Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Migration Oxford Podcast. I'm rob MacNeil.

00:00:06 Speaker 1

And I'm Jackie broadhead.

00:00:07 Speaker 2

And today we've got our best clickbait title ever, Robo Dogs and the rise of crime migration, which despite this Clickbaiting Ness covers a really, really fascinating conversation. So, Jackie, do you wanna just give me a quick rundown of what you've just been through with Peter and?

00:00:25 Speaker 1

Petra. Thanks. Rob. This idea of criminalization.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

Which?

00:00:29 Speaker 1

Is this illusion of migration, governance and criminal law so long term we have had penalties for irregular entry, but in recent years we've seen a kind of vast coming together of these two areas and kind of criminalization at the border and linked to that the increasing.

00:00:50 Speaker 1

Use of technology as modes of surveillance, deterrence, etc. And so this conversation is really about those processes.

00:01:00 Speaker 1

Others about how new technologies are being used in quite unregulated ways at the border and what might be needed both in terms of kind of regulating that space, but also the question of why we're moving so swiftly in this direction and what the purpose.

00:01:21 Speaker 1

Of a kind of increasingly securitized.

00:01:24 Speaker 1

Days.

00:01:25 Speaker 2

Which all makes.

00:01:26 Speaker 2

Sense to ask these questions, but then there's a in a situation where inevitably peoples's access to technology in order to, you know, circumvent migration controls, or alternatively, people's access to information which might encourage them to try to to relocate from one place to another, where that is.

00:01:45 Speaker 2

Changing, but that's shifting. It's pretty normal, one would imagine for states to also be trying to take advantage of technological solutions to try and improve their ability to manage stuff. Now why? Why do we think that that is something that is potentially problematic?

00:02:00 Speaker 1

Yeah. Well, I think it's always.

00:02:02 Speaker 1

This question of what tools you have at your disposal and what their impacts are and states are always making those decisions between what they could do and what's acceptable to their populace. You know, questions of privacy questions of.

00:02:22 Speaker 1

Civil liberties, etc. I think where it's so interesting. On the topic of migration is its decisions that the state is making about how to treat people that are not. At this point, the citizens of that state.

00:02:35 Speaker 1

And so is there a different standard that you have when you're making decisions about how you're going to treat people when they're not, you know, let, let's put it really bluntly. Your voters, that's kind of a really interesting part of the discussion and might give us a hint as to why one of the things that Petra identifies, which is the border, has become a kind of.

00:02:55 Speaker 1

Experimental testing ground for technologies you know. Do we have a sense that the border is a place where you can try things out that simply would not be acceptable in other areas of public life?

00:03:06 Speaker 1

I'm not sure, but I think it's interesting to have the discussion and to see some of the examples. You know most strikingly, this idea of the robo dog. We might also say that some of these examples might not be examples that are actually going to be used in a widespread way. They're there to grab attention because politicians also want to show.

00:03:26 Speaker 1

Strength around the border, and so there's also kind of a question of technologies that you might not be using totally systemically, but which you want to kind of show that that you have grip and control because politically that has become so important.

00:03:41 Speaker 2

Which brings me to another sort of component of this discussion, which is which is that point about like the sort of the idea of the affective and I'm stealing. I'm stealing words from a conversation that we had with Petra after the interview, but this kind of like affective use of of technology versus the.

00:04:01 Speaker 2

Effective use of technology to actually manage things. So one of the things that strikes me consistently when we look at questions about border control in the UK is that despite all of the increases in technology that have been introduced at the at the UK's border with France.

00:04:18 Speaker 2

Have simply really seemed to move the problem rather than to resolve it, and in fact Madeleine Madeleine Sumption, myself, wrote a piece for the for the Financial Times a couple of years ago about the fact that actually sometimes there aren't actually straightforward solutions to these kind of concepts of border control problems, because whatever you do, whatever you introduce.

