

Selected Contributions |
ROR-n Blog (2020-2022)



Forced Migration Studies: Current Interventions

**Leonardo Schiocchet &
Christine Nölle-Karimi (Eds.)**

Forced Migration Studies: Current Interventions

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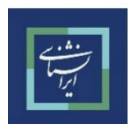
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Introduction

Leonardo Schiocchet and Christine Nölle-Karimi

Forced Migration Studies: Current Interventions is the fourth volume of the ROR-n Plattform Series, which is an Open Access publication series designed to reach out to a wide audience within and beyond academia. Volumes are published ad hoc either in English or German. ROR-n Plattform accommodates information on forced migration in various formats, from research reports and policy recommendations to informed opinion pieces, guides, interviews, and more. This volume is a selection of the ROR-n blog posts from 2020 to 2022. It is intended as a horizon into ROR-n's engagement with forced migration studies and refugee outreach. ROR-n's own production in the last two years, in turn, represents a snapshot of current discussions in forced migration studies and public engagement with forced migration processes.

Our invited authors range from well-established senior scholars to graduate students and professionals working in institutions engaging directly with refugees. Together, the series of short entries comprised here attest to this book's wide regional breath, which includes, for example: African refugees in Brazil; European forced migration policy; the forced migration crisis in Ukraine; Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; Assisted and Voluntary Return Programs for Gambian refugees; second generation of Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland; overnight deportation of minors in the EU territory; religion in forced migration policies in the Middle East; Colombian refugees in Brazil; Syrian refugees in Lebanon; the clinical practice

of migrant psychoanalysts; humanitarian aid work in Lebanon; environmental migration in Morocco and Indonesia; orientation courses and “health literacy” among refugees in Austria; among others.

This book features 23 chapters arranged in two main sections, each subdivided in two. These sections are: Part 1: Forced Migration in the Contemporary World, subdivided into Policy Critique and Contextual Panoramas/Horizons; and Part 2: Concept and Affect within Forced Migration, subdivided into Rethinking Categories and Affect and Sensibilities among Refugees. At the end of this volume, readers will find concise biographies of each contributor.

Forced Migration in the Contemporary World

Policy Critique

This section offers a window into some of the most important debates in current forced migration policy, particularly in the European Union. Ruth Wodak opens the book with *Collective Amnesia: The de-Historization and Normalization of Closed Borders*. In this piece, Wodak mobilizes her knowledge of linguistics to tackle de-historicization in forced migration processes. She questions how it is possible that refugees, women, men, and children, are turned away from borders and pushed back into extreme danger, calling for the importance of an informed and positioned historical perspective.

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and Adèle Garnier follow suit with *Forced displacement from Ukraine: Notes on*

Humanitarian Protection and Durable Solutions. This chapter surveys scholarship on displacement and the Ukrainian context and contextualizes the history of displacement in the region while focusing on contemporary refugee politics. It aims to portray Ukraine as both a receiving country (with a large population of forced migrants) and as refugee-producing prior to 2022. Moreover, it considers questions of “vulnerability”, “prioritization” and “pathways” with the goal to support advocacy on behalf of Ukraine. Finally, it compiles a tentative state-of-the-art bibliography on forced migration and Ukraine until the first days of the war against Russia that can be very useful to scholars, case workers, activists and policy makers alike. Following Sandvik and Garnier, in *Which Victims Count? The EU and Refugees from Ukraine*, Monika Mokre presents and analyses a directive on temporary protection in the case of mass influx of refugees, issued by the EU in 2001 and activated for the first time with regard to refugees of Ukraine. Mokre explains the reasons, consequences, and fault lines of this decision. She questions particularly why the directive had not been activated when forced migrants were coming primarily from Syria and Afghanistan and what this new policy means for future EU engagement with forced migrants.

In *Blocked Access to Citizenship: Home, Foreign Home* Rainer Bauböck and Gerd Valchars show that Austria's citizenship law is in urgent need of reform and what this reform should look like. Early in the morning of 28 January 2021, Austrian police escorted four minors, children of rejected asylum seekers, to the airport from where they were deported to Georgia and Armenia. These

children had been attending school and living in Austria for many years and were considered “integrated”. The deportation caused widespread protests and a debate on *ius soli*, the attribution of citizenship by birth in the territory. Like Bauböck and Valchars, Lisa Wolfsegger argues for the need of a stronger focus on children’s rights in asylum processes. Her *What about the Rights of Child Refugees in Austria?* concludes this section of the book by drawing attention to major systematic shortcomings in the provision and implementation of children’s rights for child refugees. In the meantime, the deportation of the teenager Tina to Georgia has been ruled to have been unlawful.

Contextual Panoramas/Horizons

In this section we move the focus from policy to context-specific insights on forced migration processes world-wide with an emphasis on practice. Nina Egger’s *How Important is Religion for Refugee Management in the Middle East?* compares Middle East countries’ forced migration policies and practices, arguing that even not officially, religion, along with ethnicity, is still often an important (and at times essential) element of these policies. In the following chapter, *Spaces of Transregional Aid and Visual Politics in Lebanon*, Estella Carpi illustrates different meanings attributed to spaces as well as to the visibility of symbols, logos, buildings, and icons related to the humanitarian intervention in Lebanon. Through photos and words, Carpi describes aid-marked spaces arguing that humanitarian aid serves as a politics of space. Although the material stems from in-depth fieldwork in Lebanon, the

chapter suggests that such spaces also exist elsewhere beyond the Middle East.

Along with migration (forced or otherwise) the COVID-19 pandemic has been a key element characterizing the reality of the world today. As a few chapters in this book suggest, COVID-19 regulations and forced migration processes collide, informing domestic and foreign policy and the experiences of refugees alike. Two chapters in this section tackle this issue. In *The Lebanese Covid-19 Crisis within Crises and its Refugees* Leonardo Schiocchet argues that while COVID-19 has been among the most serious issues in most countries (particularly in the global north), the pandemic has been experienced at best as secondary to other more pressing issues in many parts of the world. The author argues that in Lebanon, COVID-19 is only one among several crises that have been hitting the country hard and explores how refugees, and particularly those living in overcrowded camps, have been affected by it. Similarly, Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli's *Refugees and COVID-19 in Brazil: Challenges, Lessons, and Expectations* presents an account by refugees in Brazil, about their reflections on problems, lessons, and expectations for the future in times of COVID-19. As Brazilian non-nationals, they are deprived of access to information and services, while being blamed as "responsible" for the transmission of illnesses. Martuscelli argues that it is crucial to understand the perspectives of refugees to adopt policies that take their particular needs into account.

Closing this section, in *Voluntary Returns or Forced Choices? Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programs in The Gambia*, Viola Castellano analyzes how

Assisted and Voluntary Return Programs (AVRR), envisioned as a solution to combat “irregular migration” by the EU, unfold in the case of Gambian migrants and asylum seekers. She argues that for Gambians caught in bureaucratic mazes with no chance of regularization in Europe, or stuck in detention centers in Niger and Libya, “voluntary return” is experienced as “forced choice”, a feature that invalidates AVRR intention to change the social imaginary of deportation.

Concept and Affect within Forced Migration

Rethinking Categories

This section analyses and rethinks core categories involved in forced migration processes. The opening chapter, *Refugee, Asylum Seeker or Migrant? Words Matter. People Matter. Politics Matters.*, by Jasmin Lilian Diab, tackles the usage of the most basic of such categories. She acknowledges that across the world, an ongoing debate is raging about the manner through which we describe the millions of people escaping protracted conflicts in their home countries and fleeing to safer places. Her chapter thus questions who after all is a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant, problematizing how the media and other social actors have been mobilizing these terms.

One key concept in the jargon of policy makers and scholars in the field of forced migration is “vulnerability”. In *Vulnerability in Contexts of Flight - A Critical Analysis of Multiple Aspects of Vulnerability among Refugees*, Maria Six-Hohenbalken and Josef Kohlbacher put the

vulnerability paradigm and its implementation into perspective. They argue for sustained institutional efforts to promote and develop the agency of refugees for the mutual benefit of refugees and host societies.

Another buzzword among policy makers, activists, case workers and scholars alike is “resilience”. In *The Effects of UNHCR’s Resilience Approach on the Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* Lyla Andréé argues that the way in which the UNHCR implements its mandate in Lebanon in response to the Syrian refugee crisis “weakens” international refugee regimes. She argues that the conception of international protection based on the “resilience approach”, as service provision, gained ascendancy over that of protection, as the provision of rights to the individual. She concludes that lack of alternatives to the current resilience-based frame engenders the risk that the precarious situation of the refugees will be reproduced and exacerbated.

Nationality is another vital category affecting people undergoing forced migration processes. In *The Category of Nationality in an Investigation on Colombian Refugees in Brazil*, Angela Facundo Navia suggests that making nationality the main criterion for the analysis of the effects of migration disregards other more crucial factors such as class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and political action. Navia argues against naturalizing nationhood as primary identification category and explains that in Latin America regional variations are important and become indispensable elements for understanding the reasons why people migrate, flee, are displaced or are afraid to return.

At the same time, she cautions against completely disregarding nationality or national origin of refugees.

Daniela Grijalva and Rachael Diniega suggest other categories beyond nationhood that should characterize the refugee status. Their chapter entitled *Thinking of Environmental Migration through Translocality and Mobilities* discusses environmental migration through the lens of translocality and (im)mobility, problematizing the logic of securitization against migrants often found in policies today. Through cases studies in Morocco and Indonesia, they argue for expanded attention to environmental migration, as well as more protection for migrants and their human rights.

Hannah Myott and Mina Vasileva's "The Ideal Austrian" vs. "the Refugee": The Construction of Collective Identities in the "Values and Orientation Courses" takes us back to Europe to discuss what means to be a refugee in Austria. Their chapter derives from research conducted between 2018 and 2019 on the required values and orientation courses for refugees in Austria. They conclude that such courses promote "fundamental," "non-negotiable," "shared values" as if they were natural and neutral, leaning on essentialized ideas about "Austrianness" and "refugeeness."

Closing this section of the book, Julia Volk's *Which Fields of Action do Occupational Therapists Identify to Promote Health Literacy of Syrian Refugees in Austria?* shows how the concept of "health literacy" is embedded in practice of occupational therapists in Austria, particularly through her own professional engagement with Syrian refugees. Besides discussing valuable results of her

fieldwork and current struggles of health care access for refugees in Austria, she also proposes fields of actions for occupational therapists promoting the health literacy of refugees.

Affect and Sensibilities among Refugees

In this concluding section of the book, anthropologists, psychoanalysts and sociologists engage directly with forced migrant's affects and sensibilities, putting refugees' experiences at the center of analysis. Despite the long-established consensus that the perspective of the forced migrants should take the central stage in all interventions and particularly in policy, affect and experience have been relatively overlooked in the classical literature. Current forced migration studies, however, have been increasingly acknowledging the importance of the topic, and the contributions in this section highlight why this is so.

In this sense, it is very fitting that this section opens with an enlightening piece by Sylvia Koberwa, herself an Ugandan refugee in Brazil. As a Masters' student in anthropology, Koberwa explores an experimental form of writing, mixing long excerpts of her own testimonials with engagement with the classic and current literature in forced migration studies. Her *Humanitarianism and forced Migration: Motherhood and Humanitarianism in the Covid-19 pandemic in Rio de Janeiro* brings to the fore a dense portrait of the challenges and motivations tied to the experiences of motherhood among African forced migrants in Brazil.

Gender is another important dimension of the experiences of forced migrants. In *Gender Troubles in Shatila, Lebanon: Bodies that Matter (the Fidā'iyīn's Heroism) And Undoing Gender (the Shabāb's Burden)* Gustavo Barbosa argues for the full historicity and pliability of masculinity. On the basis of his extensive fieldwork experience in Shatila Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, he argues masculinity changes according to context. He demonstrates that faced with unemployment and the demobilization of the Palestinian Resistance movement in its military form, the "lads" from the camp cannot replicate the heroic persona of their forebears, the fidā'iyīn, who exude virility when narrating their deeds. Like Barbosa, in *From Self-Denial to Politics of Visibility: Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland from the 1960s to 2015*, Sarah El-Bulbeisi tackles this impossibility of replicating the experiences of earlier generations of Palestinians through her study of generations of Palestinian refugee residents of Germany and Switzerland. Her analysis highlights generation rather than gender and brings important new insight to the topic, provocatively asking if violence (symbolic and physical) produced through forced displacement end upon resettlement or citizenship. Her analysis combines ethnographic methods (especially participant-observation) with discourse and psychoanalytical conceptualization, particularly (counter-)transference and free association. The changing perspective informed by ethnography and psychoanalytical self-reflection leads to a deepened understanding of her own experiences and those of others with a similar background.

Like El-Bulbeisi, Suzana Mallard's *The Cross-Border Clinic and the Idea of Existential Pangea* also draws direct inspiration from psychoanalysis. Throughout many personal displacements and her clinical professional work in the area of mental health with migrants, Mallard recognized a pattern in groups of foreigners and diasporic communities. She observed that many of the professionals addressing the needs of forced migrants had experienced displacement and dispossession themselves. Her chapter discusses how the personal experiences of the therapists impacted their "listening" of their forced migrant patients.

The book concludes with Leonardo Schiocchet, Mirian Alves de Souza and Helena Manfrinato's *The Impact of Covid-19 among Refugees of the Syrian Conflict in Brazil*. In this chapter, the authors examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated numerous difficulties for refugees of the Syrian conflict in Brazil. In 2018, Brazil became the world's sixth largest recipient of requests for asylum, with Venezuelans accounting for more than three quarters of all claims, and significant groups of refugees from the Syrian conflict. Yet, Brazil already had also around 3 to 4 million citizens of Syrian origin (alongside millions of Lebanese and Palestinians) that migrated to Brazil before the second half of the Twentieth Century. This chapter shows how refugees of the Syrian conflict in Brazil tend to be embedded in support networks led by the established Arab diaspora in Brazil and other Brazilian grassroots initiatives. It argues that the most immediate consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic among refugees has been a devastating economic downfall. It also has brought about a reorganization of some forms of solidarity among refugees

and Brazilian activists, while significantly restricting others.

This collection is intended to offer readers a broad panorama of the most important current debates on forced migration within and outside of academia. We hope that it will serve as a historical snapshot of how these debates affect and are affected by the tribulations of the current historical moment.

Forced Migration in the Contemporary World

a. Policy Critique

Collective Amnesia: The de-historization and normalization of closed borders

Ruth Wodak

Originally published in 11/24/2021

On 21 April 2021, *The Guardian* reported that “[N]early 17 child migrants a day vanished in Europe since 2018”. Of course, this fact as well as many other numbers and statistics are not new and not surprising. National governments, the European Union, politicians of all parties know that unaccompanied refugee children belong to the most vulnerable groups in our globalized societies as recent [reports](#) of the *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty* and of the Austrian *Kindeswohlkommission* (established in the spring of 2021) illustrate. Frequently under way for months or even years, they finally arrive – if they survive such highly dangerous and traumatizing journeys at all – at the borders of countries which do not want to host them and which either imprison them in camps, lock them into [cages](#) and separate them from their parents (like at the US-Mexican border), threaten to send them back immediately or – rarely – after many months or even years of waiting because of difficult bureaucratic procedures allow them to stay legally with foster families who receive monies from the respective state for their food, education, clothing, and

so forth. NGOs, journalists, scholars, and international organizations have written a vast number of reports, proposals, articles, and books, documenting the plight of child and adult refugees; petitions are launched daily, asking for help; and symposia continue to discuss options for humanitarian policies.

In predictable cycles, pictures of drowning women, men, and children in the [Mediterranean](#), - between 2014 and 2018, UNICEF assumes that at least 678 children have died when trying to reach the safe harbors of Italy or Spain by boat - or of fleeing women, men and children in [Afghanistan](#), or of [starving children](#) in camps in an African camp or of children running around in bombed-out streets in a [Syrian town](#) shock the TV audience around the world. Since September 2021, quality broadsheets report almost daily that children, women, and men are freezing at the border of [Belarus and Poland](#). In fact, these refugees have become instrumentalized as pinball between the autocratic regime in Belarus and the European Union, as sociologist [Judith Kohlenberger](#) poignantly argues in a recent commentary: “Poland as well as Belarus conduct violent pushbacks which clearly violate the Geneva Convention as well as European Charta of Human Rights”.

To date, the sanctions proposed by the [European Union](#) prove ineffective, as migration expert Gerald Knaus rightly maintains. On 18 October 2021, [CBC radio](#) reported that Polish volunteers were trying to help refugees to

escape to Poland despite the danger of being caught by the Polish police. The Polish border is mainly protected by the Polish army. In fact, Catholic priests have brought collapsible prayer pulpits to pray – not for the refugees but for the soldiers, protecting Poland *from* refugees. The liberal broadsheet *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported that, “at a joint press conference aired on public television, Poland’s Ministers of Interior and National Defense [both members of the Polish far-right national conservative Party PiS] presented a photo showing an alleged migrant having sexual intercourse with a cow. The presented material, it turns out, comes from an old pornographic video.” Obviously, such lies, xenophobic sentiments and related activities catch international attention and lead to scandalization. However, after a few days of intensive debates, other pressing news stories replace such reports, and daily routines prove more important.

At this point, I would like to stress the process of *de-historization*. It is worth asking ourselves how it is possible that refugees, women, men, and children, are turned away from borders? That they are pushed back into extreme danger? That they receive no visas to enter safe countries? Has a collective amnesia infected (some of) the member states of the European Union? Has the memory of the [Conference of Evian-les-Bains 6-15 July 1938](#) been suppressed? A conference where delegates from thirty-two

countries met to discuss the future of European Jews trying to escape Nazi atrocities.

During the nine-day meeting, much sympathy for the refugees was expressed; but most countries, including the United States and Britain, offered lame excuses for not taking in more refugees. Even efforts by some Americans to rescue children failed: the so-called "[Wagner-Rogers bill](#)", an effort to admit 20,000 endangered Jewish refugee children, was not supported by the Senate in 1939 and 1940, probably due to [widespread antisemitic prejudice](#).

On 27 January 2017, when former US President Donald Trump signed an executive order that would ban all refugees from settling in the US for 4 months and ban Syrian refugees indefinitely, journalist Dara Lind sarcastically states, "We've been here before," and recounts the failure of the Wagner-Rogers bill in much detail. But – unfortunately – the past does not influence present decision-making. We are all experiencing a *déjà-vu*. In this way, historians [Michal Frankl and Lidia Zessin-Jurek](#) remind readers in an opinion piece in the broadsheet *Der Standard* on 13 November 2021 that the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border seems horrifyingly similar to the situation of Jewish refugees at this very border in 1939, caught in no-mans-land. Sadly, many powerful politicians seem not to have learnt from history!

Accordingly, the success of the so-called *Kindertransport* has been forgotten; the *Kindertransport* saved over 10,000 Austrian and German Jewish children in 1938 by allowing them to travel to the UK, escaping Nazi persecution. In fact, [Lord Dubs, a British Labour politician](#), had to appeal to the British government and British Prime minister Boris Johnson to grant safety to stranded children by reminding MPs and readers of the *Kindertransport*. He stated that “I certainly never imagined that 81 years later, in the same country that gave homes to 10,000 lone refugee children like me, I’d be fighting for just a few hundred to be allowed to find their families here.” Historian [Philipp Ther](#) has traced the trajectory and persecution of refugees in Europe over many centuries. In one chapter, he specifically focuses on the plight of children. In the 1930s, apart from the *Kindertransport*, around [20,000 Spanish children](#) were saved from being killed by Franco-fascists during the Spanish Civil War. These children were given shelter by French civilians in France, after having successfully crossed the borders to France.

Secure rich countries such as Austria seem to have forgotten a non-distant past, a past where many Austrians had to flee their homes because of the Nazi regime and the danger of being deported, tortured, and murdered – by Austrian perpetrators. The reason for such de-historization is the impact of *realpolitik*. National-conservative parties

across Europe have shamelessly normalized the discriminatory body-politics of the far-right in order to attract the far-right electorate. The restrictive, exclusionary policies demanded by far-right populists seem to be on the rise: only specific individuals ‘deserve’ to be admitted – what political scientist [Bastian Vollmer](#) addresses as “[moralization of borders](#)”, while others are kept waiting outside or are denied entry, thus reinforcing borders and boundaries.

In fact, former Austrian Chancellor Kurz (ÖVP) denounced the saving of lives in the Mediterranean as “[NGO madness](#)”. On 18 January 2020, Kurz, during an interview with the [German newspaper Bild](#), was asked whether Austria would help some of the children (‘You’ve mentioned migration. There is, again, a large crisis on the Greek island. Would you be willing to accept refugee children from Lesbos in Austria?’). His response was: “No, we are not willing to do that. Austria over the last few years made a disproportionate contribution. There were over 150,000 asylum applications in our country, in my opinion far too many for the small Austria. We are still processing those.” Legitimation by rationalization and the argument of numbers are used here in the attempt to justify Austria’s decision to close its borders to incoming refugees – obviously an instance of what [Wilhelm Heitmeyer](#) labels “coarse civility” [*rohe Bürgerlichkeit*].

When asked if Austria would open its borders for 100 unaccompanied minors stranded in the camps on Moria, then [Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg](#) answered in an interview from 10 September 2020 that “If we clear the Moria camp, it will be full again [...] It is also sending the wrong signal, namely that there is hope to get to Europe. That would trigger a chain reaction and we would no longer be in control of the situation. [...] This is a question of common sense”. Appealing to common-sense without conveying facts is a typical populist strategy. The then foreign minister explicitly argues fallaciously that the situation would get out of control if one would even help a few children. A “chain reaction” would follow, a scenario of threat, without any facts to substantiate these claims. He framed his remarks as “shouting for [fair] distribution [of refugees] would not be the solution”; in this way, any humanitarian appeals were quickly denounced as unproductive and irrational “shouts”.

In a video message on [12 September 2020](#), [Sebastian Kurz](#) added a fallacious argument to justify the decision that no unaccompanied refugee children from Moria should be hosted in Austria: “This inhumane system from 2015, I cannot reconcile this with my conscience. [...] At the European level, we will advocate a holistic approach. What we don’t need is symbolic politics. [Instead] real sustainable support for affected areas, an economic

perspective for the African continent, and an effective protection of our external borders [are needed].”

Why the policies of 2015 should be assessed as inhumane is not elaborated, no evidence is provided. On the contrary, civil society, NGOs, local, regional as well as a few national governments succeeded in saving many refugees; solidarity with the vulnerable became relevant. This changed after the terror attacks in Paris (November 2015) and New Year’s Eve 2015 in Cologne. However, latter actions were not committed by refugees who had just arrived; but these terrible events were quickly instrumentalized by many politicians as arguments for protecting the countries *from* refugees. Kurz explained that he could not reconcile with his conscience not being able to save *all* children; and he fallaciously concluded it would be better not to save even one. Moreover, he denounced the attempts to help refugee children as symbolic politics; and once again cynically emphasized that protecting the external borders was more important than protecting the children. Predictably, [Kurz and his turquoise-green coalition](#) government stated on 21 August 2021 that no refugees from Afghanistan would be granted visa from Austria – although the [Viennese Major Michael Ludwig](#) (from the Social-democratic Party), for example, immediately proposed to host at least 300 Afghan female judges and journalists in Vienna, after the victory of the Taliban.

The cynical rejection of the Charta of Human Rights and of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child substantiate de-historization and the normalization of exclusion. Far-right populism in all its varieties has become normalized as a mainstream political force in many European countries and beyond. It is possible, therefore, to claim that the far right has successfully launched and subsequently established an overall exclusionary, quasi “political-religious master frame” (@ Michael Minkenberg) with immense influence on discourses and material practices, far beyond the boundaries of the far right.

Forced displacement from Ukraine: notes on humanitarian protection and durable solutions*

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and Adèle Garnier

Originally published by ROR-n in 4/7/2022

* Originally published on March 4, 2022 by Refugee Law Initiative – School of advanced Study, University of London at <https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2022/03/04/forced-displacement-from-ukraine-notes-on-humanitarian-protection-and-durable-solutions/>. We would like to thank Greta Uehling for her careful reading and encouragement to publish this blog.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine February 24 2022 marks the start of a new displacement crisis. In a statement on February 24, [Filippo Grandi](#), the High Commissioner for Refugees, emphasized that ‘The humanitarian consequences on civilian populations will be devastating. There are no winners in war, but countless lives will be torn apart. We have already seen reports of casualties and people starting to flee their homes to seek safety’. UN officials estimate [up to 4 million people](#) could leave Ukraine if the situation deteriorates. As of March 4, [1.2 million people](#) had fled Ukraine to other countries in the region.

Ukraine was one of 15 republics of the Soviet Union and became an independent state in 1991. Ukraine is a [2002 signatory to the 1951 Convention](#) and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. As of January

2022, it had a population of approximately [43 million](#). The country is bordered by Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. To contribute to the understanding of the evolving displacement context and the implications for the international protection regime and durable solutions, this blog provides a set of initial reflections. We draw on our backgrounds in refugee and migration studies to do four things:

- First, we survey scholarship on displacement and the Ukrainian context. The bibliography of sources used in this blog is provided at the end.
- Second, drawing on this literature, we provide a brief background context, sketching displacement occurring over the past century.
- Third, we pay special attention to Ukraine in the context of contemporary refugee politics, with a view to understand Ukraine as a receiving country, as hosting a large internally displaced population and as a refugee-producing entity prior to 2022.
- Fourth, we begin to carve out a list of initial issues concerning vulnerability, prioritization and pathways with a view to support advocacy on behalf of Ukraine.

1. A tentative state of the art

As part of this reflection, we have surveyed a set of key (English language) journals in refugee, migration and humanitarian studies to map out existing scholarship on displacement and the Ukrainian context. We are aware

these are Global West publications and reflect what is visible in these areas of research, rather than a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge. In doing this work, we have also observed that there are important contributions published in law, area studies, history and cultural studies. Note that we mostly bracket Holodomor studies (see [here](#) and [here](#)) in this exercise.

Journals such as *Refugee Survey Quarterly* and the *International Journal of Refugee Law* have not published on Ukrainian displacement. In the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, there are a few contributions on internal displacement and elections ([Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska and Palaguta 2017](#)); and politicization of religious actors as humanitarian providers and state failure ([Leustean 2021](#)). *Forced Migration Review* has published shorter interventions on asylum seekers in Poland ([Szczepanik and Tylec 2016](#)) and shelter ([Dean 2017](#); [Wetterwald and Thaller 2020](#)) and also hosts older contributions on deportees ([Uehling 2008](#)) and statelessness ([de Chickera and Whiteman 2014](#)). As noted in an interesting contribution in a US law journal, surprisingly little attention has been given to the continued refugee resettlement of Ukrainians to the US on the grounds of religious persecution ([Klokiw 2019](#)).

The Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies features a substantial gender oriented literature on labor market participation, transnational marriages, motherhood

(i.e. [Górny and Kępińska 2004](#); [Kindler and Szulecka 2013](#)) but no contributions focusing on displacement and conflict in Ukraine. The *International Migration Review* is home to some older scholarship on Ukraine and European migration ([Shamshur 1992](#)) and on post-war Ukrainian refugee resettlement to Canada ([Luciuk 1986](#)). *International Migration* has a contribution on legal and illegal migration in the 2000s ([Uehling 2004](#)); and *Migration Studies* features publications on internal displacement ([Uehling 2021](#)) and socio-legal aspects of return migration ([Kubal 2015](#)). While we have found few scholars with a large body of published scholarship in this topical area, it might be noted that [Greta Uehling](#), an anthropologist at the University of Michigan has been an important and prolific contributor to this field for more than two decades.

In the adjacent field of humanitarian studies Journals such as *Disasters*, the *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* and the *Journal of Humanitarian action* have nothing on Ukrainian displacement (though note Ukraine focus as part of the large scholarship on famine relief ([Werther 2021](#))). A contribution on Polish aid to Ukrainian internally displaced people (IDPs) is published in *Humanitarian logistics* ([Piotrowicz 2018](#)).

