Forced Migration in an (Im)Moral Polity and the Public Role of Migration Research

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Many countries in Europe receiving refugees are signatories to human rights conventions, and we can thus speak of a moral polity. Yet we also find externalization of migration control and widespread refusal to receive forced migrants. This observation raises three questions. First, what are the main mechanisms fuelling the dualism of human rights on the one hand and an unwillingness to accept forced migrants on the other hand? The main argument is that there is a dissonance between moral proclamations on the one hand and inaction on norms on the other hand, which leads to categorizations that result in exclusion and reinforce inequalities. Second, how is this dissonance reflected in exclusion and inequalities beyond semantics in public policies? This question is placed in the historical context of the development of migration control. Nowadays, there is an emerging migration-development-securitization nexus: for example, migration spurring socio-economic development can be used to legitimize the securitization of migration control. Third, in conclusion, given the crucial importance of the politics and policies around forced migration, deeper reflection is needed concerning the public involvement of social scientists who deal with forced migration. The argument is that the major role of migration research beyond the academic realm is not primarily to engage in policy advice and consultancy but to play an active role providing meaning and orientation for participants and audiences in public debates.