

Strangers within our Borders: Human In(security) in South Asia

Abstract:

Scholars who have studied borders and boundaries in IR and Human Geography suggest that state borders construct and accentuate differences not only between states and 'geographical spaces', but also between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. These analyses disregard the complexities that are reflected within a territory, where people experience invisible boundaries imposed by states. Even without crossing borders, people can be powerless, oppressed and disenfranchised.

Traditional security scholars and policymakers on the other hand, often argue that only those people who cross borders become a human security concern for states. This view overlooks the reality that, from a human security perspective, states are often a part of the problem rather than a source of a solution. As agents of insecurity, states contribute to the marginalization of communities, with resulting human security implications.

National borders determine the human security responsibilities of states for those people who live within those borders. In this paper, I address two specific questions. How can a conceptualisation of borders and national boundaries based on human security theories explain the 'everyday practices' of the people who are strangers within the state? Secondly, how is the socio-political boundary reinforced by the citizenship and identity politics of a state?

After consideration of case studies of the Rohingyas refugees on the Burma-Bangladesh border, the stateless Biharis in various camps across Bangladesh and the Jumma people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, as internally displaced people (IDPs), I argue that Bangladesh has contributed to insecurities of these communities within its national boundaries. I further suggest that it is essential to address the concerns of refugees, stateless people and IDPs by analysing borders and the movement of peoples from human security perspectives in order to generate strategic responses.