00:04:39 Speaker 2

There are going to be work arounds that people are going to find and the one thing that we have seen is an increase in the likelihood of people taking particularly risky journeys. Now I

don't know if I don't know what your views were on that Jackie as well. Just from the conversation that you had with Peter and Petra.

00:04:57 Speaker 1

I've heard it sometimes described as the waterbed effect, right? You push down in one area and it pops up in the other. I think that point that you make about people seeking out kind of more dangerous journeys feels important. I also think that it's about whether there's an acceptance of human mobility as a natural process or whether it's seen.

00:05:19 Speaker 1

Ultimately, is something that's abnormal. That framing feels very important because you have some acceptance.

00:05:25 Speaker 1

Of mobility and you say actually there are things that we want to do. There are areas of control we want to stop. Obviously smuggling dangerous journeys, etcetera. But there is an overall acceptance of global mobility and and therefore the system is designed in such a way to kind of accept that.

00:05:45 Speaker 1

Versus wanting to stop or have kind of complete control over it, the type of solutions you're gonna want to put in place are gonna be different based on which reality you're kind of accepting of.

00:05:59 Speaker 1

And I think at the moment often we're kind of caught a little bit betwixt and between as to which of those positions our public discourse actually sits in. And it comes back to a lot of the discussions that we've had about public opinion around migration, linking to an understanding of the trade-offs that are made. You know, if you want to reduce.

00:06:20 Speaker 1

Migration in this area, these are the consequences or these are the things that we'll have to do. I think we don't really have very much of A discussion on the border side.

00:06:28 Speaker 1

Of if you're wanting to make very, very severe kind of reductions that's going to come with a very high price tag, for example, obviously in other areas of public services, we talk a lot

about the cost this we don't seem to talk that much about kind of how expensive it is. So I think it kind of comes down to what's our understanding overall of.

00:06:48 Speaker 1

What would be a kind of ideal situation in terms of?

00:06:51 Speaker 1

Immigration. And then secondly, the understanding of the trade-offs, what do you?

00:06:55

Thanks.

00:06:55 Speaker 2

Think no? Well, that's a very good question. I think there is a there is another underlying question which is what do people believe is achievable. And unfortunately I kind of slightly fear that public discourse has taken us to a place where people believe that the impossible is achievable, that that somehow or another.

00:07:11 Speaker 2

We can have totally secure borders that we can stop anybody from entering the country that doesn't have the legal right to do so. There's there's very little evidence to suggest that that's feasible.

00:07:23 Speaker 2

And the costs, not just financial, but also human, of actually implementing a policy that that makes something like that happen are probably likely to be pretty challenging to take. Now I think on that note, we should probably move on to our conversation with our our brilliant panellists today.

00:07:41 Speaker 1

I'm joined by Petra Molnar, a lawyer specialising in border technologies and author of the recent book The Walls Have Eyes, and Peter Walsh, senior researcher at the Migration Observatory here at the University of OK.

00:07:53 Speaker 1

Petra, in your new book, you use the term crummy Gration. Can you tell us a little bit what you mean by this and how the governance of migration and criminal law are being increasingly kind of brought together?

00:08:06 Speaker 3

Yeah. So I used the term for immigration as a callback to work. That's been done by, you know, other scholars.

00:08:13 Speaker 3

In the space such as Cesar Garcia Hernandez.

00:08:16 Speaker 3

Who wrote about this?

00:08:17 Speaker 3

Phenomenon where the conflation of criminal law, norms and immigration are becoming 1, and I think this is seen in in different ways, both in the way that we think and talk about migration as in.

00:08:32 Speaker 3

People on the move now being seen as criminals, threats and frauds, and also in these broader kind of ways that states in particular are able to frame migration as a problem, a problem to be solved. And so when we start criminalising human movement again, the phenomenon that's been with us since time immemorial and we.

00:08:52 Speaker 3

Employ these framings. Not only do we weaken the the human rights protections that are already present for people on the move, but it also gets at these conversations around how we think about migration. What are some of the logics that underpin how we manage it?

