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Editorial for Refugee Review Volume V

'Migration, Asylum and Refuge during a Global Pandemic: Perspectives of Migrants, Researchers and Practitioners'

The Pandemic became a 'great disruptor' for international and internal mobility across the globe and throughout the migration cycle (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021).

According to the latest World Migration Report 2022, there are 281 million international migrants globally, including 169 million migrant workers. As of the end of 2020, out of total 89.4 million people living in displacement, 26.4 million were refugees (including 5.7 million Palestinians), 4.1 million were asylum seekers, and 3.9 million were displaced Venezuelans (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021) . The top ten countries of origin – Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Burundi – accounted for more than 80 percent of the total refugee population. More than half of all refugees resided in ten countries – Turkey, Lebanon, Colombia, Pakistan, Iran, Uganda, Germany, Sudan, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia (ibid.: 45-49).

COVID-19 had multi-faceted unequal impacts on people on the move, on host communities and communities of origin, on practitioners, and researchers. Mobility disruptions and strict health protocols affected every aspect of our social lives (Benton et al., 2021) – from access to food, education, safety, healthcare to concerns about the mental health, burnout, and exhaustion of those who migrate, care for, help and does research about migrants (Açıkalın et al., 2021; Al-Awaida et al., 2020; Espinoza et al., 2021; Moyo et al., 2021; Ocean Nexus Center, 2020; Schmidtke & Oquendo Lorduy, 2021; WB-UHNCR, 2020). Existing vulnerabilities deepened, scarce resources stretched even more, and, by no accident or coincidence, global inequalities in vaccine distribution and access to medical supplies mirrored global (im)mobilities patterns (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2021; Crawley, 2021, Tanner et al., 2021). The 'Covid excuse' (Stierl & Dadusc, 2021; Tazzioli & Stierl, 2021) and 'sanitary apartheid' (Heller, 2021) of arbitrary border closures to people on the move or to nationals of some countries (e.g. as the recent case of Omicron travel restrictions called

'unnecessary' by the South Africa[1]) vividly demonstrated that pandemic exacerbated global injustices.

While not so much a direct driver of movement in itself, Covid-19, and the related measures to contain it, primarily act as stress multipliers, impacting on other drivers, mainly economic reasons for leaving, access to services, security, rights and freedoms (Horwood & Frouws, 2021, p. 96). COVID-19 affected the scale of implementation of all durable solutions for refugees – return, integration, and resettlement. In 2020, over 250,000 refugees returned to their countries of origin compared to 317,000 in 2019. 34,000 refugees were naturalized last year with the Netherlands, Canada and France taking the lead; however, the total number was noticeably lower than 55,000 naturalized refugees in 2019. During 2020 we have also seen a big drop in the resettlement of refugees – only 34,400, a third of the total 107,700 refugees resettled in 2019, because of resettlement program suspensions (ibid).

The implementation of international protection and durable solutions were largely suspended due to public health emergency (Anonymous, 2020) despite the UN's appeals for solidarity, responsibility and burden-sharing (UN Executive Committee, 2021). The implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees was also affected by the COVID-19 and remains uneven across countries and regions (Carrera & Geddes, 2021; Dowling et al., 2021; DRC, 2020).

During COVID-19, people on the move and migrant workers have been affected simultaneously by three crises: health, protection and socio-economic (United Nations, 2020). The Pandemic disrupted complex chains of transnational support and care. Despite some positive examples of COVID-19 inclusion and care for migrants and people on the move (IOM-UN Migration, 2021; IOM, 2021; United Nations Network on Migration, 2021b), most forcibly displaced people, informal migrant labourers, or returnees have had limited access to social safety nets vital during pandemic and remain in situations of vulnerability (Cishwanath et al., 2020; United Nations Network on Migration, 2021a). An intersectional lens on the displaced highlights differential impact of COVID-19 on various groups of migrating people – children, older persons, LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities among others (Davis, 2021; UNHCR, 2021a, 2021c, 2021b).

The future of global mobility in the case of prolonged pandemic is highly uncertain as are the immediate and long-term consequences for people who are on the move, their families, and communities along the migratory routes. Most current predictions indicate

[1] See Ines Eisele (Nov 30, 2021). Omicron: Which countries have closed their borders? *Deutche Welle* https://www.dw.com/en/omicron-which-countries-have-closed-their-borders/a-59979182

further mobility restrictions, tighter controls, erosion of international protection system and precarious migratory choices as a result of absent regular pathways and long-term solutions (Benton, 2021; IOM-UN Migration, 2020).

Volume V of Refugee Review explores four thematic areas related to the impact of global pandemic on migrants, researchers and practitioners who work within the broadly defined field of migration studies. Our first area of interest are *the effects of border closures* and establishment of strict health protocols on mobility and immobility. **Górczyńska** looks at severely curtailed access to asylum at the borders of Poland that took place well before the recent migration 'crisis' at the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021. She argues that pandemic restrictions were used by the Polish authorities to justify border closures and denying access to asylum well before the pandemic. **Haden** analyses the sub-Saharan migrant communities in Morocco to explore the consequences of the externalization and securitization of the European Union's migration and border policies to its neighbour countries on migrants' access to healthcare. **Nabi** looks specifically at the situation of refugees in Lesbos during the Covid-19 and argues that refugees' lives became a biopolitical terrain of struggle between efforts for invisibility by the states and the EU and visibility by the refugees. **Bendel, Fackler and Wiese** summarise the series of three online events where experts debated challenges to human rights of refugees that arose due to Covid-19 taking the cases of Western Africa, Libya, Greek island of Lesbos and Bavaria (Germany).

The second area of interest for us to explore was the *intersectionality and COVID-19*. For instance, **Bhat** explores the impact of Covid-19 on transnational care practices of Nigerian migrant women in Southern Europe. The paper argues that cross-border lens allows us to see broader impact of pandemic restrictions on marginalised communities at origin and destination countries. **Owigo** analyses the challenges Somalian women-returnees from Saudi Arabia face and gendered vulnerabilities they experience during migration cycle. **Hucke** explores the case of lesbian migrant women in South Africa who feel themselves in a situation of 'double quarantine' due to dual restrictions caused by the pandemic and restricted access to support.

The third theme of this volume is the impact of pandemic on the *welfare* of migrant communities. **Kinawi** focuses on the protection gap experienced by the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, whose socio-economic rights are not protected. **Tobin, Momani, and Al Yakoub** compare the impact of coronavirus prevention measures on Syrian refugees in Jordan who reside in camps and those who live in urban areas. Taking example of Bengaluru (India), **Mangur and Sengupta** look at the help provided by the civil society organisations to migrant labourers stranded by the lockdown. **Golesorkhi, Fortson and Riedmann** explore the impact of pandemic-related immobility exacerbated by the

restrictions paused by the racial justice protests on mental health and livelihoods of refugees in Portland (US). This section concludes with reflections of impacts of the pandemic on migrant communities through the lens of two artists. **Moran's** poem 'Old Age Home' painfully traces the experiences of a family Elder, lamenting the way he or she was pushed out of the family in old age. Through his work 'Selfish Healthy', **De Santo** illustrates the silent environmental externality of the pandemic – the significant waste produced.

Finally, we were interested in what noticeable and tangible *changes the pandemic brought to lives and work* of practitioners and migrants in all aspects of their lives. **Cabitza, Da Mosto, Lesi and Levi** discuss not only the intersectional impact of Covid-19 on women refugees and asylum seekers residing in reception centre in Bologna. They also explore the impact of pandemic on social workers who face increased workload and stricter rules they needed to abound. **Totah** explores how migrant artists from Arab region experienced lockdowns and expressed resilience in the face of the pandemic through their artwork.

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Borders and COVID-19

Journey Interrupted: Access to Asylum at the Borders of Poland in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

MARTA GÓRCZYNSKA[1]

Abstract

This article explores border restrictions introduced by the Polish government in response to the global pandemic and how they affected those seeking asylum. The author argues that the government's failure to exempt asylum seekers from the general border closure was not an accidental omission, but rather indicates a deliberate decision to exclude this category of migrants from the right to enter Poland during the pandemic. This decision is the continuation of a long-standing policy of closed doors implemented at Poland's eastern borders since 2015, when the currently ruling Law and Justice Party won the parliamentary elections by exploiting anti-immigration sentiments surrounding the "refugee crisis." The sudden drop of asylum applications submitted in Poland in 2020, along with the reluctance of border authorities to apply discretionary measures to allow entry to Poland for those seeking international protection, seem to confirm the unlawful practice of denying access to asylum in the time of the pandemic. The Polish example fits in with the general trend of closing the borders for refugees which might be observed in the states of the Global North not only in the times of a health crisis.

Keywords

Access to Asylum, COVID-19, Non-Refoulement

[1] Marta Górczyńska, human rights lawyer and PhD candidate at the University of Warsaw, mz.gorczynska@uw.edu.pl.

Introduction

Border restrictions introduced by states across the world in response to the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic made access to asylum even more difficult than under regular circumstances. Travel bans, information chaos, and restrictions in the operation of international transport have affected the right to seek asylum in many parts of the world, and Poland was no exception. The number of applications for international protection received by Polish migration authorities in 2020 has been the lowest in twenty years. Moreover, in the first four months of the pandemic, not even one asylum application was received at the Brest-Terespol border crossing, traditionally the busiest entry point to Poland for asylum seekers.

One might argue that this was inevitable and, at least to some extent, justified, considering that extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. This paper, however, attempts to demonstrate that closing the borders of Poland to asylum seekers in the time of the pandemic is a continuation of the long-standing practice of systemic pushbacks recently acknowledged and condemned by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the judgement *M.K. and Others v. Poland.*[2] The practice has existed at Poland's eastern borders since 2015, when the right-wing Law and Justice Party took advantage of fears surrounding the "refugee crisis" and fuelled anti-refugee sentiments among the society to win the parliamentary elections.[3]

In order to offer the reader a comprehensive overview on the subject of access to asylum at the borders of Poland in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper has the following structure: in the first section, the state of law following the introduction of the legal measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus is analysed; in the second section, the statistical data which can serve as evidence of closing the borders of Poland to refugees are explored; in the third section, a wider context of pushback policy in Poland is presented and, finally, the conclusions are drawn.

Extraordinary Measures for Extraordinary Times?

In April 2020, when the new virus was spreading across the globe, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees informed that as a response to the escalating health crisis, 167 countries had fully or partially closed their borders, from which at least fifty-

[2] European Court of Human Rights, judgement of 23 July 2020, *M.K. and Others v. Poland*, applications nos. 40503/17, 42902/17 and 43643/17.

