

"What's in a label?" by Jackie Pollock, Forced Migration Review, Issue 37: Armed Non-State Actors and Displacement.

<http://www.fmreview.org/non-state/Pollock.html>

This succinct and well-articulated article challenges the current international protection regime of migrants' rights – a regime that is based on demarcation and categorization of migrants. Rather than sustaining and promoting the legal frameworks in which migrants continue to be isolated and segregated from one another and the local population, the article recommends fostering a culture that does not tolerate exploitation of migrants, or of workers (both migrant and local). The author goes on to report that such demarcation has seeped into advocacy work. Migrant rights groups are feeling the pressure to mark out target groups to call their own. This trend of demarcation often creates a barrier to effective cooperation amongst different groups. Pollock also suggests that where a culture of openness and non-exploitation is present, migrant workers are able to be instrumental in reporting instances of exploitation (such as human trafficking).

The author calls for the examination of the root causes of migration from failed states, and highlights the need to work together to challenge the restriction of migration regimes. The article presents a powerful argument, supported by well chosen examples of Burmese migrants in Thailand. It serves not only as an excellent overview of the complex reality of migrants whose movements are driven by multiple factors; but also as a warning that the current international legal regime not only fails to provide the necessary protection to migrants but – through its attempts to neatly classify people – also risks further isolating and segregating migrant communities.