



SEEKING REFUGE: FAITH-BASED APPROACHES TO FORCED MIGRATION

Poverty and Peacemaking II
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

Gender and Migration

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Questions to be addressed

- How do gender, religious and racial identities intersect as part of the migration/displacement experience and what implication does this have for policy practice and people's lives?
- How do experiences of migrants themselves challenge or support approaches from governments and civil society regarding gender, religion and migration?
- What are the specific needs of people experiencing displacement across the different phases of displacement?
- What current approaches are effective and sensitive to migrant experiences and needs, and what could or should be improved?
- What role do secular actors and assumptions play in the analysis of religion, gender, and migration?

Introduction:

- Migrants are concerned about religious organizations (hostility, anti-LGBT, conversion). While these concerns should be taken seriously, this understanding should be critiqued in the context of the assumptions and work of secular organizations

Anindita Bhaumik, Connect Faith

- The organization raises awareness and has done work with organizations about domestic violence, gender-based and sexual assault. Forced migration in the context of Hindus in Bangladesh isn't well known. State involvement makes it impossible to stay in homes. Also because of infringed citizenship, children and women are more vulnerable. Women experience forced migration differently than men because of pre-existing gender inequalities. The capacity to seek help is diminished by the loss of self, subject to abuses/violence.

Anecdote

- A Hindu woman talked to her through session about missing India and was glad to see someone from her culture. Her husband threatened to kick her out, physically abused her in front of her family. She reminded her that she couldn't leave because women



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who had fled had been raped (these news were circulating). She started having night terrors and stomach pains. She couldn't return India and the U.S. didn't feel like home because of cultural and language differences. Furthermore, she felt stigmatized by the few families she met in temple in the U.S.

Reflection

- Faith doesn't always give protection. Hindus also try to set themselves as model minorities.
- Victim of two types of forced migration: the turmoil of the region + domestic abuse
- She doesn't feel like the society as a whole has given these women the resources, but also, the organizations aren't doing the work because she is the only Hindu speaker in the entire Massachusetts area. This aspect is missing from the work.

Andrew Fuys, Church World Service

- As a refugee service provider, we've observed that faith is an important - and sometimes the only - form of emotional or psychosocial support available to many forced migrants. The ability to practice faith safely and freely can be critical for survivors of trauma. But LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming refugees often face threats from within their own families and communities, including faith community groups, and thus may not be able to access this support.
- Surveyed LGBTQ asylum seekers in South Africa and found that, for many, faith is fundamental for their being. However, some still felt unsafe in their faith communities, even after fleeing to South Africa. For those that felt safe, they had could tap into accepting faith communities, but may still experience xenophobia or hadn't been able to receive services in their language.
- We began outreach to faith community leaders in Kenya and South Africa in 2014, starting with one-to-one meetings with faith leaders, and then working with interested faith leaders to organize community training on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and their relationship with persecution and forced displacement. We have observed knowledge gains and attitude shifts across the course of workshops and dialogue activities - facilitating changes toward more inclusive practices is a longer process.
- Through the process they have been able to connect with religious leaders and organize locally. Being forced from home is common threat faced by LGBTQI nationals and migrants in need of refugee/asylum protections. The organization is currently trying to bridge this together, by connecting participating faith leaders, national LGBTQ civil society organizations, and LGBTQ refugee community groups in dialogue.



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- Migration should be interested in the context. It can be happening internally, externally and involve different degrees of agency, coercion, and incentives. Migration is always made by social, economically, political pressures, constructs and norms. This will help us better understand how to serve our migrants.
 - o Response for environmental migration very different than with conflict migration (i.e. Syrian refugees)
- Gender is political. Home also becomes political. Thinking about policy and UN women and how one views their needs. Until men stop being the “default” legally, socially, economically, gender equality will mean women equality.
- UN Women is trying to include equality into global agenda. Women’s equality and empowerment became a goal on its own, but is also included in other seventeen goals.
- How do we make sure gender is integrated in migration? UN has advocated for acknowledging needs of oppressed sexual and gender individuals. They are trying to develop and push for creation of policies that are gender sensitive and understanding of the heterogeneity of migrants.

Discussion and questions

- Multiple sources of trauma (not just migration) for people on the move – language, culture, sexual identity and religion, faith
- Identities are transformed by the interaction with governmental and other humanitarian agencies?
- White men considered the norm—How do we involve men? (Only two in the room)

How can we conduct effective outreach in the ground/local level?

- Anindita: It’s very difficult because identities are different when they arrived. They are transforming at the time. However, places of worship are potential places/fundamental. Workshops at public libraries.
- Andrew: There’s a weekly meeting space at the detention centers for clients. He says his organization has found it to be a valuable starting point. When carrying out faith religious leader, you have to be reflective in doing it in a way that allows for them to respond/feel safe about doing it.



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- Hind: Since gender and home are political, try to connect it to the UN. Even when we are working with individuals in the personal level, we reflect/become strategic about the institutional level. We want to use local level to make global/macro level changes.

We have to look at subliminal misogynistic messages. We are in a heteronormative male society, so we should begin early. From working with men, we should start their programs early.

- Hind: When talking about gender equality, first we need to address women's inequality but also, the accepted characteristics of masculinity. Power doesn't exist in a vacuum.

Sanctuary cities are needed or at least places of worships.

Even within groups, they call things different names. Queer for example. At the UN, there's no legal instrument and convention, we are taking this under the same agenda.

Anindita: We need to hold our government, our representatives and officials accountable and encourage them to be proud of their culture.

Some of the notes taken by student rapporteurs were submitted as rough notes from the session rather than as a polished summary.