[3] Elżbieta M. Gozdziak and Péter Márton "Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland," *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 7, no. 2 (2018): 125-151, accessed 5 June 2021, http://www.ceemr.uw.edu.pl/vol-7-no-2-2018/special-section/where-wild-things-are-fear-islam-and-anti-refugee-rhetoric-hungary

seven had not introduced any exceptions for persons seeking asylum.[4] The UNHCR has launched an online platform allowing users to track temporary measures introduced by states and their impact on protection.[5] Indeed, at the beginning of the worldwide chaos caused by the outbreak of the new infectious disease, it seemed that the right to asylum and the non-refoulement principle were at risk of mass violations like never before.

Poland was no exception. By means of the Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of 13 March 2020,[6] border traffic at the external borders of Poland (with the Russian Federation, Republic of Belarus, and Ukraine) was temporarily suspended or restricted, and border traffic at the internal EU borders (with the Federal Republic of Germany, Czech Republic, Lithuanian Republic, and Slovakian Republic) was restricted, both until further notice. The Regulation was introduced based on Article 16(3)(2) of the Act of 12 October 1990 on the protection of the state border,[7] according to which the Minister responsible for internal affairs may order a temporary suspension or restriction of border traffic at specific border crossing points, considering the need to ensure national security or public safety, or protection against threat to human life or health, as well as preventing the spread of animal disease epidemics.

As a result, since 15 March 2020, passenger traffic in the direction of entry to Poland has been limited to the categories of persons enumerated in the text of the Regulation, including Polish citizens and indicated groups of foreigners, such as: spouses and children of Polish citizens, holders of a Pole's Card, diplomats and their families, holders of permanent or temporary residence permits, foreigners allowed to work in the territory of Poland, and foreign large goods vehicle drivers. Additionally, as a way of exception, the Regulation gave the competence to commanding officers of the Border Guard stations to allow any other foreigner, upon prior consent of the Commander in Chief of the Border Guard, to enter the territory of Poland in particularly justified cases. The Regulation did not specify the legal means of granting such permission.

[4] UNHCR press release of 22 April 2020, Beware long-term damage to human rights and refugee rights from the coronavirus pandemic: UNHCR. Available on: https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/4/5ea035ba4/beware-long-term-damage-human-rights-refugee-rights-coronavirus-pandemic.html [accessed on 16.02.2021].

[5] UNHCR, COVID-19 platform on temporary measures and impact on protection. Available on: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/137 [accessed on 16.02.2021].

[6] Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of 13 March 2020 on the temporary suspension or restriction of border traffic at certain border crossing points (Journal of Law 2020, item 435 with further amendments), hereinafter: Regulation, accessed 16 February 2021, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20200000435/O/D20200435.pdf

[7] Act of 12 October 1990 on the protection of the state border (Journal of Law 1990, no 78, item 461 with further amendments), accessed 16 February 2021, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19900780461/U/D19900461Lj.pdf

Persons seeking international protection had not been included in the text of the Regulation, which was immediately pointed out by the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman)[8] and the group of non-governmental organisations providing assistance to refugees and migrants.[9] They argued that, since the external borders of Poland had been almost entirely closed and asylum seekers had not been included on the list of foreigners allowed to enter, the right to seek asylum became impossible to exercise. The problem concerned not only foreigners seeking entry to Poland, but also those already present on its territory. Information chaos combined with temporary suspension of the face-to-face applicant's service at the Office for Foreigners (the central asylum determination authority) made access to asylum procedures in the first months of the pandemic incredibly difficult.[10]

In the meantime, under international law, persons in need of protection from persecution shall retain the right to seek asylum even in the most extraordinary circumstances. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, states are responsible for ensuring protection from expulsion to all persons within their jurisdiction, including at the frontiers.[11] Prohibition of non-refoulement, considered by most legal scholars as a peremptory norm deriving from customary international law[12] and enshrined also in other international treaties,[13] cannot be derogated.[14] Therefore, under any circumstances, measures that are introduced in order to mitigate the risk for public health caused by the spread of the virus cannot preclude entry to those at risk of persecution.[15] The right to

[8] Ombudsman's communication of 2 April 2020, Coronavirus and the rights of foreigners seeking protection from persecution. The Ombudsman asks the Border Guard about the current procedures on the eastern border, accessed 16 February 2021, https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/koronawirus-granice-ochrona-miedzynarodowa-w-Polsce

[9] Letter of 26 March 2020 of a group of non-governmental organisations to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration, accessed 16 February 2021, https://amnesty.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Wystąpienie-NGOs-do-MSWiA-2020.03.26.pdf

[10] The position of 13 May 2020 of the Expert Committee on Migrants, an advisory body to the Ombudsman, on the rights of migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, accessed 24 February 2021, https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/sytuacja-migrantow-pandemii-stanowisko-rpo-i-komisji-ekspertow-ds-migrantow

[11] Article 33(1) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereinafter: 1951 Refugee Convention).

[12] Cathryn Costello and Michelle Foster, "Non-refoulement as Custom and Jus Cogens? Putting the Prohibition to the Test," in *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law 2015: Jus Cogens: Quo Vadis?*, eds. Maarten den Heijer and Harmen van der Wilt, (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016): 273-327, accessed 27 February 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-114-2_10

[13] For example, Article 3(1) of the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

[14] Alice Edwards, "Temporary protection, derogation and the 1951 Refugee Convention," in *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 13, no. 2 (2012): , accessed 27 February 2021, https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1687379/Edwards.pdf

[15] See also: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Key Legal Considerations on access to territory for persons in need of international protection in the context of the COVID-19 response." 16 March 2020, accessed 23 February 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/cz/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/04/UNHCR-Legal-Considerations-on-Access-to-Territory-in-the-Covid-19-Pandemic-March-2020.pdf

asylum and the prohibition of collective expulsions of foreigners are envisaged also in EU law.[16]

Despite several amendments of the Regulation since its introduction and the gradual expansion of the list of non-nationals allowed to enter Poland, as well as repeated calls by the Ombudsman to include asylum seekers,[17] persons seeking international protection have not been mentioned in the text of the legal act to this day. Under these circumstances, it would be very hard to argue that the failure to include this extremely vulnerable group of foreigners on the list of persons allowed to enter Poland was an accidental omission made by the government under the pressure of extraordinary times. It rather points to a deliberate policy of the Polish government.

The explanation which the Border Guard provided in response to the Ombudsman's concerns has raised even more doubts regarding the observation of the non-refoulement principle at the borders of Poland in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.[18] The Commander in Chief explained that under extraordinary safety measures introduced at the external borders, only persons falling into one of the categories enumerated in the text of the Regulation are being sent to the border checks in the direction of entry to Poland. Other categories of travellers do not undergo either border control or administrative proceedings during which decisions on the refusal of entry could be issued.

Not only might such practises violate several procedural rights, including the right to effective remedy, but they might also hinder the right to asylum and pose great risk of the collective expulsion of foreigners. The European Court of Human Rights has found in a number of cases that all measures compelling foreigners to leave the country, or not allowing them to enter, must be taken on an individual basis after careful examination of each case.[19] Meanwhile, under the current state of Polish domestic law, potential asylum seekers arriving to the borders of Poland who do not fall into one of the categories of foreigners allowed to enter under the provisions of the Regulation are not being allowed to undergo the border check and, therefore, have no chance to present their case and request international protection.

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[16] Articles 18 and 19 of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Article 6(2) of the Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast).

[17] The correspondence between the Commander in Chief of Border Guard and the Ombudsman is summarised in the letter of the Ombudsman of 12 May 2020 to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration, accessed 23 February 2021, https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Wystąpienie%20do%20MSWiA%20ws%20sytuacji%20na%20granicach%2C%2012.05.2020.pdf

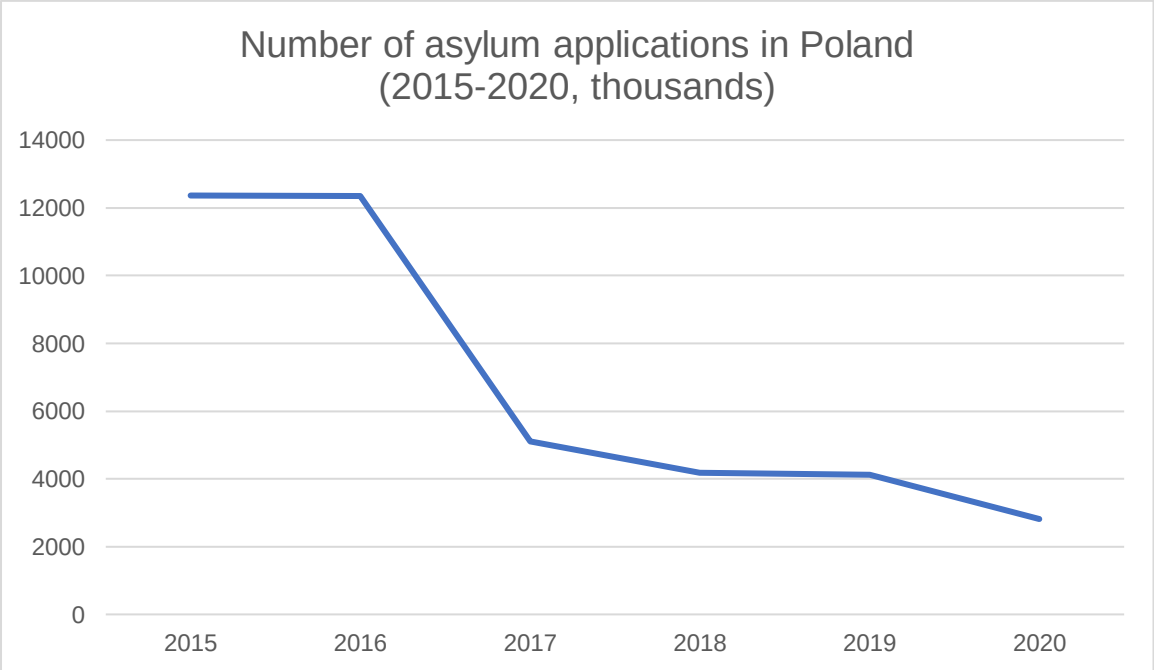
[18] Ibid.

[19] European Court of Human Rights, judgement of 23 February 2012, *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy*, application no. 27765/09, §§ 183-185.

Despite this, the Border Guard has assured, in correspondence with the Ombudsman, that the right to asylum is being observed and that applications for international protection are being received. Analysis of the statistical data, however, contradicts these assurances.

Figures Don't Lie

During the entirety of 2020, 2,815 persons applied for asylum in Poland,[20] which was 32% less than the year before, and the least since 1999. In the period of April to July 2020, in the first months of the pandemic, no application for international protection was received at the Brest-Terespol border crossing point, which has traditionally been the main entry point to Poland for most asylum applicants.[21] In the third quarter of the year, asylum applications were received from only twenty-two people at that border crossing point. The same number of applications was received in the fourth quarter. For comparison: in the first quarter of 2020, just before the beginning of the pandemic, 404 persons submitted asylum applications in Terespol.



[22]

Apart from the legal measures introduced by the Polish government, what has also affected the situation at the border is the suspension of the Brest-Terespol train. The train

[20] Statistical data available on: https://migracje.gov.pl.

