

REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

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Lecture 03

Lecture 03: Politics of Space in Migration

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Refugee, Migration, Diaspora. So, today we are going to talk about the refugees and in that relation we will discuss, you know, the politics of space, spatial segregation as well as the concept of biopolitics and sovereignty. First, let us try to understand the terms refugee and migrant. They are not interchangeable terms as people often use them.

Refugee, we have to understand is not a homogeneous identity, but responds as a category in different ways to the macro processes. So, macro factors affect the refugee's decision in settlement and in constructing the experiences and the identities. right? So, factors such as policies and measures taken by the government, the geographical conditions of migration, the class and caste affiliation of a person. In the case of India, we also have an additional category called caste.

All these factors have a combined effect on the refugee experience. According to Holborn, The refugee is an involuntary migrant and a victim of politics, war or natural catastrophe. Every refugee is naturally a migrant. However, not every migrant is a refugee.

Difference between the two terms refugee and migrant is based on whether someone's movement has been voluntary or not. For the refugees, mostly the push factor is dominant. So, refugee influx is dependent on incidence of riots and hence refugees are byproducts of the nation building processes and also how such processes implement themselves, how such processes precipitate. We see that critic and scholar Alexander Kluge says, what is the history of a nation after all, but it's stories, numerous stories, stories upon stories, like the many surfaces of a nation.

So, a nation has a palimpsest quality. It is like a palimpsest where one narrative at one point in history kind of overlaps and, you know, builds itself on another narrative. So,

different phases of history, different, you know, narratives of history overlap. There are so many different layers of history that make up a nation.

There cannot be a monopoly of narrative. We have to understand the different layers. identities of individuals and social groups and communities that are forming through these interstitial spaces, through the interface, through the nodes of contact of these different histories, different cultural histories. Now, when we talk of politics of space, politics of space examines how spatial arrangements influence social relations and power dynamics and individual experiences.

In the context of migration, politics of space explores how physical and metaphorical spaces shape themselves and are shaped by the experiences of refugeehood and displacement. So, according to Michel Foucault, space is fundamental in any exercise of power. Refugee camps can often isolate the refugees from the broader society. This is because these camps are usually located, you know, at the fringes of civilization, thereby creating physical and social separation. They are located in remote areas, typically away from the mainland and, you know, the hub of activities and civilization, like I said.

thereby reinforcing the socio-cultural marginalization of these displaced peoples that we call as sharanarathi, we call them as, you know, uprooted people, udvastu, pravashi and so many other different terms that we have in India. We see that the way they are located in the camps, these camps are geographically at the fringes of the mainstream society which further socio-culturally marginalizes the refugees through geographical distancing. Analysis of the politics of space draws on the works of so many of the critics that have talked about how spaces speak to the question of refugee crisis, the problem of displacement and migration that we are currently facing.

Currently, we are witnessing across the globe. Critics include Michel Foucault. Then we have Giorgio Agamben. We have Edward Said, Mikhail Bakhtin, Edward Soja, David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman, Henry Lefebvre and Doreen Massey.

So, next we have to understand the definition of heterotopia. In the context of spatial segregation and exclusion, heterotopia is a very important term. Heterotopia is a term that has been coined by Michel Foucault. It refers to spaces that function differently from mainstream societal norms. Such a space is culturally, institutionally discursive and essentially an other to the mainstream or the main activities going on at the heart of the society.

It is away from the heart of the society, away from the cultural hub of a given society. It is an other. essentially an other. So, in terms of being disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory and constantly transforming heterotopia unfolds, you know, infinite possibilities, infinite rather subversive alternative possibilities can be visualized through this term heterotopia. In terms of being an approximation of utopia or a parallel space, heterotopia as a world within world is understood as cut off, as isolated from what is outside.

And therefore, it unfolds, like I was saying, it unfolds in finite possibilities. So, understanding of heterotopia is critical for analyzing how the refugees experience and adapt to their environments. Foucault's notion of heterotopia helps in understanding the unique nature of spaces and how, you know, spaces such as the refugee camps which exist outside of conventional societal structures function. On the other hand, we have just the opposite of heterotopia. As we all know, it is utopia.

Utopia refers to an imagined perfect society, idyllic society, where everything works harmoniously and everyone is happy. However, unlike heterotopias, utopias are idealized spaces, as the term suggests. And so, therefore, they do not exist in reality. Foucault contrasts heterotopia with utopia. While utopias are spaces with no real place, right?

So, what does that mean? Spaces with no real place. Utopias could be something in our imagination, in an ideological sense, as a part of our mental scape, there could be a utopia. One very common example of utopia, if we go back to Shakespearean literature, in *The Tempest*, we have Gonzalo's Republic.