00:09:06 Speaker 3

And this is also where perhaps some of the work on technologies and surveillance comes into play. Because when migration is a problem, you need a solution for it. And solutions are increasingly becoming technological.

00:09:19 Speaker 1

Thanks, Petra. Peter, I know a lot of the work that the Migration Observatory has been doing is looking at the idea of the border being framed as a problem. I wonder if you could just say a little bit in the work that you do about how you see this kind of increasing merging between migration, governance and crime.

00:09:36

Hello.

00:09:36 Speaker 4

Yeah. So on the books, unauthorised migration to the UK has been a crime since 1971 and the trend is towards increasing securitisation and criminalisation. So recently some legislation was introduced that toughened the criminal penalties associated with unauthorised migration and this was in the context.

00:09:56 Speaker 4

Text of people crossing the English Channel in small boats. You know, at that point I think the maximum penalty was six months imprisonment for an authorised migration to the UK, increased to four years and smuggling facilitation of an authorised migration increased to a potential life sentence.

00:10:17 Speaker 4

And you know, we see this not just in the UK. I was reading a a report by the Library of Congress and the US and it it, it was quite striking in that it found that actually most countries around the world now.

00:10:29 Speaker 4

Have unauthorised migration as a criminal offence? There's a separate question, of course, about how often countries actually prosecute individuals. It seems that they prefer return, but it feeds nevertheless into this discourse that the border is something to be secured and that people who enter it without authorization pose a threat.

00:10:49 Speaker 4

Sometimes that's framed as a threat to national security, and we see this now with the New Labour government in the UK, which proposes to use counter terrorism.

00:11:00 Speaker 4

Hours to disrupt smuggling activity so you know very much feeding into that risk, danger securitisation discourse.

00:11:08 Speaker 1

And it's really interesting I think as well to see the kind of continuity across governments and in different contexts, as well as having that kind of historical context. Petra, you were talking then about technologies, you know, and this idea that.

00:11:21 Speaker 1

I think you describe borders as being the kind of ultimate testing ground for quite high risk experimental technologies, partly as a consequence of kind of logic of securing borders that Peter.

00:11:32 Speaker 1

Described. Can you explain what some of the new technologies that we're seeing being used at the border and why you think the border has become such a sort of area of of testing for experimental technologies?

00:11:45 Speaker 3

Sure. So in the recent years, we've been seeing a massive proliferation of digital technologies that impact essentially every single point of a person's migration.

00:11:53 Speaker 3

Your knee.

00:11:54 Speaker 3

And what helps me to think about it is sometimes if we trace the kind of temporal journey of somebody on the move. So there's all sorts of things that happen before you even leave your country. These are things like social media, scraping of your online activity, risk profiles being made on you based on which mosque you go to on Fridays or who you associate with.

00:12:14 Speaker 3

There's also the technologies that are making their ways into spaces of humanitarian crises and emergencies. Once you, for example, leave your country, things like biometrics and refugee camps, iris scanning, fingerprinting, predictive analytics used to make predictions about where groups of people are.

00:12:32 Speaker 3

At the border is where we're seeing perhaps the more quote unquote traditional or obvious examples of surveillance, things like drones, thermal cameras, but also more experimental projects too, like at the US Mexico border, where a few years ago a robo dog was being announced as the kind of newest.

00:12:51 Speaker 3

Piece of technology to join the global arsenal of of border management tech and experimental projects in the European Union space too, such as the eye Border Control project, which was essentially an AI lie detector that was piloted at the.

00:13:05 Speaker 3

And then the last class of technologies are things that you might come across when you've already arrived. So that can be as a triaging algorithm or voice printing technology.

00:13:16 Speaker 3

Or also carceral.

00:13:18 Speaker 3

Technologies that are used in immigration detention spaces, ankle shackles, face recognition applications.

00:13:24 Speaker 3

For identification purposes and and technologies like this.

00:13:28 Speaker 3

But really what I've seen context across context and jurisdiction across jurisdiction in the course of the 6-7 years that I've been working on this book, is that borders really are this high risk laboratory of experimentation. They are spaces that are opaque discretionary, where there's huge power differentials between.

