

Module B

Violence in the borderland and forced migration in Central and West Asia

Population mobility had always been associated with the region that is now identified as stretching from Afghanistan, across Central and West Asia. Movements of nomadic pastoralist societies but also movements resulting from trade, pilgrimage and conquest marked the landscape of the region since times immemorial. With colonial redrawing of the political map, these everyday movements were sought to be restricted in a variety of ways. Subsequently, sedentarization, the Soviet collectivization campaign, forced deportation of minorities during and after the world wars and the buffer status that Afghanistan had in the 'great game' has traditionally been identified as the cause of forced migration and displacement in the region. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new states a number of other issues have assumed importance in the interpretation of forced migration and refugees. State building processes across the region have left people stateless as they fall outside the definition of citizens (Uzbek brides in Kyrgyzstan), ethnic conflicts have encouraged movements across borders that have subsequently been met by resistance from the host state as upsetting demographic balance (Uzbeks who crossed the border into Kyrgyzstan after 2005) economic imperatives have led to labour migration, in certain cases resentment among displaced peoples have encouraged them to join resistance movements in other parts of the globe (IMU joining ISIS) and environmental degradation has led to displacement (Aral Sea). Most of these movements cannot be comprehended through a statistical approach since the flows escape official census. There is also the trend of the return of the refugee with all the associated institutional issues (the return of Afghan refugees). In certain cases states have actively encouraged return for a variety of political reasons (the Uzbek government have asked for the return of migrants from Russia) and the reluctance towards return has come from the migrants. In other situations refugees have become politically significant for states who wish to replace regimes in neighbouring states or even transform border demarcations (Turkish government is asking for a buffer zone between Turkey and Syria to restrict the movement of Syrian refugees into Turkey). All of these invite new interpretations in the study of forced migration and refugees. This module identifies four facets that involve recent events requiring detailed study.

STATE BUILDING, DISPLACEMENT AND STATELESSNESS (Diloram Karomat)

states jeopardised the ethnic balance. This resulted in the movement of Russian minorities as a response to the anticipated loss of status and politicization of political life. In a number of cases it also led to statelessness. Large numbers of people with different ethnic backgrounds and holding Soviet documents discovered that new nationality laws of emerging sovereign states left them out of the definition of a citizen though in most cases constitutions recognized all people living within its territorial boundaries as citizens. However, not all of them acceded to UN conventions on refugees and statelessness. This was complicated by the fact that the history of borders in the region is problematic and the territories of the five states are closely interwoven with the existence of a number of enclaves. Post delimitation the borders were left flexible within a broader system where people shared a common Soviet passport and movement and employment was unrestricted. This, of course, changed in the post 1991 period. In most cases, as in the Ferghana Valley where populations were mixed movements, trade, marriages continued unhindered. Since movement across the borders in the valley did not require documentation old Soviet passports were often not changed to new national ones. From 1999 and particularly since 2005 when borders (like the Uzbek-Kyrgyz or Uzbek-Tajik) were fenced and visa regimes were introduced large numbers of people found themselves stateless. Statelessness is not just the result of circumstances (like the border brides of Central Asia) but also the result of events like riots that leave people without documentation (the Uzbek Kyrgyz riots in Osh). In recent times citizenship rules have been used in Uzbekistan as a political instrument to punish non-compliance with the ruling establishment and passports have been cancelled leaving nationals stranded in third countries.

LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE *GASTERBAITERY* (Anita Sengupta)

In the post-Soviet situation it is common to think of migration as a “westward” process where the movement is from Russia to southern and western Europe, the United States or even Israel. There is however another kind of migration out of the former Soviet space into the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan inspiring the use of the term *gasterbaitery* (the Russianized plural form of the German word *Gasterbaiter* meaning unskilled or semi-skilled migrant labours). Russia and Kazakhstan’s resource fuelled building boom has transformed them into one of the world’s largest net recipients of migrant labour after the United States and post-Soviet states like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan rank among the most remittance dependent states in the world. This has made migration an issue of considerable political commentary in both the states and in June 2012 President Putin signed into force a concept paper on Russia’s migration policy till 2025 which recommended changes to legislation that would require the testing of certain categories of migrant workers for their knowledge of Russian language, history and legislation. Similar changes to Kazakh legislation called for distinguishing between the ethno national vision of

securitization perspective of discouraging illegal migration. Despite the scale of the movement there are few detailed studies of the meaning of this migration for the migrants themselves, its resonance for domestic politics in receiving states and its implications for those on the move and their families left behind. In the states from where this migration originates policy makers have been preoccupied with the macro dimensions of the numbers who move, the amount of remittance and whether this movement should be restricted by actively encouraging locals to record the migration and ask for their return. While seasonal migration had always been a way for funding life cycle ceremonies, the present migration needs to be understood in terms of not just the lack of economic opportunities but also difficulties associated with remaining legal in circumstances where political capital is made out of their illegality but they are “tolerated” for economic reasons. The ways in which migration feeds into the nationalist discourses of both the sending as well as the recipient states also remains largely unexplored.

RETURNEES IN AFGHANISTAN: IMPEDIMENTS TO REINTEGRATION (ArpitaBasu Roy)

Migration is often explained in terms of violent conflict or the attraction of labour markets in rich countries or urban centres. Although many other factors may be at play such as natural disasters, developmental projects, it is usually the political or economic causes which are used to distinguish between involuntary and voluntary migration respectively. It is becoming increasingly clear that this primarily causal framework may not do justice to the complexity of today’s global migration flows, including those involving Afghans. Afghans are found in a range of places which includes countries in the neighbourhood (primarily Pakistan and Iran) and further abroad, forming networks, which are connected through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information. Neither the definition of “refugee” in international texts nor the various typologies of migration offer a satisfactory analytical framework to explain and understand the migratory strategies developed by the Afghans.