That is a utopia. Gonzalo, the character, thinks of a utopian society, which is Gonzalo's concept of republic. So, where everyone is happy, but then that is a mental space, need not correspond with a real geographical place. However, heterotopias are real places which function outside of everyday norms. They are a part of the society and yet cut off from the mainstream life.

So, a heterotopia, according to Michel Foucault, A heterotopia is a real place, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. So, the same thing, the same artifacts are imbued with inverted and differently represented, alternatively represented meanings. Heterotopic spaces allow the migrants to preserve their cultural identities and practices within a dominant host culture that may not always

be very welcoming or inclusive. that can be indifferent or in as in many cases we see the host culture could have a vastly different habit or habits of their own.

So, these spaces in terms of refugee camps and you know migrants settlements can both integrate and isolate and in that sense they can influence the migrant's experience of social integration and visibility. In refugee camps, heterotopia manifests through the creation of spaces which have a dual significance. These spaces tend to both protect as well as isolate, reflecting the broader social and political tensions between the host and the refugee societies. So, heterotopic spaces uniquely intersect visible and invisible boundaries, creating complex social landscapes where traditional norms are both challenged as well as reinforced. So, heterotopias provide a contrast to the normal life order,

thereby representing spaces of otherness where different rules may apply. And so, heterotopic spaces challenge and subvert the conventional understanding of space and societal norms. To put very simply, when a person becomes a refugee and comes to a new land, they do not come as empty signs. They come as people who have a baggage of history and language and culture that they carry with themselves. They are uprooted people from a geopolitical space, which happens to be their homeland, their native land.

And they carry some reminiscence of that land in terms of culture and history and language and clothing habit and food habit. So when that meets with the host society, there is a visible tension. There is a conflict. from both the ends and this conflict, this friction enables formation of a new hybrid identity. Through an interface of two different cultures, two different histories, two different habits, new hybrid cultures can emerge.

So, refugee camps can act as sites of both exclusion and alternative social order. We see that the dual role of camps exist in providing safety and at the same time segregating the refugees from the broader society. So, on the one hand, the host society or the, you know, the different humanitarian initiatives, the NGOs, they are on the one hand, they are providing safety, security, protection measures, but at the same time, it is only possible through segregating the refugees from the broader social happenings in the mainstream, in the host society. So, here I am going to bring a reference from a very popular text that we read as part of magical realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 100 Years of Solitude. written in 1967.

So, in 100 Years of Solitude by Marquez, we see that the author uses the concepts of segregation, exclusion and heterotopia in order to explore the complex themes of

isolation, marginalization and the blending of reality with fantasy. This novel is set against the backdrop of a fictional town called Macondo. Macondo, which is modeled after Garcia Marquez's hometown of Aracataca, located in Colombia. So, Macondo evolves from a small village to a bustling town. thereby mirroring the historical and political changes, transformations that undergo in Colombia.

Macondo serves as a microcosm of broader social, political and cultural dynamics, reflecting the interplay between inclusion and exclusion and the nature of spaces which exist outside the conventional norms. So, Macondo becomes this heterotopia. which is a continuation with the conventional norms and yet where the norms get upturned. The norms can be played around with for newer meanings, newer significances and newer possibilities. Through its unique narrative and its setting, 100 Years of Solitude offers a profound commentary on the nature of society and the human condition itself.

Firstly, we see that it can be seen through the lens of magical realism. The town of Macondo acts as a heterotopic space where reality and fantasy coexist. Next, we see the question of alternative reality. Events happening in Macondo reflect the tumultuous history and politics of Latin America, thereby offering a space of resistance and reflection. Next, we talk of temporal justification.

The novel's non-linear timeline emphasizes the fluid nature of heterotopia, the heterotopic space that Macondo is, where past, present and future blend among themselves. There is no significant unilinear progression of narrative as such. That is something which amounts to, you know, or can be seen as one of the salient features of magical realism. Next, we talk about biopolitics and sovereignty. So, biopolitics refers to the governance of populations through an emphasis on the biological and bodily aspects of life, a concept which has been once again developed by Michel Foucault.

So, biopolitics encompasses the ways in which states regulate the bodies and lives of individuals, especially the marginalized groups like the refugees. Sovereign states exercise control over their borders, deciding who can enter, how long a person can stay and then when they have to leave, as well as monitor the physical movements of the refugees for as long as they stay within the precincts of the sovereign state. So, this control impacts the refugees and the migrants' quality of lives, often creating precarious and uncertain conditions. Giorgio Agamben's concept of the state of exception. So, Agamben's concept of the state of exception describes situations where normal legal protections have been suspended vis-a-vis the refugees' existence.