00:13:48 Speaker 3

The actors that are developing and deploying the technology.

00:13:52 Speaker 3

And communities on the move on whom this technology is tested. And so it then becomes this perfect laboratory of experimentation. That's why we see things like Robo dogs and drones and unregulated tech like this, which is first rolled out at the border and then also makes its way into other facets and spaces of public life.

00:14:11 Speaker 1

It's super interesting. And do you see a difference, I guess between some of the more embedded technology?

00:14:17 Speaker 1

Is and some things that maybe we might view as slightly more on the performative side. So things like the rubber dogs, things that are very eye-catching, you know, we know that a lot of migration policy making in particular on the border is there for a kind of show of strength as well as actually being about migration governance. Do you see kind of a big difference?

00:14:38 Speaker 1

And the types of technologies from that point of view.

00:14:41 Speaker 3

Absolutely. And and thanks for putting it this way, because there is absolutely an element of performance or performativity in the kind of surveillance theatre that has grown around the the use of technology at the border. You know, a lot of it is very viscerally perhaps disturbing or or meant to act as a deterrent as well. Right. When you see a robo dog or a drone.

00:15:02 Speaker 3

Or a sound cannon.

00:15:04 Speaker 3

But there is a gap, too, between the kind of messaging where a lot of the power operates right, and then the actual implementation on the ground. A lot of the reality is, is messier than the power brokers would would like us to to believe. And you know, there are others doing great work on this, like Mariana. That's really, for example, have been making arguments reminding us that we have to think about.

00:15:24 Speaker 3

The kind of practical operationalization of this tech versus the kind of performativity of it that we see.

00:15:31 Speaker 1

Peter, I was struck by what Petra was saying about some of the technologies that were about kind of surveillance and understanding numbers and thinking about the work of the Migration Observatory and the public understanding of migration and the impact that that has. And I just wondered about your reflections, you know, particularly when we know that the kind of net migration statistics.

00:15:51 Speaker 1

Drive so much migration debate in the UK that balancing act between the surveillance needed or the ways in which that information is gathered and the way it kind of drives public and policy debate.

00:16:06 Speaker 4

Yeah, well, you know, this is a a big thing in the UK now that you know the technologist Zion of the border. And I think, you know, we see it most concretely with our E border scheme that we poured, you know, at least a billion pounds into. And, you know, you can scan your passport and it'll take a photo of your face. It takes the biometrics from the passport. And then, of course, we have.

00:16:26 Speaker 4

That's less seen.

00:16:27 Speaker 4

Our securitisation of our border with France, again to tackle irregular migration and just the whole suite of technologies that were introduced initially to try to combat people stowing away in lorries, and it was a really incredible array of technologies. You know, CO2 detectors, heartbeat monitors, thermal imaging, drones.

00:16:47 Speaker 4

And I suppose you know less obviously. There's also the kind of work that goes into processing visa applications, so I remember I was giving evidence in Parliament in relation to this very big increase in Albanian arrivals crossing in small boats.

00:17:03 Speaker 4

And the Albanian ambassador to the UK was asked, well, you know why? Why are Albanian spending so much money to smugglers when they could, you know, just fly into an airport if they, you know, genuine asylum seeker and, you know, the answer to that was, is that actually behind the scenes, the UK has a pretty robust and quite restrictive.

00:17:23 Speaker 4

Visa processing system and it's thought to be based on an algorithm and a lot of information is gathered from applicants, especially from from those countries that do require visas for tourism or to come longer, and that they require now the UK Government a lot of information. They want bank statements, they want to know where you're going to be staying.

00:17:41 Speaker 4

They want the letters from contacts in the in the UK they want return flights and so on and so forth. You know the whole itinerary and if.

00:17:49 Speaker 4

They.

00:17:49 Speaker 4

Suspect that actually your true purpose in coming to the UK is not for tourism or to be a student or work. We understand that there's an algorithm that actually processes all of that information.