[21] Most of the asylum applicants come to Poland from the former USSR republics, such as the Russian Federation (mostly from Chechnya), Tajikistan, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, etc.

[22] Source: https://migracje.gov.pl

arriving from Brest to Terespol has served for many years as the main means of transport for asylum seekers arriving to the border of Poland. It is chosen particularly by citizens of the former USSR countries due to convenient connections between Moscow and Brest.[23] Suspension of the train, combined with the refusal of the Border Guard to accept asylum applications at other border crossings, led to the actual denial of access to asylum.[24]

As the statistics and testimonial evidence prove, the problem with accessing asylum at the external border of Poland, which is at the same time the external border of the EU, has primarily affected citizens of the Russian Federation of Chechen origin, who are the largest group of asylum applicants every year in Poland.[25] Despite the fact that Poland also shares the border with Russia, it is the Polish-Belarusian border crossing point in Terespol that has served, for them, as a main point of entry to Poland since the 1990s. The suspension of the Brest-Terespol train, along with the introduction of entry restrictions, made the possibility of submitting asylum applications at the external borders of Poland in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, if not impossible, then at least extremely difficult.

According to the statistics provided by the Border Guard,[26] in the first three months of 2020 there were subsequently 2,163 (January); 1,695 (February); and 729 (March) decisions on the refusal of entry issued towards citizens of Russia at the border crossing in Terespol. It is worth noting that, as the non-governmental organisations report, most of the Russians refused entry at that border crossing were, in fact, rejected asylum seekers.[27] Starting from April until the end of the year, there were just a few of these refusals each month (between three and fourteen). Even taking into account that some of the asylum seekers have not been able to reach the border of Poland due to the pandemic, it can be assumed that those who have managed to reach it might have been arbitrarily rejected entry, with no official administrative proceedings conducted and no decisions on the

[23] See more in Chrzanowska, Aleksandra et al., *At the Border: Report on monitoring of access to the procedure for granting international protection at border crossings in Terespol, Medyka and Warszawa-Okecie Airport*. (Warsaw: Association for Legal Intervention, 2016):, accessed 23 February 2021, https://interwencjaprawna.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/at-the-border.pdf

[24] Human Constanta, *Report on the situation with transit refugees on the Belarusian-Polish border (January-March 2020)*, (Minsk: Human Constanta, 2020), accessed 18 February 2021, https://humanconstanta.by/en/report-on-the-situation-with-transit-refugees-on-the-belarusian-polish-border-january-march-2020/

[25] In 2019, out of 4,111 asylum applicants 2,618 were the citizens of Russian Federation (63%); in 2018, out of 4,172 applicants 2,743 were the citizens of Russian Federation (65%); in 2017, out of 5,105 applicants 3,574 were the citizens of Russian Federation (70%). Statistical data can be accessed on: https://migracje.gov.pl/en/ [accessed on 07.03.2021].

[26] Statistical data provided on 24 February 2021 by the Information Protection Office of the Headquarters of the Border Guard upon the request of the author of the article (letter no. KG-OI-VIII.0180.45.2021.JL).

[27] Jacek Białas, Marta Górczyńska, and Daniel Witko. *Access to Asylum procedure at Poland's external borders: Current situation and challenges for the future,* trans. Marta Górczyńska. (Warsaw: Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, 2019): , accessed 26 February 2021, http://www.hfhr.pl/en/hfhr-report-access-to-asylum-procedure-at-polands-external-borders-current-state-of-affairs-and-future-challenges/

refusal of entry issued. Such concerns were also raised by the Ombudsman in the official letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration.[28]

One might rightly argue that, even though they were not expressly included in the text of the Regulation, asylum seekers have retained the right to seek protection from persecution under the provisions of international law, which should be applied directly without any reservations. Yet, analysis of the statistical data shows that in the entirety of 2020, out of the total number of 23,848 permissions to entry granted by commanding officers of the Border Guard under special procedures foreseen in the Regulation, only eleven were granted for the purpose of seeking asylum. The right to asylum, the non-refoulement principle, and the prohibition of collective expulsion have been seriously undermined.

As a side note, it must be mentioned that last year Poland witnessed a significant increase in the number of asylum applications lodged by citizens of Belarus. While in recent years, around thirty to forty asylum applications per year were filed by Belarusian nationals, in 2020, because of state repressions conducted after a series of nationwide anti-government demonstrations, 408 Belarusians requested international protection in Poland. As a gesture of political support for the Belarusian opposition, on 15 September 2020,[29] the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration amended the Regulation and excluded Belarusian citizens who were holders of Polish tourist visas from the travel ban to Poland. Already on 21 September 2020,[30] the Regulation was amended again to exclude all citizens of the Republic of Belarus from the ban, regardless of visa possession.

Although in principle, the introduction of entry facilitation for repressed Belarusians stays in line with international human rights obligations and should be positively assessed, the differentiation of the situation of refugees based on their citizenship finds neither legal nor moral justification and should be deemed discriminatory.

Old Game, New Rules

[28] Letter of the Ombudsman to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration of 12 May 2020, accessed 5 June 2021, https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Wystąpienie%20do%20MSWiA%20ws%20sytuacji%20na%20granicach%2C%2012.05.2020.pdf

[29] Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration of 15 September 2020 amending the regulation on the temporary suspension or restriction of border traffic at certain border crossing points (Journal of Law 2020, item 1597), accessed 23 February 2021, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20200001597/O/D20201597.pdf

[30] Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration of 21 September 2020 amending the regulation on the temporary suspension or restriction of border traffic at certain border crossing points (Journal of Law 2020, item 1623), accessed 23 February 2021, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20200001623/O/D20201623.pdf

Denying access to asylum at Poland's borders to people fleeing persecution is not a phenomenon solely connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mass summary expulsions of asylum seekers routinely carried out by the Polish Border Guard have been widely reported since at least 2015.[31] The policy of closed doors and rejection of the EU refugee relocation scheme were the main campaign promises made by the Law and Justice Party, which won the parliamentary elections in the fall of 2015. The problem particularly concerns the Brest-Terespol crossing point as, due to the absence of regular border control between Russia and Belarus, it has been for years a main entry point to Poland for refugees fleeing Chechnya and other former USSR republics, such as Georgia, Tajikistan, Armenia, etc.

According to the reports of national[32] and international[33] NGOs, as well as the Polish Ombudsman,[34] Border Guard officers intentionally ignored the asylum claims made by foreigners arriving to the eastern borders of Poland. The refusal of entry decision is being issued based on a brief memo drafted by the officer and not signed by the foreigner. The border check interviews last only a few minutes and are purposely conducted in a way that does not allow for the proper identification of persons seeking international protection. The questions asked by the Border Guard officers intend to prove that the reasons for entry declared by the foreigners are of an economic nature.[35] Moreover, the interviews are conducted in the premises of the closed railway station where neither lawyers representing the asylum seekers nor independent monitoring bodies, such as representatives of non-governmental organisations or the UNHCR, are allowed to enter.

[31] See for example: Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights' open letter of 22 July 2016 to twenty-one international and EU institutions reporting on Polish authorities denying access to asylum at the eastern borders of Poland, accessed 27 February 2021, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/POL/INT_CCPR_CSS_POL_24692_E.pdf

[32] Chrzanowska, Aleksandra et al., *At the Border*, ; Marta Górczyńska and Marta Szczepanik. *A Road to Nowhere: The account of the monitoring visit at the Brest-Terespol border crossing between Poland and Belarus*, (Warsaw: Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, 2016): , accessed 27 February 2021, http://www.hfhr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/raport-droga-donikad-EN-web.pdf; Amnesty International Poland "Tam i z powrotem: Brześć – Terespol," 7 December 2016, accessed 27 February 2021, https://amnesty.org.pl/tam-i-z-powrotem-brzesc-terespol/

[33] Human Rights Watch, "Poland: Asylum Seekers Blocked at the Border," 1 March 2017, accessed 27 February 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/01/poland-asylum-seekers-blocked-border; Amnesty International, "Poland: EU should tackle unsafe returns to Belarus," 5 July 2017, accessed 27 February 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/poland-eu-should-tackle-unsafe-returns-to-belarus/

[34] Commissioner for Human Rights, "Inspection of the railway border crossing in Terespol." 21 September 2016, accessed 27 February 2021, https://www.rpo.gov.pl/en/content/inspection-railway-border-crossing-terespol

[35] Ibid.

Foreigners who are refused entry to Poland are being expelled to Belarus by return train the same day.

Under the provisions of the domestic law, when an asylum seeker arrives to the border, the role of the Border Guard is limited to establishing their identity, collecting the information necessary for completing their asylum application, and transferring the application to the competent authority, i.e. the Head of the Office for Foreigners, within forty-eight hours.[36] Foreigners not meeting the entry conditions are issued an immediately enforceable decision on the refusal of entry, which can be appealed to the Chief Commander of the Border Guard within fourteen days.[37] Such decisions cannot be issued, however, to a foreigner who, in the course of the border check, declares his or her intention to seek asylum.[38]

At the peak of the "border crisis" in the summer of 2016, as many as a few hundred persons, mostly Chechen families, were being refused entry to Poland for months.[39] Each day they would board the same morning train to make yet another attempt to apply for asylum in Poland. Asylum applications were, however, received only from one or two families daily. Some people were returned to Belarus over seventy times before they were eventually allowed to apply for asylum and enter Poland, while some have never been allowed to enter.[40]

Politicians of the ruling party, including members of the government, deny, on the one hand, the existence of the unlawful pushback policy at the external borders of Poland,[41] but on the other hand, on multiple occasions, made unambiguous statements against accepting refugees, particularly from Muslim countries,[42] and proudly emphasised

[36] Article 30(1) of the Act of 13 June 2003 on Granting Protection to Foreigners on the Territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Law 2003, No 128, item 1176 with further amendments), hereinafter: Act on Protection, accessed 27 February 2021, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20031281176/U/D20031176Lj.pdf

[37] Article 33(1) and (2) of the Act of 12 December 2013 on Foreigners (Journal of Law 2013, item 1650 with further amendments), hereinafter: Act on Foreigners, accessed 27 February 2021, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20130001650/U/D20131650Lj.pdf

[38] Article 28(2)(2)(a) and (b) of the Act on Foreigners.