While the academic specialist fields of refugee and forced migration studies have a limited track record on Ukraine, a larger body of work on forced displacement can

be found in area studies, (with a key point of reference being a special issue in *Europe-Asia Studies* 72.3 (2020)). This includes research on the IDPs ([Kuznetsova and Mikheieva 2020](#)) in Crimea ([Charron 2020](#)) and Donbas ([Sereda 2020](#); [Sasse and Lackner 2020](#)); media representations of IDPs ([Rimpiläinen 2020](#)) IDPs and public space ([Lazarenko 2021](#)) and gender ([Kuznetsova 2021](#); [Khrystova and Uvarova 2022](#)); humanitarian crisis ([Scrinic 2015](#); [Quinn 2015](#); [Bulakh 2017](#)).

2. A century of Ukrainian displacement and resettlement

In the following, drawing on historical scholarship and scholarship in history, we provide a brief chronology of displacement in Ukraine over the past century. There was substantial out-migration to North America prior to the First World War ([Chyz 1939](#)). Between the early 1920s and 2020, Ukraine – until after the Second World War divided into Western and Eastern Ukraine – has experienced numerous periods of mass emigration, forced relocation and displacement. Before the first World War, poverty and land scarcity led to large scale migration from Western Ukraine (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and later Poland and Romania) to North America. In the East, peasants were subjected to massive, forced relocations to other parts of the Czarist empire. The annexation and deportation continued under Stalin. The Holodomor –to kill

by starvation –was a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine between 1932-1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians. The famine was exacerbated by the governments rejection of outside aid, confiscation of household foodstuffs and the restriction of population movements ([Basciani 2011](#)). In addition to ethnic Ukrainians, national minorities were also oppressed and deported in the 1930s and 1940s (ethnic Germans, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Bulgarians, Armenians, and Greeks) ([Malynovska 2006](#)). As the international refugee regime began taking shape, the emergence of anti-immigration laws in the US (the Immigration Act of 1917, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, and the Immigration Act of 1924) significantly curtailed transnational Ukrainian migration. Groups displaced by the first world war were again displaced by World War II from reception countries in eastern Europe ([Kulischer 1949](#)).

The Second World War took an enormous toll on Ukraine. While there are no reliable numbers available, 5 to 7 million people [are estimated](#) to have died, and an estimated additional 2.3 million Ukrainians were sent to Germany to perform forced labor. The repatriation agreement signed by Allied powers in at the Yalta conference in February 1945 categorized Ukrainians from the East as Soviet subjects to be forcibly repatriated to the USSR, and many fought to gain recognition as refugees. Ukrainian Displaced Persons (DPs) residing in the German, French, and British zones of temporary occupation at the

end of the Second World War were a very mixed group comprising of Ukrainian prisoners of war taken by the Soviets, guerillas fighting against the Soviets, slave labor for the Nazis and Nazi-sympathizing Ukrainians. After the War, this group became classified as political refugees ([Stebelsky 1991](#)). In terms of overseas resettlement, in 1947, in a first for Australia, the country joined Argentina, Canada and the US in resettling DPs. as part of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) resettlement agreement ([Persian 2018](#)). Post-war resettlement to Canada was a short-lived affair, due to conflicts between the established diaspora community and arriving DPs ([Luciuk 1986](#)). With respect to the US, of the 352,000 people admitted to the US under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, 15 percent were Ukrainian, and most were Ukrainian speakers from Western Ukraine. Most Ukrainian immigrants were subject to the limitations that the National Origins Quota System regulating immigration from 1924 to 1965. A specific case concerns the postwar trajectories of ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) from Ukraine. Under Nazi resettlement, this population had ended up in Germany and Austria. While not eligible to be assisted by IRO, some did seek assistance. Broadly belonging to Catholic, Protestant, and Mennonite faith groups, the latter was comparatively much more successful in utilizing religious networks for overseas emigration. While individual efforts to switch national identification mostly failed and petitioners living in 'mixed'

marriages had some success, the well-organized Mennonites managed a 'collective conversion' from German to Dutch nationality and resettled as a group ([Panagiotidis 2020](#)). By 1955 only about 250,000 of the 2.3 million Ukrainians displaced because of World War II had been allowed to relocate abroad ([Wenner 2010](#)). By 1952, most Ukrainian refugees in DP camps had been resettled ([Dyczok 2000](#)).

In the post-World War period, religion has been a key structuring factor in resettlement. Post-World War II Ukrainian refugees tended to be Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic; beginning especially in the late 1970s, numerous Soviet Jewish refugees arrived in the US ([Basok and Brym 1991](#)), along with smaller populations of Evangelicals, Baptists and Pentecostals. As president Gorbachev's glasnost policy allowed people to apply for emigration on the grounds of religious persecution, refugees from various evangelical faiths settled at the end of the Cold War. Ukraine experienced economic crisis from the late 1980s until the late 2000s, engendering high outward migration. However, it was the 1990 Lautenberg Amendment that became a primary driver of Ukrainian immigration to the United States. On denominational grounds, Ukrainians were admitted as religious groups with a lesser group-based burden of proof with respect to discrimination. While initially intended as a temporary protection mechanism for persecuted religious minorities in the Soviet Union, it has

become a central gateway for Ukrainian Jews, Catholics, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Baptist and Evangelicals ([Klokiw 2019](#)).

Whereas the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act took refugee admissions under 30,000 per year. Between 2001 and 2003, the US maintained a separate designation, and an associated quota, for countries from the ‘former Soviet Union.’ This quota was removed in 2004, when Ukraine was integrated into a broader ‘Europe’ refugee quota which led to a rapid decline of admissions. Nevertheless by 2011, Ukraine was among the ten countries with the most refugee arrivals (Capps 2015) during FY 2000 through FY 2011. By 2013, only 227 Ukrainian refugees were admitted ([Klokiw 2019](#)). At the Russian occupation of Crimea and the subsequent arrival of the Trump administration, the numbers surged again. While the Trump administration slashed the resettlement quota, by 2019, Ukrainians were one of the [top groups](#) resettled as refugees in the United States, with a 75 percent growth in arrivals. On a parallel track, Ukrainians have received high admissions under US visa schemes, making up the highest portion of overall European admissions from 2009 to 2018 ([Klokiw 2019](#)).

3. The politics of displacement prior to the 2022 invasion

Ukraine has since the end of the Soviet Union been a country of origin, transit and arrival for forced migration,

as well as a provider of ‘durable solutions’ for ethnic Ukrainians returning to the country from which they had been exiled during the Soviet era.

In the 1990s, the ethnic composition of Ukraine changed significantly. Many ethnic Russians left, and many ethnic Ukrainians returned, including Tatars originally from Crimea, whose returned population increased fivefold between 1989 and 2001. Returnees arriving after the adoption of a new citizenship law in November 1991 did not have Ukrainian citizenship on arrival, as the new law linked citizenship to permanent residence in Ukraine. A sizable population was stateless, as Tatars also had not been granted citizenship of the ex-Soviet Republic in which they lived before their departure. The population from ex-Soviet Republics in which there were conflicts also increased, including from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Ukraine developed a refugee protection framework from the 1990s, with the adoption of the Law on Refugees in 1993, the opening of a UNHCR Liaison Office in Kyiv in 1995, the ratification of the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 2002. Asylum claims were processed from 1993. Asylum procedures were criticized as weak, with high levels of forced returns for instance of Chechens. Still, Ukraine recognizes several thousands of refugees a year, and this in some years has included sizable contingent of Afghan refugees since the

1990s. Ukraine in the 1990s was also a country of transit for irregular migrants, with 100 000 migrants being detained at its western borders between 1991 and 2003. Human trafficking, particularly of young women, also increased in the 1990s, and Ukraine ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2000. With the expansion of the European Union in 2004, and the perspective of an association agreement with Ukraine, the European Union focused on capacity building and contributed to fund asylum processing centres.

The suspension of negotiations of the EU association agreement by a pro-Russia government in 2013 led to the Maidan protests in Kyiv and a pro-European regime change the following year, rapidly followed by Russia's occupation of Crimea. 5.2 million people were affected by the conflict and 1.6 million were displaced within and outside Ukrainian borders, Ukrainian IDPs have moved westward. As of 2019, there were 1.4 million IDPs in Ukraine, the 12th-largest population of IDPs worldwide. Outside the borders, most Ukrainians sought refuge in Russia, but many also went to European Union countries, where the refugee recognition rate was very low – many Ukrainian nationals did not apply for asylum.

As of 2020, the main countries of origin of refugees and asylum seekers in Ukraine were Afghanistan, Syria, Russia and Bangladesh (the latter almost only asylum seekers), with a total of 2249 refugees and 2359 asylum

seekers. There were also 35,875 stateless people. Besides, at the end of 2019, IOM estimated that there were between 37,000 and 60,900 irregular migrants in Ukraine, of various nationalities, concentrated in large cities, and with the largest shares from South Asia, West Africa and the Horn of Africa. The majority were young men with secondary education who had arrived with valid visas as tourists or students.

4. Pointers for advocacy

How the exodus from Ukraine will play out remains to be seen. Many of the structural impediments to transit and (temporary) settlement are not present in the current context. Ukrainians don't require Schengen visas to enter the European union and can stay for up to 90 days. Furthermore, in an unprecedented move, Slovakia admits Ukrainians without valid passports. 'If they pass an individual assessment conducted by border officials'. Poland has also explained that they will admit those without valid documents. At the supranational level, the European Union has for the first time triggered the adoption of the EU temporary protection directive. The directive grants immediate protection, to Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians legally residing in Ukraine and fleeing to war for one year. In terms of the traditional framework for durable solutions, traditional overseas resettlement countries have announced visa extensions for Ukrainians

and priority processing of family reunification. Ukrainian diasporas, for instance in [Canada](#), which hosts one of the largest populations with Ukrainian origins, are mobilizing resources to support their fellow nationals. [Canada has also announced an emergency, two-year temporary protection measure](#) for Ukrainian nationals fleeing the war, with no ceiling on eligible applications. Public opinion and politicians at [municipal](#) and [provincial](#) levels have signaled they will welcome Ukrainian refugees. Several countries are pressured to do more than the changes they first announced, such as the UK and Australia.

At the same time, **vulnerability is gendered**: all men between 18 and 60 have been conscripted and denied exit from the country. Also, Ukrainian men are currently prevented from leaving Ukraine so as to be available in case of mass mobilization and this appears [to disregard concerns for men in vulnerable situations](#) or the impact of family separation. **From this perspective, gender-based advocacy focusing on men is necessary**, especially as it has not been a priority in refugee advocacy.

Furthermore, **the politics of solidarity are not universal**: solidarity with Ukrainian refugees does not seem to apply to non-White people also fleeing Ukraine. Instances of discrimination and racism have been reported in Ukraine and at the Polish borders, with [African students in Ukraine being trampled on or stopped](#) from fleeing by border guards. The situation has been denounced by the

African Union. **All advocates should support fair treatment for all people affected by the war regardless of their ethnicity and migratory status.**

Finally, vulnerability is tiered. The invasion has meant further displacement for refugees who had fled to Ukraine, such as [Afghans](#) who had fled the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Governments and civil society providing support to forced migrants from Ukraine should **ensure non-Ukrainians are not just not discriminated against, but rather prioritized given their particular vulnerability.**

We don't know how long the invasion will last, what kind of conflict this will develop into and what the civilian toll will be. Our intervention, albeit a tentative exercise, aims to provide a background context for discussions – both scholarly and in various practitioner and activist communities – about humanitarian protection and durable solutions moving forward.

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Which Victims Count? The EU and Refugees from Ukraine

Monika Mokre

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It was at the end of the 1990s when the EU once again realized that it was not able to act unilaterally and in solidarity in times of crisis. While this had already become obvious regarding the war in Bosnia and the genocide there, the Kosovo crisis, and the influx of refugees due to it was another case in point. Basically, these and other failures showed that, after then 50 years of European integration, nationalism of the Member States still prevailed.

Thus, in 2001 the “Temporary Protection Directive”^[1] was issued. In its *contents*, it provides a pragmatic and effective solution for times in which the asylum systems of Member States are overwhelmed by the number of refugees. For a period of one to three years, those concerned by the directive shall hold a residence permit including the right to accommodation, health services, social services, education, and access to the labour market. In order to distribute the burden of this situation, displaced persons can be transferred between Member States if the respective Member States as well as the persons concerned agree.

In its *procedures*, the Directive follows the usual legislative procedure of the EU: the existence of a mass influx of refugees has to be established in a proposal by the Commission which is then decided upon by the Council of the European Union with qualified majority voting (i.e., a majority of states representing a majority of the population of the EU).

Until early March 2022, the Directive has never been used in the more than 20 years of its existence although its implementation was discussed three times: In 2011, Italy and Malta called for its activation due to the high influx of refugees in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, especially from Libya. In the crisis of 2015, UNHCR and some Members of the European Parliament proposed to make use of it. And in 2021, EU foreign policy official Josep Borrell discussed the possibility of invoking the directive to aid Afghan refugees following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. In none of these cases, the European Commission saw the need for a proposal, probably due to the resistance of those Member States not directly affected by the situation.

Due to its obvious dysfunctionality, the Commission proposed in 2020 to repeal the directive and to replace it by a regulation^[2] as part of the foreseen “Pact on Asylum and Migration”. This directive could be implemented by the Commission without inclusion of the Council and would

focus on the respective Member State facing a mass influx of refugees.

The regulation would allow for temporary protection without asylum procedures as well as for increased possibilities for asylum procedures at the border. These accelerated asylum procedures at the border form a prominent and highly problematic part of the foreseen pact. Inter alia, it is foreseen that “in normal times”, persons from a country with less than 20% positive asylum decisions (in EU average) can be rejected in such a fast-track procedure. According to the directive, in times of crisis, persons from a country with less than 75% positive asylum decisions could be rejected at the border.

The regulation also refers to general solidarity measures according to which Member States have either to accept a certain number of asylum seekers (calculated on the base of population and GDP) or deliver a financial contribution, the latter inter alia on the base of “return sponsorships”, i.e., organizing and financing voluntary or involuntary return to the country of origin.

As the whole “Pact on Asylum and Migration”, this regulation has not been issued yet. Instead, the Directive of 2001 has been activated for the first time in its history and in an incredibly short time. For once, the EU has shown an ability to speak with one voice, overcoming at this point the nationalism of the Member States. It is easy to understand the reasons for this unprecedented situation. First, an

external enemy has always been the most effective means to create and re-enforce a feeling of collective identity. Even the preamble of the Council Decision refers to the invasion undermining “European and global security”. Second, this new influx of refugees concerns first and foremost those countries who have always been opposed to every form of EU solidarity in accepting refugees, i.e., the Višegrad states Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary as well as Austria.

Thus, while it is laudable and of utmost importance that Ukrainian citizens will be able to enjoy temporary protection in the EU, the most recent EU policies do not show a rejection of nationalist principles but, rather, a new application of them, enlarged by EU supra-nationalism. Again, EU refugee politics do not focus on people in danger but on its own interests. For the time being, these interests have shifted – from a general rejection of refugees to the protection of a specific group of refugees.

And this group is very specific. It includes Ukrainian citizens, persons under international protection in Ukraine and the families of these two groups. Persons with a permanent residence in the Ukraine who “are unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country of origin” should also get protection – either according to the Council Decision or in another national form. Persons with a temporary residence in Ukraine not able to return to their country of origin – e.g., students or workers, but also

asylum seekers – may be granted protection according to the Decision. The – legally not binding – introduction to the Decision recommends that they should at least be allowed visa free entry in the EU in order to return to their country of origin. People with a – permanent or temporary – residence in the Ukraine who could return to their country of origin without being in danger are not mentioned at all.

The proposal of the Commission went beyond the very narrow scope of the final decision: it included everybody “unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country of origin” as well as everybody with a long-term stay in Ukraine, irrespectively of the conditions in the country of origin.

This would have made a significant difference as many inhabitants of Ukraine do not hold Ukrainian citizenship. There were 76.000 foreign students in Ukraine, nearly a quarter of them from Africa. And as I am writing this, there is increasing information about BIPoC[3] hindered to leave Ukraine or to enter another country, especially Poland. In both these countries, fascist groups have been active for a long time and continue to be very present. Also, people who transported BIPoC to the EU face police persecution due to human trafficking.

It should also be mentioned that about 400.000 Roma who live in Ukraine also face racist discrimination including fascist attacks when trying to cross borders. Furthermore, according to UN figures, about 30.000 of

them do not have documents; thus, their chance of being accepted under the conditions of the directive are slim^[4].

Finally, it remains to be seen how the mass influx of refugees from Ukraine will affect those from other countries asking for asylum in the EU. Especially in this regard, it is important that the directive is still in force and not the foreseen regulation. If all asylum seekers from countries with less than 75% of positive decisions were subjected to the fast-track procedure, only people from Venezuela, Syria, and Eritrea would have a chance for a proper asylum procedure. But also without these stipulations, more and more asylum claims have been decided negatively after a very superficial assessment of flight reasons even before the war – at least in Austria.

People are dying in the war in Ukraine – people from different nationalities, including from the Russian Federation. People are fleeing to save their lives – people living in the Ukraine and also Russian citizens opposed to the war. These people must be protected – this is enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, irrespectively of their nationality, ethnicity, gender, class etc.

There is no doubt that the decision to activate the Directive on Temporary Protection is an important step here. But there is also no doubt that the limitations of this decision contradict these fundamental principles and are

driven more by nationalist and supranationalist concepts and interests than by a truly universal understanding of human rights – including the rights of those who, out of which reason ever, are not residents of the country of which they hold the citizenship. The European Union understands the “four mobilities” including mobility of persons, as one of its most important values and achievements. But when it comes to the protection of refugees and the rights of migrants in the EU, individual mobility leads to exclusion. Third country citizens in the EU lose their right to citizenship in a Member State when they spend some time in another Member State. Afghan refugees who spent their whole life in Iran do not receive protection as they are not persecuted in their country of origin. And now, the Council of the European Union simply ignores the plight of those who decided voluntarily to make Ukraine their new home.

Probably, its limited approach made it possible to implement the directive without protest of right-wing parties. In this vein, the Austrian right-wing party FPÖ recently published the slogan: “War refugees, yes, hidden mass migration, no.” And in social media, those usually opposed to any kind of protection for people on the move welcome Ukrainian refugees as they are “white and our European brothers and sisters”.

Maybe one should mention at this point that the full-hearted acceptance of Ukraine as a part of Europe is a rather recent development directly related to the definition

of a common enemy. Up to now, it has, e.g., not applied to the many exploited Ukrainian workers in EU agriculture.

And, maybe one should also mention that in the same week that Russian forces entered Ukraine, the US launched airstrikes in Somalia, Saudi Arabia bombed Yemen, and Israel struck Syria and Palestinians in Gaza. We did not hear much about that.

Notes:

[1] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2001:212:0012:0023:EN:PDF>

[2] Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of The Council addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0613&from=EN>

[3] Black indigenous people of colour

[4] <https://ukraine.un.org/en/106824-about-30000-roma-ukraine-have-no-documents-story-roma-activist>

Blocked Access to Citizenship: Home, Foreign Home*

Rainer Bauböck and Gerd Valchars

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* Originally published by Der Standard in 2/01/2012 at <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000123761978/die-oevp-muss-sich-bewegen>

Early in the morning of 28 January, heavily armed police escorted four children of rejected asylum seekers (three minor girls and a boy) to the airport from where they were deported to Georgia and Armenia. The incident caused widespread protests because the children had been living and attending school in Austria for many years and were considered well integrated. The social democratic governor of Carinthia, Peter Kaiser, and others called for a debate on ius soli, the attribution of citizenship by birth in the territory.

*In a **guest commentary** in one of the Austrian leading newspapers "Der Standard", political scientists Rainer Bauböck and Gerd Valchars show that Austria's citizenship law is in urgent need of reform - and how other countries handle this. The text below is a slightly modified English translation.*

Children who were born and went to school in Austria are being deported because their parents have no right to asylum. The ongoing discussion focuses on whether the Minister of the Interior could have refrained from deporting them despite the negative decision of the courts, whether the best interests of the child should take precedence over state interests, whether such cases should be examined by a hardship commission in the future, and whether the federal provinces must be re-involved in this examination.

A few voices state the obvious. Because of their circumstances of life, the children who were deported are Austrians. They can only be deported because they do not have Austrian citizenship. Our citizenship law only provides for the possibility of naturalization for children born in Austria after six years of residence, and they must meet the same harsh conditions as first-generation adult immigrants.

When asked whether the citizenship law should not be reformed, ÖVP parliamentary faction chairman August Wöginger answered twice on ORF (the Austrian public broadcasting corporation): "We have a well-functioning citizenship law." No, Mr. Chairman, we don't! In December, the Brussels Migration Policy Group published the current figures of its Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which social scientists consider a solid measurement tool

for integration policies. In a recent comparison of access to nationality in 52 countries Austria ends up in last place, together with Bulgaria.

Born in the country

The NGO [SOS Mitmensch](#) (SOS fellow human being) has therefore called for children born in Austria to be automatically granted citizenship if one parent has lived in the country for six years prior to birth. With such a conditional *ius soli* Austria would join Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Great Britain, Ireland, Luxembourg or Portugal. In the case of Tina and her little sister, however, this would not have prevented the deportations because the mother had not been in the country long enough before giving birth and her stay was linked to her ongoing asylum procedure. Only an unconditional *ius soli*, in which birth in the country alone is sufficient for the automatic acquisition of citizenship, would have protected the girls. According to [GLOBALCIT](#), such a birthright exists in as many as 31 countries worldwide, most of which are in North and South America. In Europe, there has been no unconditional *ius soli* since 2004.

Pure coincidence

One argument against unconditional *ius soli* is that it creates an incentive for "birth tourism". This cannot be dismissed out of hand. Middle class mothers from Mexico and China pay a lot of money to deliver their babies in

specialized birth clinics in the US so that their children get American citizenship. One can also rightly object that the mere coincidence of birth in the territory is not a sufficient indicator of attachment to a state. However, when children grow up and go to school in a country, this is certainly enough evidence that that country is their home.

So, in addition to birth, socialization in the country needs to be added as a second and crucial indicator for belonging. And here there are several European countries that can serve as models. Let's look at the two European MIPEX leaders: In Portugal, minors are eligible for naturalization if they were born in the country and have been in school or training there for at least one year. In Sweden, underage children with permanent residency get citizenship after three years (or two years for stateless children) with no further conditions, based on a simple declaration by their parents.

Is there a chance for reform?

The obvious solution, then, would be to reform the Austrian citizenship law to introduce both a conditional *ius soli* and an entitlement to citizenship for minors regardless of their place of birth and their parents' residence status. Would that create an incentive for abusive asylum applications? This cannot be completely ruled out, but the answer is surely obvious: fair and speedy asylum procedures would eliminate this incentive.

Is there any chance of such a reform in Austria? The Green Party is currently being harshly criticized by many for not having the courage to risk even breaking up the government coalition on this issue. Green MP Sibylle Hamann is right that this would not help anyone.^[1] However, there is not a single word about citizenship in the coalition agreement. This issue was obviously left out because the Greens were not in favor of further restrictions. In view of the continuation of the agenda of the right-wing ÖVP-FPÖ government (2017-19) in the other areas of migration and asylum policy, this silence on naturalization was a small and little-noticed success for the Greens. Now, however, they are challenged to actually use this leeway. Given the unattractive alternative coalition options for the ÖVP, it is not very likely that Chancellor Sebastian Kurz will let the coalition fall apart if the Greens make a push for the overdue reform of the citizenship law.

What is needed now for the deported children is a humanitarian repatriation campaign. For thousands of children who are threatened with deportation from their Austrian homeland in the future, a reform of the citizenship law is needed.

What about the Rights of Child Refugees in Austria?

Lisa Wolfsegger

Originally published in 3/24/2021

The NGO *asylkoordination österreich* is a networking organization that stands up for the rights of vulnerable groups. Particular emphasis is laid on child refugees. This blog post draws attention to major shortcomings in the provision and implementation of children's rights for child refugees.

In 2020, 5,522 children applied for asylum in Austria. While 1,467 have entered the country without their parents and are, therefore, unaccompanied, most of them, that is, 4,055, have entered Austria with their parents^[1]. All adults and accompanied/unaccompanied minors – have to apply for asylum. This is the only possibility for legal residence in Austria. Other forms of legal entrance are rare. In the asylum process, three points are checked: asylum according the Geneva Refugee Convention (1), subsidiary protection according the European Convention on Human Rights (2) and humanitarian residence permits: §§ 55 and 57 (3).

Discrimination of Children

In Austria, there are two groups of children—children and child refugees. There are systematic shortcomings before, during and after the asylum process concerning minors. The state does not provide children that fled to Austria without their parents with a guardian for extended periods (weeks or even months). During this initial process, no one is responsible for them. As a result, about half of the unaccompanied minors disappear altogether. No one keeps track of the missing children. In 2020, 764 children disappeared in this way[2].

After passing through the initial phase, unaccompanied minors are provided with accommodations with 24/7 care. However, they are disadvantaged compared to Austrian children in the custody of state-provided child-care accommodations, as the state provides fewer resources for their care.

Study on Accompanied Minors

In 2019, some colleagues and I jointly published a study with UNICEF[3]. It focused on the situation of accompanied minors, particularly on the rights of accompanied child refugees during the asylum process and on the contribution of existing support services serving their best interest. The focus group were children in families during the asylum process in Austria. As our study shows, most protection is provided through the voluntary

commitment of supporters or teachers. Despite this considerable voluntary effort and individual engagement, we found clear deficits in the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child for child refugees. In particular, the state authority providing infrastructure and supporting structures, does not take the best interest of the child and the protection of the children's rights sufficiently into account.

No Place for Being a Child

The asylum procedure is stressful, for children and parents alike. Children have to take the role of adults and therefore involuntarily encounter the world of grownups. There is no space for being a child. Leyla (14 years) described her daily life with "three times a week crying, four times a week being happy". The eight-year-old Rami wished for a kind fairy to grant a legal residency status ("Aufenthaltsstatus"). While other eight-year-olds desire *Lego*, Rami dreams of a legal residency status – actually a word that an eight-year-old should not even know.

Asylum seeking children are explicitly excluded from the law that prescribes minors to be educated until the age of 18 ("Ausbildungspflicht"). Their parents are not allowed to work, and the families often live in cramped housing without any private room for children. The

parents' lack of system knowledge prevents them from giving adequate support to their children.

Children often do not know any other place than Austria. Nevertheless, they experience racism and the feeling of being unwanted every day. Although some of them have been born in Austria, this does not entitle them to legal residence. In Austria, children always get the citizenship of their parents, no matter how long they have already lived in the country. This discrimination in the asylum process leads to an enormous physical and psychical burden on them.

Legal Consequences

As part of guardianship, parents are their children's legal representatives. When parents cannot afford a lawyer, there is no preparation for, or support at, the interview. Accompanied children often become invisible in this legal context. While the authorities recognise unaccompanied minors as autonomous parties, accompanied minors are seen as "appendix" of their parents. The focus on the violation of children's rights and child-specific grounds for persecution disappears. Families with a positive asylum status can receive minimum benefits ("Mindestsicherung"). If they have subsidiary protection or humanitarian status, it depends on the region whether they get any social welfare at all. If the asylum procedure ends with a negative decision, many families fear deportation. In early 2021, the

case of Tina received media attention. The 14-year old Tina was born in Austria and lived here for 12 years. In January 2021, she and her family were deported to Georgia. As we will see below, this case is not an unpleasant exception. Deportations of minors are cruel everyday occurrences in Austria. Even though it would be legally possible, authorities refuse to grant humanitarian status to families. Consequently, Austria deported 67 minors in the pandemic year of 2020.^[4] Also detention (“Schubhaft”), the cruel imprisonment without crime does not stop at children. In 2020, 13 children were in detention, eleven of them being unaccompanied minors.^[5]

What do we need?

The focus should be on the best interest and the rights of the child. Currently, the best interest of the child hardly matters. According to the law, people receive humanitarian status when the right to a private and family life prevails over the interests of the state. This consideration is in the discretion of the authorities. This humanitarian status is not humanitarian; it simply does not work anymore. In recent years, high legal barriers have been created by the deciding immigration authority, the “Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl” (BFA), which is subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The BFA is over-financed and uses its large personnel of about 1,000 employees to file legal appeals (“Amtsrevisionen”) against

positive decisions by the Federal Administrative Court, which is the second instance. As a result, the criteria for admission and the legal reasoning have become so complex that they beat even specialized lawyers. The entire legal apparatus is inscrutable for all parties involved.