00:18:01 Speaker 4

And feeds into the decision on that, and there's there's a real challenge.

00:18:04 Speaker 4

There because the algorithm you know is to us from the outside of black box. You know we don't know about how the algorithm works and whether that may, as has been observed before with algorithms of this kind feed into prejudice. So it's and it's a real challenge and you know, especially with regard to transparency about how these technologies work.

00:18:24 Speaker 1

Thanks, Peter. Petra, I'd love to come back for your thoughts and these kind of idea of algorithmic fairness and also one of the things that kind of comes up repeatedly, which is.

00:18:33 Speaker 1

A balancing act between these technologies exist, and therefore presumably there is a kind of entrepreneurial sense that they might be used versus the need for regulation and the need to actually be quite thoughtful in how they're deployed. The idea of the border as a kind of testing.

00:18:53 Speaker 1

Round would give the sense that there's not that much thought as to, you know, the quote from Jurassic Park just because you can doesn't mean you should.

00:19:02 Speaker 1

How much kind of thought do you think is given and how much regulation do we have?

00:19:06 Speaker 1

In these areas.

00:19:07 Speaker 3

I'm really glad that we're talking about some of these more, you know, hidden uses of technology to like, like these are triaging because I think this shows us the kind of priorities of the state to introduce technologies under the guise of efficiency, right, of making immigration systems more efficient.

00:19:27 Speaker 3

Faster processing like dealing with backlogs which are all really worthy goals, right? Like I used to practise law in Canada and I know very well how floating in is how painful it is, how difficult it is to navigate.

00:19:40 Speaker 3

But I think the concern for a.

00:19:42 Speaker 3

Lot of us.

00:19:42 Speaker 3

Is that fixing a broken system with a Band-Aid solution that creates additional problems? Is is not the answer, and it's also about some of these broader questions to ask too, right? Like what are we actually optimising for and hold efficiency good for if it is exacerbating the kind of power?

00:20:01 Speaker 3

Differentials that are already in this space, creating additional discrimination, right? Which algorithms are very, very good at like Peter, was just saying, oftentimes they are inscrutable disable. To understand why a particular decision was rendered, especially in discretionary and high risk applications that are part and parcel of the immigration.

00:20:20 Speaker 3

You know, I think we are.

00:20:20 Speaker 3

Seeing a move across.

00:20:22 Speaker 3

The world to try and think about what governance and regulation in the tech space generally could look like. Right. And of course you know, we have domestic privacy legislation that can sometimes be used in discrimination and equality rights and then broader fundamental rights, framings that that we've been trying to use at.

00:20:40 Speaker 3

To our research lab, for example, as a scaffolding to try and pin responsibility to. But when it comes to specific governance making.

00:20:47 Speaker 3

There really needs to be so much more. You know, we really need guard rails at minimum, and frankly, a conversation around moratoriums and bands. Really, when it comes to some of the sharpest edges of this technological system, because it's now been very well documented that these technologies are discriminatory, they are privacy rights infringing.

00:21:08 Speaker 3

They really infringe on a whole host of of of fundamental human rights, and yet the governance mechanisms that we currently have are falling short.

00:21:17 Speaker 3

Even something as you know, looked forward to or lauded as the European Union's recently ratified act to regulate artificial intelligence with the so-called AI Act. It's a really missed opportunity because it could have gone a lot farther to regulate the types of technologies that are being used in spaces like the border.

00:21:37 Speaker 3

But also you know things like predictive policing or welfare algorithms, technologies that are weaponized specifically towards marginalised community.

00:21:46 Speaker 3

So we really have to have a lot more conversations about perhaps and integrate the holistic approach in terms of how to regulate this from the municipal level, regional level state level, but also the international level.

00:21:58 Speaker 1

And you talked about moratoriums and bands at the sharpest end. What would you describe as the kind of sharpest end?

00:22:05 Speaker 3

It's always a bit difficult to.