Refugees often exist in a state of exception because they lack full legal rights and protections. Now, Agamben describes this concept called bare life. What is a bare life? A bare life is a life that is stripped of political rights and therefore it does not have any social aspects and it exists solely in its biological aspect. Refugees often embody this concept of bare life as their legal status is suspended or reduces them to mere survival without much social, cultural or political agency.

Refugees are often subject to biopolitical control or governance through mechanisms such as camps, border controls and legal statuses that, you know, seem to have a total monitoring, total control over their lives. And when we talk of camp life, we cannot not mention the Nazi camps. That's where the whole, you know, idea of violence arises. associated with camp life comes from camp life from the Nazi concept where the Nazis had kept the Jews right the gas chambers and the camp life where human life was reduced to or you know crammed completely compressed into a subhuman condition and humans were often being compared to animals, to cattle So, Nazi camps becomes a kind of synecdoche, a kind of a meaning that cannot be missed when we are talking about camp life.

Signification and essence that is at the heart of camp condition, camp life. So, Agamben identifies the camp as the ultimate biopolitical space where the state of exception is realized. Biopolitical practices in migration include detention and deportation of individuals. illustrating how sovereign powers regulate these uprooted bodies because they are not accepted back in their own countries due to some political, communal, cultural upheaval, ethnic cleansing. They are seen as rootless people and the host land often regulate these uprooted bodies

through deciding to detain them or deport them. The refugees are often seen as unfamiliar and therefore a potential threat to the national security of the host society. Refugee camps and asylums are sites where refugees are both protected and controlled, thereby illustrating biopolitical governance. Camps often feature strict regulations on movement, on employment and access to services, thereby reflecting biopolitical control. Refugees experience a very limited sense of freedom, emphasizing this status as what Agamben calls as the bare life.

And this refers to only the biological existence of an individual without having much social dimension. and a very limited degree of freedom. So, as I was already describing at the beginning of this lecture, refugees exist at the margins of political life. They are

included in the state's territory, however, excluded from direct socio-political rights or participation. So, this kind of duality highlights the paradox of their existence within national borders.

Humanitarian efforts within camps can paradoxically reinforce biopolitical control because these aides in the form of NGOs or any other apolitical groups that go and help the refugees, they focus mainly on the survival of refugees. However, they cannot really facilitate the basic human rights or even the social relevance of the refugees. They can only enable or facilitate the survival through providing, let us say, the basic needs like food and clothing. So, this aid in fact can itself become a tool of governance emphasizing biological life over any kind of socio-political agency of a group of people marked as refugees.

So, Agamben would say that the camp is not simply an external space to the political order but rather is a part of it. In the context of the discussion we are having here in our lecture, we can look at Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which was written in 1906. So, *The Jungle* provides a stark critic of the industrial capitalism and the state's regulatory failures, thereby illustrating how These factors can exert biopolitical control over immigrant laborers' lives and the bodies in the early 20th century America. So, Sinclair's novel offers a powerful exploration of how economic and political systems can shape and control the biological and social existence of marginalized populations.

The living conditions of the immigrant workers are portrayed as deplorable. Sinclair details overcrowded, poorly ventilated and dilapidated housing in Packingtown, where families live in cramped quarters that are prone to flooding, that have, you know, diseases breeding in them. And so discomfort is at its height. To quote Packingtown, from one part of Sinclair's novel, "each had one of these to face.

Perhaps there was no time for anything but the struggle to live. There was never any proper rest," unquote. In one of the novel's most heart-wrenching moments, we see that the infant son of a couple, Jurgis and Ona, so Jurgis and Ona's infant son, Antanas drowns in a muddy street near their home after a heavy rainfall. The poorly maintained, filthy conditions of the workers' housings indirectly leads to this tragedy.

The housing area is hardly maintained, which leads to the death of an infant out of drowning. Sinclair's work underscores the urgent need for social reform to safeguard the basic conditions and the basic human dignity of these vulnerable sections of society, you know, serving as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for social justice and

human rights that the refugees are constantly fighting for. Further, we see that Jurgis' wife Ona faces sexual harassment and exploitation by her boss named Connor, who coerces her into a sexual relationship under threat of firing her from job and blacklisting her family. Later, when Jurgis finds this out that his wife has been exploited, he tries to attack the boss, which leads to his imprisonment and the family's further financial ruin. This incident highlights the

Ultimate vulnerability of immigrant women, immigrant workers within the workforce and the systemic abuse of power which preys on the most defenseless section of the society. It also marks the beginning of Jurgis' disillusionment with the American dream in the novel. So, we talk of the American dream where, you know, people from the developing countries move to America with high hopes of, you know, socio-economic upward mobility, of access to different facilities and a better lifestyle.