What happened before the deportation of 14-year-old Tina?

In the case of Tina, the mother applied for a humanitarian status and, therefore, for a re-examination of the best interest of the child in May 2020, that is, nine months prior to the deportation. Thus, the mother did her best to safeguard the best interest of her child. The authority ignored the application, although it was required to deal with it within six months. This was contrary to law!

The best interest of the child had been examined 1 ½ years before the deportation. A proper procedure would have included a re-examination before deportation. This did not happen. In the long interval since the last examination, the children had become integrated in Austria and their ties to the country of origin had decreased. Therefore, their adaptation to the country of origin had become more difficult. If the authorities take children's rights seriously, they have to re-examine to decide if the deportation indeed corresponds to the best interest of the child.

We see that the shortcomings in the proceedings for children and asylum are systematic. Children's rights are consistently ignored; child refugees are not recognized as children. Just as in the case of Tina, our study shows the need for a stronger focus on the rights of the child in the asylum process. The current situation is a systematic failure that is politically intended. For many years, *asylkoordination österreich* has been working to improve conditions in the field of children's rights for this vulnerable group. Each and every one of the 67 deportations of a minor in 2020 was cruel. Altogether, we need better options for the legalization of undocumented persons in Austria – not only for children.

Notes

[1] Source: parliamentary query response from *NEOS* (AB 4983/AB) – 15.03.2021

[2] Source: parliamentary query response from *NEOS* (AB 4983/AB) – 15.03.2021

[3] Andrea Fritsche, Katharina Glawischnig, Lisa Wolfsegger: „Dreimal in der Woche weinen, viermal in der Woche glücklich sein“. Zur kinderrechtlichen Situation begleiteter Kinderflüchtlinge und ihrer Familien. UNICEF Österreich / *asylkoordination österreich*. 260 Seiten. ISBN 978-3-200-0664-1.

[4] Source: parliamentary query response from *NEOS* (AB 4983/AB) – 15.03.2021

[5] Source: parliamentary query response from *NEOS* (AB 4983/AB) – 15.03.2021

***Forced Migration in the
Contemporary World***

b. Contextual Panoramas/Horizons

How Important is Religion for Refugee Management in the Middle East?

Nina Egger

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Multiple refugee regulatory regimes exist around the globe. Sometimes local Refugee regimes in the Middle Eastern region coordinate their actions with the international refugee regime, sometimes they overlap, sometimes they stand in contradiction to one another. The various refugee regimes govern the lives of refugees in different ways (Bauer-Amin, Schiocchet and Six-Hohenbalken et al. in press). If international actors such as UNHCR that promote secular values in the refugee governance want to operate in the Middle East region, they need the approval of local governments. Therefore, the local authorities' policy priorities play into the management* of refugees there.

The administration of refugees within a humanitarian setting may comprise such factors as housing allocation, access to food aid, de-politicization, repatriation, stereotypes etc. (Zetter, 1991). However, fewer scholars of forced migration have discussed the importance of religion as a factor for refugee management (Horstmann and Jung, 2015)[1]. In what follows, I demonstrate how religion is

important, if not essential, for refugee management in the Middle East.

My first argument is that depending on the political parties in power or the institutional arrangement of a nation-state, religion continues to structure the political life in many Post-Ottoman states officially or unofficially. In various Middle Eastern states, the whole concept of minorities is still based on the millet system, a law introduced in the time of the Ottoman Empire. This legal system was formulated in the contracts Islamic conquerors made with the leaders of the non-Muslim religious groups of the territories they conquered. This legal system based on religion still lays the base for politics and minority politics in many but not all Middle Eastern States (Braude and Lewis, 1982).

In Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the millet system lays the base for the country's politics of exclusion of non-Jews and their categorization into different ethno-religious groups. In other words, Israeli authorities have adapted and appropriated it to achieve the preservation of Israeli Jewish identity and the differentiation of non-Jewish identities. Thus, the country's ruling elites use the millet system for their politics to exclude non-Jewish groups from power and equal citizenship in their country (Sezgin, 2010).

A second example of an ME country in which the millet system influences political and social life is Lebanon.

In this country, the millet system has even been institutionalized in consociational political power-sharing agreements, and sectarianism continues to structure societal life on the ground (Bauer, 2012). A further example is Jordan, where a re-configured version of the millet system still influences political life, at least on the level of formal politics. The political life on the ground, particularly in the peripheral regions, is structured more strongly by tribalism and such criteria as group numbers (Maggiolini, 2021). But on the whole, due to the influence of the League of Nations and the British Mandate for Palestine on the level of formal politics, millets have been re-framed as religious minorities with particular cultural and religious rights since the foundation of the Jordanian nation-state. Owing to these administrative amendments, the members of the former millets have been integrated into the state as equal citizens and have ceased to be bound to the authorities of their faith.

My second argument is that the continued strength of identity and power politics in the Middle East has a great bearing on refugee policies. Local governments are not keen to accept displaced people that do not demonstrate the preferred religious or ethnic identity features and do not fit the prescribed vision of community. For this reason, as refugees, they are often marginalized within the polities' and societies. In Turkey, since 2014, Arab- Sunni Muslim Syrian refugees have received preferential treatment when

it comes to access to political advantages and humanitarian assistance as compared with refugee groups of other religious backgrounds.[2] Afeef-Fathimath (2009) provides further evidence for Israel, where refugees from countries considered enemy states, that is, almost all majority Muslim states, are not allowed to claim asylum.[3] However, the question is not only religious even in Sunni-majority countries, but also in many cases ethnic, for example, concerning the Kurds in Syria and Turkey.

The third argument supporting my claim that religion is relevant for refugee management in the Middle East is that many governments of the region equate religion, ethnicity, and nationhood with the political loyalties of individual subjects. Israel, for example, considers all refugees from so-called enemy states (Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Yemen, Iran, and Afghanistan) as not eligible for seeking asylum in their country (Afeef-Fathimath 2009). In Turkey, only Syrian refugees are allowed to apply for temporary protection, which entails that nationhood is in practice still a vital factor for refugee management. Through nationhood, the Turkish refugee regime is purposely determining access to humanitarian services on the grounds of religion and ethnicity. This point is further illustrated by Danis (2011), who has demonstrated that Kurdish refugees from Iraq in 1988[4] and Kurds and Shia refugees from Iraq in 1991[5] have been ignored by

Turkish authorities and have no access to any humanitarian support. I have illustrated elsewhere how Ezidi refugees were provided with adequate access to humanitarian services in Turkey in 2014 and afterwards, owing in large part to ethnicity and religion as the Turkish refugee regime's policy criteria (Egger 2016).

My fourth argument is that authorities worry that the presence of religious minorities may allow the international community to interfere with their domestic political affairs. A case in point is the Vatican involvement on behalf of the Christians in Iraq (Pullela, 2014). Furthermore, there is the angst that non-Muslim faith groups and Muslim minority confessional groups may organize politically and form political opposition in countries that are mostly governed by Sunni Muslim autocratic leaders and religious clans. The Ezidis and Syrians in Turkey joining the opposition party HDP may be considered one such example (Toksabay, 2015).

My fifth and final argument is that Civil Society Organisations (CSO) as well as Civil Society and International Organisations such as UNHCR have very limited influence when it comes to challenging the power of governments regarding their criteria for refugee management in all Middle Eastern countries. For this reason, exclusive criteria such as religion and ethnicity continue to be important for refugee management. There are several reasons for this.

First, many civil society organizations in the Middle East are not secular but religious. Hence, in the ME, religion is often an essential component within CS, which in turn affects the management of forced migrants.

Second, CSOs are considered as a threat by many ME governments. This particularly applies to those that are secular and offer services beyond humanitarianism. CSOs often have different interpretations of political problems and of how to solve them. Consequently, some ME countries design legal frameworks to restrict their influence, for example by monitoring their operations and funding (Kuzmanovic, 2012).^[6] Therefore, even secular CSOs are often not capable of maintaining their standards of ethnic and religious neutrality in the field of refugee assistance.

Third, because of the sheer power and often brutality of regional governments, CS is not capable of challenging them regarding the criteria they apply for refugee management, including religion, ethnicity, and race. Aware of the risks involved, many Middle Easterners do not actively speak out on exclusionary refugee politics.

Fourth, international organizations such as the UNHCR^[7] have limited influence on the criteria according to which local governments implement the administration of refugees. They need to collaborate with local governments and respect national legislations. Hence, even though the UNHCR is conducting Refugee Status Determination Procedures in some Middle Eastern

countries according to mandate definition,^[8] its influence is still limited. It can only provide RSD services to a limited number of refugees considered eligible for resettlement by local governments and governments around the globe that are willing to take them in. In Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq, UNHCR was and is conducting RSD services only for people of Syrian nationality and a few other refugee groups considered eligible (UNHCR Lebanon 2018; Oktay, D and Tumer, Ö and Veysel, E 2015; UNHCR Iraq 2015). In other countries such as Jordan, by contrast, UNHCR can only provide humanitarian protection services to refugees (UNHCR, 2006). Thus, despite UNHCR's presence in the Middle East, its overall ability to challenge local criteria for refugee management remains minimal.

Conclusion

In many but not all Middle Eastern countries, long established traditional institutions such as the millet system, which is based on religion, continue to structure political and often social life. Religion is associated with political loyalties and is therefore still vital for the governments in most of these states. For this reason, religion, along with ethnicity, remains relevant for the administration of displaced people in the region. I have also demonstrated that citizen-led political organizations and non-organized civil society and international organizations operating in the field of refugee management such as

UNHCR only have very limited influence on government and their handling of challenges relating to refugees. They have hardly any impact on local governments' policy priorities regarding refugee administration.

Governments in the ME are very protective of their sovereignty and their own political sensitivities. Hence, even if not the sole relevant factor, religion continues to play a relevant role in refugee management. What I have argued here paves the way for further relevant questions, for example, of the impact of the long-term instability in the region and its correlation with the relevance of religion for refugee management. One also needs to probe into the question of what other factors in addition to religion and ethnicity, such as race, poverty, illness, visions of community, traditions, etc., are relevant for refugee management in the region.

Notes

[*] By “refugee management,” I refer to institutionalized refugee management.

[1] Among the exceptions are Leonardo Schiocchet, Janet Hoskins, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Elisabeth Mac Allister. Overall, *Building Noah's Ark for Migrants, Refugees, and Religious Communities* sheds light on the insipient topic of the centrality of religion for navigating the internal and external worlds of people in displacement.

[2] This does not mean at all that Arab-Sunni Muslim Syrian refugees are not marginalized and disenfranchised in Turkey, only that other groups are even more marginalized.

[3] Afeef-Fathimath also speaks of strong ideological preferences for Jewish immigration and reveals that the authorities in Israel distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish immigration and only encourage the latter. Moreover, she shows that non-Jews are not encouraged to enter the state, as their presence is perceived to challenge and undermine the state's ethno-national foundation. Non-ethnics are considered a serious threat to the survival and integrity of the nation state due to demographic and other reasons.

[4] They fled to Turkey due to the chemical weapon attack targeting Iraqi Kurds, especially in Halabja in 1998 under the government of Saddam Hussein.

[5] They entered Turkey as refugees due to the Iraqi Gulf War.

[6] Funds are especially monitored by governments in this region if they originate from abroad.

[7] UNHCR is obviously not the only international organisation operating in the field of refugee legal and humanitarian assistance in the region. Nevertheless, it remains the only international organisation conducting RSD procedures for non-Palestinian refugees.

[8] Meaning, according to religious and ethnic secular criteria.

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Spaces of Transregional Aid and Visual Politics in Lebanon*

Estella Carpi

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... Everyone was there and wanted their logo to be known... it's a brand. And in the July 2006 war [of Israel on Lebanon] there were definitely more international brands than ever. (Author's interview with the Manager of the Social Development Centre, Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs, ash-Shiyyah, Beirut, October 30, 2011)

The visibility of symbols, buildings, and icons can powerfully mark spaces and make such spaces political, culturally oriented, spiritual, and even human. In times of crisis, it is particularly employed to exhibit the presence of humanitarian work. However, such a visibility can take different forms, and humanitarian logos are only one means of expression. Humanitarian logos communicate to the public that the labelled organizations are there assisting the needy, alleviating their predicament, witnessing human suffering, or rescuing lives. During the years I spent researching aid in Lebanon (2010-2020), people have often spoken of the 'war of logos' to emphasize the competition between different humanitarian actors intervening in crisis-stricken areas. In such areas, where

migrants and refugees often reside, new local understandings of physical space have arisen. However, aid-marked spaces across Lebanon are not only relevant in the time of war or post-war.

In this blog post, I show how they can become stable hubs of human trust and reciprocity, a normal part of everyday life, inviting dwellers to rethink these spaces of coexistence. Aid, therefore, going beyond official humanitarianism, turns out to be a politics of space, changing people's perceptions of the places they have known for long and inducing them to rethink their spatial margins.

After the arrival of refugees from Syria (2011), the aid coming into Lebanon from the Arab Gulf increased, involving both in-kind assistance (i.e. food and school material kits) and cash-based programmes. Traditionally, Islamic charity work objects to iconic politics, adducing Prophet Mohammed's *hadith* "the left hand does not see what the right hand gives" (*la ta'lamu shamaluhu bima tunfiq yaminahu*). However, some Arab Muslim philanthropists provide humanitarian aid by making their relief provision visible and, at times, even displaying their own face, their national flag, and their logos. Individual philanthropists in the Arab Gulf often opt to show the national flag and the faces of charity founders.



Aid distribution by Khalaf Ahmed al-Habtour Foundation (United Arab Emirates) in an Akkar village, North Lebanon. March 2019.

During my most recent fieldwork for the [Southern-led Responses to Displacement](#) project in North Lebanon, many Syrian refugees emphasised that they do not support the politics of some foreign governments in the Syrian conflict and, at times, are reluctant to accept the donations. A Syrian refugee friend told me in Bebnin in the spring of 2019, “We’re using the plates with the Saudi logo to show you we are given this stuff... but we normally don’t like using them as we don’t think Saudi politics helped Syrians in any way...”.



Saudi Arabia NGO's plates for Syrian refugees. Bebnin, Akkar. March 2019.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's symbol on jumpers. Kweishra, Akkar. April 2019.



School bags distribution from Saudi Arabia. Al-Bireh, Akkar. March 2019.

NGOs and UN agencies from the ‘global North’ similarly use logos to mark *their* humanitarian space, although the space is often shared with other humanitarian actors. I often met refugees who stressed how ephemeral and punctuated (appearing, disappearing, and reappearing over time) humanitarian assistance is: humanitarian logos always remain there, while aid workers show up to provide help only once in a while. Beneficiaries generally interpret logos negatively, as a sign of an increasingly prominent humanitarian-business nexus where assistance needs to be branded to be funded and supported. Yet some refugees I

spoke to view the logos positively, as they visually convey the politics that relegate their lives to the margins and make their living conditions precarious and unjust. Such acts of ‘self-visibility’ enable people in need to battle against the discriminatory and unequal politics of some aid providers.



UNICEF's and Solidarités International's logos on the toilet of an informal tented settlement (one for more than a hundred people) in Akkar hamlet. March 2019.



UNHCR tarp covering construction material in front of al-Bahsa new mosque in Akkar, North Lebanon. March 2018.

Logos also inform us about the cooperation between humanitarian agencies which, generally, we would not associate with each other, such as *Polish Aid* and *Australian Aid* co-funding a dispensary for Syrian refugees and vulnerable local residents in the village of al-Bireh in North Lebanon.



Ophthalmology clinic in Bireh, Akkar. March 2019.

Spaces of aid are usually remembered by the nationality of the funders, whose logos - often displaying their national flag even for non-governmental funding - are placed on street signs, entrance gates, and indoor walls.



Turkish government-funded clinic in Kweishra, North Lebanon. March 2019.

In the sign above it is evident that the funding for what is commonly known in Kweishra (Akkar) as the “Turkish hospital” (*al-mustashfa al-turki*) is a donation from the Turkish state to the Lebanese state. However, the local residents and Syrian Arab refugees point out that only Turkmen Syrian refugees and a small number of Turkmen Lebanese have access to this clinic.



The Kuwaiti NGO “The Doors of Goodness Foundation” (jama’iyyat mu’assasat abuwab al-kheir), assisting Syrian refugees, shows the national flag. Halba, North Lebanon. February 2019.

Beneficiary communities sometimes speak about humanitarian symbols with criticism and question their aid and service provision. A Syrian refugee woman from Homs who relocated to a border village in Lebanon highlighted that rent and medications were the primary needs of her family and community in Lebanon. At a time when e-food ration cards^[1] had not been introduced yet, she told me with sarcasm, “I came from Syria to get packages of bread in Lebanon... I don’t give a damn about their ‘grains of hope’: it’s 2,000 Lebanese Lira... I can pay for it. Why don’t they provide medications and cash for rent instead? They

provide what is easier for them” (Wadi Khaled, January 29, 2013).



Mercy Corps bread distribution in Wadi Khaled, Akkar. November 2012.

New local understandings of physical space have arisen in areas newly inhabited by migrants and refugees. For instance, in the economically disadvantaged district of Dinniye, local residents told me they used to identify the Emirs’ Castle Hotel (*Funduq Qasr al-Umara’*) as the luxurious holiday resort for tourists from the Arab Gulf. From 2012 onward, with the arrival of Syrian refugee families, local people conceptualised the area as a hotspot of “relief for the left-behind” (*al-ighatha li’l ma’zulin*),

where refugees collect aid provided by the Arab Gulf and are temporarily accommodated.



Aid distribution for Syrian refugees at the Qasr al-Umara' Hotel, Dinniye, Lebanon. April 2019.

Aid-marked spaces across Lebanon are not only relevant in the time of war or post-war: they can remain stable hubs of human trust and reciprocity, a normal part of everyday life. The *Beit Atfal as-Sumud* in the Palestinian refugee camp Shatila in Beirut's southern suburbs[2] represents a point of call for Palestinian dwellers, providing education, play activities, and medical support and referring beneficiaries to other NGOs and specialistic services. During my visits since 2011, I realized the employees are more trusted than the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA)'s services.[3] The *Beit* is

the spatialization of the most effective aid in the neighbourhood, as known by other migrant and refugee groups who inhabit the area.



Entrance of Beit Atfal as-Sumud in Shatila, Beirut. September 2011.

A large number of Syrian refugees in rural and peri-urban Lebanon reside in informal tented settlements (ITS) built on pieces of land on the side of public roads, which they need to rent from landowners, rent apartments or occupy empty depots in urban settings. Sometimes, families who were not even acquainted to each other before arriving in Lebanon end up living in the same household to be able to share expenses and make ends meet. A Lebanese resident from the city of Halba contended, “Once we know in which buildings the refugees live, we tend to avoid those

areas.” We thus see new *borderscapes* (Lebuhn, 2013) in the making, where new margins, although not physically marked, emerge in the environment.



Building rented to Syrian refugees. South Lebanon governorate. July 2016.

Some spaces are neither marked by NGO logos nor emerge as official spaces of aid provision in the public sphere. Yet, within local communities, they are understood as places where aid is likely to be given. Hairdressing and beauty salons for Ethiopian migrant workers became important points of call to weave support networks and exchange resources between Lebanon and Ethiopia or other African countries. Indeed, in Bourj Hammoud[4], African migrant workers from different national backgrounds said they frequent the same places where it is

possible for them to gather information and seek support from other social groups or their countries of origin, beyond their own national belonging.



Ethiopian hairdressing salon in Bourj Hammoud, Beirut. February 2019.

Football in Lebanon is known to be an activity people are passionate about, a way of connecting them to the world outside, and also a reason for gatherings and social mingling. National flags of other countries are often used to show support to national football teams. However, during my research in Lebanon, I realized there is sometimes a more complex story about the different national symbols exhibited in public space. A Lebanese Armenian family in Bourj Hammoud told me how they not only support Brazil in football world leagues, but they also cherish the generosity of their relatives who resettled in Brazil in the 1970s and sent material and moral support

during the Lebanese civil war (1975-90). Showing the Brazil flag outside their balcony became a way to show their gratefulness.



Brazilian flag outside the balcony of a Lebanese Armenian family in Bourj Hammoud, Beirut. February 2019.

Similarly, a taxi driver, in the municipality of Minieh in North Lebanon, spoke of Argentina not only as his favourite football team in the world leagues, but also as the place which welcomed and supported him, his family and friends during the 1980s. After returning to Lebanon after the end of the civil war, he still preserves his childhood

memories of Argentina and hopes his own children will get to know the country at some stage.



Sticker of Argentina on a taxi cab in Minieh, North Lebanon. April 2019.

Humanitarian aid, ultimately, turns out to be a politics of space. It changes people's perceptions of the places they have known for long and induces them to rethink their spatial margins. Moreover, the material manifestations of aid are not exclusively to be found on logos and brands that indicate distribution spots or offices. Symbols, material objects and shops can give rise to different aid imaginaries. While those who believe in a no-profit humanitarianism commonly criticize the logo-marked bond between aid provision and business,

alternative spaces of aid do not need to be marked by logos, as they are the result of entangled stories, personal relationships, and transregional trajectories of human support. Intimate memories do not need logos to have their presence acknowledged; it is generally in people's mental spaces that they are preserved.

Notes

[1] At the outset of the Syrian refugee influx into Lebanon (2011-12), many of the 'global North's' humanitarian actors were reluctant to provide cash assistance to refugees, preferring to prioritise the delivery of food, medical, and other items. In 2013 e-food ration cards began to be distributed to refugee households, replacing the old food vouchers. Also, over the last few years, especially after the 2015 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, NGOs and UN agencies agreed on reducing the delivery of in-kind assistance in order to enhance cash assistance. Nowadays, Arab Gulf funded NGOs in Lebanon mostly provide material aid, such as mattresses and food, and, during Ramadan, *iftar* baskets and dates.

[2] Established in 1984 after the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres.

[3] UNWRA services are seen as decreasingly sympathetic with the Palestinian cause.

[4] An independent municipality located at the East of Beirut, historically marked by the Armenian forced

migration, and today populated by different migrant groups.

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The Lebanese Covid-19 Crisis Within Crises and its Refugees

Leonardo Schiocchet

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In Lebanon today, the livelihoods of Palestine refugees and refugees of the Syrian conflict are largely intertwined. Palestinian forced migration is one of the largest, oldest and most protracted cases in the world. Especially for those living in one of the dozens of refugee camps in the Near East today, forced mobility (having to leave one's land) became quickly enforced immobility (as they have been kept in refugee camps for around 70 years), as Anne Irfan suggests (May 12, 2020). The protracted situation of Palestinian refugees means that they have been immersed in regional contexts for decades. The Syrian war greatly affected more than half a million Palestinian refugees in Syria (UNRWA n/d a), many of whom managed to move especially to Lebanon or Jordan. The current Lebanese political and financial crisis has therefore equally affected Lebanon's displaced from the Syrian war. Access to Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon varies. While some have been largely closed to non-Palestinian refugees, others have been quite open. This can be attributed to various degrees of external control. The physical boundaries of some camps (like 'Ayn el-Helweh) are

controlled by Lebanese army checkpoints, in others these boundaries are self-managed by Palestinian factions (like Wavel [Al-Jalil]), while access to others is largely uncontrolled, as it is most notably the case with Shatila.

Shatila is located in the south of Beirut, where most of the internally displaced from the south of Lebanon moved during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) - a majoritarian Shi'a population today much aligned with Hizbollah. Since the infamous Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982, the Palestinians de facto lost control of the camp and its boundaries became increasingly porous. The camp was largely absorbed by the urbs of Beirut, and while it is symbolic territory for most Palestinian (Schicchet 2016), it presently harbours a very diverse population composed of around 10.000 registered Palestinian refugees (UNRWA n/d a); poor Lebanese citizens of all confessions; a myriad of illegalized workers (Filipino who arrived as maids, Sri Lankans who arrived to work as garbage collectors, etc.); and refugees, most notably from the Syrian conflict. Around 120.000 Palestine refugees left Syria for its neighbouring countries (UNRWA n/d b) as part of the 884,266 registered refugees[1] from the Syrian conflict that are living today in Lebanon, a significant number of them (Palestinian or not) ending up in Shatila (UNHCR, June 30, 2020) or in the Beka' Valley[2].

In October 2019, Lebanon was hit by a political crisis that turned the country into turmoil. Protesters

blocked the most important roads in the country in a bid to force the government to resign, which caused economic life to grind to a halt, affecting the most vulnerable populations, including refugees. The global Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020 affected Lebanon relatively less than many other countries in the region. However, there are no reliable numbers, especially when it comes to such densely populated and loosely controlled refugee camps as Shatila. The response to the Covid-19 outbreak, however, deepened the economic crisis, which quickly escalated to become the worst since the country's independence in 1943. As a study by the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) suggests (June 2020), it is expected that poverty will rise to 45% or more of the population by the end of 2020, with extreme (food) poverty more than doubling to 22% of the population. The GDP is expected to fall by 15% and unemployment rates should hit 50%.

Many external observers praised the Lebanese government policies to curb the spread of Covid-19 through curfews and movement restrictions. In reality, however, the Lebanese government used this opportunity to remove the protesters' bases in the largest cities. Government actions, coupled with some of the protesters' fear of the pandemic led to the temporary demobilization of the *Hirak* (Arabic, "mobility") social movement. Meanwhile, established elites linked to the government filled the gap left by the protesters and by the insufficient

state health policies, often offering aid and thus strengthening clientelism and the grip of the status quo. In Shatila, the efforts of the United Nations Refugee Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the UNHCR were severely hampered by lack of funds. While *Hirak* has regained some momentum in the last few months, the explosion in the port of Beirut (August 4, 2020) brought a vast number of protesters back to the streets, with a high increase in the numbers of those willing to resort to more confrontational actions such as erecting burning street barricades in response to the violent state response.

As Irfan suggests, “Imposing immobility” has been a basic tenet of many national governments in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. But the “twin pillars of social distancing” - keep people indoors and keep them apart - can be mutually exclusive, for in most refugee camps staying put means staying in an overcrowded, often unsanitary, environment (May 12, 2020). My own fieldwork (intermittently, from 2006 to the present) corroborates the impossibility of social distancing policies. In Shatila, refugee aid is not nearly sufficient to keep people indoors, so they have to scarp a living day-by-day through informal work such as vegetable vendor (inside the camp) or day labour construction worker (outside the camp). If imposing immobility in Shatila is not an effective answer to combat Covid-19 in Shatila, we have to look elsewhere.

When I asked one refugee if the Covid-19 crisis had hit Shatila hard he answered: “I think so, but not officially” (...) “people are not caring about it. Shatila and Sabra always were crazy. They never cared. Actually, I have been in quarantine now for 14 days. My sister has it” . To put the conversation in context, the situation in Shatila is so dire that curbing the spread of Covid-19 in the camp is not necessarily a priority from the point of view of many residents, much contrary to the perspective of many in the Global North. The pandemic hit Lebanon during the recent political and economic turmoil, and for many Shatila residents, putting food on the table, or dealing with quotidian symbolic and physical violence take precedence. There are pockets of grassroots actions against the pandemic. As Irfan contends (May 12, 2020), some refugees themselves are pioneering new initiatives to combat the virus through organizing the distribution of information and resources and donations of essential items to keep the community safe, and refugees must be seen as potential assets in the global combat against Covid-19. Yet, general instability and the lack of policies dedicated to refugee camps greatly curb such actions. The muted reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic in Shatila is significantly due to the government’s lack of support for their non-citizen population (one of the largest in the world) and further subdued by the current political and economic situation.

This situation is similar in Lebanon at large, and hot spots of Covid-19 may spread fast in the near future. Looking at the situation of the most vulnerable populations may shed light on how to deal with what the EuroMeSCo (June 2020) called, in the case of Lebanon, a “crisis within a crisis”. Within this context, it is also logical that the scant responses (both by the Lebanese government and by grassroots initiatives) may be even more pronounced in Shatila among refugees from the Syrian conflict who, having moved to the camp only in the last few years, lack the necessary social and economic support, including networks of clientelism (epitomized by the figure of the *wasta*) that are vital for survival especially among vulnerable populations in Lebanon.