00:22:06 Speaker 3

Answer This right because I think I've seen the the gamut of of all the different technologies, right? And it's hard to cherry pick which ones should be banned and which ones you know are are OK, right? Because it's dependent on so many different facts.

00:22:19 Speaker 3

But I do think it's OK to say that the things like robo dogs are perhaps do not have a place at the border or discriminatory face recognition technology that's used to power snake oil projects like an AI lie detector at the border, which is just super discriminatory and also just doesn't work. You know, we tried to come up with the.

00:22:38 Speaker 3

Framework in a recent report that Professor Lorna MacGregor at Essex University and I did for the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner last year.

00:22:46 Speaker 3

To come up with a bit of a framework of guidelines for this, but it is difficult, right? Because then it's like once you start picking out certain technologies and what happens to conversations around things like, you know, these are triaging algorithms or the last quote unquote sexy technologies that we also have to pay attention.

00:23:03 Speaker 1

To Peter's recent speech.

00:23:06 Speaker 1

On migration, the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said that alongside the NHS and the economy, securing our borders is the issue that.

00:23:13 Speaker 1

Matters to working.

00:23:14 Speaker 1

People. And so you know, it really feels like from the political point of view, there's this continuing kind of stricter, stricter border enforcement, the kind of search for more powerful tools. I just wonder if you could reflect a little bit on the intersection between that impulse at a political level and some of the things that Petra is talking about in relation to.

00:23:35 Speaker 1

Regulation and ensuring kind of fairness in border enforcement.

00:23:41 Speaker 4

It's true that I mean, this has been the trend for some time now and you know it does raise the question of whether there's a sense in which so.

00:23:48 Speaker 4

Much.

00:23:49 Speaker 4

Of this tough talk is symbolic. We take the example of the Labour Party's policy on small boats and asylum. You know, their slogan is smashed the gang.

00:24:00 Speaker 4

Things and and that sounds tough and that sounds and will no doubt appeal to certain parts of the population. And it is true that among all of the migratory streams to the UK, of course, this unauthorised small boats migration is the most controversial. But you, you'd have to imagine that in this particular case that you know, the UK Government knows the challenges that are associated.

00:24:22 Speaker 4

With smashing the gangs, which are that they're highly decentralised, the people most directly involved with getting the boats to the water and getting people into the boats, it doesn't require high level of training or investment for them to operate you can apprehend.

00:24:39 Speaker 4

And others pop up. It's a bit like whack A mole and then you think about the the masterminds behind these smuggling operations. They typically operate far beyond not only the UK's jurisdiction, but the EU's jurisdiction, and the government must be aware. It's certainly been the experience of the the long experience of the previous government, just how challenging.

00:24:58 Speaker 4

Disrupting smuggling activities is yet, you know, the trend seems to be to ever, ever increasing tough rhetoric. You have to imagine that there's a symbolic component to this cause the government must understand how difficult this is in practise and the experience of other countries says.

00:25:14 Speaker 4

That just as an enforcement heavy approach is not sufficient, that actually it's worthwhile to complement that kind of securitization approach with say safe and legal routes for people to migrate. The other thing I think that I, I'd love Petra's view on this. You know the the sense in which.

00:25:34 Speaker 4

Regulators, people like you, that always having to play catch up. You know that the technologies just outstrip the regulation and they proceed at a a pace. I remember in the in the UK actually last year the Home Office organised a hackathon.

00:25:48 Speaker 4

That's what it called it a hackathon, where it invited programmers to improve the efficiency of asylum processing and and asylum decision making. And I I won't say they weren't totally sensitive to some of the challenges here, but it was very much, you know, all steamer had, I think, this just kind of feeds into this idea of the sense in which technologies are outstripping regulation.

00:26:10 Speaker 4

And and can and continuing at at such a fast pace?

00:26:14 Speaker 3

Yeah, for sure. I mean, you gotta love a good hackathon, but joke jokes aside, I mean, this is absolutely something to really critique too. This kind of turn to techno solutionism at all costs, right. And also under the guise of, like, AI for good or tech for good. That is the kind of framing that we see so much when again.

