

Dear friends,

Attending the winter camp was a wonderful experience for me. I was privileged to be able to enjoy exciting presentations, discussions, performances and film screenings, and to admire the creativity and commitment of activists to a world of peace and justice. Since this was my first time in India, the camp offered me a unique introduction to the everyday challenges of vulnerable groups and individuals in the country. However, I am not an activist and cannot comment on the event as an activist. My brief comment is to be seen in light of my background as a social anthropologist who has worked on minorities and migration issues for many years.

What I found fascinating about the winter camp was that, despite its focus on activism, it was theoretically very stimulating. Commenting on the presentations, Ranabir Samaddar often hinted at the theoretical implications of the issues under discussion. I would like to take up a question he posed in the camp again and again: “Who is a migrant?” Or: “When is a person a migrant?” and share with you some thoughts about the light the camp sheds on this issue.

In the mainstream migration discourse a migrant is a person who moves and relocates her place of residence. I have never been comfortable with this definition as I do not understand how it might enable meaningful comparison. In mainstream journals of migration research, you find essays on global mobile elites next to essays on displaced persons. The analytical profit of such a juxtaposition has never been clear to me.

Focusing on deprived, marginalized, and vulnerable people and in general on groups and individuals who are systemically exposed to exclusion and violence, the program of the camp invites us to identify the core marker of migration not in mobility, but in the precarious relationship to place and the social deprivation that comes with it. “Migration” can be unrelated to the movement of people or the crossing of nation-state borders. While affluent Western Europeans owning homes in the Mediterranean are not considered migrants, the so-called “second (or even third)-generation Turks” in Germany are subsumed under the category of migrants though they are born in Germany and some of them have never crossed the borders of the country. There is much to suggest that migration is not about mobility but about a relationship of power.

It is important to keep in mind that citizens of powerful states in Europe or America, who have moved all over the world, never regarded themselves as migrants and were never perceived as such in their homelands either. Their relationship to their new place of residence was anything but precarious. Irrespective of where they have found themselves, they could always rely on the energetic support of their states of origin whenever their rights or interests were seen to be violated. The contrast with the fundamental vulnerability and the feelings of helplessness of most migrants could not be greater.

Precariousness is central to the migrant position. Understanding migrants not as “mobile people” but as people considered *out of place* opens up possibilities of meaningful comparison with other positions marked by precariousness and exclusion that characterize many vulnerable and marginalized social groups with very different legal status and without any background of mobility. And that is what, in my view, this winter camp has done. It discussed migration as a disadvantaged position along with other disadvantaged positions, and not as a mobile category. Migrants are closer to indigenous populations than to many categories of mobile people. This may appear obvious and even trivial in the eyes of activists—but it is not in the eyes of the vast majority of scholars. The empirical down-to-earth attitude of activists protects them from the errors of a priori theorization and conceptualization to which scholars are very susceptible. I have always believed that social theory can be useful for activism and

advocacy. But more and more, I also think that activism can crucially inform theoretical reflection.

Thank you all for the inspiring experience.

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