[39] Jonathan Brown, "Chechen asylum seekers stranded in Belarus," *Aljazeera*, 5 October 2016, accessed 7 March 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/10/5/chechen-asylum-seekers-stranded-in-belarus

[40] Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center, *Asylum Seekers in Poland – Current trends*. (Krakow: Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center, 2018), accessed 7 March 2021, https://www.pomocprawna.org/lib/i5r5fu/Focus-Report---Asylum-Trends-Poland---Sep-2018-jmj2dcq4.pdf

[41] Response of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of 23 August 2017 to parliamentary question no.14453 on preventing foreigners from submitting applications for international protection at the Terespol - Brest border crossing point, accessed 7 March 2021, http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/InterpelacjaTresc.xsp?key=1D2FAF44

[42] Jan Cienski, "Why Poland doesn't want Refugees," *Politico*, 21 May 2017, accessed on 7 March 2021, https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-nationalism-and-religion-explain-why-poland-doesnt-want-refugees/

the tightness of Poland's borders.[43] In response to the 2017 European Parliament resolution calling Poland to ensure access to asylum,[44] the Polish government stated[45] that "the measures introduced at the external border, particularly at the Terespol border crossing point, were appropriate in the current migratory situation."[46] As a side note, it is also worth noting that Poland, together with other V4 countries, has strongly opposed the acceptance of refugees within the EU relocation scheme attempting to address the 2015 refugee crisis.[47] In the judgement of 2 April 2020, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) found Poland in failure to fulfil its obligations under EU law by refusing to comply with the temporary mechanism for the relocation of applicants for international protection.[48]

In the last few years, numerous cases on the arbitrary refusal of entry were brought to domestic administrative courts by asylum seekers and their legal representatives. In all cases heard by the Supreme Administrative Court, the refusal decisions of the Border Guard were overturned. The Court has found the border proceedings conducted by the Border Guard officers flawed due to their improper way of conducting interviews with foreigners. The Court indicated that, instead of the brief memos drafted by the officers, protocols compliant with Article 67 § 1 of the Code of the Administrative Proceedings[49] and signed by both the Border Guard officers and the foreigner shall be drafted.[50] Despite the established case law of the domestic administrative courts, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration expressed the opinion that judgements delivered in individual cases

[43] TVN24, "Czeczeni koczowali na granicy. Szef MSWiA: rząd PiS nie narazi Polski na zagrożenie terrorystyczne," TVN24, 31 August 2016, accessed 27 February 2021, https://tvn24.pl/polska/czeczeni-koczowali-na-granicy-szef-mswia-rzad-pis-nie-narazi-polski-na-zagrozenie-terrorystyczne-ra672450

[44] "European Parliament resolution of 15 November 2017 on the situation of the rule of law and democracy in Poland (2017/2931(RSP))," accessed 18 February 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0442_EN.html

[45] Białas, Górczyńska, and Witko, *Access to Asylum,*

[46] To read more about the position of the Polish government see also: Marta Szczepanik "Border Politics and Practices of Resistance on the Eastern Side of 'Fortress Europe': The Case of Chechen Asylum Seekers at the Belarusian–Polish Border," in *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 7, no. 2 (2018): 69-89, accessed 7 March 2021, http://ceemr.uw.edu.pl/vol-7-no-2-2018/articles/border-politics-and-practices-resistance-eastern-side-fortress-europe-case

[47] Euronews, "Poland refuses Mid East migrants," Euronews, YouTube video, 1:20, 2 January 2018, accessed 7 March 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_z9k2JN6iVI.

[48] CJEU, judgement of the Court (Third Chamber) of 2 April 2020, *European Commission v. Republic of Poland and Others*, joined cases C-715/17, C-718/17 and C-719/17.

[49] Act of 14 June 1960 - Code of the Administrative Proceedings (Journal of Law 1960, No 30, item 168 with further amendments), hereinafter: Code of the Administrative Proceedings, accessed 9 March 2021, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19600300168/U/D19600168Lj.pdf

[50] See for example the rulings of the Supreme Administrative Court of Poland in the cases nos.: II OSK 2511/18, II OSK 2599/18, II OSK 3100/18.

are not applicable to the general situation, hence the practice at the border has remained unchanged.[51]

On 23 July 2020, the ECtHR delivered its first ruling on access to asylum in Terespol, confirming the systemic practice of pushbacks at the eastern borders of Poland. The case of *M.K. and Others v. Poland* concerned the return of a group of Chechens who arrived to the Terespol border crossing point in 2017 with the intention to seek asylum and, instead of having their applications received, they were returned to Brest in Belarus. The Court found Poland in violation of Article 3 (freedom from torture), Article 13 (right to effective remedy), and Article 34 (right to individual application) of the European Convention on Human Rights,[52] as well as Article 4 Protocol 4 to the Convention (prohibition of collective expulsion of migrants). The Court stressed that Belarus cannot be considered a safe country for Chechen refugees, therefore, "by failing to allow the applicants to remain on Polish territory pending the examination of their applications, [Poland] knowingly exposed them to a serious risk of chain-refoulement and treatment prohibited by Article 3 of the Convention" (§ 185). Several other border cases are pending examination before the ECtHR.[53]

However, just like domestic rulings before, the ruling of the ECtHR has not changed the unlawful practice of pushbacks. On 3 February 2021, the consortium of non-governmental organisations providing legal assistance to migrants in Poland, in response to the call for submissions on pushback practises made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, drew his attention to the ongoing systemic violations of asylum seekers' rights at the external borders of Poland.[54]

Considering the jurisprudence of the domestic and European courts, the Regulation giving the competence to Border Guard officers to decide which foreigners arriving to the border should be allowed entry if they are not included in the text of the Regulation, should be assessed critically. By failing to include *expressis verbis* persons seeking international protection in the text of the Regulation, the Minister opened the doors to arbitrary decisions made by the Border Guard which, as the hitherto case law and practice prove, might lead to the violation of asylum seekers' rights. What is even more concerning is that, according

[51] See: the letter of 29 October 2019 of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration to Ombudsman no BMP-0790-2-7/2018/MJ., accessed 27 February 2021 https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Odpowiedź%20MSWiA%2029.10.2018.pdf

[52] 1950 Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

[53] Inter alia: *D.A. and Others v. Poland*, application no. 51246/17, communicated on 7 September 2017; *Sherov v. Poland*, application no. 54029/17, communicated on 16 December 2020; *T.Z. and M.M. and Others v. Poland*, application no. 41764/17, communicated on 8 February 2021.

[54] The submission is available on: https://www.hfhr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Submission-for-HRC-report-2021-POLAND-NGOs-printed.pdf [accessed on 24.02.2021].

to the Commander in Chief of the Border Guard, under these extraordinary measures, the Border Guard are no longer obliged to initiate the formal administrative proceedings to issue the refusal of entry decision but can unofficially ban travellers from approaching the border check instead. The statistical data seem to be proving that trend.

Even if we agree that extraordinary times justify extraordinary measures, it seems that, in the case of Poland, these extraordinary times are an excuse to sanction an unlawful pushback policy.

Conclusions

As this paper demonstrates, the reason behind the unprecedentedly low number of asylum applications received by Poland in 2020 is twofold. First, mobility restrictions introduced by most states in response to the outbreak of the pandemic made it more difficult to travel across the world, also for refugees. Restricting the categories of travellers allowed to exit and enter, suspending international train and bus connections, requiring valid PCR tests, and introducing obligatory quarantine after arrival did not make it easy for people on the move. For this reason, the number of asylum applications submitted in the EU+ countries fell to the lowest level since 2013.[55] However, as an analysis of the legal measures introduced by Poland to address the health crisis conducted along with analysis of the statistical data show, another reason is the deliberate policy of the Polish government.

Failure to include persons seeking international protection on the list of foreigners allowed to enter Poland despite the general entry ban was not an accidental omission. Despite several amendments to the law and the persistent calls of the Polish Ombudsman, asylum seekers have not been included in the text of the Regulation. Even though one might rightly argue that they have retained the right to enter under the peremptory norms of international law, the statistical data proves that access to asylum has been seriously undermined.

The legislative omissions of the government, as well as the practises implemented at the border, are consistent with the long-standing practice of routine pushbacks observed at the eastern borders of Poland since 2015, when the current ruling party won the elections using anti-refugee rhetoric. This practice was acknowledged by domestic courts and, most recently, by the European Court of Human Rights. However, instead of changing the practice and exercising caution in entrusting the Border Guard with the competence to grant entry permission to persons seeking asylum, legal measures

[55] European Asylum Support Office, "Latest Asylum Trends – 2020 Overview," accessed 27 February 2021, https://easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends

introduced by Poland in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic seem to sanction the unlawful practice and make it even easier to reject asylum seekers at the borders without conducting the proper administrative proceedings on the refusal of entry.

Polish border practice does not seem to differ a lot from the practice of many other states which chose to close their borders to asylum seekers in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a joint statement of April 2020, the UNHCR and IOM warned that growing instances of denials of entry, collective expulsions, pushbacks at borders, and forced returns created serious risk of violations of the rights of refugees and migrants around the globe.[56] Poland is not the only state which has failed to exempt those seeking asylum from general border closure. As argued by some scholars, the pandemic has extinguished the right to asylum in states of the Global North.[57]

Meanwhile, denying access to asylum to persons fleeing persecutions must never be justified, even in the most extraordinary times. Although international law does not prevent states from adopting exceptional measures due to the need to protect public health, which may include, *inter alia*, the obligation to undergo virus testing or the obligation to undergo quarantine upon arrival, these measures should be applied in a non-discriminatory and proportionate manner and must not infringe peremptory norms such as the prohibition of torture or the principle of non-refoulement. By closing its borders to refugees in the time of a global pandemic, Poland failed to observe these norms not only on paper but also in practice.

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[56] UNHCR and IOM, *COVID-19: Access Challenges and the Implications of Border Restrictions*, 27 April 2020, accessed 5 June 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/COVID%2019%20-%20Access%20Challenges%20and%20Implication%20of%20Border%20Restrictions%20%28UNHCR%20and%20IOM%29.pdf

[57] Daniel Ghezelbash and Nikolas Feith Tan, *The End of the Right to Seek Asylum? COVID-19 and the Future of Refugee Protection,* EUI Working Paper RSCAS 2020/55, (Florence: European Union Institute, 2020), , accessed 5 June 2021, https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/68175/RSCAS%202020_55.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

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Community-level Consequences of Externalized Migration and the Securitization of Health: Stories of the Migrant Experience in Morocco during the Coronavirus Pandemic

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Abstract

Using sub-Saharan migrant communities in Morocco as a case study, this research evaluates how the European Union's migration policies contribute to the externalization of migration and the subsequent securitization of migrant health. By applying externalization and securitization theories to the analysis of twenty-seven semi-structured interviews conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic,[2] this research presents the economic motivations behind externalization, the "black economy" and social mobility issues among migrant communities, descriptions of life during quarantine, the links between security and public health implementation, and the overall relationship between externalization, security, and access to care for migrants. The study found that, due to the relationship between externalization and the securitization of health, migrant communities in Morocco faced unequal access to social services and health-related information and were more likely to distrust government-led COVID-19 response measures. The interviews suggest that the securitization of migrant health contributed to the development of migrant-led social and medical support systems that were unique and exclusive to the government-led public health response.