00:26:34 Speaker 3

States all around the world are jostling for geopolitical power through their leadership to be an AI leader and the kind of arms race really that has grown up around the use of technology.

00:26:47 Speaker 3

You know, that's not to say that all technologies are bad, right? They don't have a place. Perhaps in in immigration systems. But it's all about trying to always pay attention to who's around the table when we innovate and why. And when we make the kind of decisions on what technologies are pushed forward and where resources are going.

00:27:08 Speaker 3

Or otherwise right?

00:27:09 Speaker 3

And and even.

00:27:10 Speaker 3

Just just the framing, right? That like immigration can be hacked somehow, right? Like, oh, well, you know, it's such a complex issue, but we got the solution again through technology.

00:27:19 Speaker 3

I think we also need to pay attention to the need to diversify who actually makes the technology right, because oftentimes states cannot develop these projects in House, they need private sector partners in order to do this. And unfortunately, I don't want to generalise, but the lived experience between a lot of people who are in the private sector.

00:27:40 Speaker 3

And those who live in refugee camps, for example, or who are on the sharpest edges of the tech that we're concerned about, are vastly different. And so part of the conversation is also about figuring out who sits around the table when we innovate and why and and why are certain lived experiences constantly relegated to the margins?

00:27:58 Speaker 1

One of the things that I always come back to from the UK Home Office is the independent review of the Windrush scandal which really talked about a loss of humanity in some of the decision making. Obviously we're now talking about a kind of literal loss of humanity when we're talking about algorithms, but Petra, I know that a lot of your work.

00:28:18 Speaker 1

Also looked at the more human side of these technologies and of the criminalisation of the border. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that side of your work and about understanding those stories.

00:28:30 Speaker 3

That's such an integral part to how I've been trying to understand this interplay between technology and migration and and really when? When I knew that this was going to

culminate in a book, I felt compelled to write something that was story driven and and not just about analysis and theory. There's a little theory in there, but it is mostly.

00:28:51 Speaker 3

Trying to share the the stories of people on the move that I've been privileged to learn and and and sit with over, you know, the last few years.

00:28:59 Speaker 3

To try and humanise what's happening at the border, and perhaps compel us again to think about the human story here, because there are real individuals and communities who are harmed by this technological experimentation, you know now, of course, I don't want to generalise the, you know, hundreds of conversations that I've had over the years, but.

00:29:18 Speaker 3

There are some.

00:29:19 Speaker 3

Trends and themes that emerge. You know, people sometimes reflect on the dehumanisation of the technology and being reduced to fingerprints or iris scans, experiencing the kind of exacerbation of racism and discrimination at the border that is sharpened through technologies.

00:29:37 Speaker 3

And you know also when you are actually physically present in some of these spaces where a lot of this technology is being rolled out, whether that's at the US, Mexico border, where you can actually see a lot of the infrastructure, you can see the AI powered towers that are part of again this kind of global arsenal of tech, a lot of them are Israeli technology.

00:29:57 Speaker 3

Also.

00:29:58 Speaker 3

When you're at the the EU borders, you know you, you hear the drones worrying about you see all sorts of infrastructure there. I think it really brings home the point that again, this is a daily reality now, this is not some sort of theoretical conversation that we're having here today, but it actually is something that's impacting.

00:30:18 Speaker 3

People on the move and and will likely continue to do so.

00:30:20 Speaker 3

In the years to come.

00:30:22 Speaker 4

And just on that point, Petra, I mean, my sense is that there's a real evidence vacuum in this space.

00:30:28 Speaker 4

That there's a lack of evidence about the impacts of these technologies, and yet, you know, countries are looking at at their neighbours and they're worried about being left behind in the development of these technologies and adopting them without really having a thorough understanding of what their effects are likely to be.

00:30:46 Speaker 3

Yeah, absolutely. And and and that's something that I was trying to do in, in the book as well. And what?