Notes

[1]. These numbers have been largely stable since 2016. However, it is estimated that the actual number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is around 1.5 million (EuroMeSCo, June 2020).

[2]. There are no reliable references as to how many refugees of the Syrian conflict inhabit Shatila. Based on his intermittent ethnographic fieldwork between 2011 and 2020, and constant contact with residents, Schiocchet estimates that 3.000 refugees would be conservative numbers.

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Refugees and COVID-19 in Brazil: Challenges, Lessons, and Expectations

Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli

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On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 a pandemic. At the time, few people imagined that within a year more than 131,487,572 people would be infected, and 2,857,702 would die as a direct consequence of this disease (WHO, 2021 – data of April 06, 2021). Since 2020, people’s lives have been affected by the measures adopted to control the pandemic, including the closing of borders, schools, and non-essential services, as well as general lockdowns. Amidst new mutations of the coronavirus and competition for the recently approved vaccines highlighting global inequalities between developed and developing countries, experts and international organizations have reinforced the necessity of not leaving anyone behind, including migrants and refugees (people forcibly displaced of their countries of origin due to persecutions based on race, nationality, religion, political opinion or membership in a particular social group).

However, migrants and refugees tend to be ignored in sanitary emergencies (Ventura, 2015). As non-nationals

they are deprived of access to information and services. Besides that, they tend to be blamed as “responsible” for the transmission of illnesses. Experts have reflected on the challenges refugees face in protecting themselves from this disease, especially people living in crowded detention centers and refugee camps with no social assistance and limited access to hygiene measures and healthcare even before the outbreak of this pandemic (e.g., Ponce, 2020; Raju & Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020; Riggiozzi et al., 2020; Sandvik & Garnier, 2020). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020), 85% of all forcibly displaced people live in developing countries. Besides that, many refugees (especially in Latin America) live in cities and not in refugee camps. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the refugees themselves experienced the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to understand their challenges, lessons, and expectations. Refugees are experts of their own lives. Suppose decision-makers decide not to leave refugees behind in the COVID-19 responses. If that were the case, it would be necessary to understand their views.

Brazil presents an interesting case for the analysis of the situation of refugees. It has progressive legislation towards asylum (Law 9474/1997) and migration (Law 13.445/2017) with an expanded definition of refugees (including those fleeing a situation of severe and generalized violation of human rights) and the guarantee of

rights with no discrimination to refugees and asylum-seekers including the right to work, education, access to the public healthcare system (*Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS*) and social benefits. Brazil ranked sixth in the world-wide admittance/reception of asylum-seekers in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020). With more than 331,433 deaths, Brazil is one of the countries most affected by the pandemic, (behind the United States of America) (WHO, 2021). The Brazilian government ranked the worst in terms of its responses to the pandemic (Lowy Institute, 2021). This has repercussions for the refugee population living in the country.

As part of my research, I interviewed 29 refugees of different nationalities (Syria, Venezuela, Mali, Cameroon, Guinea, Guyana, and Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]) living in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (where the governors initially adopted the WHO measures of social distancing and closure of schools and non-essential business) between March 27, 2020, and April 06, 2020^[1]. The interviews were conducted by means of Whatsapp audio calls following the ethical Recommendations of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM, 2019). The refugees' narratives on how they were coping with the pandemic and the recommendations to stay at home present a unique picture of the pandemic's initial outbreak in Brazil. This blog post presents the refugees' main reflections on their problems, lessons, and

expectations for the future in times of COVID-19. In sum, they highlight a general uncertainty regarding the disease and the future.

Refugees perceived that they were left behind by Brazilian responses (or lack of them) to COVID-19 since the government was not acknowledging or addressing their needs in the pandemic. Most of the information translated/adapted for refugees and migrants on protection measures, how to access healthcare, and the federal emergency benefit was produced by civil society organizations and universities with programs geared to support this population (like the *Universidade Federal do Paraná* – UFPR[2]). Refugees were at risk of believing in fake news since their primary source of information was social media like Facebook and Whatsapp. Recently arrived asylum-seekers that could not speak Portuguese faced the worst situation. There was much uncertainty if refugees and migrants had access to the emergency benefit package discussed by the government at the time. Some refugees had already received false links promising access to benefits (that were not in place yet at the time of the interviews) to steal people's data.

Refugees were also afraid of facing discrimination when seeking out healthcare because they believed that if the medical personal were put in a situation to decide who should receive treatment, they would prefer Brazilian citizens over foreigners, that is, the refugees. Another

challenge was the closure of essential refugee services such as the Federal Police responsible for naturalization and documentation appointments, the civil society organizations providing migrants and refugees with services and information online, and stores sending remittances to the home countries (like Western Union) and offering international phone calls. Many refugees were worried that they could not send vital remittances to their families abroad. Besides that, the Brazilian borders were closed, creating uncertainty if refugees' relatives with family reunification visas could enter Brazil. The closure of borders also prevented asylum-seekers from entering Brazil and claiming asylum, especially Venezuelans.

A final challenge that appeared in the interviews was that refugees were "living the pandemic twice." They were facing the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, and the Brazilian government was not doing a good job about it. However, at the same time, they worried about their loved ones that were facing the pandemic in the countries of origin that were less equipped than Brazil to fight the pandemic. Most refugees in Brazil come from Venezuela (near 65,49%), Syria (11,79%), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (3,79%), countries facing armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies (CONARE, 2020).

In fact, refugees from Venezuela, Syria, and DRC felt that they were better prepared to stay at home and follow the WHO measures as compared with the local population

because they had already faced war, other diseases (like the Ebola epidemic), and humanitarian emergencies in their home countries. They believed that these past experiences helped them to better understand and follow health recommendations without panic. This also allowed them to empathize more strongly with other groups affected by the pandemic, like recently arrived people, people living in abandoned buildings called occupations, elderly people, poor people, and homeless people. Many refugees depended for their livelihood on catering businesses, which were severely impacted by the canceling of events, fairs, and parties; they were unemployed or were in fear of losing their jobs due to the economic crisis. At the same time, they took action to assist those who were more vulnerable by sharing food with them, distributing food packages and hygiene kits, and offering information. Refugees were worried about the Brazilian population's well-being and requested that the Brazilian government help everybody (including wealthy Brazilians) and not only refugees. They felt that, as everybody was being affected by the pandemic, everybody needed help.

The interview's final questions invited the refugees to reflect on the future: the next three months and the future in general. Most refugees' answers showed that they expected the pandemic to be over soon and that they could resume their previous mode of life after one month. I believe most of my interviewees feel disappointed

considering that we are facing this pandemic for more than a year now and our lives are far from “normal.” Nevertheless, the refugees had an optimistic view of the future in general. They expected that humanity would be able to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way as we have fought other pandemics that are now part of history books. They also expected that people would learn to take better care of themselves, their houses, and the planet in general. The refugees hoped that the pandemic would help people to improve, be less selfish and appreciate such vital values as health, family, and life. Actually, the refugees generally agreed that life itself was most essential. That is why they argued that the Brazilian government should save people’s lives first and put the economy in the second place.

The refugees in Brazil reflected on their problems, lessons, and expectations during the outbreak of the country’s COVID-19 pandemic. It is crucial to understand their perspectives to adopt responses to this crisis that take their particular needs into account and do not leave them behind. This essay briefly presented the main findings of the research entitled “Refugees and COVID-19” developed at the *Núcleo de Pesquisas em Relações Internacionais* (NUPRI) at the University of São Paulo (USP). More studies should consider refugees as experts for the impact of the pandemic on their lives, especially because we have been living the COVID-19 pandemic for more than one year now.

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Notes

[1] For further methodological discussions of this project, see Martuscelli, P. N. (2020). How are refugees affected

by Brazilian responses to COVID-19?. *Revista de Administração Pública*, 54(5), 1446-1457. Epub November 02, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-761220200516x>

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Voluntary Returns or Forced Choices? Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programs in The Gambia

Viola Castellano

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Despite existing for several decades, voluntary return programs for migrants and asylum seekers became an essential part of the 2020 EU Pact for Migration and Asylum. In the words of EU Vice-President Margaritis Schinas,^[1] the program for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration became “One of the pillars of the new ecosystem we are building on returns, to the mutual benefit of the returnees, the EU and third countries”. Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programs (AVRR) provide recipients with free transportation back to their countries of origin, and an initial financial/counseling/logistical support to re-start their lives there. These programs are generally coordinated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the support of other humanitarian and co-developmental organizations. They are operated from the countries migrants encounter on their undocumented routes to Europe (the so-called transit countries) and from EU countries. They are sponsored either by the European state from where the return is made, or by international funds

such as the European Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF). According to the IOM, voluntary return is based on the voluntary decision of the individual which in turn is composed of two elements: freedom of choice - meaning lack of physical, psychological, material pressure - and informed decision.

One of the issues I investigate in my current research on post-asylum subjectivities, is related to how AVRR programs work in the case of The Gambia, the smallest country of continental Africa with a population of two million people. Despite its modest size, in the last decade, more than 70,000 Gambians applied for asylum in European countries, after traveling mainly through the Central Mediterranean Route. The asylum authorities of the various European countries tended to label Gambian asylum seekers mainly as “economic migrants”, even more so after the autocratic and violent regime of Yaya Jammeh ended in 2017 and democracy was restored in the country. This left them undocumented, in legal limbo, and at risk of being repatriated to The Gambia. In addition to Gambians who reached Europe, many more were blocked in the various African transit countries. The number of “stranded” Gambian migrants increased in the last 5 years as a result of: EU and African countries’ agreements on measures to tackle irregular migration through return, deportation, and border externalization, made in the Valletta EU-Africa Summit in 2015 (Pace, 2016); the restoration of the

bilateral agreements between Italy and Libya in 2017 to prevent migrants from reaching European shores through the reinforcement of the so-called Libyan coastguard; and, finally, due to Covid-19, which further complicated Search And Rescue (SAR) operations by NGOs in the Mediterranean. The acts of violence that sub-Saharan migrants suffer along the Central Mediterranean Route, and especially in Libya, have been widely reported by humanitarian organizations, with 85% of refugees and migrants suffering torture and inhumane or degrading treatment (Medici per I Diritti Umani-MEDU). Due to these factors, Gambian (and other) migrants stuck in dangerous conditions in transit countries, or those with no chance of regularization in Europe, became privileged candidates for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programs.

Once back in The Gambia, AVRR programs treat returnees as victims of irregular migration in need of empowerment through self-entrepreneurship, with the goal of discouraging irregular migration by combatting the widespread local stigmatization of “failed returnees” (Schuster, L., & Majidi, 2015). Returnees, indeed, especially the ones repatriated from Libya, are nationally constituted as a political problem, because of the widespread stigmatization they are subjected to, as failed migrants who wasted family resources. This adds up to the general association of deportation with criminality, and to moral suspicion towards those who experienced the violent

dynamics dominating the "backway" (the Gambian term to designate the undocumented trip to Europe). Their failure and their traumas accumulated along the journey are therefore perceived as a threat to a country that saw its structural poverty and unemployment worsening in the last decades. In the public eye, their alleged desperation makes them more likely to engage in criminal activities and more mentally unstable. As much as traveling to Europe is seen as a form of social and economic prestige (Schapendonk, 2017), the financial, existential, and emotional cost of the journey, when it is not successful and does not produce wealth to redistribute within the community, becomes a disadvantage, a stigma.

This is why IOM and other organizations' goal is to revert the imaginary around return and deportation (Fine and Walters 2021). In my research, I observed how, with that goal in mind, IOM depicts AVRR returnees as direct victims and witnesses of the perils of "irregular migration" and of human trafficking. On the one hand, their status, as stressed by Fine and Walters, is seen as a resource and a voice against "irregular migration", and they are often involved in (paid) activities of sensitization in villages and cities, sponsored by the same IOM and other international organizations and NGOs. On the other hand, they are promoted as enthusiastic self-entrepreneurs and coached through programs in business administration and various work skills in locally contracted companies and agencies.

Their “success stories” are presented as living proof of the benefits of homecoming and the possibility of “making it” in The Gambia.^[ii]

In the interviews^[iii] I collected, I observed how some of the returnees embraced the subjectivity promoted by IOM and EU partners, engaging in sensitization activities and complying with the self-entrepreneurial ethos envisioned by AVRR programs. I also observed how others, instead, preferred not to go back to their village and hide in the metropolitan areas. They were too ashamed to face their families and were willing to embark on the journey again as soon as they had the possibility. IOM and other organizations administering AVRR switched to the direct funding of returnees’ “business plans” once they realized that their previous funding scheme left returnees employed to pay for another trip towards Europe. These business plans, which they need to present to obtain the reintegration funds, are aimed to initiate a new career path in The Gambia. Finally, a third group, mainly constituted by returnees from Libya, strongly politicized their social location and questioned how the Gambian government and its EU partners were managing the issue of returnees, arguing that the humanitarian assistance provided by OIM reintegration programs was not sufficient.

The efficiency of the AVRR programs indeed has increasingly been criticized by various humanitarian organizations, as well as by returnees themselves. They

were labeled as a form of soft deportation (Andrijasevic, 2010; Brachet, 2018; Kalir, 2017), due to the lack of choice of undocumented migrants in such “voluntarily” returns. The questionable degree of voluntariness of these programs is well demonstrated by the fact that they are most successful in dangerous transit countries such as Libya or in European countries where deportations are consistently implemented.^[iv]

In the campaigns against “irregular migration”, its own engendered violence is presented as immanent to the moral feature of illegality connected to the mobility effort and to the smuggling network. While presenting the (il)legal violence of undocumented migration as an exceptional form of suffering, these initiatives remove their genealogy and the active role of Europe in what has been called the mobility regime (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013).

In conclusion, for European countries, the promotion of voluntary repatriation constitutes another tool in pursuing border externalization through agreements with countries of origin, negotiating economic aid in return of repatriation deals, meanwhile formally responding to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean. However, for Gambian asylum seekers caught in bureaucratic mazes with no chance of regularization in Europe, and for the ones who are stuck in detention centers in Niger and Libya, voluntary

repatriation is rather experienced as forced choice. This is a crucial element that often invalidates AVRR programs' appeal to the idea of choice for the neoliberal subject (Crane and Lawson 2020) and their intention to change the social imaginary of deportation.

Notes

[i] “Press remarks by Vice-President Schinas on the EU’s Voluntary Return and Reintegration Strategy” of 27/04/202: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_1991

[ii] *Tekki Fi*, which is the name of the EUTF sponsored program of economic development addressed to Gambian youth and return migrants, means indeed “to make it” in Wolof: <https://www.tekkifii.gm/about>

[iii] I conducted research in The Gambia in November and December 2019. During that period I collected 26 interviews among government officials, IOM and NGOs workers and directors, voluntary and forced returnees and their family members. I conducted two focus groups with the students of the University of the Gambia on the right to asylum and participant observation in a family of a returnee with whom I lived for two weeks. The pandemic disrupted the possibility of returning to Gambia in 2020 and 2021 as planned, but I nevertheless conducted 12 online interviews with some of the people I previously met in the 2019 fieldwork.

[iv] As stated in the IOM Gambia AVRRE webpage, 90% of voluntary returns in The Gambia were operated by the EU Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration. Among them, 2,992 Gambians returned from Libya, another 1,392 from Niger and 618 more stranded along key migration routes in Africa and in Europe. Please refer to: <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-hits-milestone-5000-gambians-supported-assisted-return>

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***Concept and Affect
within Forced Migration
a. Rethinking Categories***

Refugee, Asylum Seeker or Migrant? Words Matter. People Matter. Politics Matters

Jasmin Lilian Diab

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Source: Euro-med Human Rights Monitor

Legally speaking, the words ‘refugee,’ ‘asylum seeker,’ and ‘migrant’ have three very distinct meanings and implications. Using them inter-changeably leads to hindrances to the livelihoods of each population group, the policies that govern them, and the legal frameworks they fall under. Across the world, an ongoing debate is raging about the manner through which we describe the millions of people escaping protracted conflicts in their home countries and fleeing to safer places. So are they refugees, asylum seekers or migrants? The answer to this question is

pivotal – as the term used not only outlines state obligations, policies and applicable international legal instruments, but also may deny a person their internationally recognized human rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. In dismissing many people on the move as “economic migrants” who are less deserving of humanitarian assistance, states have been able to shy away from their legal and human rights obligations towards some of the world’s most vulnerable groups. In 2015, widely popular news network Al-Jazeera made a trailblazing decision on the issue of terminology and wording, by announcing that it will cease using the umbrella term “migrants” when referring to the Mediterranean refugee crisis.^[i] Quite fittingly, Al-Jazeera justified this move by insisting: “[...] the word migrant has become a largely inaccurate umbrella term for this complex story”.^[ii]

This kind of “washing” is quite commonly resorted to for words referring to controversial subject matters – particularly those with economic, social, political and legal implications. At any instance in the migratory process, there are multiple terms available to describe human movement that are pertinent to the exact migratory experience an individual undergoes – as well as the nature (forced or not) of their experience. The intentional use of one particular term over another to describe a person on the move involves a choice on the part of the speaker and

carries implications about their opinions and understandings about those they are describing, and the rights they believe those being described are entitled to. As Mawuna Remarque Koutonin argues, in the lexicon of human migration, there are still “hierarchical words” created for the purpose of putting white people “above everyone else”.^[iii] For instance, when people refer to “expatriates”, they are often discussing affluent people, who have moved to another country – and are often white.

Defining Narratives

The UN Refugee Agency defines refugees as: “[...] persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution”.^[iv] According to UNHCR, as of 2020, at least 82.4 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes.^[v] Among them are nearly 26.4 million refugees, around half of whom are under 18 years of age.^[vi] Refugees’ situation is often so dangerous and intolerable that they cross international borders in order to seek safety in nearby countries, and thus become internationally recognized as “refugees” and as entitled to specific protections under international law, local legal frameworks in host countries, the UNHCR, and other international UN agencies and organizations.^[vii] These individuals are recognized as refugees precisely due to the fact that their lives and wellbeing is threatened if they return home. Refugees are additionally protected in

international law by the: (1) 1951 Refugee Convention, its (2) 1967 Protocol,^[viii] and (3) 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.^[ix] Refugees are people for whom denial of asylum carries potentially life-threatening consequences.^[x]

Moreover, asylum seekers are individuals who claim to be a refugee, but whose claim has not been evaluated yet or processed.^[xi] While not every asylum seeker will be recognized as a refugee, every refugee is initially an asylum seeker. Asylum seekers are individuals who apply for asylum on the grounds that returning to their home country would lead to their persecution on grounds of their race, religion, nationality or political beliefs.^[xii] An individual is an asylum seeker for so long as their asylum application remains pending. By the end of 2019, UNHCR states that there were an estimated 4.2 million individuals around the world waiting for a decision on their asylum claims, and more than one million individuals who seek asylum annually based on the aforementioned grounds.^[xiii]

Due to the specificity (and implications) of each of the aforementioned definitions, placing refugees and asylum seekers under the “migrant” umbrella poses increasingly problematic realities for both groups. Migrants choose to move. They do not move because of an immediate or evident threat of persecution or threat on their lives, but rather with the aim of improving their

economic standing, their education, their quality of life, or to reunite with their families.^[xiv] Different from refugees and asylum seekers who are unable to return to their home countries safely, migrants face no such barrier to return nor are they at any risk if they do return.^[xv] If migrants choose to return to their home countries, they will immediately continue to receive the protections and rights outlined for them by their government by mere citizenship. For individual host states, the distinction between asylum seekers, refugees and migrants is a pivotal policy concern, as states' determination of each individual's status on their territory outlines their obligations towards the individual in question, as well as the international legal protections this individual is afforded.

The Politics of Blurring the Lines in Definition

And while the definitions of asylum seeker, refugee and migrant seem clearly outlined in writing, in application, some individual cases cannot be easily categorized as one or the other – nor can their legal standing be outlined to determine the types of protection these individuals have the right to, and require. Challenges to placing an individual under a specific “category” stems from the fact that labelling an individual as an “economic migrant” or an “asylum seeker” may not always reflect the complex reality of their migratory experiences, as well as the realities that motivated them to move (for instance, this is particularly

challenging for migrants that leave areas with natural disasters, drought, etc.). Furthermore, are people arriving at the shores of host countries asylum seekers or migrants? Habitat for Humanity insists they could be “a mix of both” depending on their motive for moving – regardless of whether or not they arrive in the same boat.[xvi] In order to adequately assess the category under which these individuals fall, a case by case investigation must take place into whether or not this migration was “coerced” (for migrants) and “forced” (for asylum seekers and refugees).[xvii]

Moving from these complexities, state politics plays a fundamental role in shaping narratives, attitudes and outlining rights provision within their borders. Often enough, states refrain from specific categorizations in order to reduce its obligations towards particular groups, as well as to refrain from negatively impacting bilateral relations and regional political economies. When terminology such as “displaced”, “illegal immigrants”, “aliens” or “illegal arrivals” are used to refer to those seeking asylum for instance, the implications are not restricted to public sentiment – but rather are translated into policy, legal instruments, citizenship rights, and state obligations under the treaties and conventions they are party to. All this, renders the debate over the “right” term to use when it comes to cross-border movement not only controversial, but also highly political.

Concluding Remarks

Using the terms “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” and “migrant” interchangeably poses dire consequences for the lives and safety of millions of people on the move each and every day, and additionally take away attention from the legal protections vulnerable groups on the move require. Not only can the use of specific words impact rights, this can also undermine public support for refugees, foster anti-refugee/immigrant sentiments, and further generate public disapproval of asylum processes and the non-refoulement principle. At a time where borders are being crossed at unprecedented rates, and a time where we continue to move closer to our understanding of an international community and a shared responsibility, it is pivotal to provide an adequate legal response for some of the world’s most vulnerable populations on the move through contextualizing responses to meet their specific human rights, social, cultural, political and economic needs.

Notes

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[iii] Mawuna Remarque Koutonin (2015), Why are white

people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?, The Guardian, Retrieved at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/13/white-people-expats-immigrants-migration>

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[vii] Ibid

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[x] Ibid

[xi] UNHCR (2021), Asylum-Seekers, Retrieved

at: <https://www.unhcr.org/asylum-seekers.html>

[xii] Ibid

[xiii] Ibid

[xiv] Ibid

[xv] Ibid

[xvi] Habitat for Humanity (2016), Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Migrants: A Crucial Difference, Retrieved at: <https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/blog/2016/09/refugees-asylum-seekers-migrants-crucial-difference/>

[xvii] Ibid

"Vulnerability in Contexts of Flight" - A critical analysis of multiple aspects of vulnerability among refugees

Josef Kohlbacher & Maria Six-Hohenbalken

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As Agier (2011, 158) has aptly put it, "all refugees are vulnerable". The concept of vulnerability fulfils a central function: it serves to identify groups that need targeted support and special protection. In its practical application, however, the concept has ambivalent effects. Used as a "label" that establishes unequal power relations, it neglects existing heterogeneity/s within groups and may lead to an underestimation of the groups' capacity to act. In what follows, we present how our recently published volume entitled *Vulnerability in Contexts of Flight* advances the discussion on this topic.

Initially applied to risk and disaster studies, the conceptualisation of vulnerability was subsequently taken up and elaborated on by various disciplines. Owing to its application in politics, as well as in guidelines and indicator systems in International Organizations (UNHCR; WHO), the concept has gained additional weight. On the down side, there are some inherent pitfalls to the multiplicity of approaches, applications and discourses and the resulting centrifugal tendencies. In addition to discordant academic

approaches, we have to take tendencies of compartmentalization, pathologization and victimization into account.

Vulnerability includes two components: inherent and situational factors. The former refer to aspects that are quasi-inherent to human nature, i.e. a social or affective dependency on other people, basic life needs based on our biological nature, such as those for food supply, physical or psychological integrity, recreation, etc. The latter refer to the need to cope with the challenges of life. By contrast, "situational vulnerability" is context-specific and is influenced by social, political, economic or environmental determinants. These have an inherent temporal component and can be effective in the short, medium or long term. There is a legal definition that stipulates which people particularly need protection. According to Art. 21 of the EU Reception Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU), these are in particular (unaccompanied) minors, people with disabilities, people with serious physical or mental illnesses, pregnant women, single parents, victims of human trafficking, torture or psychological, physical and sexual violence, as well as older people. Furthermore, LGBTIQ refugees are in particular need of protection.

Its relational aspects aside, the concept presupposes the vulnerability of refugees as a given characteristic. Yet, the social construction of vulnerability and the mechanisms of creating and/or denying the ability

to act need to be addressed from a scholarly and socio-political perspective. This approach brings social environments, framework conditions, networks, institutions, organisations and discourses into focus. It is necessary to investigate the factors that enable, force or deny the ability of refugees to act. Furthermore, the entitlement of all refugees to universal rights and to social participation must be considered. The rights and needs of refugees and their inclusion in the host societies constitute the uniting theme of all the contributions in this volume (Kohlbacher and Six-Hohenbalken 2020).

In addition to highlighting specific problems pertaining to the vulnerability of certain groups of refugees, this volume presents preventive measures geared to promote resilience - i.e. the ability to cope with extreme life crises - and to prevent the development of clinical symptoms of illness. All the authors aim to make visible and give voice to the concerns of refugees who are by definition "vulnerable", be they women, LGBTIQ, people with mental illness or people who do not fall into these categorisations, such as young men and fragmented families. A further intention is to pursue an inter- or transdisciplinary orientation and to point out the challenges for practitioners in refugee work. The authors illustrate the conceptual issues confronting the endeavour to shift the focus to those people for whom fleeing and being a refugee poses special and additional challenges due to age, gender, illness/health,

social contexts, etc. The concept of vulnerability is also a challenge for practitioners in refugee work. We attempt to show that the status of being a refugee does not come to an end with a positive asylum decision. The fragmentation of families, problems in family reunification, the long-term consequences of the refugee experience, political violence and torture are factors that perpetuate individual vulnerability. Vulnerability cannot be captured by legal definitions alone. It is the intersectionality of different factors that brings further vulnerabilities to light.

The Contributions in Detail

Monika Mokre deals with the vulnerability of young male refugees. She pursues two analytical goals. Firstly, she shows that discourses on the vulnerability of migrants and the hazards they face do not contradict but complement each other. Secondly, she elucidates the specific gender reference of these discourses, which in effect exclude young refugee men from support services. *Gabriele Rasuly-Palczyk's* contribution is dedicated to the emergence of the vulnerability paradigm and its implementation. Although the term is omnipresent in international as well as national discourses, there is as yet no consensus on to whom and how the term is applied. The author presents the different definitions and approaches based on an inherent or a situational understanding of vulnerability and discusses the legal instruments of operational refugee

protection. *Sabine Bauer-Amin and Maria Six-Hohenbalken* focus on transformations in the family relationships of refugees from Syria. Experiences of flight cause ambivalences and phases of liminality with regard to spatial and temporal factors. The authors use examples from interviews with refugees from Syria to show how family structures, which are anyhow constantly evolving, change in the context of flight. Refuge not only causes a fragmentation of families, but also promotes their denucleation, which as a major consequence leads to efforts to maintain family relationships on a larger scale despite considerable spatial distances. *Josef Kohlbacher* analyses the resident mobility of refugees from Afghanistan within Austria in the field of tension between determinants of vulnerability and the structural integration opportunities on the housing market. Most refugees prefer to live in an urban setting. As a result, those entitled to asylum, tend to migrate to Vienna. However, this hardly corresponds to a realistic assessment of the real opportunities on the urban labour and housing market, which is analysed in the article. *Lena Siemers* deals with the situation of Nigerian women who have become victims of human trafficking and forced prostitution. In the course of psychosocial counselling in 2018 and 2019, the author supported numerous trafficked persons and learned about their fates. On the basis of the experience of a young woman sold into prostitution via Libya to France and then to Germany, she

describes the practices of human trafficking and the numerous mechanisms of sexual exploitation and oppression young women from Nigeria are exposed to. The text by *Serdar Arslan, Cécile Balbous and Magdalena Mach* from Queer Base Vienna is dedicated to LGBTIQ refugees, and their specific problems between vulnerability and self-empowerment in the Austrian asylum system. LGBTIQ are exposed to various forms of discrimination, especially to social and institutional racism. In particular, they find themselves in the difficult situation of having to perform their sexual orientation within a normative framework that offers no space for otherness. This contribution examines the socio-political (and legal) situation of LGBTIQ refugees from a perspective grounded in activist practice. *Klaus Mihacek and Martin Stepanek* of the Psychosocial Centre ESRA (Hebrew for “aid”) analyse the requirements of psychosocial care models for the treatment of trauma sequelae in the context of flight and migration. In psychotraumatology, “trauma” is understood as a physical and psychological reaction to situations of extraordinary threat or of a catastrophic scale that would trigger profound despair in almost any person. The authors describe the requirements that arise for the psychosocial care of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. *Thomas Wenzel and Reem Alksiri* from the World Psychiatric Association, Scientific Section on Psychological Aspects of Torture and Persecution and CEHRI (The Centre for the

Enforcement of Human Rights International) reflect on the many aspects of torture and human rights in an interdisciplinary framework. They emphasise that safeguarding such essential human rights as protection from torture and care for survivors and relatives hinges on an interdisciplinary cooperation bringing together health professionals, lawyers and cultural anthropologists and offering public support for those affected. *Ursula Trummer and Sonja Novak-Zezula* of the Center for Health and Migration (Vienna) discuss aspects of “irregular migration”. How to offer health care for persons who have migrated to Austria without a valid legal status? Their contribution analyses the results of a study conducted in four EU member states on the economic costs of care for these migrants, comparing primary care and emergency hospital care. The volume includes interviews with two experts on refugee work. One is with *Peter Sarto*, who works for the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and Young People (Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaft, KJA), which also attends to the needs of minors living in socio-pedagogical institutions. In the second interview, *Ali Gedik* reports on his experiences in caring for unaccompanied minor refugees.