Recognizing regional realities are necessary and the legal categories that define refugees and returnees do not necessarily describe Afghans and their neighbours as they live, move, work, and intermix along Afghanistan’s borders. Refugee and returnee movements are and have been part of larger social and economic processes that Afghans have engaged in and developed for generations if not centuries. This has been both a source of strength and a weakness for Afghans. On the one hand, this mobility has given them an important tool for coping with adversity. On the other, however, it has clouded their legal status, making it difficult to provide for their protection and search for durable solutions. Many of these people are neither

return are entirely appropriate outcomes.

In the case of Afghan refugees, repatriation has not been the panacea some had initially hoped. The fact that an interim government was established in Afghanistan in 2002 after the removal of the Taliban regime had in fact led to a peculiar phenomenon where both Iran and Pakistan started officially talking about full repatriation of the Afghans and threatened closure of refugee camps. Thus the real issues in sustainable reintegration and the importance and role of such migratory networks between these countries came to the fore. Afghanistan's immense poverty, poor socio-economic indicators, its ongoing security difficulties, decision of the international troops to pull out and the massive continuing migration across its borders all suggested that an exclusive emphasis on repatriation was neither "feasible nor desirable. The capacity of Afghanistan to absorb more returnees is stretched. On the other hand, research suggests that returns program since 2002 may not have been as ruinous as some feared. Afghans do not appear to feel they were forced to repatriate, and they have moved back to an Afghanistan that closely matches their own economic circumstances. Indeed, given the lack of regulation at the border with Pakistan and the continued ability of Afghans to work in Pakistan and especially Iran, the status quo may not have been all that different had assisted returns been much fewer — that is, many Afghans would have continued to live and work on both sides of the border, crossing frequently for social and economic reasons.

The complex myriad of Afghanistan's institutional weakness, conflicting land laws and regulations, the multiple layers of disputes, the weak judicial system, the powerful elites that act with impunity, and the predominantly landless nature of returning refugees, are some of the most serious obstacles to successful reintegration of Afghan returnees. Without access to land, it is extremely difficult to provide other basic services to returnees. As a result, they will likely continue to migrate to the urban informal settlements *en masse*. More flexible definitions for the moving Afghans and intermediate solutions for Afghans in the border regions, include solutions that should involve exploring ways to guarantee refugee and returnee rights within a broader human rights framework, focusing and coordinating development strategies simultaneously on both sides of the border to provide a better foundation for monitoring and normalizing the extensive cross-border traffic.

THE SYRIAN DISPLACEMENT (Priya Singh)

There is a lingering history of forced migration to, from, and within West Asia. The roots of forced displacement in the twentieth century can be traced to colonial experiences (Palestinians ousted from the territory which subsequently became Israel), post-colonial circumstances (as in the case of Kurdish refugees), civil war (Syrian and Lebanese refugees) and conflict and post conflict situations (Iraqi and

witnessed intersecting processes of forced displacement and enforced sedentarization of mobile and nomadic populations for whom movement and mobility are essential parts of their lives and livelihoods. Since the formation of the nation-states in the region, the borders between countries of West Asia have remained porous, enabling refugees to move reasonably effortlessly throughout the sub-region over the past century.

In the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings of 2011, the Syrian refugee crisis has assumed critical proportions as the nation is trapped in the midst of a civil war singularly characterised by the absence of proportionality, which has displaced vast numbers of Syrians from their homes and communities. Over 6.45 million (August 2014) were estimated to be displaced within Syria and more than 2.9 million (August 2014) exiled as refugees beyond Syria's borders, the great majority of them hosted by neighbouring countries who struggle to respond to the needs of the countless refugees that they host. The increasing sectarian nature of the conflict has raised fears as ethnic and sectarian conflicts tend to lead not only to large scale but also protracted displacement. Since March 2011, internal displacement has been widespread. Given both the direct and indirect effects of the conflict, millions of Syrians have left their communities in search of safety and survival and continue to move in search of security. Displacement in Syria as elsewhere is a dynamic process. People return to their homes to check on property and relatives, they go to stay with relatives in areas perceived as safer and then move on even if either conditions deteriorate or when they perceive it is no longer safe. Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey primarily but also Egypt and even Iraq have accommodated the Syrian refugees rather openhandedly. However, after almost three and a half years, they are feeling the strains in the form of growing social tensions in host communities, the competition between citizens and Syrian refugees for health care, shelter, water, employment and education. In Lebanon, it is the fear of spill over of violence which is the major concern. For Turkey, the large influx of Syrians raises serious questions about its relations with Syria and the broader region as well as about domestic ethnic sectarian relations within the country in addition to the crisis influencing Turkey's long standing Kurdish problem. The main political impact of the arrival of Syrian refugees has been felt in Kurdistan as it has given an impetus to the pro-Kurdish agenda in the region. In terms of the repercussions of the influx of the Syrian refugees on domestic political life in Jordan, it could threaten the tribal Bedouin base of the Hashemite kingdom, which has already been endangered by the Palestinian refugee presence. Egypt in the present state of affairs is principally concerned about the security implications of continuing to allow large number of Syrians to enter their territory. These challenges call for an exhaustive yet inclusive approach to an analysis of what is a dynamic albeit enforced displacement both within and beyond the borders of Syria with its implications both for the nation itself and for the region at large.