00:30:51 Speaker 3

We tried to do at.

00:30:51 Speaker 3

The Refugee law lab to create this kind of evidentiary backing, so to speak, from a comparative perspective too, because then you know it's it's a lot harder to refute, but this is just an issue at 1 border, right. But this is a global phenomenon now.

00:31:06 Speaker 1

And I think that intersection between research and.

00:31:10 Speaker 1

And hopefully be a kind of productive space, just as a final question, I'd love to ask you both kind of looking to the future what you see coming next. Either the trends that you see happening and continuing or the things that you would like to see.

00:31:25 Speaker 1

Change and your kind of hopes for the future, Peter.

00:31:29 Speaker 4

My sense is that these kinds of developments are are going to well, if if they haven't already, just prove irresistible. This has been the trend now we've we've seen this for many years.

00:31:40 Speaker 4

As these technologies have spread almost by process of contagion, that countries are looking at what other countries are doing and adopting these technologies at breakneck speed and and often perhaps exclusively, without universally rather without sufficient regulatory safeguards in place, that's my sense.

00:32:01 Speaker 4

And Petra will be able to, I think, speak to this this question of actually what are the appropriate safeguards, how should we be thinking about these?

00:32:08 Speaker 4

Technologies.

00:32:09 Speaker 3

I really like that framing of contagion because I think you're absolutely right. It is this kind of global obsession and and it it really does work that way, right? Like something proliferates at 1 border and all of a sudden we find it and another border, and then all of a sudden, you know, it moves from the border into our cities. There's like, this visceral kind of component to how.

00:32:29 Speaker 3

This technology, it starts filtering through into so.

00:32:32 Speaker 3

Many facets of life.

00:32:34 Speaker 3

I mean, but to answer your question about where this is heading and and you know where we might be going. The pessimist in me has to agree with Peter that I think we're going to see you.

00:32:43 Speaker 3

Know a lot.

00:32:44 Speaker 3

More, again, unbridled innovation and development and deployment of technology, both because again, it's it's also very lucrative, right, something we didn't talk about is this.

00:32:54 Speaker 3

Rise of this border industrial complex.

00:32:56 Speaker 3

Or private sector entities are making massive amounts of money off of this politicisation of migration, too, and this weaponization of differences, right that politicians in the UK and the US and Canada have become super good at. So I think it's very likely that we're going to see an exponential rise of technologies, but the optimism.

00:33:16 Speaker 3

We will say that I think there is also a lot more awareness of what's happening when it comes to the intersection of technology migration.

00:33:25 Speaker 3

And as bleak as it might seem, I will say this, you know, over the course of writing this book, I've seen some very difficult things. Things that I think sit with you for your entire.

00:33:36 Speaker 3

Life as they should.

00:33:37 Speaker 3

And challenge your conception of, you know, common humanity. But at every single border and every single crisis zone.

00:33:45 Speaker 3

That I've had the privilege to work.

00:33:46 Speaker 3

At there are.

00:33:47 Speaker 3

Always people who choose to turn towards each.

00:33:51 Speaker 3

And who make choices to find a way back to our common humanity? Whether that's, you know, 70 and 80 year olds, Americans who drop water in the snow desert. Whether that's journalists who are risking their lives in Palestine, whether that's researchers who are coming together to to talk about these topics and and find solidarity and.

00:34:11 Speaker 3

An increasingly fractured world, I think that's what we have to look forward to and also find ways to collaborate and strengthen the work that we're doing to make sure you know that at the end of the day we don't lose sight of the fact that, yeah, there are real people who are at the centre of this.

00:34:25 Speaker 1

It's great to be able to finish on an optimistic note and to say huge thank you to Peter and to Petra for what I think was an absolutely fascinating discussion on a really important topic. Thank you both.

00:34:37 Speaker 1

You've been listening to the Migration Oxford Podcast. I'm Jackie broadhead.

00:34:40 Speaker 2

And I'm rob MacNeil.