The overall aim of the volume is to critically discuss the concept of vulnerability and to provide an overview of the theories associated with it. Of particular concern are the emergence of vulnerability, its differentiations in the

context of flight and migration, the danger of instrumentalization, as well as its practical implications. *Vulnerability in Contexts of Flight* offers conceptual and functional perspectives on this complex phenomenon and provides an overview of the specific practice-related tasks confronting the respective experts. In the context of flight, vulnerability occurs in many different forms, and the resulting consequences for refugees are just as diverse. We plead for a critical reflection on the social and legal framework and its impact on the perpetuation of vulnerability of refugees in the host societies. In politics, the great potential and skills of refugees tend to be overlooked. Institutionally, sustained efforts need to be made to promote and develop the agency of refugees, not only for their own benefit, but also for the benefit of the host societies.

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The Effects of UNHCR's Resilience Approach on The Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Lyla André

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Lebanon resembles other Middle Eastern states (except for Yemen) in that it is not part of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 protocol on the Status of Refugees and did not develop a national asylum system. After 3 years of relative openness, the Government of Lebanon forbade in 2015 the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) from registering additional Syrian refugees thereby denying them national but also international rights. This policy led to a situation in which about 70% of Syrian households in Lebanon have not one single member with a legal residency^[i]. With the UNHCR contribution to asylum in such a deadlock in Lebanon, its mandate has mainly focused on burden-sharing, that is to the contribution to protection in the host country. Closely embedded in a large scale "resilience" approach to refugees' plight, the way in which the UNHCR implements its mandate in Lebanon is illustrative of the rise of a new conception of refugee protection that weakens the Refugee Regime, as I argue in what follows.

UNHCR mandate in Lebanon targeting refugees' resilience and self-reliance

Framing the international stakeholders' response to the Syrian crisis, the [Refugee Resilience Regional Plan](#) (3RP) to address the Syrian crisis outlines the goal of "bringing about a scaling-up of resilience and stabilization-based development and humanitarian assistance to cope with the crises" by bringing together about 200 humanitarian and development partners, including governments, United Nations agencies, and national and international NGOs. Resilience was tellingly defined in 2017 by UNHCR as "the ability of individuals, households, communities, national institutions and systems to prevent, absorb and recover from shocks, while continuing to function and adapt in a way that supports long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, and the attainment of human rights."[\[ii\]](#). Resilience has become the essential goal of humanitarian & development joint action at a global level because it intends precisely to bridge the divide between relief, recovery, and development to prevent future crisis. In this perspective, service provision through the inclusion of forcibly displaced people into the hosting state services targets both resilience and self-reliance of refugees, linking humanitarian assistance and development: "While humanitarian action tends to be seen as contributing to the

self-reliance of forcibly displaced people and development cooperation as building the resilience of host populations, bringing these concepts together has evident value." Building on this common ground, UNHCR's contribution is supposed to serve its mandate of international protection: "UNHCR's work enhances protection and solutions by supporting self-reliance and resilience in three key areas: (1) strengthening the capacity of national services in the area of preparedness and emergency response, including contingency planning; (2) supporting national systems and local communities in responding to displacement once it occurs; and (3) helping equip the displaced for the future."[\[iii\]](#)

This evolution has also reached the education sector. In the same communication on resilience from a protection perspective, education is listed among UNHCR's main roles: "(2) supporting national systems and local communities once displacement occurs, in order to ensure the inclusion of displaced persons in national services, such as healthcare and education". In the case of the Syria crisis, the provision of education to refugees is enshrined both in the 3RP and in the international "No Lost Generation" initiative launched in 2013 by UNICEF and Save the Children to ensure that the Syrian children affected by the conflict are provided with education and protection in Syria and in neighboring countries.

In Lebanon, the 3RP regional framework gave way to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan that requires yearly assessments of refugees' needs for each sector. Within this setting, the education sector has been one of the most funded and the most visible in Lebanon from the onset of the Syrian crisis, as childhood education has remained a core objective of the international endeavor. According to its mandate, UNHCR leads the Refugee component of the 3RP that merely deals with protection activities implemented in coordination with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). Besides overseeing the Response, UNHCR is also a fund custodian, counting among the main humanitarian actors providing services to refugees. This prioritization of Education in Emergencies and its integration within the public system in Lebanon conceptually fits with UNHCR's stated objective of building multi-scale resilience of the individual - reaching both Lebanese & Syrian refugees; of the community - empowering most vulnerable local communities in the society; and of the State - reforming Public education.

Widening UNHCR's mandate: Legal Protection versus Protection activities

The past twenty years saw the development of discursive and institutional strategies prioritizing education among UNHCR's fields of action as it is a basic human right enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the

Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention. Accordingly, education is defined as a tool for protection fitting UNHCR's mandate and shedding new light on its "raison d'être". UNHCR education activities foster social cohesion, provide access to life-saving information, address psychosocial needs, and offer a stable and safe environment for those who need it most^[iv]. Based on this definition, protection is seen as an outcome of the implementation of UNHCR's mandate. Such a conception of international protection - as service provision - gained ascendancy over that of protection - as the provision of rights to the individual - as it used to be traditionally prioritized in the Refugee Regime. Gradually, the normalization of UNHCR's humanitarian mandate aligned with that of other humanitarian stakeholders privileging a more technical and "evidence-based assessments of needs" that might overshadow the advocacy in favor of increased rights.

International efforts in the field of education in Lebanon are particularly illustrative of this tendency. In Lebanon, over half of Syrian refugees are children below the age of 18^[v]. This situation has confronted the Lebanese public-school system with a gradual influx since 2013, as the country has always allowed Syrian refugee children to pursue an accredited education. The Ministry of Education (MEHE) has taken the institutional lead of the Education in Emergency response with the "[Reaching All Children with Education](#)" (RACE) program developed with the support of

the international community led by the UN. The strategy has targeted Syrian and Lebanese pupils covering "both immediate humanitarian response interventions as well as longer term support that will build the resilience of children, communities, the education and protection systems, and infrastructure that are so critical to their future".^[vi] The understanding of education as a tool for protection is mentioned in the introduction of the RACE II Strategy as an emerging theme for donors considering "the need to increase the focus on those sectors traditionally not well covered in humanitarian responses, but which are essential to protecting the future of an entire generation of children and the prospects of stability in Syria and the region". Education as a socio-economic and collective right encompasses refugees in the wider community of the "most vulnerable" enabling them to access public services.

UNHCR response to Syrian refugees is well enshrined in the international joint humanitarian-development effort, tipping the scale from a strict definition of international legal protection to a widened definition of protection based on service provision. Thereby, UNHCR's contribution to Syrian refugees' protection in Lebanon might overshadow the Refugee Regime's two mandates, namely that of (a) legal Protection and (b) the purpose of finding durable solutions for refugees. In other words, the international response to the Syrian refugees in Lebanon further shifts away international practice; from a rights-

based approach to a need-based approach of international Protection; and from a purpose-centered process of finding durable solutions to a never-ending process of service provision. In doing so, both the discursive strategy and the implementation of UNHCR mandate in international protection question the classical statement according to which “Protection is thus based in the law; it may be wider than rights, but it begins with rights and rights permeate the whole”.[\[vii\]](#)

Service provision and the lack of legal and political responsibility for refugees

Deprived of its legal component, UNHCR's mandate of protection in Lebanon emphasizes the provision of services and targets resilience of the individual and beyond, refugees' self-reliance. The resilience-based approach to burden-sharing somehow institutionalized what used to be an anomaly or an “institutional curiosity”[\[viii\]](#) of the interstate system embodied by The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Established in 1949 as a three-year temporary mandate until a just and durable solution for Palestinian refugees was achieved, the agency's temporary mandate has periodically been renewed for over 70 years, and it continues to provide essential services such as education, health, relief and social services to Palestine refugees in the Near East until the present. Far from being an innovative

solution, the widened definition of protection promoted by the international community via the 3RP rather serves to mainstream an exceptional formula used decades ago in response to the exile of Palestinians. However, even lacking a protection mandate, UNRWA has played a changing and ambiguous political role representing Palestinian refugees in their hosting territories; this is precisely what distinguishes the Palestinian experience from the current response to Syrian refugees in the Middle East. Moreover, as it has widened its relief and humanitarian mandate towards development, UNRWA has increasingly acted as a service provider, therefore playing a Nation State's role. In contrast, through its fragmented sectoral approach, the 3RP is able neither to be a representative agency nor to embody political and legal responsibility for Syrian refugees.

Protection beyond service provision

Currently, the collapse of basic economic and social services following the accumulation of major crises in Lebanon points out a "protection gap" and brings back the issue of legal protection for refugees and migrants. Amid an unprecedented economic crisis and following the Beirut Blast of August 4, 2020, both Lebanese and non-Lebanese experienced a rapid deterioration of their socio-economic conditions. Gaps in resources, services and capacities continue to widen, further hindering the access to and the

quality of basic services (water and sanitation, shelter, electricity, food supply) before even tackling the issue of education. As the government was forced to put the country under a strict lockdown in January 2021, [UNHCR](#) reported that 88% of the refugees are living below the extreme poverty line and [50% of the Lebanese population](#) fell below the poverty line.

In the light of refugees' increasing vulnerability, the provision of basic services seems to go hand in hand with the provision of legal protection. A lack of legal residency and a work permit *de facto* worsens refugees' living conditions as legal discrimination weighs on their daily lives exposing them to the risk of arrest and detention. It also hampers their access to basic services like education, as well as to obtaining civil status documents (marriage, birth registration). Indeed, despite the many accomplishments of the RACE strategies and while their exile reaches nearly a decade, around 44% of Syrian children (aged 6 – 14) remain out of school, out of which 36% remained out of learning in the year 2018-2019.[\[ix\]](#) The COVID 19 outbreak one year ago has further compromised Syrian refugees' access to education. Notwithstanding COVID 19 contamination rate fluctuances, schools have remained closed for about a year in Lebanon. Educational programs are conducted remotely and more than 90% of public schools are delivering daily lessons via WhatsApp or Telegram. Remote learning reduces

consequently the quality and outreach of education as it also conditions attendance to an internet connection and the availability of a smartphone and/or a computer. Even though UNHCR officially advocates for the fulfillment of its original mandate, the management of Syrian refugees' protection in Lebanon is facing a political stalemate. As a result, the resilience-based approach of service provision remains the only viable and consensual approach.

At the core of the resilience-based burden-sharing lies the danger that the approach of prioritizing collective rights over the traditional Refugee Regime takes root. It is worth remembering that the traditional Refugee Regime was achieved through the creation of an independent international institution responsible for refugees' international protection. To quote Hyndman, "Responses to human displacement and assistance to Forced migration speak the language of humanism: the protection of rights for all people."^[x] Without alternatives to the current resilience-based frame, there is a great risk that the precarious situation of the refugees will be reproduced and exacerbated. This would once again raise the issue of statelessness issue that the Refugee Regime was supposed to solve.

Notes

^[i] 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

[ii] Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective

EC/68/SC/CRP.4.

[iii] *Ibid.*

[iv] UNHCR Refugee Education 2030 – A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion.

[v] As of December 2019, Lebanon hosts 620,706 refugee children and youth of all nationalities (i.e. Syrian, Iraqi, Somali, Sudanese, Eritrean, etc.) between the ages of 3 and 18, out of a total refugee population of 1,518,500. UNHCR registration figures, Lebanon Education Unit, 2021.

[vi] RACE II, June 2014, 5.

[vii] Goodwin-Gill. (2014) The International Law of Refugee Protection in The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199652433.013.0021.

[viii] Al Hussein (2005) Réfugiés 50 ans après : l'évolution de la représentation du réfugié palestinien dans le discours officiel de l'UNRWA. Stephanie Latte Abdallah. Images aux frontières : représentations et constructions sociales et politiques –Palestine, Jordanie 1948-2000, IFPO. 117.

[ix] UNHCR Lebanon Education Unit, 2021.

[x] Hyndman. (2000). Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism. University of Minnesota Press. 181-182.

The category of nationality in an investigation on Colombian refugees in Brazil

Angela Facundo Navia

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For several years I have conducted anthropological research on the political and administrative character of refuge in Brazil. Although more recently I have worked with people from other countries, my expertise mostly rests on the experiences of Colombians with a wide range of state officials, international agencies and NGOs.

The mention of nationality when describing the groups we work with is viewed with suspicion by some authors addressing the anthropology of migration. They point out, quite rightly, that considering nationality as the main criterion for the analysis of what happens to people when they migrate may disregard other more important factors such as class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, political action, etc. These categories are indeed better suited to explain the enormous inequalities in access to the benefits and rights in the citizen's link with a state. The criterion of nationality, moreover, can lead us to take for granted or naturalize the very idea of nationhood, that is, a permanent construction that aims to encompass an enormous diversity of subjects, times, spaces, experiences,

and memories, and present it to us as an experience common to the group of people it tries to describe (Colombians, Haitians, Venezuelans, Syrians, etc.).

We know that, on the contrary, in addition to the differentiated experiences that we have just pointed out, regional variations in Latin American countries are strongly marked and become indispensable elements for understanding the reasons why people migrate, flee, are displaced or are afraid to return. Finally, the criticisms point, also rightly, to the fact that not all people have a nationality and that the dispute over what the national project should look like is often the source of the violence that expels people and allows banishment to be one of the contemporary political punishments.

On the other hand, there are also risks if the category of nationality or national origin of refugees is completely ignored in our investigations. Like it or not, the prevailing model of contemporary planetary organization is that of nation-states that provokes what author Liisa Malkki calls the "national order of things" (1995). Refugees in that order are thought of and produced as inhabitants of a different world: "the world of refugees", as people who are outside the national order and outside the power of the state, as Butler has also pointed out in conversation with Spivak (2007). This reading ignores the situations of violence and injustice that led to the exodus from their country of origin, nationality or where they lived for a time.

The formulas so used in the language of humanitarian management in Brazil such as restart, new opportunity and a life that is remade from scratch also reinforce the idea that the refugee ceases to exist in that hostile place of origin and will be reborn protected and sheltered in a place of peace. It is also assumed that this change of state will occur thanks to the power of the State to recognize people as refugees. That is clearly not what happens. Nor do these notions mirror what we have seen in the trajectories of refugees, even among those who manage to activate an official application or obtain such recognition^[i].

In the case of Colombia, moreover, nationality has been used not only to describe and qualify people, but also the conflict itself, which causes one of the most intense and prolonged displacements in the world, leaving to date more than 8 million people forcibly displaced and almost 400 thousand refugees (UNHCR, 2000).^[ii] The formula "the internal Colombian conflict" invokes the idea that this is only a product of relations between individuals and groups within the country, ignoring the game of international interests that feeds and keeps it active and, in addition, reinforces the imagination of a conflict contained by the fictitious lines that are the geopolitical borders. The dynamics of the war in Colombia, as persecution of political opponents and social leaders, the control of local economics with practices such as money-lending, forced displacement of populations and the export of

paramilitaries and mercenaries (as was made clear in the recent assassination of the president of Haiti), to name but a few, are practices that have passed beyond Colombia's national borders long ago and are part of regional dynamics.

As a research category, nationality does not necessarily give us information about people's specific experiences or conditions, or even their character, way of thinking, and personality. Instead, it locates the analysis of the social situation in a geopolitical context. In addition, the diplomatic relationship between different countries usually affects the administrative responses of a government when it comes to acknowledging groups of refugees. This can be seen in the attitude of the Brazilian government to Venezuelans. Another case in point is the issuance of humanitarian visas for most of the Haitians who arrived at the beginning of the last decade^[iii].

In the early 2010s, the massive presence of people from Haiti strongly mobilized public opinion, the media and humanitarian agencies in Brazil, as is the case today with Venezuelans. In this context, most of the economic benefits or in-kind donations distributed by NGOs went to Haitians, generating discontent on the part of some white-mestizo Colombian families who at the time lived in the same shelters and demanded the same benefits. Some Afro-Colombians, on the other hand, benefited from a kind of racially informed blindness of some officials who thought,

according to my interlocutors, that all the black people in these management spaces were Haitians. Thus, a political-administrative decision, based on the national order of things, directly impacted the daily lives and coexistence of people who shared the status of asylum seekers.

In the contexts investigated, nationality also appears as an element of negotiation based on the attributes that are commonly associated with a certain group. The refugees and applicants with whom I spoke were convinced, for example, that Colombians were very hardworking and that this characteristic was associated with nationality. Other nationalities, by contrast, were thought to be lazy and deceptive. Elsewhere (Facundo, 2021), I have explored how these supposed national characteristics are associated with gender and especially with race. Here, I want to point out that the interpretation of the national characteristics was not only carried out by migrants, but also by the officials responsible for implementing the programs for the reception and care of refugees and applicants.

As for the Colombian refugees in Brazil, it struck me that the officials emphatically referred to their case as positive and that this evaluation was based not only on the technical competence of the programs and officials, but also on the characteristics of the Colombians. According to officials, Colombians, especially those who arrived as refugees through the solidarity resettlement program,

were very grateful people, who accepted any job, who complained little about life's problems and were always willing to make progress. Most striking to me was that those supposed characteristics of Colombians were always contrasted with the supposed characteristics of Palestinians who had also arrived in the country through the resettlement program. For the officials I interviewed, the Palestinians had acquired "the habit of protest" and that prevented them from establishing a dialogue that Brazilian programs considered adequate and educated, as was explored by Sonia Hamid (2019). In addition, their cultural habits and their alleged *machismo* contrasted, according to the officials, with Brazilian cultural dynamics, including hygiene habits, the custom of salaried female labor, as well as the manifestation of gratitude. In that permanent comparison, Colombians in Brazil were constructed as a "close otherness" in contrast to the "radical otherness" represented by other national groups.

In addition to the interpretation of nationality, another element that allowed an immense drama, still active, of millions of people banished, exiled, persecuted, to be transformed into a successful story of refuge and integration in the Brazilian nation, was the small number of Colombian refugees. At the time I started the investigations there were fewer than 700 Colombians, most of whom had come through the Brazilian resettlement program for Colombian refugees in Ecuador (which at the time had

recognized almost 60,000 Colombian refugees). Therefore, they had not arrived in Brazil on their own and had not activated an application for refuge. The low number of Colombian refugees was not read by the representatives of the government or its NGOs as a problem. Quite the contrary: it was seen as evidence of the good technical management of programs that only brought in people according to the reception capacity. Moreover, starting in 2011, when Colombia's then-president recognized for the first time in national history that there was an armed conflict, Brazilian officials' interpretation was that Colombia would be in the process of finding its way to peace and therefore capable of protecting its own citizens. This interpretation translated into a refinement of the selection criteria for spontaneous refugees, a reduction in the number of applications granted, and the progressive deactivation of the resettlement program for Colombians.

The Residence and Free Transit Agreement between Mercosur member countries and partners, including Colombia, was also a key element in reducing the number of refugee applications. According to my interlocutors, federal police officials refused to open the refugee application processes, citing the option of obtaining immigration regularization through the residence treaty. Furthermore, many of those holding the required documents and capable of paying the fees, chose this option, as it did not impose restrictions on them in entering

and leaving the country, or paying vital visits to Colombia. The national and international bodies responsible for the management of refugees and migrants insist on the need to distinguish between different categories to safeguard the status of the refugee. However, in the daily lives of the people with whom I worked, these categories are often mixed.

In recent years, the situation in Colombia has deteriorated again. Assassinations of social leaders and signatories of the failed peace agreement have increased exponentially. Collective displacements and massacres have again reached the same scale as in the closing decade of the last century, leaving vast territories available for mega mining, agro-industrial, tourism and energy generation projects. The repression of social protest leaves hundreds of people missing, killed, maimed, or imprisoned without due process of law.^[iv] Social inequality is progressively increasing on account of the prevailing war economy and the Covid-19 pandemic^[v].

Despite rising Colombian applications for asylum in Brazil, the majority of residence permits issued since 2016 are based on the Mercosur agreement. This calls into question the supposed transparency according to which an experience of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution translates into a request for protection or its recognition. I do not intend to question the moral and existential value that the figure of the refugee has for many

people, and that, in multiple ways, dignifies and recognizes their suffering. But based on the case illustrated here, I suggest that not all the well-founded fears of persecution are captured by this juridical-political figure.

Moreover, we can say that the economic consequences of the state of war experienced by a country like Colombia make it difficult to distinguish the threats to life derived from deterritorialization from economic or political threats. The perception of events in a given country and their translation into protection policies for the affected persons is a complex game that includes decisions and administrative traditions of the nation-state and diplomatic relations, as well as assessments and negotiations with categories of nationality that qualify individuals and the conflicts or causes of expulsion. Yet, perhaps most importantly, protection and policies also depend on the assessments and choices (even if they are very limited) of migrants themselves.

Notes

[i] Many of the contemporary nation state mobility regimes are based on what is known as “reciprocity rule”. This means that the nation states treat citizens of a determinate country as their own citizens are treated in that country. One of the problems of that manifestation of the power of the state is that stateless persons do not have a state to enable such rule. Often stateless persons are treated in the

worst possible manner in the countries applying the reciprocity rule.

[ii] Due to the dynamics of the conflict in Colombia, which has lasted for more than 7 decades, there are disputes over the starting date for accounting for displacements. The year considered by the National Government is 1985. The historical record, according to the Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) is 8.1 million displaced from 1985 to December 31, 2020. The IDMC (Global Observatory of Internal Displacement) in collaboration with the RUV published in 2021 a Global Report on Internal Displacement estimating that, of that historical accumulated, almost 3,300,000 people had overcome the condition of displacement to 2020. The number of people who remain displaced, according to that report, is 4,922,000. Nevertheless, considering that the conflict continues active, the risks of new displacements remain, and the historical record is used for social care and repair policies, the official data continues to be that of the historical record. https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/grid2021_idmc.pdf#page=34?v=2

[iii] I thank Leonardo Schiocchet for reminding me that an exception to this dynamic was the case of Syrian refugees. The Brazilian government opted for the formula "refugees from the conflict in Syria." So he included in that group people of other nationalities, including Palestinian

refugees. A much broader way of protection than that of other countries at the time.

[iv] See the Reports of Indepaz and Tremors: https://4ed5c6d6-a3c0-4a68-8191-92ab5d1ca365.filesusr.com/ugd/7bbd97_691330ba1e714daea53990b35ab351df.pdf

[v] These circumstances led to one of the most intense social massive protests in recent years. Since April 28 of this year a national strike was declared. More information about the situation of human rights in the context of the national strike was available in: <http://www.indepaz.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/3.-INFORME-VIOLENCIAS-EN-EL-MARCO-DEL-PARO-NACIONAL-2021.pdf>

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Thinking of Environmental Migration through Translocality and Mobilities

Daniela Paredes Grijalva and Rachael Diniega

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Environmental Migration: From Threat to Everyday Experience

Millions of “climate refugees” fleeing drought on their way to Europe or Pacific islanders left with no sovereign territory as sea level rises. Does this sound familiar? Certainly such imagery representing the “human face of climate change” has been successful in gaining public attention to urge immediate action. At the same time, national security policymakers and think-tanks in the receiving countries tend to perceive such mass migration as a threat. Following this securitization logic, nation-states see the need to protect themselves against it.

Migration scholars have countered such “alarmists” by classifying the phenomenon as a routine and integral aspect of a complex web of migration experiences. (Non-)migration decisions range from forced to voluntary, and most movements initiated by environmental changes or disasters will be short-distance, temporary, or within countries. As framings of environmental migration have gained in fluidity and scope, the nuances have been illuminated further through multidisciplinary research

spanning the social and natural sciences. We argue that environmental migration demands more refined attention, particularly from the viewpoint of policymaking, in order to move from a logic of protection against migrants to one of protecting them and their human rights.

Securitization paints a simplistic picture. We argue that two particular concepts--translocality and (im)mobility--point towards new directions in understanding the fabric of human-environment relations. We have both begun our doctoral projects researching different aspects of this issue in Morocco and Indonesia. In this essay, we set out to illustrate our preliminary findings on how to expand our conceptualization of environmental migration. Only by capturing the everyday yet complex realities of migrants themselves can we lay a foundation for expanding measures geared towards the protection of human rights that accurately address their situation.



Fig. 01: Rural town in the Middle Atlas Mountains, Morocco

Integrating Translocality into Environmental Migration

The existing research on environmental migration has widened the conceptual spectrum beyond such dichotomies and categorizations like forced or voluntary, the number of “climate refugees,” and the singling out of isolated reasons for migration. However, strict divisions persist, two of which can be addressed by the concept of translocality. First, current research on climate change and migration primarily focuses on the question of how climate change will affect human migration and emphasizes the urgency for mitigating climate change. Second, in part due to the concept of a unidirectional flow of environment to migration, studies also assume divisions between origin and destination and prioritize rural-to-urban migration.

Broadly defined, the concept of translocality examines the environment and migration as part of the integrated socio-ecological system (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013). Rather than looking at migration as a sudden or new phenomenon driven by singular or multiple factors, it assumes that migration (or mobilities) also occurs as a natural part of life trajectories. The existing movements have an impact on the environment, which also in turn affects future migration decisions and perceptions of climate change. They are intricately linked. Thus, translocality integrates the human-environment nexus to

examine how environmental factors influence mobility and how mobility itself influences the environment. This directly counters the security narrative that environmental change in place A automatically leads to migration to place B, end of story. Rather, there are ongoing migration pathways and mobilities that occur parallel to or in conjunction with environmental changes and create them.

Translocality also upends the strict categorization of origin, transit, and destination by facilitating the study of multi-directional connections and the mutual (re-)shaping of communities. It challenges the assumption that environmental change is only happening in the place of “origin”, often coded as rural or domestic, versus the destination, often connoted as urban or international. A singular place is connected to others translocally through multiple types of simultaneous mobilities. More often than not, people are not only moving from a location; they are also moving to it or passing through. The localities in question may be rural, semi-urban, or urban. And, returning to the earlier point, each of these location’s environments is affected by each type of mobility and has its own environment that factors into mobility decisions and trajectories.

Translocality thus is a concept that can illuminate the complexity within the environment-migration web. It offers further insights into the ways in which migration has

an impact on the environment and moves away from the boundaries of origin, transit, and destination.

Towards an Environment-(Im)Mobility Nexus

Looking at the nexus of environment and migration has too often been framed as a matter of international border crossings by people affected by some environmental crisis. While this is certainly a significant part of the issue, we argue that focusing on the physical movement of people per se obscures the numerous other relevant facets. For instance, it does not allow to adequately understand how the populations in question and the environment mutually constitute each other. What is more, it might project a migrant subjectivity on people living translocal lives.