Keywords: Externalization, securitization, migrant health, COVID-19, Morocco

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Introduction

The European Union's migration policies contribute to the externalization of migration and the subsequent securitization of migrant bodies and healthcare access. The EU has externalized migration control—a process that describes the funding of state-level border security operations to create third-country borders—across the southern and eastern borders of the EU; these third-country neighbors include Libya,[3] Morocco,[4] Tunisia,[5] and Turkey,[6] among others. Within these countries, migration control is tied to financial and political deals, including to different forms of official development assistance (ODA). Tying migration control to aid and trade subsequently politicizes and securitizes migrant bodies as negotiating tools. As such, where there is money between international entities—be it for the development of healthcare facilities or to increase the capacity of local governments to monitor border crossings—the subject of the transaction has political implications.[7]

Regarding migrant communities, these political implications contribute to the politicization of migration. As suggested by the root of the word, politicization is the making of a category, event, ideal, object, or other, more political than previously perceived. At the community level, *politicization* decreases the capacity of people with migrant status to integrate within a host society and subsequently increases vulnerability.[8] An example of the politicization of migration is the emergence of NGOs in response to the deaths of several sub-Saharan migrants near the border of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005.[9] Prior to this, in 2003, the first domestic migration law—Law 02-03—had been enacted and unevenly implemented throughout Morocco. The deaths in 2005 led to the creation of dozens of migrant-oriented NGOs that expanded the political space and added

[3] Elin Palm, "Externalized Migration Governance and the Limits of Sovereignty: The Case of Partnership Agreements between EU and Libya," *Theoria* 86, no. 1 (February 26, 2020): 9–27.

[4] Stephen Smith, *The Scramble for Europe Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020): 128.

[5] Vasja Badalič, "Tunisia's Role in the EU External Migration Policy: Crimmigration Law, Illegal Practices, and Their Impact on Human Rights," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20, no. 1 (2018): 87.

[6] Elena Ambrosetti and Enza Roberta Petrillo, "On the Far Side of Crisis: Moving Beyond a Security-Based Migration Approach in the EU," in *Escaping the Escape: Toward Solutions for the Humanitarian Migration Crisis* (Gutersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017): 26.

[7] Rosalind Raddatz. "The Securitization of Foreign Aid: Trends, Explanations, and Prospects," in *The Securitization of Foreign Aid*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 237–55.

[8] Bernd Simon and Olga Grabow, "The Politicization of Migrants: Further Evidence That Politicized Collective Identity Is a Dual Identity," *Political Psychology* 31, no. 5 (2010): 718.; Ole Waever, *Securitization and Desecuritization* (København: Center for Freds 1993), 51.

[9] *Guerre Aux Migrants: Le Livre Noir De Ceuta Et Melilla*. (MigrEurop, June 2006); Katharina Natter. "Crafting a 'liberal Monarchy': Regime Consolidation and Immigration Policy Reform in Morocco." *The Journal of North African Studies* (2020): 1–25.

new voices to interpret government reports related to migration.[10] Given how these new actors changed the political actors involved in migration policy, the topic became politicized. At both the individual and societal level, politicization has a weighted impact on people with migrant status.

A more inter-regional consequence of externalization and politicization is *securitization*. The securitization of migration requires the dehumanization of people with migrant status as they subsequently become threat-related political pawns.[11] This political usage allows for negotiations to emerge between bodies of power that inadvertently label migrant bodies as commodities.[12] One can see an example of this in the June–May 2021 border crisis between Morocco and Spain, during which Morocco allowed nearly 9,000 migrants to cross the border of the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in response to Spain's medical treatment of a Western Sahara opposition leader. The European Parliament later adopted resolution 2021/2747 which claims that Morocco violated the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child by using unaccompanied minors to put pressure on Spain.[13] By creating a humanitarian crisis, Morocco securitized migrant bodies and used the weight of the migrant movements for state-level political gain.

While the effects of externalization, and subsequently securitization and politicization, are mostly assessed through statistics of irregular border crossings and interceptions provided by border controls, few studies focus on the intrapersonal and community-level consequences of externalization among migrant communities.[14] This study aims to highlight the lived experiences of people with migrant status—using Morocco as a case study.[15] In this case study, there is a special focus on how the impacts

[10] Ibid.

[11] This definition has evolved from Ole Wæver's definition of securitization as a "speech act," which shifts a topic out of the political realm and into the security discourse. Cite: *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*

[12]Corey Robinson, "Tracing and Explaining Securitization: Social Mechanisms, Process Tracing and the Securitization of Irregular Migration," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 6 (2017): 505–523.; Alexander Kelle, "Securitization of International Public Health: Implications for Global Health Governance and the Biological Weapons Prohibition Regime," *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 13, no. 2 (March 2007): 217–235.

[13] "Motion for a Resolution on the Breach of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Use of Minors by the Moroccan Authorities in the Migratory Crisis in Ceuta." *European Parliament*, (EU: 8 June 2021)

[14] Sharon Pickering and Brandy Cochrane. "Irregular Border-crossing Deaths and Gender: Where, How and Why Women Die Crossing Borders." *Theoretical Criminology* 17.1 (2012): 27–48.; Kara Williams and Alison Mountz. "Between Enforcement and Precarity: Externalization and Migrant Deaths at Sea." *International Migration* 56.5 (2018): 74–89.; Luna Vives and Kara Williams. "Closing the Gap: Official Statistics on the Migration of Unaccompanied Migrant Children across the Mediterranean." *Research Handbook on the Law and Politics of Migration*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021): 125-40.: Sebastian Cobarrubias. "Mapping Illegality: The I-Map and the Cartopolitics of "Migration Management" at a Distance." *Antipode* (2019): 770–94.

[15] In this context, a person with migrant status includes all individuals who have left their place of origin and are in transit to a new location. This definition includes the liminal stages in which a person desires to continue their travels, but cannot due to any number of reasons. This definition also includes all those who do *and* do not have access to paperwork, but does not include people who qualify as Refugees and thus may benefit

of externalization securitize migrant lives, and how this systematized securitization impacted access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study presents the economics behind externalization, the "black economy"[16] and social mobility issues faced by migrants, descriptions of life during quarantine, the relationship between security and public health implementation, and the overall relationship between externalization, security, and access to care for migrants. Using interviews with members of the migrant community, NGO leaders, representatives of the Ministry of Health, and others, this study demonstrates how international policy trends result in the securitization of migrant health, using access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic as a microcosm.

Economics and ODA behind Externalization

To understand how politicization, securitization, and externalization impact the lives of people with migrant status, there must be a brief introduction to how offshoring border control affects the larger political structures of Morocco. At the national level, the externalization process is funded through a series of economic and official development assistance (ODA) programs, as well as through trade pressures.

In 2019, Morocco's €42.26 billion in exports made up 39.1 percent of the national GDP.[17] The top trading partners were Spain and France, which, respectively, purchased 24.1 percent and 21.7 percent of Moroccan exports.[18] Cooperation agreements such as the European Neighborhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership reinforced these trade relations. From participating in these programs, Morocco was granted an "Advanced Status Partnership" which "affords the country certain economic and political advantages when working with EU countries."[19] Outside of formal trade, the development sector contributes to the economic relationship between the European Union and Morocco, with the European Union and other donor states transferring more than €750 million in ODA, down from €2.4 billion in 2017.[20] Of this ODA, Morocco has received €174 million through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTFA) specifically for "improved migration management."[21]

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from state-enforced protections under international humanitarian law. In Morocco, the primary legislation that addresses migrant protections and legal rights is Law 02-03.

[16] The "black economy" is a descriptor—used by one of the interviewees—which distinguishes the economic conditions that are exclusive to the sub-Saharan community from the overall informal market.

[17] "Morocco (MAR) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners." *OEC*. (1 July 2021)

[18] "Moroccan Foreign Trade in Figures." *Santander Trade*, (Santander: 2021).; "Exports of Goods and Services (% of GDP) - Morocco." *Data*, World Bank, (2020)

[19] Ann Seymour. "Hundreds of Migrants Rush Border Fence in Melilla." (Morocco World News: 19 July 2019)

[20] "Net Official Development Assistance Received (Current US$) - Morocco." *Data,* (World Bank: 2019)

[21] "EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa." *EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa*, (European Commission: 2021),

In 2019, EUTFA funds represented 12.4 percent of all EU funding for Morocco. This did not account for bilateral migration agreements or for migration-oriented funding that is not streamlined through EUTFA. According to the European Court of Auditors, between 2014 and 2020, the majority of Morocco's €1.4 billion of annual aid was earmarked for social services, rule of law, and sustainable growth. Within these categories, the auditors found that the European Commission had "not allocated funding to sectoral programmes using a transparent method and coordination of donors amongst the sectors was uneven."[22]Additionally, between 2014 and 2018, €266 million was classified as unallocated ODA. The relationship between unallocated ODA and general funding for migration in Morocco from the EU is important. Using data from the OECD, a linear regression-based financial analysis showed that, between 2009 and 2017, 88 percent of the variance in unallocated ODA received by Morocco from the EU was attributable to irregular border crossings. Given that the p-value for this correlation was p=0.00017, there is a 99.983 percent chance that the correlation was not random and that there is a direct relationship between unallocated ODA and the European Union's response to irregular border crossings.[23] It is through this unallocated ODA, in addition to earmarked programs, established funding channels, and economic cooperation agreements, that migration is externalized in Morocco.

As the externalization process is integrally linked to the total economy, migration control has both local and intraregional significance. On the ground, ODA contributes to an increase in border funding to facilitate the development of Morocco's migration response teams and increased the capacity of migration infrastructure across the border.[24] This more fully funded security system makes it more difficult for people with migrant status to effectively travel through Morocco to Europe, leading to Morocco becoming a transit-destination country.[25] As more people are forced into conditions of liminality—living on the edge of society, often without paperwork and often in informal shelters such as the growing tent communities in the forests of Oujda and Tangier—fewer people are

[22] "EU Funding for Morocco Showing Limited Results so Far, Say Auditors." (European Court of Auditors: 2019).

[23] The financial analysis was part of a larger-scale study that used 25 indicators to run more than 120 linear and multiple linear regressions from OECD data directly obtained from *oecd.org*. After analyzing these relationships, 35 correlations stood out as the most relevant and informative. However, given that 120 linear regressions were conducted with a p-value of 0.05, there was a 1-(1-0.05)^(120) chance that at least one non-significant observation appears significant when it is not. To account for the potential of a false discovery, I used the Bonferroni Correction to find the p-value at which false discoveries were statistically unlikely. In the case of this data set, 0.5/120=0.0042. Thus, all correlations with a p-value greater than 0.0042 are statistically significant and unlikely to be the result of false positive correlations. The statistics highlighted in the above research indicates a direct relationship by the two indicators involved.

[24] Conclusion based on findings from financial analysis, as well as from the interviews that follow.