But in return, the reality is something very dark, something very gory. The novel exposes exploitation and dehumanization inherent in industrial capitalism and highlights the state's regulatory failures in protecting the the basic rights and dignity of the immigrant workers in America. So, coming back to the question of space and identity, the politics of space is also tied to one's identity formation.

A space is never dead. A space is always interacting with the current human experiences and activities. Refugees and migrants often navigate complex and layered identities shaped by their displacement and the spaces, the various spaces that they have been through and that they inhabit. Edward Said's notion of imaginative geographies explores how spaces are constructed through narratives and how these constructions, these various constructions of spaces affect the identities of those that inhabit the spaces. Refugees and migrants often navigate multiple overlapping identities that are influenced by their countries of origin,

and the host society. So, this navigation, this shift and transformation can be challenging when the multiple identities that they possess, that they posit cause a friction or come to, you know, come into conflict with each other. This happens more, if the host society is somewhat unwelcoming or exclusionary in its attitude. So, according to Edward Said, "just as none of us is outside or beyond the geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography," unquote. Narratives play a crucial role in constructing spaces and the identities within them.

So, it could be the literary narratives, the memoirs, the autobiographies. The personal histories, journalistic writings, all these kinds of documentations about the refugee and migrant experience can play a crucial role in constructing the spaces and the identities within these spaces. These narratives can either reinforce the stereotypes or can alternately challenge dominant discourses. Refugees and migrants can reclaim a space by creating counter-narratives which challenge dominant spatial constructions. These counter-narratives highlight the

the refugee's resilience, agency and contribution to the society. As Edward Said says, to quote him, "spaces are not mere backdrops to action, but are fundamental to the constitution of social relations and identities," unquote. Identity at a given point in time is therefore carved out through a negotiation between the past and present special identities. So, displacement forces individuals to reconcile their sense of self with new and often challenging environments. Refugee camps in that sense can be seen as the third space where the physical and the mental experiences of displacement converge.

You know, it could be the mental experience could be the mental scape, the psychic scape that we have about a space, the expectation that we have about a space. It could be from, you know, Certain heresy, some certain, you know, mythical understanding of a space and what to expect of that space even before I have arrived in that space versus the physical, real, tactile experiences. All these things converge, the mental experience, the expectation and the real happenings, the real experience. So, the expectation and the experience actually converge to form the third space.

These spaces become sites of survival, resistance and identity formation. So, third space fosters cultural hybridity where migrants blend their original cultural identities with that of the host society. So, this type of hybridization creates new forms of cultural expressions and identities. Third space is therefore vital for the emergence of new cultural forms that can potentially transform the societal norms and the power structures. David Harvey's concept of the right to the city argues

for the inclusive participation of all urban residents in shaping a city. So, Harvey's work highlights the intersection of geography, economics and social justice. This concept supports the idea that refugees and migrants should have a voice or their own stake in the development of an urban space. This is because urban planning and policies can either facilitate or Or contrastively, they can hinder the refugee's process of integration.

Harvey's ideas therefore help us understand how spaces like refugee camps and urban areas are influenced by the capitalist processes. When discussing urban spaces and integration, key concepts include, you know, concepts like spatial fix, the right to the city and accumulation by disposition. These concepts are crucial for analyzing how the refugees navigate and how they are affected by spatial and economic dynamics. Spatial fix refers to capitalism's tendency to resolve crisis through spatial reorganization. Refugee movements can be seen as a part of this broader spatial dynamics.

Spatial fix explains the process of geographical expansion and development as a solution to the crisis of over accumulation, capital over accumulation. Next slide. The term accumulation by disposition refers to the process by which wealth and power are centralized through dispossessing certain individuals of their lands, rights and resources. Just how people become refugees. Once people become refugees, they move, they are ousted of their own land and they go stay in a host land.

Their property, their rights, their resources, their lands, their capital, these are all accumulated and centralised. So, refugees often experience this process of accumulation by disposition. They are disposed and they are forcefully displaced and their properties are confiscated and centralized. Next, the right to the city involves the ability of all inhabitants, particularly that of the marginalized to shape the urban spaces and their ability to access the urban resources. Refugees often struggle to claim this right to the city due to legal and social barriers.

According to David Harvey, I quote him, "The right to the city is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart's desire," unquote. So, with this, we come to the end of today's lecture. We will continue with our discussion in the next lecture. Thank you.