Many migrants can take nothing for granted

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Q. Migration has been in the news with immigration, particularly in the United States, but it has been global as well. Why did you start to look at this issue?

A. While I have worked on migrants and migration for many years, I started looking more specifically at this issue of migrants and human security at the end of 2015. The *New York Times* had a series of stories on refugees including that very iconic picture of the young Syrian boy who had drowned and washed up on the shores of Turkey. That photograph went around the world. It made me think about my own research, and whether it was capturing all these different kinds of migration together. So I began to think about a continuum of migrants who are subject to transnational, national, and local policies and practices, whose position within these structures affects the conditions of insecurity they encounter during and after they move.

Q. Early on, you talk about the structural

impediments to migration that are a key to understanding what is going on. What are those impediments?

A. The structural impediments to moving are most often political, but they include a mix of political, economic, and social impediments. For instance, what kind of rules and policies exist to sort out who can move and under what conditions? A key issue of migration is: do people have the resources to move? Many people don't. Some people end up moving close by because that's how far they can get. People may try to move further away; which, depending on where they were in the first place, could mean crossing an international border. After people have moved, there are a whole lot of impediments to their settling down and accessing resources for living. A number of questions arise when we think about human security. Where and how do migrants get their food? Their shelter? What about their health? Their physical safety from violence? Their ability to exercise rights? Are the people in the area where they settle willing to accept them? These questions apply to all migrants, whether or not they were forced to move.

Q. You outline a number of issues with forced migration. What are they?

A. The conditions that affect the forced migrants are basically the same issues that other types of migrants face, of housing, health, safety, food, water, and safety from violence. Forced migrants are fleeing from something. It could be major environmental-related disasters like a tsunami, severe desertification, or some kind of chemical pollution of a river or the land. Or they could be moving to escape wars and conflicts. Some people – mostly young women, girls, and boys – are trafficked to other countries. When they move, the question is: Are they allowed to move freely? If they are anywhere near international boundaries, the

answer is: No. They are often repressed and pushed back. People are not willing to accept them. These forced migrants are put into actual camps, detention centers, or camp-like situations. They live in spaces where nothing in life can be taken for granted. In some extreme cases, you've had examples of people trying to leave by boat. We've certainly seen this outflow from the Middle East and North Africa towards Europe. According to the 2017 UN reports, many of these forced migrants end up in camps in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. What we're beginning to see is a pattern of nation states trying to exert their power to repel migrants over the three-mile maritime boundaries that are within the jurisdiction of nation states, as well as the seas beyond that limit.

Q. That is, of course, a political issue too.

A. It is a political issue. We're seeing a lot more assertiveness for repelling people from reaching the actual land shores of countries. There is also an associated issue of bringing the issues of migrants under more broadly defined criminal justice systems. On the one hand, there's been a real upsurge in crimes such as smuggling, and trafficking of human beings; these have become profitable industries. On the other hand, we are also seeing problematic ways in which nation states are dealing with these migrants. There have been well publicized news articles about Australia paying smugglers – the same smugglers who are bringing people by boats – to take them back. Smuggling and trafficking are also evident on the land routes. Pakistan happens to be one of the top 10 countries that hosts forced migrants, especially from Afghanistan. Bangladesh and India have now gotten forced migrants from Myanmar. In every country around the world, some people are raising questions about national security. At the same time, the questions about ensuring the human security of these migrants often remain unanswered, or partially answered. So migrants struggle to survive.

Q. You describe what you call the 'glocal' terrains: globalization and how it affected local concerns, which includes human rights issues.

A. The term glocal is used to describe how the local and global forces interact with each other. On the one hand, we have all of these conventions about human rights, which are supposed to ensure that every human being, irrespective of political status, has the right to political, civil, social, and economic rights. On the other hand, the reality is whether or not people can access these rights really gets played out on the ground, through everyday encounters with institutions and people. Human rights don't have enough political teeth if a country is not willing to comply with them; and many countries, to greater or lesser extents, don't comply. I'm going to use an analogy because I think it illustrates this phenomenon. Prior to and during the civil rights movement [in the U.S.] when the buses were segregated, there were no lines drawn on the bus that said African Americans had to sit here, or there. But that line was actually imposed very strictly by the people on the bus, and this imposition was supported by the state's institutions. In exactly the same way, if you have a group of people who might theoretically be due all kinds of rights, including the right to food, shelter, safety from violence, and so on, they will not be able to access these rights as long as other people and institutional arrangements make it impossible for them to do so. When we study human rights and mostly examine the laws at the national level, we do not adequately analyze the migrant's experience on the ground. I think the struggles of forced migrants, more than anybody else, really show us the limits of these rights, when there are inadequate mechanisms to ensure access to these rights.

Q. Many people who talk about immigration think migrants are coming to the United States. But you are

looking a fairly unique situations such as the migration of people of Japanese origin from Brazil, forced migration in Pakistan, and people going to South Africa. What would you say about people changing their thinking that this is a global concern?

A. Migration is a global phenomenon. There are many streams of migration going on in different parts of the world. We don't see it in the local news, so it is not visible to us. According to the most recent UN report, international migration reached 258 million in 2017. Over 60 percent of international migrants, those who are not part of the forced migration stream, live in Asia or Europe. North America is host to the third largest number of international migrants. That said, among the list of countries, the United States is home to the largest number of international migrants. The authors in the special issue of Current Sociology discuss the human security of different types of migrants in a number of countries, including the U.S.

Q. What are your thoughts on how some of these issues can be addressed better?

A. In order to improve the situation, we have to consider political solutions. I think the way the situation can be improved is to humanize, and not dehumanize, the people who are on the move. There is always a genuine concern for national security, and I'm not undermining that. However, we're in this moment where many people are saying, because there's a concern for national security, we can dehumanize everyone. Right now we are moving increasingly to the situation that immigration and immigrants and criminal justice and criminal activities are becoming part of the same operation. We need to look, through a human rights perspective, at the fact that a large number of immigrants actually are

due their human rights. Some have fled horrible conditions; others come here for work. Are they able to access rights substantively? We are not taking a good, hard look at what happens to them after they arrive. Are we meeting our own aspirations to be a place where human rights principles and practices are honored?

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