[25] Conclusion based on the work of Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula's *Transit Migration: the Missing Link between Emigration and Settlement* (2008).

effectively integrated into the larger society.[26] Thus, by politicizing and securitizing migration, the process of externalization "strengthen[s] a discourse that degrades the migrant 'other' and pushes their human rights to the bottom of geopolitical priorities."[27] This demographic transition to a migrant-hosting nation has led Morocco to alter its domestic budget, intraregional strategies, and relationships with the European Union. The system of economically-linked and ODA-linked migration control thus impacts the larger political structure of Morocco and affects how people with migrant status operate within the country.[28] Focusing on access to healthcare among the migrant community, we can see how these public service interactions serve as a microcosm of the consequences of externalization.[29]

Interviews: The Personal and Community-level Consequences of Externalization

To assess the impacts of externalization, securitization, and politicization on access to care in Morocco during the pandemic, I conducted virtual interviews with members of the migrant community, Moroccan lawyers, Ministry of Health officials, NGO workers, and regional experts between March and September 2020. Contact between interviewees and myself was made through chain-referral sampling. This method, though the most efficient for a virtual setting, limited who I was able to contact. The nationalities of the individuals within the migrant community with whom I spoke were Cameroonian, Congolese, Guinean, Ivorian, and Nigerian. Of these individuals, I spoke with six women and eight men. Four of the interviewees were in Rabat, while ten interviewees were in Tangier. I conducted eight of the interviews in French through a translator, and six in English. Five of the men and women I spoke with were parents with children living in Morocco. Six of my interviewees were regularized—meaning they had been granted legal status in Morocco through a dual UNHCR–Moroccan government documentation program—and eight were undocumented. None of my interviewees entered Morocco through the regularization programs or other legal paths, and those who *were* able to gain paperwork by the time of our conversation were part of the Moroccan government's 2013 or 2017 migration

[26]Isabella Alexander-Nathani, *Burning at Europe's Borders: an Ethnography on the African Migrant Experience in Morocco* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021): 213–214.
[27] Mathieu André and Anna Jacobs, "Asylum and Migration in the Maghreb: Country Fact Sheet Morocco" (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, 2012): 7.
[28] Stephen Smith, *The Scramble for Europe Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020).
[29] Nora Gottlieb et al., "Economic Arguments in Migrant Health Policymaking: Proposing a Research Agenda," *Globalization and Health* 16, no. 1 (2020); "What Is the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Immigrants and Their Children?," OECD (OECD, October 19, 2020); Grant, Aubrey. "Coronavirus, Refugees, and Government Policy: The State of U.S. Refugee Resettlement during the Coronavirus Pandemic." *World Medical & Health Policy* 12, no. 3 (2020): 291–99.

regularization campaigns. Once in Morocco, many of the interviewees described failed integration and assimilation. This inability to incorporate into a society heavily influenced migrant's experiences before and during the pandemic.

Using public health and healthcare accessibility to exemplify the implications of externalization at the community and individual level demonstrates the human cost of international policy.[30] This is an important area to study as just 10 percent of all migration research discusses issues within middle and low-income nations like Morocco,[31] and only 5 percent of migration research discusses health or access to healthcare at all.[32] There is even less literature on the role of public health systems within transit countries and transit-destination countries.[33] Access to the health system is also important to analyze as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the individual-level disinvolvement within this sector. Subsequently, changes in how members of the migrant community *interpreted* the health sector were also demonstrated throughout the interviews.

The interviews gave an important glimpse into the lives of people with migrant status both before and during the pandemic. As demonstrated in conversation about employment, integration, and access to healthcare, among other topics, many of the conditions in which migrants were operating during the pandemic were continuations of the migrant-exclusive social sectors and service-providing sectors largely prevalent before the pandemic. The pandemic thus presented a canvas in which the community-level consequences of externalization were augmented and in which access to healthcare was highlighted.

The "Black Economy," "Dirtiness," and Illegality

To assess how the pandemic affected integration and access to healthcare, I first asked interviewees about their more holistic experiences while in Morocco. The interviewees reported that both before and during the pandemic, members of the migrant community faced a universal problem: lack of employment. This problem was not unique to the

[30] As defined in the introduction and the previous section externalization is the process of outsourcing migration control to other countries. There are numerous sociological and political consequences to this process.

[31] Sweileh, Waleed M., Kolitha Wickramage, Kevin Pottie, Charles Hui, Bayard Roberts, Ansam F. Sawalha, and Saed H. Zyoud. "Bibliometric Analysis of Global Migration Health Research in Peer-Reviewed Literature (2000–2016)." *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2018); Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, *Transit Migration: the Missing Link between Emigration and Settlement* (Houndmills (Gran Bretaña): Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 7–8.

[32] Asya Pisarevskaya et al., "Mapping Migration Studies: An Empirical Analysis of the Coming of Age of a Research Field," *Migration Studies* 8, no. 3 (2019): 455–481.

[33] Antje Missbach and Melissa Phillips, "Introduction: Reconceptualizing Transit States in an Era of Outsourcing, Off Shoring, and Obfuscation," *Migration and Society* 3, no. 1 (2020): 19–33.

migrant communities, as Morocco's youth unemployment rate was 22 percent in 2019.[34] The high unemployment produced a more competitive employment market, leading many people with migrant status to rely on handouts and informal public work such as street-hawking, or the often-nomadic selling of second-hand goods in city streets. While some Moroccans also work as street hawkers, the overwhelming majority are sub-Saharan migrants.[35] Because of the population most widely represented in street-hawking, the work has become closely associated with migration, and thus "illegality", among Moroccan nationals.[36] Perceptions of this status also contributed to the harmful image of "dirtiness" that made migrant communities easy targets to blame for the pandemic.

Based on these working conditions, I asked migrants and volunteers of migrant-run NGOs what their estimate of the unemployment rate among the migrant community was compared to Moroccan citizens before the coronavirus pandemic. According to Moussa,[37] a middle-aged man from Cameroon, before the pandemic, there was "maybe 96 percent of migrants don't work and only 4 percent do. Work is for someone who has papers and a contract and the right to [work], but most of them don't have that." Likewise, Alphonso[38] from Guinea, suggested that "out of 100 you'll find something like 90–95 people don't have a job… maybe 5–10 percent work in the informal sector… [and] 80–90 percent either stay home or don't work." Both men estimated that less than 1 percent of people with migrant status were employed during the pandemic. Those that were working, they suggested, were Moroccan-educated sub-Saharan students who were working in call centers.

One of the consequences of the large-scale unemployment and the sporadic participation in the informal workforce is "the black economy." In this economic system—which was initially described by an interviewee—people with migrant status lack all forms of civil and legal protection and are easily taken advantage of by employers. A lack of documentation becomes a lack of recourse should an employer refuse to pay daily fees or should working conditions be dangerous or inhumane. This financial vulnerability contributes to the destabilization of any progress from integration programs and contributes to a low economic status for many members of the migrant community. Likewise, this lack of stable employment perpetuates cycles of illness and social silencing,

[34] "Unemployment, Youth Total (% of Total Labor Force Ages 15–24) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Morocco," Data (World Bank, January 2021).
[35] Conclusion based on Isabella Alexander-Nathani's *Burning at Europe's Borders: an Ethnography on the African Migrant Experience in Morocco* as well as the reports from various interviewees.
[36] Alexander-Nathani, *Burning at Europe's Borders: an Ethnography on the African Migrant Experience in Morocco*: 100–106.
[37] All names of interviewees changed for anonymity.
[38] Name changed for anonymity.

as people are unable to pay for medical expenses, guarantee an adequate, healthy diet, or advocate for their own self-interests in the larger community.

The social separation caused by poor working environments is related to the general lack of integration of migrant communities in Morocco. As described by Aminata,[39] a 20-year-old woman from the Ivory Coast who makes her living from street hawking and begging, "Sometimes when you ask them [Moroccans] for money, they insult you. Some throw water at you. Sometimes they even spit on you if you're begging for money to eat." Mary,[40] a Nigerian woman, also described Moroccan children throwing stones at her and her young daughter while begging, saying that after this happened, her daughter asked, "Why do they treat us like we are not human?"

These acts of social exclusion and overt racism extended beyond financial gains and were compounded by the pandemic. In describing the general experience of getting onto a bus during the pandemic, Emile,[41] a woman from the DRC, stated, "If a black man comes to sit next to a Moroccan, the Moroccan stands up and gives him his spot… they thought it was us, the Africans, who brought the coronavirus." Mahir,[42] a young man from Cameroon, also described the current pandemic being blamed on migrants. He reported that he was called racial slurs and referred to in derogatory ways ("*mon amie")* and that Moroccans frequently covered their faces with handkerchiefs when black men and women walked past them.

The experiences described by interviewees were ultimately not *caused* by COVID-19 but were the exacerbation of pre-existing racism and racial systems. Compounded by the exclusion of black people from the formal economy and the continued affirming of 'otherness,' the effects of racism contributed to the lack of trust and impacted how public health knowledge was transmitted between the migrant community and the Moroccan citizenry. This racism, which exists in numerous forms and is experienced in numerous ways, had many consequences.

Life During the Period of Forced Confinement

The lack of trust and the migrant dependency on the "black economy" partially contributed to the exclusion of the migrant community in Morocco's public health response to COVID-19. On March 2, 2020, the first positive case was reported in Casablanca, Morocco, from a Moroccan expatriate living in Bergamo, Italy. By March 24, the Moroccan government had

[39] Name changed for anonymity.
[40] Name changed for anonymity.
[41] Name changed for anonymity.
[42] Name changed for anonymity.

closed public and private schools and restricted meetings of more than 50 people. A few days later, the government enacted a strict quarantine and a national curfew. The sudden closure of the public sphere heavily impacted both Moroccan and migrant communities. This public health strategy failed to account for a lack of resource attainment among the citizen population, let alone for non-regularized and undocumented people without resilient social and economic networks.

The interviewees reported similar experiences during this initial phase. Harmonie,[43] a single mother from Nigeria, reported being able to provide her children with only bread, sugar, and water for the more than two weeks it took her to be connected with a service-providing NGO. Emile likewise described the confinement as a devastating blow for the migrant community, saying, "We had nothing. We were there stuck in our houses just like animals." François[44] also stated, "We couldn't pay for rent anymore, we couldn't feed ourselves," and John,[45] a Nigerian man, described having "No food, no sanitizers, nothing" to prepare himself and his roommates for being inside for such a long period. These descriptions of the early lockdown highlight how the migrant community lacked resource resilience and was unsupported by the government and, perhaps, more deeply affected than many other communities in Morocco.[46]

Soon after the lockdown was implemented, Moroccan officials announced a variety of changes. Acknowledging the necessity of movement, authorities implemented "certificates of mobility" to one individual *per family*. However, the migrant-run NGO Platform for the Association of Sub-Saharan Migrant Communities (ASCOMS) reported that many people with migrant status were refused the certificate on account of their irregular administrative situations. In apartments where up to eight people resided, the organization reported that just a single person received the certificate of mobility. Likewise, ASCOMS reported that their constituents were denied government assistance due to their inability to claim benefits from their places of work.[47] The large participation in the informal "black economy" severely limited those who were able to receive economic assistance.