Migration studies have established that there are multiple factors driving migration and that it may also take multiple trajectories. The (im)mobilities approach builds on these findings and expands the scope of study to include the circulation of ideas, things, and people in everyday life. It further attempts to problematize the notions of forced and voluntary migration by applying anthropology's holistic view of lived experience. Using mobilities as a concept, ethnographic research has revealed how people, places, things and ideas become connected across time and space.

While notions of mobility are abundant in anthropological inquiry, sociologists and geographers have led the way for a mobilities turn in the social sciences. Anthropologists have in turn pointed out that the very same processes shaping mobility also produce immobility and exclusion (Cunningham & Heyman 2004). Critical anthropological approaches questioning notions of boundedness and sedentary biases—which privilege non-migration--have expanded our perception of human movements.

The analysis through the perspective of regimes of mobility on a global scale can illuminate the forces at play (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013). The regimes are embedded in particular environments and in social structures and articulations of power at different levels. Thinking of environmental migration in these terms could help us frame the movement of people in the context of environmental change in relation to power asymmetries from the start. What is more, this framework could help us understand how ideas of environmental change and ideas of migration circulate across translocal networks.

Moving Away from Securitization to Human Rights

We feel that it is paramount to gain a holistic understanding of the social and the environmental questions involved in migration. Ultimately, however, the issue of environmental migration is about people, as

Sarah Louise Nash (2018) reminds us. While it has been important to gain public attention, there is the apprehension that high-profile discussions may instrumentalize statistical projections to inspire fear. Will a translocal and mobilities lens on environmental migration enable us to understand the ways in which people exercise their human rights? Will such a conceptualization shift the debate away from hardline positions advocating securitization and restrictive migration policies?

The human rights community has connected the impact of climate change on human rights and human migration since the advocacy of Small Island Developing States to the Human Rights Council in the 2000s. Human rights narratives on environmental migration often focus on the gap within international protection instruments. They refer to the fact that the Geneva Convention of 1951 does not include environmental factors as grounds for refugee status. In short, there are no legal “climate refugees.” Some actors like the International Organization for Migration, the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, and specialized organizations on internal and disaster displacement have raised awareness on the need to consider existing guiding principles and regulations for internal displacement. The acknowledgement of environmental migration in the landmark Paris Climate Agreement COP21 and the Global Compact for Migration reveals an evolving consensus among international actors

in the highest levels of climate negotiations and international migration governance respectively. What exactly a human rights-based approach means for environmental migration, however, remains an ongoing task.



Fig. 02: On the move in Eastern Indonesia

Our Projects

The relationship between everyday translocal (im)mobilities, climate change, and human rights is understudied. Both migration and environmental studies show us that the underlying reasons are complex and difficult to pinpoint. At the same time, against this backdrop, it is important to consider that there are ongoing debates at a conceptual and a practical level on the rights of this diverse group of people in international law. By

adopting the lens of translocal mobilities, our projects will contribute to identifying which rights are exercised or restricted.

For the case of the Central Sulawesi populations displaced during the triple disaster of September 2018 (earthquake, soil liquefaction, and tsunami), a security-based analysis would focus on how to regulate the lives of hundreds of thousands of displaced people to keep order in the relocation sites. Our proposed framework, by contrast, suggests the necessity of investigating how mobilities are shaped by at times long-lasting translocal networks across our field sites. In terms of human rights, the most pressing issues are access to health, housing, and decent work in a sphere not governed by sedentarist rights-granting schemes.

To understand the effect of migration on the environment in Morocco, a securitization approach would emphasize the importance of regulating migration to minimize harm to the environment (and thus prevent further environmental migration). The approach highlighting translocal mobilities, by contrast, would reveal how migration and environmental change interact in non-linear mechanisms and thus which environment- and migration-related human rights are of key concern. This would build a foundation for the inclusion of human rights and local environmental changes in the study of translocal mobilities, allowing us to gain an understanding of which

human rights advocacy paths best fit the realities on-the-ground.

Final Remarks

To tackle the urgent and multidimensional issue of environmental migration both for policy and academia, collaboration across disciplines is essential to do justice to affected peoples. We wish to move beyond a migration management or securitization view towards a path that listens to people's stories and asks questions about the realization of human rights. We suggest that cross-disciplinary inclusion of these framings of translocality and mobilities into each of our research projects will add much-needed perspectives for an ethically grounded representation of the people we meet and the realities of their everyday lives. Whether tackling displacement in Indonesia or the effects of migration on the Moroccan environment, translocal mobilities provide a useful framework of analysis and synthesis disentangling the underlying complexity of our dissertation projects. These representational descriptions could then contribute as a lens for developing a human rights-based approach for environmental migration.

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“The Ideal Austrian” vs. “the Refugee”: The Construction of Collective Identities in the “Values and Orientation Courses”

Hannah Myott and Mina Vasileva

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Numerous countries in Europe have “integration”[1] requirements for refugees who have recently arrived, although these programs vary greatly. Many integration policies build on a foundational premise about essentialized identities of host societies (“us”) and newcomers (“them”), which is an integrationist logic that we seek to problematize. In the Austrian case, one element of this logic is the discourse of “fundamental values” which suggests that native Austrians “have” something that incoming refugees lack. In the following, we investigate this topic and its underlying assumptions by drawing from fieldwork that was conducted between October 2018 and March 2019 and focused on one of Austria’s integration requirements, the so-called “values and orientation courses” (Werte- und Orientierungskurse) for refugees.

What are the Values and Orientation Courses?

The idea of communicating Austrian *Grundwerte* (fundamental values) to those entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection goes back to

2010, when the first National Action Plan for Integration (NAP.I) was adopted. Even more than that, like the other seven Handlungsfelder (fields of action), the area Rechtsstaat und Werte (rule of law and values), which laid the foundation for the classes, was already developed in 2008/2009 (BMEIA National Action Plan for Integration). It then took until 2015 for the “50-Point Plan” (50 Action Points: A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria) to be officially put together by Heinz Faßmann and an expert council under the mandate of Sebastian Kurz, then Minister of Integration. This publication was the first that BMEIA brought out to explicitly target the integration process of refugees in Austria. The “Rule of Law and Values” section originally elaborated the idea for a “course format, specifically designed for [the] initial orientation purposes (...) [of] persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection [giving] a good overview of life in Austria and the fundamental values governing coexistence” (2015: 14).

The 50-Point Plan formed the basis for the values and orientation courses, which are mandated in the “Integration Act” of 2017. According to the Integration Act, “the values and orientation courses must teach participants about the democratic system and the fundamental principles derivable from it (fundamental values of the legal and social systems), and about the rules of peaceful coexistence” (Integration Act 2017: §5.3). They are carried

out by the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, or ÖIF) and are organized as one single eight-hour session guided by an instructor and an interpreter. According to the official training document *My Life in Austria: Opportunities and Rules*, the curriculum of the courses is set up to start with History and Its Effects on Present-Day Austria, then proceed to Language and Education, Labor Market and Economy, Healthcare, Housing and Good Neighborliness, Legal Integration, and Cultural Integration (BMEIA/ÖIF 2016: 86).

The course begins with Austria's geography and history starting from Franz Joseph onwards, addressing topics such as Maria Theresia, both world wars, and antisemitism. The topics of school and work are then presented, followed by the constitutional state, media/press, equality, and democracy. This is followed by a section on duties, which mainly includes explaining the solidarity principle, taxes, and what kinds of social security they ensure. The curriculum then turns to how participants can—and why they should—learn German on their own. Health-related topics are also raised, where participants are taught what an e-card is and how it works. This is followed by rules for good cohabitation such as waste disposal, privacy, legal rest hours, nighttime periods, and the avoidance of noise nuisance. The last part of the curriculum deals with intercultural competencies. This includes an exercise in which participants must decide

whether certain pictures represent something that is legally permitted in Austria, socially accepted, none, or both.

While the stated goal of the Federal Act and the courses contained therein is to “quickly integrate persons who are legally resident in Austria into Austrian society” (Integration Act 2017: §1.1), the reality is that refugees may only attend the course after receiving their legal asylum in Austria—a process that in some cases takes years. This highlights the symbolic nature of the courses and begs the question why they hold such a prominent position in recent integration measures.

Construction of “the Austrian” Identity

The course curriculum constructs and communicates an essentialized “Austrianness,” which we refer to as “the ideal Austrian.” This ideal citizen is perfect; they never cross the street when the light is red, they are extremely neighborly, and they go through life with a sense of solidarity with their fellow citizens. To illustrate this ideal Austrian, the values and orientation course’s accompanying booklet, *My Life in Austria: Opportunities and Rules* (BMEIA/ÖIF 2016), features photo examples with captions about Austrian society/behavior underneath. One photo features a woman wearing a high-visibility jacket and a hard hat, stating: “Technical professions and management positions are open to both women and men”

(ibid.: 100). Another shows two women talking and smiling, with the caption: “Neighbours often talk to one another and help each other” (ibid.: 117). And, under a photo that shows a businesswoman standing and explaining something to three employees at a computer, the caption says: “In the labour market, as in all other areas of life in Austria, women have the same rights as men” (ibid.: 104).

This ideal Austrian lives in a utopic version of Austria as well, where gender inequality does not exist. The fact that Austria is ranked relatively low on the Global Gender Gap report compared to other countries in the Global North (WE Forum 2017) does not play a role in this version of Austria. Without presuming to understand the motivation behind representing Austrians in such a way, it is clear that it is at best oversimplified and at worst misleading. The construction and communication of this idealized character reinforces an imagined collective national identity that serves as an example for refugees and situates two essentialized, collective identities against one another: “the Austrians” and “the refugees.” These contrastive identities are reminiscent of Said's concept of Orientalism, which defines Europe as the Orient's “contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1978: 9f). Likewise, Austrianness is developed in contrast to its “others,” in this case, “refugees.” These essentialized identities fit into the “powerful regime of classification, an apparently commonsensical system of ordering and sorting

people into national kinds and types” brought to light by Liisa Malkki (1995: 6). She problematizes the widespread universalization of “the refugee” and “the nation,” categories that continue to exist in today’s “national order of things”. In the case of the values and orientation courses, defining “the Austrian” in such stark terms within this system of classification and categorization implicitly produces and reproduces constructed images of not only a homogenized Austrian identity, but also the refugees’ identity.

Construction of “the Refugee” Identity

In general, refugees are portrayed as deficient—they have to take the courses because they lack basic Austrian values. They are imagined as a homogeneous group characterized by being Muslim, non-secular, antisemitic, homophobic, and not respecting women’s rights. All these ascribed qualities create a group of external “others” whose integration into Austrian society seems difficult or even unachievable.

Part of the problem in identifying these issues is that this characterization is rarely explicit. It is implied through comparison and an overemphasis on “Austrian fundamental values.” The implication of this is that this characterization is difficult to “prove,” allowing it to pervade without too much controversy. Some markers of these pervasive understandings about the collective

“otherness” of refugees include implicit or explicit comments that take for granted a common acceptance of these assumptions. For example, during our meeting with a representative of an Austrian ministry who is involved with integration programs, it was mentioned how the curriculum is especially designed for refugees and that he would not lecture American, Canadian, or German migrants on (gender) equality. Not only is this a very generalized assumption for a highly diverse group of people, but it also perpetuates the narrative of a progressive, perfectly gender equal “western world” versus a patriarchal, backwards Middle Eastern one—“the West” versus “the Orient,” as Said puts it (1978).

Similarly, in our interview with a member of the “team of experts” who formed the “50-Point Plan,” assumptions about patriarchy, modernism, and gender roles of migrants came to light. This member referred to migrants as harboring a “traditional patriarchal sort of thinking,” which was seen in Austria in the 1960s and 70s. This modernism—seeing societal progress as a linear development, for which a country like Austria is “ahead” of a country like Syria—although well-meaning, displays a subliminal understanding that homogenizes refugees into one “patriarchal” category. Likewise, our interview with a values and orientation course instructor uncovered the assumption that refugees are not used to women working, another homogenizing assumption that puts all refugees in

one “basket,” so to speak. Finally, the structure and curriculum of the courses were presented to us in a workshop for “MultiplikatorInnen.” In this workshop, subtle comments and emphases, including topics such as antisemitism, women’s independence, and the importance of keeping religion private, as well as side comments such as “you can’t just go around swearing at people,” display the underlying culturist (Schinkel 2017), civilizationist (Brubaker 2017), integrationist (Meissner and Heil 2020) assumptions at the base of the courses: Refugees—especially Muslim refugees—have a cultural deficiency that makes their values incompatible with Austrian ones. They must be trained how to be more “Austrian” in order to coexist peacefully.

Many recent policies in countries in Europe and beyond share a common grounding in identitarian[2] civilizationism, or “construing the opposition between self and other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms” (Brubaker 2017: 3). This is one manifestation of an “us” versus “them” rhetoric often used in relation to an imagined Muslim other. Similar to this concept of “civilizationism,” the values and orientation courses place emphasis on the concepts of secularism and liberalism. Both of these categories are activated through their placement against Muslims, who are thus portrayed as the opposite and therefore a potential threat to liberal

and secular values such as gay rights, women, Jews, and freedom of speech.

In order to legitimize Muslims' position as "the other," the religion itself must be instead viewed as a kind of culture (Karagiannis and Randeria 2016). Emphasizing the civilizational threat of Islam and the cultural identity of Christianity allows increasingly restrictive integration policies to exist and gain popularity without drawing accusations of religious discrimination. It can even simultaneously highlight secularism as a sign of progressive "Western" society, as evident in the Austrian values and orientation courses.

In this regard, the problem is not that the values and orientation courses bring up women's rights, LGBTQI rights, freedom of speech, or nonviolence, but that they construct them as an exclusive attribute of the "we-group" that "the others" must learn.

Conclusion

The problem of the values and orientation courses appears to be twofold. First, they create and promote homogeneous, sacrosanct, rigid values that do not include or even ignore real challenges faced by Austrian society, such as racism, sexism, or the rise of right-wing politics. On the other hand, they also implicitly produce and reproduce constructed images of the refugees' identity by placing them against this "ideal Austrian," thus representing them

as non-Austrian and therefore deficient. This is a manifestation of the “us” versus “them” rhetoric in relation to Europe’s imagined Muslim other, which frames Islam in cultural terms and therefore constructs a civilizational threat. As opposed to nationalism alone, the process seen here could be understood as Brubaker’s “civilizationism” (2017).

The values and orientation courses are portrayed as providing an “overview of life in Austria and the fundamental values governing coexistence” (BMEIA 2015: 14), but this disregards several realities. First, most of the course participants have already been in Europe and Austria for a longer period before they are granted asylum and allowed to take the courses. Additionally, according to recent interviews, more information about Austrian life can often be gained from individual interactions and personal connections rather than institutional, mandated courses. [3]

In conclusion, the courses promote “fundamental,” “non-negotiable,” “shared values” as if they were natural and neutral. Despite the intention to “enable persons to participate in social, economic and cultural life in Austria” (Integration Act 2017 §2.2), integration measures such as the values courses often lean on essentialized ideas about national identity. The values and orientation course curriculum constructs and communicates an optimal, essentialized “ideal Austrian” by communicating “what

Austrians do.” Simultaneously, they exclude contradictory perspectives and ban refugees themselves from influencing the discourse. In fact, no refugees were consulted or included in the team of experts who organized the curriculum. This way, the courses become a selective, hierarchical, hegemonic interpretation of who and how Austrians are and what refugees “are to learn what society expects from them and what is not negotiable in order to enable peaceful coexistence of all people in Austria” (50 Action Points 2015: 15).

Notes

[1] Although the term “integration” is still used commonly in policies and even in migration studies, we would like to note that we do not accept the term “integration” at face value, given its problematic underlying logics. Although there is not the space to discuss it in depth here, see e.g. Meissner and Heil 2020, Rytter 2019, Schinkel 2018, and Korteweg 2017 for discussions about this topic.

[2] Members of a far-right ideology in Austria (Identitäre Bewegung Österreich or IBO) and several other European countries actually call themselves “identitarians,” referring to a similar logic studied here (albeit in explicit ethno-nationalist terms rather than seemingly neutral ones). Our thanks to Prof. Ayse Caglar for pointing this out.

[3] See (Myott 2020).

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Which Fields of Action do Occupational Therapists Identify to Promote Health Literacy of Syrian Refugees in Austria?

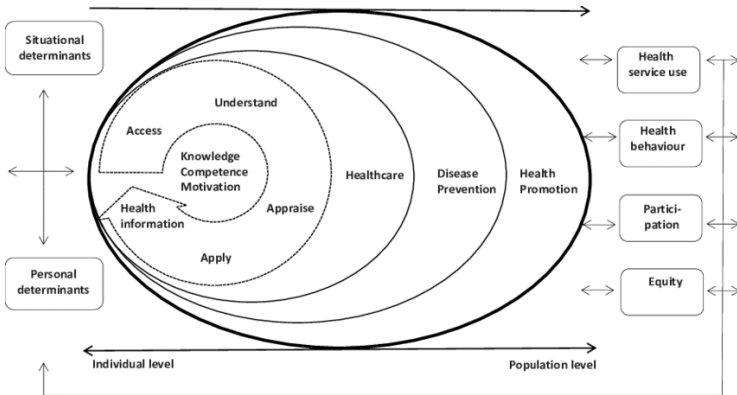
Julia Volk

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Health literacy – competences that enable access, evaluation and application of knowledge about health - is gaining importance in public health as well as in politics. Although being a refugee means a higher risk in having bad health literacy, there is little data on refugees who live in Austria.

The following is a synopsis of my master thesis (Volk 2017), which aims at gaining knowledge of health literacy of refugees and defining fields of action for occupational therapists to promote the health literacy of this “target group”. To this end, I have interviewed two refugees (a Syrian couple), two occupational therapists (working in this field) and two so-called “experts” (researchers from "Gesundheit Österreich GmbH" and "Salus Gesundheitslotsinnen"). The term *health literacy*, as used in this work, refers to the model developed by Sorensen et al. in 2012 through a systematic literature review. As shown in the image below, health literacy consists of internal motivation, competences and knowledge that allow a person to access, understand,

appraise and apply health-related information within external determinants of the health system. Health literacy is an unequally distributed but influenceable social determinant that follows a social gradient and causes – among many other things – health inequity. In the light of its relational conception, there are two levels that influence health literacy: an individual level – with personal and individual skills and competences – and a systematic level – with the demands and the complexity of the system a person is living in.



(Sorensen et al., 2012)

Being a refugee carries a higher risk in having bad health literacy, which can be attributed to a lack of proficiency in the language of the host country, to a lack of cultural/systematic knowledge and to socio-economic

factors. Such refugee-specific aspects as sense of home or residence permit status play a comparatively small role. The interviewed couple who fled from Syria to Austria has limited health literacy according to every of Sorensen's defined variables – access, understanding, appraisal and application of health-related information. Reasons for that are the complexity of medical language, stigmatization during medical treatment, financial disadvantages and obstructive frame conditions. Moreover, the interviewed refugees themselves name occupational deprivation and unemployment as their personal reasons for their poor health literacy.

This indicates that occupational therapy can promote the health literacy of refugees. In my work, I have identified the following fields of action for occupational therapists in promoting the health literacy of refugees:

- the development and resumption of meaningful activities
- the promotion of individual occupational competences in everyday life
- the orientation towards existing competences and resources
- work in group settings

The latter assists group dynamic processes that allow people to build social networks. Moreover, activities in groups serve as a medium for communication and facilitate

interaction automatically through the activity, which is of additional value.

Occupational therapy promotes three sets of meaningful benefits in the work with refugees. First, there is the client-centered approach. Unlike the impression created by the media, the “group of refugees” is very heterogeneous in itself. Working with refugees, therefore, means taking a sophisticated and client-centered perspective to develop individual purposeful solutions.

Second, there is the holistic and bio-psycho-social mind-set and the competence to consider and treat both physical and mental illnesses, while taking into account the social, cultural and physical environment. This aspect is especially important in the work with people who were forced to flee and suffer from traumas.

Finally, the absolute USP (unique selling proposition) is that of connecting health and occupation, and promoting health and quality of life through meaningful activities. The refugees themselves named lack of meaningful activities as one of two causes for their limited health literacy.

Considering these factors, it is incomprehensible why occupational therapists are not part of the work with refugees in the Austrian health system. One of the interviewed occupational therapists mentioned the following obstacles this professional group faces in the attempt to gain a foothold in the work with refugees: language, financing and biases inherent in the system. One

such bias is that while psychotherapists and social workers are recognized as an “authorized” professional group in the work with refugees and are recompensed for their expertise, this is not the case for occupational therapists. These challenges absolutely need to be overcome.

A few occupational therapists work – mainly as volunteers – in this field. The following may serve as a rare best-practice example of occupational therapeutic work with refugees in Austria: *Bike2gether* was a bicycle-repair-shop initiated in an emergency accommodation for refugees in Vienna in the summer of 2016 with the aim to promote meaningful activities for the inhabitants and to broaden their scope of action. This project addressed four important factors: doing (activities), being (getting a new and meaningful role in life), becoming (activities gain meaning through becoming) and belonging (gaining new social contacts, becoming part of a community and discovering new fields of action). This intervention by occupational therapists aimed at promoting occupational balance and occupational justice. And, therefore, it promoted health literacy as well.

Finally, I would like to mention a study by an occupational therapist, who has investigated occupational deprivation of unattended underage refugees in Tyrol in 2015. She found out that lack of financial resources and being forced “to do nothing”, a state called “occupational deprivation” in the terminology of occupational therapists,

diminishes health and quality of life. A daily life that is determined by dependence, loss of control and isolation causes a loss of motivation, well-being and the expectation of self-efficacy, which in turn lead to the feeling of being ill. Besides that, such environmental factors as bad living conditions, missing education and social networks have a negative impact on the health of refugees. These findings again illustrate the interaction of internal and external factors and their influence on health. They also emphasize that meaningfulness is essential for health and quality of life. Generated by individual meaningful activities, manageability and comprehensibility, it may be enhanced or restrained by the system.

That is why – in addition to the necessary stress on systematic conditions – the focus on the promotion of meaningful activities of refugees through occupational therapeutic work is so important for the promotion of health and health literacy. These meaningful activities play an important role for everybody's health but are often forgotten, especially when it comes to refugees. Occupational justice must be seen as a dimension of health equity that includes the right of performing meaningful activities!

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***Concept and Affect
within Forced Migration***
b. Affect and sensibilities among Refugees

Forced Migration; Motherhood and Humanitarianism during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Rio de Janeiro

Sylvia Koberwa

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Humanitarianism is defined by several principles: humanity, the belief that all humans are equal and have inalienable rights; impartiality, the insistence that we help those who are most in need and that we do not play favourites; neutrality, the commitment to action that does not intentionally benefit or hurt one side or another; and independence, the attempt to ensure that the action is not connected to parties who have a stake in the political outcome of the emergency (Barnett, 2014, p.2). This text analyses the relationship between African refugee mothers, their survival dynamics and humanitarianism in Rio de Janeiro during the Covid-19 pandemic.

My choice of approach arises from the stereotype that mothers and children are “mere victims.” Equally, Barbara Harrell Bond (2002, p. 52) argues that humanitarianism is about defending, advocating and securing the enjoyment of human rights. It also implies a shift from seeing beneficiaries of humanitarian aid as “victims” to be pitied, to survivors of adversity - who often demonstrate unimaginable strength and dignity in the most

adverse circumstance". The research methodology is inspired by my own ethnographic participant observation as an asylum seeker in Rio de Janeiro and observations from some African refugee mothers and their children living in Rio de Janeiro.

Dawn Chatty (2014, p. 80) mentions that anthropology's unique contribution to the field of refugee and forced migration studies includes carefully documenting what happens to people, their culture and society when they are forcibly displaced and wrenched from their territorial moorings, or indeed, when they are dispossessed through processes of forced sedentarisation and involuntary immobility. I, therefore, intercalate personal reflection and engagement with the forced migration literature to achieve this goal. The idea is to directly merge my first-hand experience of exile with the literature on forced migration to give an image of how African refugee mothers obtain humanitarian aid and survive in Rio de Janeiro and how COVID-19 has affected their struggle.

Experiences before the Pandemic

In 2018, I had to bite the bullet, MOVE to Brazil and make a fresh start with my 18-month old daughter after the brutal murder of my late husband in Uganda. We were hosted in Rio de Janeiro by Sheila, a Brazilian lady who was a friend to my late husband and later guided me to a humanitarian

organisation and the federal police, where I sought asylum.

I visited the humanitarian organisation to ask about my daughter joining a public daycare so that I would look for a job. The social worker asked me what help I needed precisely, even after explaining. I was astonished, but I told her that I needed a recommendation letter to take to daycare schools. In my mind, I thought that everything would be a walkover, but I needed to follow the “protocol” of applying to the Education secretary like any other native.

I got this information from the three schools we visited with Sheila, which left me wondering why the social worker would not give me the correct information. I questioned if she knew the proper procedures for putting a refugee child into a public school. First, one needs to identify the schools in their residence, choose five options, and access the Rio de Janeiro municipal council’s website. Not forgetting internet access is key to completing the task. Then, fill in the child and school’s information. A registration number is generated at the end of the process for future use.

I waited for six months before receiving a phone call from the daycare school where my daughter started school.

There existed no formal procedure for ushering in refugees at this organisation about essential information and public services like the “CPF[1],” an eleven-digit number that serves as an identification of taxpayers in the Income Tax and enables access to services and the “SUS[2]” card that guarantees public health to the population in

Brazil. A simple brochure in different languages like Portuguese, French, Spanish, English, and Arabic would be far better; for Harrell-Bond states that until refugees have access to effective legal remedies, humanitarian assistance will continue to be inhumanely delivered to refugees. (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 52).

I went back to the social worker to seek jobs information after a long haul of waiting for their contact. Shockingly, she told me that only private or institutional cleaner jobs could be available, though she was unsure because I did not speak Portuguese. She said she did not guarantee anything, despite sending my curriculum vitae to the organisation's email address after requesting it. A volunteer translator enabled this meeting.

The undermining view of refugees is critical in understanding that the social worker did not think of asking me about my professional abilities and skills. Although she was aware that I had a higher education degree, fluency in English, and professional experience in banking, she had my CV at hand. This clearly shows that the mothers' academic backgrounds and professional experiences before the displacement and integration processes are not considered by humanitarian sectors regarding professional insertion. This strongly contributes to the reproduction of the trope that refugees are "mere victims." Moreover, this aligns with Harrell-Bond's seminal

work (1986), in which she argued that refugees are not a priori dependent and passive, but rather that humanitarian institutions and political structures have created and even demanded the dependency of forced migrants upon donors and providers of assistance.

Then, in January 2020, I participated in the selection process at Abraço Cultural in Rio de Janeiro, the English course that Maimuna, an African refugee mother and former English teacher, had recommended to me. Maimuna played a significant role in getting to know the course, realising my potential to teach English professionally in Brazil, and feeling welcome in this country. I was approved as an English teacher. This course is significant in my life because it offers employment opportunities to persons in refugee situations. Even though I spoke some Portuguese, I didn't feel integrated into Brazilian society. When I started to teach English in this course with centrality to the Global South, I developed a sense of purpose and belonging.

This work gives visibility to the agency of refugees because it allows us to deconstruct the idea of an opposition between refugees and hosts, who are considered agents (supporters, hosts, donors). Refugees are also their hosts and supporters. This experience allows problematising monolithic views, such as that refugees are not agents in this process. Several authors have recognised this problematisation as necessary (MALKI, 1995;

HARRELL-BOND, 2002; PACITTO and FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, 2013). Many mothers help each other through referrals and recommendations about jobs, public schools, hospitals, work permits and general survival ideas by themselves. As was the case between Maimuna and me.

For the first time, the image of an asylum seeker was optimistic as I started teaching my Ugandan culture to the natives at this course and could afford a small apartment for my daughter and me.

Patricia Hill Collins has pointed out that while motherhood is a contradictory institution that is experienced in diverse ways by black women, it can be empowering: “[m]otherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women’s empowerment” (Collins, 2007, p. 108). Similarly, these mothers strive daily to break stereotypes and barriers they face in society, even though their potential is generally belittled.

Life during the pandemic

In March 2020, I started to teach and just after moving to my apartment, the Covid-19 pandemic set in. Everything almost came to a stand-still. We entered into the quarantine period. I was in a state of panic as the course stopped classes. I was

cut off from my friends and had no physical help. Then there was the worry about my daughter's well-being and the new bills I had just acquired.

