who wish to see the complexity and totality of the refugee's situation reflected in research have advocated for studies to be included under the broader more comprehensive umbrella of *Forced Migration Studies* which includes all relevant factors impacting refugees and their situation as well as the logistics of caring for them.

Alternatively, if studies of "refugee logistics" are to exclusively focus its scope and attention only on those issues directly pertaining to LOSCM then the ability for research in this area to find the whole "truth" might be somewhat constrained. In fact, if "refugee logistics" research is exclusively based on the assumption of the UN' 1951 legal definition that a refugee is:

[...] a person whom is owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Then, the refugee's reality becomes very narrow and objectified, and thus the resulting complexity associated with their factual situation is hidden. This narrow scope is similar to the current weakness of humanitarian logistics research conducted in and published by scholars in developed countries with minimal inputs from beneficiaries and aid workers based in the theatre of humanitarian operations (Oloruntoba *et al.*, 2016). Another dilemma is that other individuals who are forcibly "displaced" or are seeking protection (such as IDPs and failed asylum applicants) are excluded by the UN's definition. This means they fall outside the qualifying scope of "refugee logistics" research. Nevertheless, for the purposes of implementing and enforcing international refugee law, a "working" definition is inevitably required to "process" an individual's worthiness of protection from harm, and whether they can be granted asylum, detained or deported. Maybe it is now time to reconsider the definition of refugees to reflect what is practically happening around the world.

Overall, this "thought paper" argues that the scholarly field of humanitarian logistics as well as the new field of "refugee logistics" studies need early conceptualisation and clarification of terms, structure, and organisation. Hence, research that contributes in these areas and helps structure the field is in demand and welcome. Also, research that clarifies and/or integrates specific concepts, definitions, and labels is in demand and welcome. Research that presents typologies and taxonomies of LOSCM phenomena and contexts are urgently required and welcome. Such studies will lay a solid foundation for future studies. Furthermore, scholars and their viewpoints and papers still need to be open to critical reflection and adjustment as larger socio-political, socio-economic, and international power relationships change the landscape of research in humanitarian logistics.

Overall, the study of "refugee logistics" may need to be placed under a larger, more comprehensive umbrella in recognition of broader socio-political and socio-economic factors which impacts heavily on LOSCM. Such broader factors are an appropriate "backdrop" for the study of LOSCM in the context of caring for refugees and IDPs. The "dual imperative" of refugee logistics research in particular, and humanitarian logistics research in general is that by their very nature, "refugee logistics", "humanitarian logistics", "humanitarian operations" and "humanitarian supply chain management" scholarship are equally about helping and protecting vulnerable populations (i.e. humanity) as much as they are about pushing the research agenda forward and extending the current boundaries of research in humanitarian LOSCM. It is therefore logical to expect that scholars undertaking research in "refugee logistics" and humanitarian logistics truly and genuinely desire to help vulnerable groups through useful,

impactful research (Gallien *et al.*, 2015; Kunz *et al.*, 2017; Oloruntoba, 2018). Hence, the LOSCM approach can provide more practical solutions to refugees and IDPs that could be implemented during the preparedness, response, and recovery phase of humanitarian relief.

Overall, future research could focus on:

- The study of secure humanitarian logistics corridors for refugees and IDPs which are most important in the context of conflict situations and insecure environments, where individuals and families need to safely escape dangerous situations. Studies on the logistics of supplying and re-supplying of besieged communities with basic sustenance and medical support are welcome.
- The rapid sourcing and deployment of shelters for refugees and IDPs perhaps through the use of tents, or demountable and other modular/flexible accommodation in safe spaces.
- The logistics of food supplies, medical equipment and healthcare commodities for refugees and IDPs in complex emergencies and insecure environments are required. Likewise, studies at the intersection of logistics and public health which focus on temperature controlled cold chain logistics such as used for vaccines that must be administered to infants before their fifth birthday to immunise them against childhood diseases.
- Conceptual and practical issues of how temporary logistics solutions are affected if refugees and IDPs become permanent.
- Temporary and permanent camp design and facility layout as long-term encampment is a growing aspect of a growing refugee crisis. Hence, as a result, there is need to ensure that shelters provide a safe and suitable environment for both short- and long-term accommodation.
- The logistics of waste management and refuse disposal, and recycling and allied issues in refugee camps.
- Methodological and framing issues and how to overcome inter-cultural obstacles to undertaking useful and impactful research. This is important when we undertake research focused on places in the developing world that we have never been to and places we do not understand as well as when we undertake research on people from different cultural backgrounds or people who speak other languages. The deployment of culturally and ethically sensitive research techniques is important and research on these issues in a logistics context is needed.

6. Summary and conclusion

While this is not an empirically researched article, this “thought paper” has sought to introduce the five papers in the special issue, analyse the nature and challenges of displacement from the displaced person’s perspective and from the planning perspective of humanitarian organisations. This “thought paper” has also argued for more critical appreciation of the strategic role and strategic value that research in LOSCM can play in helping and caring for refugees and IDPs in spite of the difficult ideological and political environment and policy context in which such “refugee logistics research” will be undertaken. The paper also outlined some basic challenges to undertaking useful and impactful research in “refugee logistics” and “humanitarian logistics” while advocating for more critical analysis and investigations that explicitly acknowledges its limitations while being methodologically and ethically sound. The paper concludes by briefly suggesting a future research agenda for this new sub-field of humanitarian logistics research.

Note

1. www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561 (accessed 20 February 2018).

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