This lack of government-level support and the lack of authorized mobility led many migrants to depend on NGOs or to simply go without essential items during much of the pandemic. Alphonso, John, and Lorina,[48] a woman in her late 20s from Nigeria, all discussed

[43] Name changed for anonymity.
[44] Name changed for anonymity.
[45] Name changed for anonymity.
[46] It is important to note that the period of forced confinement exposed how much of Morocco's middle and lower-economic citizenry also lacked resilience. Everyone struggled and the pandemic severely impacted every member of society.
[47] ASCOMS, "Platforme ASCOMS COVID-19 Response," *Platforme ASCOMS COVID-19 Response* (2020): 5.
[48] Name changed for anonymity.

how the pandemic influenced people's mental health. Lorina reported receiving counseling for depression through an NGO before the national lockdown, but at the time of our interview, she was unable to travel to the counseling services and could not afford the minutes on her disposable phone to call the counselor from her apartment. John also described many of his friends facing depression from being indoors without certificates of mobility. Alphonso, in describing his work with migrant-run NGOs, stated that all organizations were aware people were struggling. He described a series of initiatives that different NGOs were attempting to implement, including conversations during food deliveries and social media connections. The lack of mental health support during the period of forced confinement was indicative of Morocco's underfunded public health system and the general stigma and lack of mental health professionals in the larger Middle East and North Africa.

Laayoune: A Look at COVID-19 from the Administrator's Perspective

While living through the period of forced confinement, a majority of interviewees reported receiving news exclusively through social media and word of mouth. A variety of misinformation about the pandemic combined with the lack of trust contributed to a myriad of social problems and public health problems. Distrust shaded interpretations of public health messages, including access to testing and opportunities to receive medical care. This distrust was heightened by the use of security personnel in the public health implementation strategy. As many interviewees revealed, it was a common belief that the Moroccan government manipulated the public health response to the pandemic to illegally arrest, deport, and test migrants for coronavirus without their consent.

According to Hachim,[49] an employee at the Laayoune Ministry of Health, these stories emerged on social media and evolved around security. Some of these rumors included that Moroccan authorities "just wanted to test medicine on [migrants] and that the Moroccan authorities only wanted to raise the number of cases" of COVID among the migrant communities; or that the authorities inject people with the virus to eliminate the migrant population; or that COVID originated from 5G network services in a plot to ruin the African continent. At an international relations level, another theory or rumor was that, in the eyes of the government, higher numbers of cases in migrant communities may be a positive thing that can be used as a "manipulation [between] Spain and the detention centers in Laayoune and Dakhla." These rumors, regardless of their validity, indicated how many members of the migrant community viewed the pandemic, their place within Moroccan society, and their relationship to the public health system.

[49] Name changed for anonymity.

As revealed in my interview with Hachim, not all of these rumors were entirely false. Throughout our conversation, Hachim provided an insight into the Moroccan medical system, how the onset of COVID was interpreted within different regions of Morocco, and how international influences impacted the implementation of Morocco's public health response to COVD-19 among migrant communities. Importantly, Hachim also gave key indicators of how Moroccan–Spanish relationships impacted the securitization of the Western Mediterranean Route and the West African Transit Route—two clandestine migration routes from Morocco to Europe—and how migration policies impacted public health implementation. Hachim described these relationships by saying:

> "...authorities did not start carrying out tests [in the migrant community in Laayoune] until some journalistic reports from Spain came saying that some immigrants were able to get to Tenerife and Las Palmas [two of the Spanish Canary Islands], and when they were tested it was found that they had the coronavirus. This is when the [Moroccan] authorities decided to carry out a large number of tests among the migrants. So when we found out about the big number of infected cases, it was very hard to convince them that they were infected and, unfortunately, many conspiracy theories were present among them."

Hachim's interview highlighted that the Spanish government had an incentive to curb migration from Morocco if there was a perceived threat from the migrant population in their territorial islands and enclaves.[50] Spain was able to respond to this perceived threat by leveraging ODA.[51] In linking irregular border crossings to Spanish territories to public health initiatives within Morocco, both the Spanish and Moroccan governments contributed to the securitization of migrant health. Migrant bodies—seen as potential carriers of the coronavirus— thus became an international security issue; people with migrant status became commodities for negotiation. Spain was consequently able to exert its influence on the Moroccan government to implement stricter public health measures specifically within the migrant communities.

These public health measures were immediate. Soon after the Spanish government contacted the Moroccan government regarding intercepted migrants who tested positive for COVID-19, hundreds of people were arrested by Moroccan police and placed in "community centers." Hachim described this as a necessary measure that only affected "homeless people," "families without a home," and "immigrants without shelter." However, when I interviewed members of the migrant community who had experienced these

[50] "Spain Urges More EU Aid to Help Morocco Tackle Migration," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, June 3, 2019).
[51] "El Gobierno Reorienta La Cooperación Internacional y Prepara Con La UE Ayuda Para El Magreb," (Europa Press, March 25, 2020).

community centers, or who knew people who had, it was clear that, at least on surface examination, immigrants were detained indiscriminately. Video evidence showed empty rooms with loose blankets on the floor, buckets in the corner, and small windows. Video evidence also showed men demanding bread and water and asking to be released to return to their homes. Video evidence did not show what Hachim described as "a normal situation, meaning that they [migrants] were fed and dressed."

The rumors about these COVID-related arrests spread very quickly. Information about testing, quarantine, and symptoms of illness developed into rumors that the government was using the pandemic to conduct medical tests on people with migrant status. People refused to be tested for the virus, uncertain of what it meant and what the consequences were. Hachim described non-compliance in the migrant community. He directly stated that:

> "Some migrants refused to take the test. Naturally, for public authorities, they couldn't just leave them in the street like that, interacting with citizens without tests. So the public authorities went to their houses and the health authorities accompanied them and they [migrants] were forced to take the test, otherwise, they wouldn't leave their houses. Naturally, these are conditions that were imposed by the circumstances because it is not possible for someone to refuse taking the test... Some of them [migrants] did not want to accept taking the test but the local authorities were imposing their authority to the extent allowed by the law under the state of emergency's framework that imposes taking tests for all the Moroccan citizens and immigrants."

These tests extended beyond migrant communities and migrant houses. After the Ministry of Health in Laayoune deemed that the "essential workers" of the fishing factories in El Marsa, Western Sahara could return to work and many people returned to their factory jobs, there were reports that police prohibited both migrant and Moroccan workers in factories from leaving until they were tested for COVID. These individuals were kept in arbitrary confinement for the entirety of the testing procedure. Hachim described how security personnel were involved in large-scale testing. He said:

> "The health authorities would go to buildings that had a lot of migrants and would test them in their houses, which is the same operation it did for the [people] working in factories. They would do the test for the whole building that the factory worker or the migrant from one of the infected factories was living in. The auxiliary forces and the police forces would close off the street with barriers and keep people from getting out of the building until the results were pronounced the following day, or in the worst case, [after] 48 hours, although it's usually only 24. Once the results were out, the barrier was removed, and freedom of movement was restored. This practice was enforced for both migrants and Moroccans to stop the circulation [of the

> virus]… The moment the tests are carried out the street was closed off until the results came out."

To combat the mounting distrust of migrant communities against the formal public health system, Hachim described involving local NGOs and community leaders to mediate the test-taking. He also stated that national health authorities and Laayoune regional authorities partnered with migrant-run associations to "raise awareness among migrants, to talk to them in their languages, to distribute leaflets, or to distribute some food rations to their houses and raise awareness about the dangers of the virus." Hachim also stated that the National Ministry of Health released a public health announcement at 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. daily in Arabic and French to inform the community of public health initiatives.

For many migrants, this mediation proved too little, too late to attain their trust. There was already another rumor circulating about false-positive COVID tests that the government was giving solely to migrants. The rumor made its way to Rabat, where Alphonso was the first to inform me of it. He reported it as follows:

> "It must be said… In the [COVID test] result that we have received, it's written 'negative' but they [Moroccan doctors] crossed it and wrote with a ballpen 'positive.' There were some tentative attempts to explain it; they defended themselves by saying that the machine made a mistake and it should have put positive instead of negative."

When I asked Alphonso why he thought the Moroccan physicians would falsify a COVID test he explained:

> "It is a worrying situation. It could be some kind of manipulation because whether it is Spain or the EU, they are always looking to curb illegal immigration. And for that, they'll use all means, like discrediting the health of the migrants by declaring that 14 people had tested positive among the group [of people who had been intercepted trying to reach the Canary Islands]. For us, it's a way to discredit and force the Moroccan authorities to double down on the fight against illegal immigration and heighten their vigilance with migrants."

When I asked Hachim if he was aware of this rumor, he stated there was only a single case of a person with migrant status who received a positive test result instead of the appropriate negative result. Regardless, rumors like this heavily damaged trust between the formal health system and the migrant community. This distrust was the compilation of systemic racism and the exclusion of people with migrant status from the initial public health response that would have allowed migrants to claim benefits during

the early national lockdown. Distrust was also based on a history of arrests, deportations, and involvement of security personnel among the migrant community.

Arrests, COVID-19, Migrant Health and Security

The experience among the migrant population with arrests and deportations was nearly universal. Multiple interviewees described personally experiencing arrests and deportations. Before the pandemic, these relationships materialized through the illegal internal deportation of people with migrant status to southern territories in Morocco. As Mahir stated, "When you're paperless, the police arrest you, and they throw you in [detention]." He later described the 500-mile return journey from Agadir, the city to which he had been internally relocated, to Tangier, the city where he was living at the time of our interview. François spoke of the systematization of these internal deportations, saying that in 2018:

> "There were a lot of arrests—around 18,000 people were arrested near the border cities like Tangier, Nador, and Oujda. All these people were transported against their will to the south, and among these people there were approximately 1,000 women. And when [the migrant-run NGO] went to the southern regions, we noticed a massive presence of women and children that were living in tremendous precariousness."

Aminata offered another description of these deportations. She said that she had been arrested three times and deported from Tangier to Tiznit. When asked to share her story, she said, "One time the police came to look for us at 1 a.m. They took us and put us on a bus and sent us directly to Tiznit. That day I was sleeping, the police broke the door, they gathered us up and sent us to Tiznit… [but] sometimes when the police come to get you, they'll take the men and leave the women." Likewise, Mary reported that the police usually come late at night. She described the last time the police came as follows:

> "They [the police] come and they start hitting the door. Sometimes my kids are in the room and they start shouting "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" and I hold them, and they start crying because they are scared. When the police come, they use their [batons]. They hit the doors. They hit them very hard and, if you don't open the door for them, they will break down your door. And you open the door and they all come into your house. Some are asking you 'where is your paper?' Some are telling you 'move.' Some are taking the things from inside your house. Anything they know they can take, they take… They can steal your clothes, they can steal your shoes and your bag. And you? You cannot even talk to them… The way they are talking to you, the way they are shouting at you: *'Yalla! Yalla! Yalla!'* All the shouting and the children crying… I say, 'God when will this be over?' Then I cry. We have been suffering here."