From the several interactions with the mothers, our main goal was to be able to support ourselves and children independently and try to live a normal every-day life. By the same token, Karen Jacobsen (2014, p. 99) argues correctly, “Millions of forcibly displaced people living in and outside camps seek to support themselves and their families often with minimal humanitarian assistance and in the face of active resistance by governments and citizens of host countries.”

*In November 2020, I received an unexpected call for the first time from the organisation to pick up resources with a humble request **not to inform any other refugees.***

Indeed, “the world of humanitarianism tends to elude critical analysis” (Fassin 2011, 35). Why would the humanitarian organisation ask me not to inform any other refugees about the resources they were offering? Furthermore, Hamid (2012), Bauer-Amin (2017) and Souza and Manfrinato (2020) question the image of refugee people as “bodies that need to be saved,” the stereotypical imagery propagated by the media, as completely helpless and miserable. As Bauer-Amin (2017, p. 128) shows, refugees “even though they are victims of persecution, violence and more, they prefer to be recognised as active

agents of their own lives". Thus, as Jacobsen (2014, p.101) states, for refugees, losses incurred during the journey combined with a lack of access to assets in the host country means they are deeply disempowered and constrained in their ability to act and challenge rules and power structures. The strategies which refugees utilise to overcome such disempowerment are therefore of great interest, as they point the way to empowering other marginalised groups.

Agreeing with the authors above, I firmly believe that the establishment of a more sustainable system that promotes social-emotional, economic and political development is vital. It is therefore crucial that these mothers are supported to construct their lives beyond "the daily bread" and the "handouts" that humanitarian sectors give them. They have a wide range of knowledge, skills and abilities and are highly trainable. However, vainly, the aid givers continue treating them as wholly helpless and miserable.

Notes

[1] *Cadastro de Pessoa Física* (Personal Registration Record).

[2] *Sistema Único de Saúde* (Unified Health System).

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Gender Troubles in Shatila, Lebanon: Bodies that Matter (the *Fidā'iyīn*'s Heroism) And Undoing Gender (the *Shabāb*'s Burden)*

Gustavo Barbosa

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*This essay presents one of the arguments developed by the author in his book *The Best of Hard Times: Palestinian Refugee Masculinities in Lebanon* (Barbosa, 2022).

In this short essay, I argue for the full historicity and pliability of masculinity, which changes from place to place and time to time. Based on fieldwork conducted in Shatila, a Palestinian refugee camp in the southern outskirts of Beirut, where I lived for one year and conducted research for two, I demonstrate that the *shabāb*, the lads from the camp, faced with unemployment and the de-mobilization of the Palestinian Resistance movement, in its military form, cannot replicate the heroic persona of their forebears, the *fidā'iyīn*, who exude virility when narrating their deeds. As may be implied from this already, based on *shabāb*'s biographies, I problematize what Marcia Inhorn (2012) has ironically labelled “hegemonic masculinity, Middle Eastern style.”

I develop my argument in three moves. First, I provide the reader with historic scaffolding, so that s/he can understand not only why masculinity has changed from one generation to the next, but also why gender, as a concept imbued with notions of power, works well to describe the *fidā'iyīn*'s lives, but not the *shabāb*'s. Second, I provide some ethnographic evidence to this argument. I finish by addressing some of the theoretical implications of my reasoning.

For the historic scaffolding, I quote from what I consider as the best documentary about Shatila, the movie *Roundabout Shatila* (2005), by Maher Abi Samra. Even though a bit dated, the quote, illustrated by the film frame below, shows how Shatila is placed at the centre of various circles of causation, all highly complex. That means, in practice, that Shatilians today, including the *shabāb*, have very little control of what at the end comes to determine their lives.



Figure 1 – Frame from the movie *Roundabout Shatila*, by Maher Abi Samra

Shatila Camp, one kilometer long and 600 meters large, is located in the outskirts of the southern suburb of Beirut. In 1949, the UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East) leased the camp in order to house the Palestinian refugees waiting for their right of return.

Lebanon is a sectarian society of approximately four million people and 19 religious communities. The principal ones are the Shiites, the Maronites, the Sunnites and the Druze. These communities have always relied on alliances with powerful foreign countries to protect their own interests. Consequently, the Israelis and the Syrians continue to play a leading role in Lebanon.

In 1982, the Israeli Army invades Lebanon. The PLO (the Palestinian Liberation Organization) is forced to leave Lebanon. Maronite militias, known as the Lebanese Forces, backed by the Israelis, commit the Sabra and Shatila massacres. It is the end of one period and the beginning of another.

The official Lebanese Army, backed by the Lebanese Forces, surround the camp of Shatila between 1982 and 1984. During this period, the Army conducts forcible house searches and massive arrests.

In 1985, Amal, the Shiite militia, backed by the Syrian regime, start the War of the Camps and surround the camp for two years. Two years later, Amal can still not

retain Shatila. Palestinian organizations, backed by the Syrians, start an internal conflict between Palestinians, which ends with total Syrian regime control of the camp that continues to this day.

1990 marks an end to the Lebanese Civil War. Shatila is still under Syrian control. The laws which deprive Palestinians of their civil rights, social rights, and economic rights are enforced again. Though deeply divided on other issues, Lebanese society holds the Palestinians solely responsible for the Civil War.

In 2002, the majority of the Lebanese Parliament votes to deny the right of property to Palestinians. The pretext invoked is to protect the Lebanese identity and the stability of the sectarian system, but the underlying reason is to retain the Palestinians' right of return. Shatila and other refugee camps in Lebanon have become the scapegoat of Lebanese society.

Two different iconic figures are associated with each of these historic periods. As shown in the quote from Abi Samra's movie, the important year to remember here is 1982, the definitive turning point in this saga. Before that year was the period that Palestinians refer to as the golden days of the revolution, the *ayyām al-thawra*, their moment of strength in Lebanon. The iconic figure associated with this period is the resistance fighter, the *fidā'ī*. The very word means the man who is willing to sacrifice himself, in the fight to reconquer the motherland. Posters from this

period often celebrated this figure, portraying him in all his courage and pride walking on the crest of hills, a *kuffiyya*, the Arab strap around his shoulders, and a *bunduqiyya*, the Kalashnikov machine-gun in his hand, proceeding to military incursions deep into Palestine. With the end in 1982 of the days of the revolution, the iconic figure became the camp *shāb*, the lad from Shatila, who cannot act as a fighter, because the Palestinian Resistance Movement was de-mobilized, and who cannot find a job either and, as a result, needs to postpone marriage plans.

The changes in the iconic figures of these two periods – the brave *fidāʿī* and the *shāb* with very limited access to power – speaks to the full historicity and pliability of masculinity. In Palestine, before 1948, a man would come of age and display his gender belonging by marrying, starting an independent household and bearing a son. For the Palestinian diaspora in Lebanon, prior to 1982, acting as a *fidāʿī* provided an alternative mechanism for men to come of age and display gender belonging. But, then, what happens to today's *shabāb*, who cannot act as male providers for the families they wish to start or act as fighters?

Based on the specialized literature, the traditional answer to this question is that the *shabāb* are emasculated, that their masculinity is in crisis because they cannot live up to the requirements of an ideal-typical hegemonic masculinity. But, by living with them in Shatila, I did not get

the feeling that they thought that their masculinity was menaced. So, rather than freezing ideals of masculinity and creating crisis by heuristic fiat, I decided, following Inhorn's advice, to nuance the discussion of the masculine ideal, opening it up to the findings of my ethnography. At the end, these findings prompted me to provoke another crisis, of an epistemological nature: the crisis of gender as a concept.

The time has come to populate this history and this discussion with ethnography and real life. A *fidā'ī*'s and a *shāb*'s biography will serve to problematize gender as a concept. While the *fidā'īyyīn* were all power, all public, all spectacle, all gender as a discourse on power, the *shabāb* have very limited access to power and, as a result, gender does not function well to reflect their burdens.

Showing me the scars in his body, results from the torture he was submitted to by the Syrians, Abu Fawzi, 62, an ex-Fattah commando, said: "I still have a very strong body. I did wrestling when I was younger. In our struggle, we never stop; we don't retire. We fight until we die." He told me about joining the revolution: "I joined the *fidā'īyyīn* without my family knowing. When they found out, my mother cried a lot and my father forced me into my first marriage, hoping I'd leave the *fidā'īyyīn*. But my marriage didn't last. I gave up my wife, but not the *thawra*, the revolution." Indeed, to be fit to fight for the motherland, Palestine, the *fidā'īyyīn* had to detach themselves from

another mother-land: home. The sphere of feminine domesticity is largely avoided by the *fidā'iyīn* when they narrate their heroic deeds. Abu Fawzi still thinks of himself as committed to the cause: "I go on thinking of myself as a *fidā'ī*. I never look back, only towards the future. And I never feel sorry for what I did." I never had the courage to ask him a question that kept criss-crossing my mind while we were talking: "How is it to kill someone?" Indeed, it is very difficult not to bow in awe in the presence of a *fidā'ī* bragging about his deeds. But I knew that I could not go on providing an all-attentive and compliant audience to these narrations, because such discourses on hegemonic masculinity, present in the *fidā'iyīn*'s remembrances, cost the *shabāb* dear.

Nawaf, 28, is as a clerical worker. All of his brothers were *fidā'iyīn* and he is very proud of them, commenting on how they carried their guns and defended the camp. Yet, he is perfectly aware that their heroic personas cannot simply be re-enacted by him. Nawaf was very generous when it came to sharing with me the challenges he faces in his love life. He first discovered the pleasures of sex through a European activist. When she returned to Europe, he did not have the means or the visas to follow her. Another European activist captured his attention shortly after, but he took the decision to put an end to the relationship. She had moved to Lebanon out of her conviction that she had to give her contribution to the Palestinian cause. This is what

Nawaf told me about her: “You know, Gustavo, she loved Palestine in me. What she liked most about me is the Palestinian hero that I know I can’t afford to be.”

The European’s departure had an awakening effect for him. Nawaf decided the time had come to be serious about his life. He regretted ignoring the needs of his family, while he was with the European. And there was a camp girl, Jamila. They started dating, away from the scrutinizing eyes of her family, but Jamila, knowing how much was at stake for a camp girl like herself, forced Nawaf’s meeting with her father so that the two could get engaged. The outcome was not what the two were hoping for. When I met Nawaf, he was still trying to recover from the break-up. Jamila’s father insisted that the couple married one year after the engagement, but Nawaf needed two years to finish his university. No agreement could be reached. When we talked, Nawaf was trying to figure ways to graduate fast and to build a house, so that he might still have a chance of marrying the love of his life.

Now, I briefly highlight some of the theoretical implications of what I showed here. I start by telling another ethnographic vignette. Once I was attending an English class for adults at a Palestinian camp. The teacher spoke mainly in Arabic, because her students had limited command of English. At a certain point, she switched into English to say “gender equity” and returned to Arabic. I decided to provoke her: “You don’t actually have a word for

gender in Arabic.” She replied: “Of course we do. It’s *jins*.” Me: “But *jins* is actually sex, no? It’s not gender. She answered: “*Jins* is sex; *jins* is also gender. There isn’t a problem here, all right?”

Actually, late 20th-century theorists have argued that there is a problem there and that sex should be differentiated from gender. Differently from the supposedly natural and unchanging sex, gender could be modified and opened space for political mobilization. Anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers demonstrated how the social constructions of the differences between men and women – or gender - were constitutive of inequalities that needed to be denaturalised. These inequalities soon enough served to establish a hierarchy in terms of different access to power by men and women. This mesmerisation by power reached its peak among researchers of masculinity, and prominently so among scholars of the Middle East. In the work of these scholars, the mesmerisation by power blended into a mesmerisation by the spectacle conducted in public. Inhorn (2012) lists some of the features characterizing this “hegemonic masculinity, Middle Eastern style”: patriarchy; polygyny; hyper-virility; tribalism; violence; militarism; and Islamic jihad. The experiences of the Shatila *shabāb* with their very limited access to power find no comfortable place within this theoretical framework. As a matter of fact, within this framework, defined as it is by a

notion of gender as characterizing different access to power by men and women, non-homosexual men with limited power become invisible. Or else their masculinity needs to be in crisis. And yet it is not. The idea that men in very specific parts of the world are in crisis and cannot live up to the demands of an atavistic, misogynist and hyper-sexual masculinity feeds terrorology industries in the service of empire.

Shatila *shabāb*'s masculinity is neither threatened by their predicaments nor are they terrorists in the making. Actually, non-homosexual Muslim men with limited access to power constitute the abject Other of liberal feminism and some LGBTIQ movements and that is the reason why they are re-traditionalised and their masculinity is stigmatized. I propose a reason for that: the fact that men like the Shatila *shabāb* who show how vulnerable they can be to others – a father, a father-in-law, a mother, a girlfriend – is so disturbing because there is a modernist rejection to the possibility that vulnerability to others can be a legitimate way of living a relationship.

Where does this lead us? I wrap up my discussion by suggesting that there may be other ways of conceptualising the sex/gender complex. Sex, as a concept, works for the naturalization of the differentiation between male and female, even though this naturalization has no foundation in reality without remainder, as attested by the multitude of intersexed bodies. In the case of gender as a

concept, this differentiation becomes an opposition, and furthermore an opposition of a hierarchical kind, based on different access to power by men and women. But let us try to learn something from the English teacher from the Palestinian camp I wrote about a few paragraphs back. She told us that *jins* is sex and that *jins* is gender. *Jins* then offers enough flexibility to accommodate both concepts. Arabic speakers know that *jins* also admits other renditions into English, such as race, class, and nation. I obviously do not want to reduce the sex/gender complex to its linguistic dimension, but there is something at play here that deserves attention. *Jins* can be sex, gender, class, race, and nation because it brings together those who pertain to the same kind. Rather than putting in relief the opposition between groups, *jins* emphasizes similarities and belonging together. When I suggest that we take proper note of this rendition of the sex/gender complex through the notion of *jins*, what I want is to call attention to the need to *culturalize* the complex, opening it up to properly reflect our ethnographic findings, which is what I did through the biographies of the *fidā'iyyīn* and the *shabāb*.

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From Self-Denial to Politics of Visibility: Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland from the 1960s to 2015

Sarah El-Bulbeisi

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Does violence (symbolic and physical) produced through forced displacement end upon resettlement or citizenship? In what follows, I aim to address this question through the case of Palestinian refugees who have resided in Germany and Switzerland for more than two generations. I show how violence has continued, albeit taking different shapes, from the Israeli state violence – the destruction of Palestinian society and identity – to forced migration in Central Europe. I also show how Palestinians have been dealing with this violence, how this violence shapes conceptions of the self and the world over the course of two generations – mainly those of the first generation, primarily men, who migrated to Germany and Switzerland in the 1960s and their children – and how this violence was inscribed into the relationships between this first and second generation. The argument I present here is based on a book I recently published in German, “Taboo, Trauma and Identity: Subject Constructions of Palestinians

in Germany and Switzerland, 1960–2015” (El Bulbeisi 2020).

My study draws on forty life stories and conversations as well as on participant-observation, which I conducted with first and second generation Palestinians between 2010 and 2015, in Germany and Switzerland. Because I am also a second-generation Palestinian living in Switzerland, I incorporated an autoethnographic, self-reflexive approach. Theoretically, I started from the premise that analysis of my interlocutor's speech must take into account: a. discourse, which provides the symbolic structures underlying meaning and expression; and b. the unconscious, which arises in the ruptures of the speech, in slips of the tongue, etc. For data collection and analysis, I combined ethnographic methods (especially participant-observation) with discourse and psychoanalytical conceptualization, particularly (counter-)transference and free association. This back-and-forth movement of taking perspective through ethnography and self-reflection through psychoanalytical approaches, crisscrossed one another in the of course of five years, allowed me to learn in depth about the experiences of others and about my own.

I argue that a crucial part of the violence Palestinians experienced in Germany and Switzerland was (and still is) exerted by discourses, representations and narratives that established moral norms, which in turn

legitimized the violence they suffered from the outset of their exile. Not only the public spheres of Central European societies generally did not recognize the original Israeli state violence enacted upon them, but also Palestinians were themselves largely blamed for it. The figure of the Palestinian Anti-Semite and terrorist embodies the threatening and evil counterpart to the North-Atlantic-European moral order. As a result, violence exerted against Palestinians becomes legitimized and is perceived as deserved. Furthermore, this regime of representation resulted in practices such as surveillance, censorship, expulsions (particularly in 1972), bans on meetings, dissolution of student unions and workers' groups.

I claim that this discursive violence – as I call it – together with the corresponding practices of criminalization de-subjectified my Palestinian interlocutors. To sum up the psychic wound inflicted upon them, I refer to Frantz Fanon's concept of "trauma of race" (1952). That is, Palestinian de-subjection manifested in fear of visibility and political activism, but also of expressing rage and mourning. It also resulted in shame, guilt, melancholia and isolation from society, families, and fellow Palestinians. This violence led many to identity denial, as a mechanism to avoid the pain of being socially stigmatized.

Many members of the first generation had desperately wanted to be a revolutionary subject. They had

often migrated for educational purposes and to acquire knowledge for the liberation movement, bringing with them their revolutionary subjectivity to Europe, where they were stranded, since after the 1967 Israeli occupation many became refugees *sur place*, not being allowed to return. In the very act of preparing oneself for liberation, they repeated their parents' experience of displacement in 1948, for which they had despised them, and whose situation they deeply wanted to reverse. As described above, the revolutionary subject position was the foundation for the widespread subversive identity of the first generation, which they were unable to embody due to displacement and/or self-denial. While rejecting their Palestinianness outwardly, they cultivated it instead as a devotion that transcended the body and – in an act of self-ethnicization – also encompasses the soul above all else; a collective body incarnated within the individual. Pursuing an enduring inner attachment to the collective trauma became an attempt to assert their place in time and space.

The creation of Palestinianness as a resulting moral identity can be interpreted as a “technology of the self” (Michel Foucault 1986), i.e. as an attempt to produce agency and control in a situation of powerlessness by submitting to a specific feeling and consciousness of commitment. As such, it constitutes a densification of different layers of guilt: it also is an attempt to transform the shame and guilt associated with the vilification of

Palestinianness and of the Palestinian experience of Israeli state violence in Western (and Arab) societies into a positive affect such as pride; or, more important, into feelings of guilt towards “one’s own kind”.

However, as a consequence of discursive violence, Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland could no longer fall back on the collective systems of meaning and interpretation (Summerfield 1999) I presented above – the revolutionary subject – provided by the community of experience to overcome the colonial trauma of being ripped out of time and space. Palestinians could not assimilate these symbolic systems into their daily lives, as it can be seen from the widening gap between how individuals imagine themselves to be and how they act in their everyday lives. Not only could they no longer draw on the ideals of the liberation movement and the resistance struggle as a resource for coping with their experience of violence, but also they felt guilty because they were incapable of living up to their ego ideal (Freud 1914).

The way Central European societies deal with their National Socialist past and imagine themselves in the present largely drives them to situate the Palestinian experience of Israeli state violence *outside of truth* (Foucault 1999) where it remains repressed and denied. Thus, my Palestinian interlocutors feel that their experience of violence was denied and perceived as shameful in the societies in which they live, a feeling that

they subsequently largely embodied themselves. The dispossession of their experience of Israeli state violence left a much greater mark on them than the dispossession of their right to return to their country. Palestinianness as a moral identity thus crystallizes the melancholia (Freud 1918) of unprocessed, non-discharged loss and pain. It contains remnants and traces of a lived, but socially rejected violence, and thus hope of rehabilitation and recognition. By “dedicating” one’s life to it, a loss is preserved which could be neither dismissed nor mourned. By forming a subversive subjectivation as a response to colonial obliteration and replacement, Palestinianness as a moral identity functions as a resource for dealing with what I described through Fanon’s concept of trauma of race.

The interwoven nature of the Israeli state violence Palestinians experienced, and the established moral norms in Central Europe legitimizing them, produced a socially accepted form of violence that not only marginalized the members of the first generation but was also a factor in their relations with their children. The second generation of Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland was marked by their parents’ derealization (Butler 2004), melancholia and emotional absence, and these played a considerable role in how the experience of trauma of race was passed down to them. In order to establish a relationship, they had to overturn their de-subjectivation and establish them as

subjects. This resulted in the inversion of social roles between parents and children (*parentification*)[1].

The second generation is influenced by the reverberations of their parents' past and of the lack of social acknowledgment about their predicament in Germany and Switzerland. In addition, their parents' experiences match their own everyday experiences of discursive violence. The 2014 Israeli offensive in Gaza represented a turning point for many members of the second generation. Not only had the first generation denied and hid its Palestinianness in public sphere, it often also had imposed this concealment on their children. The parents' repression of Palestinian identity on the surface and their cultivation of Palestinianness as a moral identity in its place was now being replaced by a visible, outward Palestinianness among the second generation. Reasons for this include the increasing violence in historical Palestine and the accompanying intensification of discursive violence in Germany and Switzerland. The intense experience that Palestinianness was taboo, reaching its highpoint in the Israeli offensive in Gaza 2014, drove members of the second generation to the conclusion that visibility alone was a necessary act of emancipation and resistance, despite their often fundamentally critical attitude towards any form of nationalism. I suggest that this, in turn, can be understood as strategic essentialism ([Spivak 1988](#)): the self is conceived of through essentialist identity categories

at the expense of other identity-specific ascriptions in order to pursue a political goal. Even though self-ethnicization became a resource for dealing with the experience of racialization for the second generation as well, they came to interpret Palestinianness as an identity of anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance in the struggle for equality and self-determination, and identify with movements of other subordinated social groups like *Black Lives Matter* in the United States.

Through the process described above, the second generation has jettisoned the desire for recognition and, to a certain extent, no longer identifies with dominant European discourses on Palestinianness. Members of this generation break with the self-denial that was passed on to them by their parents and imposed on them by society. The second generation is overcoming the fear of visibility and political activism as well as of isolation. They are developing a national and transnational socio-cultural network, countering fragmentation and discovering the anger that was denied to their parents. They are beginning to understand their parents as an affected group and tell their story in film and through literature and science, appropriating the previous generation's story as part of their own. Telling their parents' stories involves writing a comprehensive story of the Nakba and adding the marginalized history of indirect expulsion (perceived as self-inflicted) to the dominant narrative of the mass

expulsions of 1947-48 within the Palestinian canon.^[2] Through the addition of the history of the continuous indirect displacement ever since, the Nakba is no longer interpreted as a traumatic rift but as a traumatic process. Telling their parents' stories also involves translating the fragmented telling – and, more often, the non-telling – of traumatic experiences into the narrative forms of film and literature. In this process, discourse-defying pain becomes storytelling. And, in doing so, family members not only reconfigure their parents' stories, they live them. The effects of parentification is patent in the second generation's desire to merge with their parents and to keep their parents' unrecognised trauma alive hoping for social acknowledgement. Through their campaign and primarily the recognition they are obtaining for the fathers they are succeeding in part in repositioning fathers as subjects, retrieving them from their emotional absence and making them visible again. Parents who have hitherto attempted to keep their children away from political activism, passing on their own fear of visibility, are beginning to make their Palestinianness visible.

Even though the second generation's capacity to convert guilt and shame into agency offers real grounds for optimism, one cannot but see that the boundaries they come up against in their increasing desire for visibility and resistance – for instance, in their restricted scope for action and the limits of what can be said – intensify their sense of

living in exile in the country where they grew up. They increasingly see themselves as being exposed to a similar level of violence as Palestinians in historical Palestine, with the recurring metaphor of imprisonment (a feeling of suffocating and being under surveillance) representing a mental form of preoccupation. The violence the second generation experiences itself allows them to connect their situation in Germany and Switzerland with the colonial context of the Palestinians in historical Palestine, to incorporate their experience within Palestinians' experience in historical Palestine, and to establish not only a transnational identity but also a normative counternarrative of transnational repression. Since self-ethnicization remains even for the second generation a resource for dealing with the experience of racialization – despite their interpretation of Palestinianness as an identity of anti-racist resistance, the resulting question is therefore: How can one resist without re-enacting violence?

Notes:

[1] Alice Miller (1979).

[2] Nakba means catastrophe in Arabic. This designation is predominantly used to refer to the extent of the violence to which Palestinian society has been subjected in 1947-48: the displacement of at least 700,000 Palestinians – around half of the overall population in historic Palestine – and the

destruction of their community at that time, a violence that continues to this day.

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The Cross-Border Clinic and the Idea of Existential Pangea

Suzana Mallard

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Throughout many displacements and my work in the area of mental health with migrants, I began to recognize a pattern in the groups of those who are foreigners or who are part of a diaspora group. When I was in college, I was a Cape Verdean student in Curitiba, and I wondered about the group of friends I had formed, about what brought us together. I realized that there were affinities that I did not know how to name and that went beyond a shared language or origin. It was something the experience of “staying a foreigner” could bring about. I use these words as a way of acknowledging that this term cannot be understood solely as a category of being, but rather as something that impacts existence. “Staying a foreigner” represents a contingency. In the group, there were representatives from other countries, other states, and from rural areas within their state. Most came from outside the city.

Academic works that address the issue of groups that organize themselves in diasporas often do so around the issue of identity maintenance, an element of culture that is shared and maintained for this purpose. Working with

forced migrants, I recognized that many of the professionals addressing the needs of this group had experienced the condition of “staying a foreigner” themselves. The condition of foreignness concerns those persons who experience some type of psychological suffering. However, foreignness is understood here as an implicit condition of the human constitution that everybody experiences in specific moments. I am referring here to experiences of displacement where a person lacks the cultural context to understand personal observations or the expectations of others.

During my doctoral research, I conducted interviews with twelve therapists addressing the mental health of forced migrants based in major cities in Brazil such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Curitiba and Minneapolis and Atlanta in the United States. All participants were working in different institutions and NGOs and were part of what we can call a cross-border clinic. The border clinic we speak of is the one relevant to forced migrants that is on the border between knowledges, cultures, languages and otherness. It's a frontier territory that implies a psychic and symbolic displacement in a constant renegotiation between the familiar and the foreigner, between the self and the other. Otherness or alterity is a term meaning the "other of two", used to express something outside of tradition or convention (LEVINAS, 1982).

In this research I sought to find out if the personal experiences of the therapists had any impact on the listening offered to the forced migrant population. Listening in the therapeutic process is a dynamic that refers to the possibility of offering a space in which the subject can recover their own voice to tell their own story. It is worth noting that there are filters that permeate all listening, and therapeutic listening presupposes renouncing one's own cultural assumptions to ask the other about him or herself and offer ethical listening. When the account of the facts of a story takes place according to a conjuncture without going through the sieve of ethics, we distance ourselves from a certain neutrality. The ethics I refer to is that of listening to psychoanalysis, the ethics of the subject's desire. It does not respond to institutional demands or to the morals of a society or system, but it is the very foundation of human existence. For this purpose, I asked these therapists about their reasons for choosing this field of work.

Eleven of the professionals stated that they themselves had experienced or were still experiencing the state of being a foreigner. They reported that this experience had a direct impact on their fields of practice. The experience seemed to have an effect on the decision to work with this population and the way in which they listened to their patients also seemed to be affected by their choice.

We are born in and within our culture. The dynamics of groups are maintained by the feeling of belonging, the belief in the idea of being one and in the possibility of unity. According to STITOU (2007), the question of origin is necessary for the construction of a shared imaginary, which is also, in part, the reason for maintaining the social bond. This imaginary construction takes society as one and as a compact entity that responds to a single leader and concentrates on a single identification and a common ancestor. This belief is not supported by human experience itself, which highlights the impossibility of sharing the same place or history.

The perspective, marks, and memories of an experience, even when lived collectively, are individual and unique. This recognition offers the possibility of building a bond with others that is not built on the idea of communion. The experience of “staying a foreigner” offers the possibility of decentralization as well as to abandon the illusion of the universality of our beliefs. In this disenchantment process, it is discovered that the recognition of differences does not threaten an individual's singularity. This is a necessary process in view of the belief that the survival of a culture requires protecting it from any unknown influence as a justification for protecting against acts of intolerance and xenophobia. In a way, it is saying that letting go of this illusion is a way to get along with the other and also recognize yourself.

The experience of foreignness, even if it varies, brings up within the individual the possibility of recognizing a place. This experience always refers to the subject's life story, their color, their gender, their social place in the country in which they find themselves, and their capacity for resilience. "Staying a foreigner", brings knowledge of an experience that has been lived, that is unique to each individual and cannot be shared. It is a place where you do not know what the other person expects of you. This experience has the potential to awaken the person from the illusion that belonging makes us one. It means that people who have "stayed a foreigner" share with each other an existential experience. It is from the phenomenon of human mobility that brings together cultures which are initially distant that the concept of Pangea is constituted. This term designating a single, but diverse, continent, is used as an analogy for the symbolic formations that operate in the cross-border therapeutic territory.

Writing about a similar phenomenon in 1969 Victor Turner said: "I prefer the Latin term "communitas" to "community", to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living". (...) It is rather a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society" (TURNER, 1969, p.360).

What is interesting about liminal phenomena for our present purpose is the blend of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship that they offer. We are presented, in such rites, with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. These are the ties organized in terms either of caste, class, or rank hierarchies or of segmentary oppositions in the beloved stateless societies of political anthropologists. It is as though there are here two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating people in terms of "more" or "less". The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated "communitas," or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of elders.

This approximation of mental health professionals and migrants may seem forced at first. It is fueled, however, by the commonality of shared experience. Each side brings knowledge about themselves and, at the same time, realizes

that it does not know the other or what is expected of them. These conditions offer the possibility of asking and not inferring about the unknown.

When the interviewees speak of an interest, we understand that they are talking about something that affected them in their own experience of strangeness. In the same way, in the diaspora, migrants' attempts to maintain their culture, language and identity, in short, the experience of 'foreignness', suggests the possibility of delimiting a territory. It suggests that it concerns subjects who share the place of an existential experience. If you think of diaspora as the dispersion of peoples, the existential Pangea represents this rapprochement, yet it is now exemplified by a shared existential trait rather than boundaries drawn by man.

I observed that those who have experienced "staying a foreigner" and subsequently returned to their country of origin continue to be affected by this experience of choosing to work with this population. As stated above, a certain type of knowledge about oneself allows you to listen to others. When the therapists I interviewed reported that their proximity to their patients derives from lived experience, I understand that they refer to the profound and transforming experience of having been a foreigner themselves.

However, this experience is not exclusive to those who have moved to foreign lands. For one of the interviewees, it was

his relationship with language that linked him to this group. This therapist has a “speech defect” that impacts his hearing, just as someone who speaks a foreign language has an accent that reveals their nonbelonging. This professional recognized his experience with language as a vital element of his interest in working with the migrant population. These professionals reported an experience that seems to reflect knowledge about what it is to inhabit a particular space and recognize a quality of unknowing that impacts radical individuality.

It is a bond with the issue of migration that, for some, comes from lived experience which enables an understanding of this place occupied by the refugee migrant, that of a foreigner. It is an idea of otherness that does not match the national and cultural identity; one could say it is possibly created by the identity productions which are introduced via the notions of existential Pangea.

Throughout the interviews, the theoretical research process, and my own clinical practice, I observed that the professionals had “stayed foreigners”, which allowed them to take the fundamental pedagogical position of listening to the other. It is this idea – that the Lacanian clinic attributes to listening - on which the therapist draws to think about the experience of the other. There is a disposition for ethical listening, which recognizes the relativity of its referential and which is willing to investigate further. It is an ethical code that responds to the

subject's desire and not to the institutional demands or to the morals of a society or System.

This willingness to go beyond the frontiers of the known opens up the possibility of encountering the unknown without restricting oneself by outward impressions. It comes with the recognition of the irrefutable responsibility of each subject towards the other, that of renouncing the theoretical framework itself. It also works to create a listening space in which others can show up as who they are to express themselves. In cross-border clinical practice, therapists are called upon to reinvent themselves in the face of the unknown and this intervention needs to include the other to be achieved.

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The Impact of Covid-19 Among Refugees of The Syrian Conflict in Brazil

Leonardo Schiocchet, Mirian Alves de Souza, and Helena Manfrinato

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Recent data from the World Health Organization (WHO) (WHO n/a) shows Brazil as second in the ranking of the world most affected countries by the covid-19 pandemic, having surpassed 100.000 deaths in August 2020. This number is especially astonishing when considering that it is already larger than the number of immediate deaths caused by the Nagasaki atomic bomb explosion, and close to that of the highest estimates for the Hiroshima atomic bomb (Hiroshima Day Committee. n/a.). There is a consensus among health specialists and humanitarian representatives that in the case of Brazil, governmental responses are largely to be held accountable for the spread of the pandemic (OHHCR April 29, 2020). The Bolsonaro presidency has consistently downplayed social distancing measures calling them “scorched-earth” tactics, promoting instead the use of Hydroxychloroquine, which in turn has been scientifically considered inefficient and even dangerous as treatment for Covid-19 (Cavalcanti et al. July 23, 2020).

In 2018, Brazil became the world's sixth largest recipient of request for asylum, with Venezuelans accounting for more than three quarters of all claims (61.600) (UNHCR, 2019). This new role as global refugee host has not yet been sufficient acknowledged by the literature on forced migration world-wide, and may appear contradictory to Bolsonaro's strong and overt anti-minorities stance. As Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli (2020) notes, the Brazilian legislation towards migration and asylum is "progressive", since the asylum law (Law 9474/1997)

...adopts an expanded definition of refugees considering people fleeing situations of gross and generalized violations of human rights. The Brazilian Migration Law (Law 13.445/2017) adopts a human rights perspective. It recognizes many rights to immigrants, including the right to family reunification, access to healthcare and social assistance, and non-discrimination (Martuscelli 2020).

It is first and foremost important to understand that these laws are reminiscent of the governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003) and of those of the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) (2003-2016). Moreover, the Bolsonaro presidency justifies the presence of Venezuelan refugees in the country as a marker

of what it brands “Bolivarianism,”[1] a conservative push in Latin America.

As Martuscelli (2020) explains, uncertainty, fear, and xenophobia are the refugees’ main concerns in their experience of the pandemic in Brazil and government responses to it. As non-citizens, they are more vulnerable to the Brazilian government responses to Covid-19 especially due to the closure of the countries’ borders and of important sectors of the Federal Police, and to the lack of access to emergency benefits. On March 11, 2020 the government halted all asylum deadlines and, on March 16, all immigration deadlines and the meetings of the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) (Portaria Nº 2). In addition, since March 26, the government has published a series of decrees prohibiting the entrance of non-nationals in Brazil (such as Portaria Nº 47 and Portaria nº 255). Aimed at containing the Covid-19 pandemic, these decrees violate Human Rights and interfere with the Brazilian refugee and migration laws, denying the right to apply for asylum and suspending non-discrimination laws that safeguard the right for equal access to public services, including health and social assistance. Such decrees deny the protection against repatriation of refugee family members (guaranteed by the migration law) and the right to documentation, which was suspended by the partial closure of the Federal Police. After the opposition majority votes, and against its will, the government did issue a

humble emergency benefit for vulnerable populations affected by the pandemic (Auxílio Emergencial do Governo Federal, popularly known as “corona voucher”)[2]. However, refugees were uncertain if they qualify for the benefit given their lack of access to documents and information.

Besides the latest groups of refugees, mostly of Venezuelan origin, there are significant groups of refugees from the Syrian conflict that arrived in Brazil during the PT years, including 3.326 registered Syrians, and 350 registered Palestinians, along with smaller numbers of Lebanese and Iraqis (Governo Federal 2019), although these numbers may be higher in practice. In addition, Brazil has around 3 to 4 million citizens of Syrian origin (alongside millions of Lebanese and Palestinians) that migrated to Brazil especially in the second half the Nineteenth Century and first half of the Twentieth Century (Lesser 2000; Karam 2009; Pinto 2010).

Refugees of the Syrian conflict in Brazil tend to be embedded in support networks led by the established Arab diaspora in Brazil and other Brazilian grassroots initiatives, as stated by the Brazilian specialists on refugees of the Syrian conflict, Mirian Alves de Souza and Helena Manfrinato, interviewed by Leonardo Schiocchet on August 14, 2020. There is no reliable data on how many refugees of the Syrian conflict actually contracted covid-19, with few cases reported among the community. Both Souza and

Manfrinato agree that the most immediate consequence of the pandemic among refugees has been a devastating economic downfall.

Souza noted that Brazil applies different standards for the different nationalities among the refugees from the Syrian conflict, including Palestinians. The approval rate of Syrians is close to 100% and that of Palestinians is also very high. Yet Lebanese have a very small approval rate. According to Souza, the situation of refugees of the Syrian conflict in Brazil is “frightening”, given that they depend mostly on jobs in the food service industry, which came to almost a total halt in early 2020 owing to social distancing measures enforced by the government or observed by citizens on their own. Souza points out that in Rio de Janeiro, this business was overwhelmingly in the street food sector. This food is sold at very low prices, and the main consumers are members of the working class, who in general cannot afford to observe social distancing practices. Now that Brazilians are slowly returning to the streets in spite of the covid-19 pandemic the refugees’ situation is recovering slightly.

Manfrinato stated that in São Paulo, too, refugees of the Syrian conflict depend on the food service industry for a living. Yet most food used to be sold in restaurants owned by the refugees themselves. After the covid-19 outbreak, all their restaurants closed due to the lack of clients. A Syrian refugee, who sold food in the streets, created a delivery

system in neighbourhoods where few people observed social distancing measures, especially quarantine. But his relative success stands out as rare. Besides, refugees were overwhelmingly unsuccessful in negotiating lowered rents for their shops and residences, and many of them now depend almost exclusively on emergency aid. What is more, racism and xenophobia associated with covid-19 have affected migrants at large.

Few refugees reported that they had access to federal emergency aid. Most of them are benefiting from grassroots efforts by the established Arab community or other Brazilian social movements. According to Manfrinato, one of the largest mosques in São Paulo launched a large operation to distribute food (cestas básicas), blankets and clothes to those in need, including, but not limited to, the refugees of the Syrian conflict. According to Souza, even the refugees themselves, being among the most affected population, started their own initiatives to distribute food to those in need in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. These initiatives (re)approximated the refugees' grassroots social movement. In Rio, Sinsim Culinária (led by a Syrian refugee) participated in Cozinha Solidária, a partnership between Junta Local (a network of small producers and local cooks, including refugees from various countries) and other collectives to distribute food (quentinha) to a favela.

Solidarity among these refugees and Brazilian social movements is not new, but as Manfrinato contends,

the covid-19 outbreak led to a reorganization of solidarity, which was based at least as much on ideology and identity as on contextual approximations. For example, one of Manfrinato's Palestinian interlocutors created an NGO called Refúgio Brasil. The NGO had started with a group of Palestinians helping Palestinian refugees from the Iraqi conflict. With the onset of the war in Syria, it quickly gained momentum and widened its scope, while still being fundamentally funded by the Palestinian community in Brazil. This NGO, as others, used a three-phase approach to their actions: Socorro (help, emergency), integração (integration) and consolidação (consolidation). The first phase is marked by emergency aid, especially food distribution and rent support. The second is focused on generating income and autonomy by offering intercultural courses geared towards the job market. The third and final phase is accomplished by finding jobs for the refugees and maintaining professional psychological support. This NGO was very successful in creating partnerships with other Brazilian social movements and local business. However, the covid-19 outbreak caused most refugees to lose their jobs and residences. It had a devastating effect on these established networks, as it forced all social actions back to the first, emergency phase. According to Manfrinato, this example illustrates well what happened to all other grassroots initiatives in which the refugees and the Arab community were involved.

Both Souza and Manfrinato emphasize that it is equally important to note other effects of the covid-19 outbreak, which are likely to have long-lasting repercussions. The Brazilian scholars corroborate Martuscelli's point that access to public health care (SUS) poses a problem for refugees. While this access is in theory universal and independent of citizenship, in practice racism and xenophobia occur among the staff of hospitals and health centers. Souza and Manfrinato concur that anxiety and anguish in the face of uncertainty have deeply marked the refugee community in question.

In conclusion, the covid-19 outbreak precipitated and strengthened serious economic difficulties, difficult access to basic services such as official records and health care, racism and xenophobia, and the reinforcement of the community's isolation vis-à-vis others in Brazil and their own families abroad. This, in turn, has a negative impact on the psychosocial outlook of this refugee population. Refugees in general are affected by enforced immobility. The refugees in Brazil are confronted with this problem to an aggravated degree. And while the pandemic led to the emergence and restructuring of important forms of solidarity among refugees of the Syrian conflict, it also significantly restricted others.

Apart from Martuscelli's recent publication (2020) and the ongoing work by Souza and Manfrinato, very few other studies of the refugees' experiences during the

pandemic in Brazil have been conducted (see for example, Caramuru 2020; Baeninger et al 2020). The facts presented in this blog suggest that the psychosocial and structural effects of the covid-19 pandemic are likely to be long-lasting. While it is necessary to study the current situation of medical emergency, quarantine and social distancing, studies tracking the long-term effects of the so-called “new normality” on social organization are equally pressing.

Notes

[1] Venezuela’s official name is República Bolivariana de Venezuela.

[2] In September 2020, the government announced that the emergency benefit will be cut in half, despite the increasingly deteriorating economic situation of the country.

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Biographies

Lyla André is a PhD Student in international relations at UCLouvain (Belgium) funded by a FRESH Grant from the Belgian FNRS and working on "EU management of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon" with a special focus on childhood education. She holds a master's degree from the Sorbonne institute for development studies and from the African Worlds Institute (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne). Her research interests revolve around refugee management in the Middle East as well as EU development and humanitarian policy in that region.

Rainer Bauböck is part time professor in the Global Governance Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute. He is corresponding member Austrian Academy of Sciences and chairs the Academy's Commission on Migration and Integration Research. He teaches at the Central European University Vienna campus as a guest professor. From 2007 to 2018 he held the chair in social and political theory at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of EUI. His research interests are in normative political theory and comparative research on democratic citizenship, European integration, migration, nationalism and minority rights. He co-directs GLOBALCIT, an online observatory on citizenship and voting rights. His recent books include *Democratic Inclusion. Rainer Bauböck in Dialogue*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2018 and

Migration & Staatsbürgerschaft, Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2021 (with co-author Gerd Valchars).

Gustavo Barbosa is associate researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Universidade Federal Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He holds a PhD in anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of *The Best of Hard Times - Palestinian Refugee Masculinities in Lebanon* (Syracuse, 2022). He has published several articles in English and Portuguese on Palestinian refugees, masculinities, gender, and anthropological theory. His academic interests are political, economic and medical anthropology, gender, refugees, masculinities, new reproductive technologies, and hope. His homepage is gustavo-barbosa.com

Estella Carpi is a social anthropologist primarily working on humanitarianism, identity politics and forced migration. She is Lecturer of Humanitarian Studies in the Institute of Risk and Disaster Reduction at University College London. She received her PhD in Anthropology of Humanitarianism from the University of Sydney in Australia (2015). After studying Arabic in Milan and Damascus (2002-2008), she worked in several academic and research institutions in Egypt, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates. She is the author of *Specchi Scomodi. Etnografia delle Migrazioni Forzate nel Libano Contemporaneo*, published in Italian

with Mimesis (2018). Estella is a 2020-25 Global Young Academy Member. She can be contacted at: e.carpi@ucl.ac.uk

Viola Castellano is Research Fellow and Adjunct Professor at Bologna University, Italy, while previously she worked as Postdoctoral Fellow of the São Paulo Research Foundation at the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning. Since 2019, she is conducting a research on post-asylum trajectories and subjectivities between Italy and the Gambia. Her research interests revolve around the anthropology of institutions and social services, humanitarianism, political subjectivity, racism and racialization, migration management and the right to asylum. She is part of the MODI-Centro su Mobilità, Diversità, Inclusione sociale of Bologna University and the Research Group Anthropology of Global Inequalities of Bayreuth University

Jasmin Lilian Diab is a Canadian-Lebanese Scholar and Expert in Migration, Gender and Conflict Studies. Dr. Diab is the Director of the Institute for Migration Studies at the Lebanese American University, where she also serves as an Assistant Professor of Migration Studies at the Department of Social and Education Sciences. Most recently, Dr. Diab joined the United Nations-mandated University for Peace as a Visiting Professor at their Department of Peace and

Conflict Studies. She has served as an International Consultant to UN Agencies, international humanitarian organizations and governments, and has assisted in evaluating humanitarian programming, conducting research in conflict settings, conducting gender analyses, and developing strategies for organizations' interventions in hard-to-reach areas across the MENA - particularly in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria and the Palestinian Territories.

Rachael Diniega is studying for her PhD in Geography as a project assistant at the Research Platform Mobile Cultures and Societies, University of Vienna. Her research examines the effect of translocal social remittances on the environment in Morocco. Her interests build from an international background in sustainable development and human rights. Read more about her work [here](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7324-4749). <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7324-4749>

Nina Egger holds a B.A. degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the University of Vienna and an M.A. degree in Advanced Migration Studies from Copenhagen University. Currently, she is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Vienna. Her research is located on the intersection of social belonging and ethnicity, (forced) migration, and Middle Eastern Studies.

Sarah El Bulbeisi has an MA from the University of Zurich, and a PhD from the Institute for Near and Middle East Studies at the LMU Munich (2019), Germany. She is currently a research Associate at the *Orient-Institut Beirut* (OIB). Prior to that, she coordinated the DAAD project “*Violence, Forced Migration and Exile: Trauma in the Arab World and in Germany*”, a Higher Education Dialogue between Palestinian and Lebanese universities and LMU Munich. She was also a lecturer and Research Associate at the Institute for Near and Middle East Studies at the LMU Munich. Her latest book (in German) is “*Taboo, Trauma and Identity: Subject Constructions of Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland, 1960 to 2015*” (transcript Verlag, 2020).

Adèle Garnier is an Assistant Professor and the Director of undergraduate studies at the *Département de Géographie, Université Laval*, Canada. Her research investigates the interplay of regulatory levels in migration and refugee policy in comparative perspective. She is the co-editor of *Refugee Resettlement: Power, Politics and Humanitarian Governance* (with Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and Liliana Lyra Jubilut, Berghahn, 2018) and has published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Refuge and Hommes et Migrations* among other outlets.

Daniela Paredes Grijalva is a DOC-ÖAW Fellow and a researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the

Austrian Academy of Sciences, an associate member of the Research Platform Mobile Cultures and Societies at the University of Vienna, and a member of the Global De-Centre. She has worked on transnational migration, gender, and social protection in both research and practitioner contexts. Her experience in education and engagement with migrant communities intersect in a decolonial and anti-racist praxis in cultural, artistic, and academic spheres. Her interests also include disasters, environmental change, more-than-human relations, colonial legacies, and human rights. She currently researches links between the environment and (im)mobilities in Indonesia.

Email daniela.paredes.grijalva@oeaw.ac.at

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8217-9803>

Maria Six-Hohenbalken is Deputy Director of the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, and Lecturer in the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. Her fields of interest include political violence, migration, refuge, memory studies, transnationalism and diaspora studies, and historical anthropology. She coedited *Memory and Genocide: On What Remains and the Possibility of Representation* (2017) with Fazil Moradi and Ralph Buchenhorst. Her latest publication is “Silencing the Periphery—Dealing with a Fateful Past in Transnational

Spaces" in *Archiv Orientální* 12(20). Email: maria.six-hohenbalken@oeaw.ac.at

Christine Nölle-Karimi is a senior scientist at the *Institute of Iranian Studies* of the *Austrian Academy of Sciences* in Vienna. Her books include *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan* (1997); *Afghanistan – A Country without a State?* (edited with Conrad Schetter and Reinhard Schlagintweit, 2002); and *Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (2014). Her current research is devoted to literary modernity and travelogues in the Persophone world.

Sylvia Koberwa is a Master's student in Justice and Security at Universidade Federal Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She is a refugee from Uganda and holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and Social Administration from Kampala International University in Uganda. She is also an English teacher at *Abraço Cultural* in Rio de Janeiro. Her academic interests comprise motherhood, children, humanitarianism, human rights and social services in the context of forced migration.

Josef Kohlbacher, born 09-05-1958 in Lilienfeld (Lower Austria); graduations in social and cultural anthropology, sociology, German philology, history and Egyptology at the University of Vienna; 1984-1987 researcher at the Vienna

Museum of Anthropology (Dept. India and the Himalaya regions), field work in Northern and Central India and in Egypt; since 1988 senior researcher at the Institute of Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, since 2006 deputy director; main research interests: labour and housing market integration of immigrants, municipal integration policies, interethnic relations in urban neighbourhoods, residential segregation, refugee studies.

Suzana

Duarte

Santos

Mallard (doctorate in Psychosociology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, UFRJ/EICOS) is a psychologist and psychoanalyst, and a researcher in migration and diasporic phenomena. She is currently a member of DIASPOTICS/UFRJ, and an Invited Resident Student at the University of Minnesota (Family and Social Science Department), where she is conducting research among therapists who in turn work with forced migrants from 2018/19. Besides her academic activities, she is a full-time therapist who proposes psychoanalysis as a lens for listening to human and cross-cultural circumstances. Her research interests involve mental health, forced migration, decolonization and Afro-feminism praxis, psychoanalysis, and cross-cultural approach. For more on Dr. Mallard's work, including her publications, click [here](#) or follow her on Twitter: @Syoscha

Helena de Moraes Manfrinato Othman was born in Brazil. She has a bachelor's degree in social sciences from *São Paulo State University* (UNESP), Araraquara campus, and a Master's degree in Social Anthropology from the *University of São Paulo* (USP), where she is currently a doctoral student. She is a member of *Center for Religions of the Contemporary World* (PPGAS USP/CEBRAP), *Palestinian/Latin American Studies Center* (NEPLA), and the *Middle East Studies Center* (NEOM, PPGA/UFF).

Patrícia Martuscelli is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Sheffield and a Ph.D. in Political Science (Universidade de São Paulo). Before joining Sheffield, she was Social Science Research Fellow in Conflict and Migration at the Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction (IRDR, University College London), a Visiting Scholar at the Carolina Population Center (UNC-Chapel Hill), the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (UZH), and the Zukuftskolleg (University of Konstanz). Her research interests involve asylum and migration politics in Latin America, family reunification, refugee children, and refugees in Brazil. Further information and publications: <https://sites.google.com/view/patricia-martuscelli>.
Twitter @Patnabuco E-mail: p.nabuco.martuscelli@sheffield.ac.uk

Monika Mokre is a political scientist and senior research associate at the Austrian Academy of Science's Institute of Culture Studies and Theatre Studies as well as member of ROR-N. She teaches in various contexts, e.g. at Webster University Vienna and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Her main interest as a researcher and as a political activist are asylum and migration policies.

Hannah Myott completed her MA in 2020 and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Vienna, Department of Social & Cultural Anthropology. Her research interests include refugee policy, nationalism & national identity, Islamophobia, and the geographic areas of Vienna and Minnesota (USA).

Angela Facundo Navia is Assistant professor in the department of anthropology and of the postgraduate program in social anthropology at the Federal University of Rio Grande del Norte (UFRN), Brazil. She investigates regimes of mobility, forced displacement, refuge, violence, the nation-state, and race, gender and class relations. She is Research Affiliate at the Interdisciplinary Group for Gender Studies of the National University of Colombia, at the Gender Body and Sexuality group of UFRN, at the Ethnicity, Culture and Development Research Laboratory (LACED) of the National Museum and at the Laboratory of State

anthropology, regulation and public policies (Documenta) of UFRJ.

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik (S.J.D Harvard Law School 2008) is a professor of legal sociology at the Faculty of Law, University of Oslo and a Research Professor in Humanitarian Studies at PRIO. She works on the digital transformation of humanitarian action and refugee management with a focus on legalization, accountability, ethics and rights. She also has a long-standing focus on global health. Most recently, she has published on the digital transformation of the struggle against sexual violence and digital dead body management. She is currently working on the technological, gender and human rights aspects of the Covid-19 response, with a focus on vaccination passports, tracking apps, children's rights and the rule of law.

Leonardo Schiocchet has a PhD in anthropology (Boston University, 2011) and a Habilitation in social and cultural anthropology (University of Vienna, 2022). He is a researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), a member of the Refugee Outreach & Research Network (ROR-n), and principal investigator of the FWF project The Austro-Arab Encounter. Since 2005, his work has focused on social belonging processes among Arab forced migrants. His

latest book is *Living in Refuge: Ritualization and Religiosity in a Christian and a Muslim Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon* (transcript Publishing, 2022).

Mirian Alves de Souza has a PhD in anthropology (University Federal Fluminense, Brazil, 2013). She is currently a professor at the Department of Anthropology and Post-graduate Program of Justice and Security at the University Federal Fluminense, and a researcher at the Center for Middle East Studies (NEOM/UFF). She is also a member of ROR-n and INEAC-INCT. Since 2015, her work has focused on the organizations involved in managing refugee, asylum and protection processes, and on the relations between humanitarian workers and refugees from the Syrian conflict in Brazil.

Gerd Valchars is a political scientist with a research focus on citizenship and electoral rights, migration, and the Austrian and European political systems. He teaches at the Universities of Vienna and Klagenfurt; at the University of Applied Sciences, Campus Vienna; and the Institute of European Studies, Vienna. He is Country Expert Austria for the Global Citizenship Observatory (<http://globalcit.eu/>) at the European University Institute and Country Coordinator Austria for the European Web Site on Integration (<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration>). His most recent publication (with Rainer Bauböck) is *Migration &*

Staatsbürgerschaft (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press 2021).

Mina Vasileva is an MA student at the department of Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Vienna. Her research interests include forced migration, islamophobia and anthropology of policy. She is currently writing her thesis about the Austrian Values and Orientation Courses.

Julia Volk is a professional occupational therapist and teaches at the *University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt*, Lower Austria. Her Master's thesis in "Management im Gesundheitswesen" (FH Burgenland, 2017) centered on health literacy among Syrian Refugees in Austria. Her work is a result of her interest in cultures and empowering people. Her current focus lies on working with children and mentoring relevant caregivers, and her latest article is *Betätigung für Gesundheit essentiell* (ergopraxis, 2019).

Ruth Wodak is Emerita Distinguished Professor of Discourse Studies at Lancaster University. She was awarded the Wittgenstein Prize for Elite Researchers, Honorary Doctorates from University of Örebro in Sweden and from Warwick University. She is member of the British Academy of Social Sciences and Academia Europaea, and

Honorary Member of the Senate of the University of Vienna. She is co-editor of the journals *Discourse and Society*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, and *Language and Politics*. Her research foci are, inter alia “Discourse Studies (Theories and Methodologies); Political Communication; Organizational Discourses; Identity Politics and Politics of the Past; Gender Politics; Migration Studies; and Far-right Populism”. Recent book publications include: *Identity Politics Past and Present. Political Discourses from Post-war Austria to the Covid Crisis* (Exeter Press 2022; with M. Rheindorf); and *The Politics of Fear. The shameless normalization of far-right populist discourses* (Sage 2021). See <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/profiles/Ruth-Wodak> for more information.

Lisa Wolfsegger is a cultural and social anthropologist and political scientist at the NGO Asylkoordination Österreich. She focuses on child refugees: advocacy, national and international networking and providing expertise. She coedited a study by Asylkoordination Österreich and UNICEF Österreich on accompanied minors in Austria published in 2019. Lisa Wolfsegger provides refugee counselling on a voluntary basis at Deserteurs- und Flüchtlingsberatung. E-Mail: wolfsegger@asyl.at



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THIS BOOK IS A SELECTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ROR-N BLOG (2020-2022). 29 AUTHORS COMING FROM DIVERSE DISCIPLINES DISCUSS FORCED MIGRATION-RELATED ISSUES. ALL 23 CONTRIBUTIONS OFFERED HERE WERE WRITTEN BY ACADEMICIANS, BASED ON INFORMED IN-DEPTH RESEARCH AND GEARED TO A WIDER PUBLIC. THIS COLLECTION IS INTENDED TO OFFER READERS A BROAD PANORAMA OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CURRENT DEBATES ON FORCED MIGRATION WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF ACADEMIA. WE HOPE THAT IT WILL SERVE AS A HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT OF HOW THESE DEBATES AFFECT AND ARE AFFECTED BY THE TRIBULATIONS OF THE CURRENT HISTORICAL MOMENT.