These deeply impactful experiences heavily affected the way migrants perceived security personnel in Morocco before and during the pandemic. As seen in these interviews, first-hand accounts of police interaction have strictly defined how people interpret the role of security personnel in the national system. Thus, task-shifting police and security personnel not only to arrest *en masse* individuals who were violating public health protocol but also to enforce public health policy produced an incredible distrust among the migrant community in the Moroccan public health system. The overall way in which people with migrant status learned about the pandemic, lived through quarantine, and were addressed by public health personnel stems from the distrust that many people felt towards the formal healthcare system. The incorporation of police and the perceived influences of international actors likewise failed to present an image of a health system that was migrant-conscious or migrant-inclusive.

My interview with Koffi,[52] a man from Cameroon, offers another example of how the security personnel's detrimental involvement within the public health system securitized health and affected migrant's access to healthcare:

> "They [migrants] are suspicious of everything. You know, let me give you an example. If during a whole week, you feel threatened by a person, and one day, this person tells you 'Alright, I'm with you, I will take you to the hospital, I will feed you and everything', you will be suspicious [of him]. This means that every day, [migrants] know they are being tracked by the border control forces and others. And eventually, it's the police that come to take you for a screening test. That is really the problem… 'Should I trust this man who, two days ago, was hunting me down like a thief to arrest me, and today wants to take me to the hospital?'"

Koffi's words describe a system in which the use of security personnel to implement public health policies intricately links migrant health and border security. Because border security is an international issue—one in which the European Union has an established history of externalization and involvement, and one which the Spanish government heavily influences—the health of the migrant population becomes securitized. While addressing how Spain impacts Moroccan migration policy, Hachim elaborated on the perceived impacts of international actors. He described the effects of securitization on health and the cost of the coronavirus pandemic on migrant deportations. He stated:

[52] Name changed for anonymity.

> "The European Union exerts a lot of pressure on Morocco concerning the management of migration, notably on the control of its borders. At the level of Spain, we could consider that the EU shares the same borders as Morocco since there are a lot of migrants that get in through Spain… There is a lot of pressure that they [Spain] exerts on Morocco so that Morocco strengthens its borders' security. [In Tangier] the Moroccan authorities took the decision to evict all the illegal migrants which led to mass arrests which, like I said, was an official measure because the Ministry of the Interior had reacted [to migrants testing positive for COVID in the Canary Islands]… The moment they spot a migrant, they arrest him and ask him if he has a residency card. If you don't have it, they put you in their van and take you to the *commissariat.* Once there's enough of them [migrants] they're put in buses and taken to the south—mainly to Agadir and Tiznit."

In addition to describing a systematized violation of the right against collective expulsion,[53] Hachim's statement describes the externalization of in-process migration.

In using Morocco as a third-country partner to curb migration, the EU also externalized its COVID response to the Moroccan government. The EU pressures Morocco to curb COVID and curb migrant movements. The methods to curb migration that were implemented by Moroccan security personnel were methods previously implemented and described by Aminata, François, Mahir, and Mary. These negative associations with police and security personnel are part of the migrant experience and contribute, as Koffi described, to the alienation of the migrant community by the task-shifting of health to the security personnel.

Conclusion

The case study of migrant communities in Morocco during the pandemic demonstrates the overall relationships between EU ODA, the foundations of the health system, security and securitization, and the racialization of the migrant experience. This case study focuses on the community-level consequences of externalization and the effects of securitization among migrant communities in Morocco. By linking the externalization of migration in Morocco to EU-backed ODA for health and migration systems *and* ODA implemented through border security measures, the study describes the impacts of this ODA on Morocco's underfunded health system when combined with the deeply engrained, wide-scale racism and a health system that fails to incorporate culturally, legally, and linguistically sensitive public health approaches among migrant communities. Likewise, the study shows how the use of security personnel to implement public health procedures,

[53] "Morocco: Relentless Crackdown on Thousands of Sub-Saharan Migrants and Refugees Is Unlawful," Morocco World News. 7 September 2018.

as well as the lack of government support for migrant communities, contributed to decreased community-level trust. Because of the involvement of security personnel in implementing public health procedures, in addition to the general relationship to security that many migrants in Morocco have, the migrant community created a secondary health and social service system in which migrant-run NGOs and international NGOs served as primary service providers during the coronavirus pandemic.

By focusing on interviews rather than border crossing statistics, this study highlights the lived experiences of people with migrant status. Additionally, by using healthcare access and relationships between security personnel and the public health system as a microcosm of externalization impacts, this study focuses on the overall relationship between the securitization of migration and migrant health. Future research on how externalization impacts additional aspects of the migrant experience is needed. There are an estimated 272 million international migrants around the world, many of whom are operating within health systems that are not fully inclusive of their needs.[54] Understanding the human cost of the politicization of healthcare among migrant communities can lead to more effective and humanistic public policy.

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[54] Helena Legido-Quigley et al., "Healthcare Is Not Universal If Undocumented Migrants Are Excluded," *BMJ*, September 16, 2019.

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Invisible Lives as an Emerging Paradigm. COVID-19 and the Refugee Situation in Lesbos, Greece

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Abstract

The increasing restrictions of refugee movements in terms of closed camps and border militarization have led to the trend of keeping the refugees invisible in Europe. This invisibility serves a twofold: on the one hand, it ensures keeping the extraction of – natural, economic, but also geopolitical – value from the affected regions invisible, while, on the other hand, this trend keeps the victims of these interests invisible in Europe. Underlying this paradigm of invisibility of lives is a biopolitical paradigm, a paradigm of the control and management of life and death in the service of the economy and political interests. But in the very act of risking their lives through unauthorized border crossings for the possibility to live, the refugees also depict the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics, a politics affirmative of life. This paper attempts to contextualize the efforts to keep refugees invisible with a theoretical re-evaluation of biopolitics, while also attempting to contextualize the refugees' struggles for the possibility to live within the framework of biopolitics. As such, the paper will argue that biopolitics should not solely designate the politics of control and management of life, on the contrary: life becomes the biopolitical terrain of struggle between efforts for invisibility (states and the EU) and efforts for visibility (refugees). As a case study, the paper resorts to the trend of keeping refugee lives invisible that has taken place in Lesbos, Greece since the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016 and which efforts have intensified since the emergence of COVID-19.

Keywords

Refugees, COVID-19, Post-Sacer, Biopolitics, Invisibility

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Introduction

The notion of invisibility goes back to feminist studies of labor, particularly, initiated by the works of Arlene Kaplan Daniels, who pointed out the extraction of labor and profit from work that has been culturally, socially, and politically kept invisible as "work".[2] In this paper the notion of invisibility is applied to refugees insofar that, on the one hand, the increasing militarization of the borders of European Union serves to keep refugees out of Europe, in other words invisible, while, on the other hand, refugees who arrive in the Aegean islands are increasingly made invisible in the rest of Greece through geographical restrictions imposed in the aftermath of the EU-Turkey Statement, as well as the attempts by the Greek state to create closed camps on the islands, for instance in Lesbos. The emergence of Covid and the onslaught of the pandemic provided another pretext to speed up and increase the work of keeping refugees invisible. From the beginning of the pandemic until now, the authorities permit only a select number of people to leave the camps daily. Thus, it is at the level of life, its possibilities, and its reproduction that the refugee is kept invisible.[3] As such, the notion of refugee in this paper does not refer to the legal status granted to asylum seekers; rather, in a broad sense it applies to a life which is seeking shelter and refuge for providing itself the possibility for a living that they deem as dignifying, whatever the reason for the flight may be. In a narrower and more concrete sense on the Aegean islands, the term refugee refers to people from the Global South whose very life and the possibilities thereof have been continuously threatened due to global capitalism that finds some of its major centers in Europe.

Moreover, biopolitics can be broadly defined as the operations of (political and economic) power over life. As such, there has been, at least, four orientations of biopolitical analysis, that is: analysis of the operations of power on life. Starting with Michele Foucault, one can identify a political economy reading (Michel Foucault),[4] a juridical reading (Giorgio Agamben),[5] a political reading (Roberto Esposito)[6] and a metaphysical reading (Davide Tarizzo).[7] In addition, this paper identifies a fifth strand, and argues (albeit quite marginally)

[2] Arlene Kaplan Daniels. "Invisible Work". *Social Problems*, Vol. 34, No. 5, (1987).

[3] Davide Tarizzo. *Life: A Modern Invention,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 144. Tarizzo identifies two metaphysical determinations of humans in modernity. On the one hand, labour grounded in the idea of a self and its autonomous will that starts with Kant and culminates in Hegel and, on the other hand, life, which, too, starts with Kant, followed by Schelling that culminates in Darwinian metaphysics of life, where the former looks back to origin and history, and the latter is oriented towards the future. Thus, he identifies life as the proper name that we, the "moderns", can give "to ourselves, our Self, to our humanity".

[4] Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Trans. Graham Burchell, (New York: Picador, 2008).

[5] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[6] Roberto Esposito. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), and: Roberto Esposito. *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

[7] Davide Tarizzo. *Life: A Modern Invention.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

that aside of reading Silvia Federici within feminist theories and theories of commons, it is also possible to read her work as a biopolitical investigation which combines the economic and political dimensions of the relation of power to life beyond the anthropocentric readings mentioned above.[8] Simultaneously, the above-mentioned five theorists attempt, each in their own way, to provide an affirmative biopolitics, that is: a politics of life which is contrary to power's attempts to control, manage, and even exterminate life.[9] This paper, then attempts to contextualize the emergence of biopolitics, and its applicability to the refugee situation in Lesbos, Greece from the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016 through the course of the pandemic. Thus, the paper contributes, first, to a contextualization of the emergence of theories concerning life in a theoretical shift in the twentieth century, a shift in the locus of theory from the concept of Self that has permeated philosophy and political theory, as well as political practice, throughout the discourses of the Western world, to the notion of *life* (and its reproduction) which has become increasingly the focus of theory and politics since the second half of the 20th century. Furthermore, the paper contributes to both biopolitical analyses and refugee studies by contextualizing the creation, reception, and management of refugees in Lesbos (Greece) within the twofold directions of biopolitics. In other words, while the management of refugees on the island must be viewed with the biopolitical framework of managing and controlling life, it becomes clear that the struggles of refugees against such practices offer themselves as a politics affirmative of life and its reproduction. Additionally, the paper argues that Agamben's figure of biopolitical paradigm (Sacer) does not lend itself as an analytical tool for analysing the refugee situation in Lesbos, that is: while (similar to the figure of Sacer) the refugee is increasingly "only accessible to certain people and according to determinate rules"[10], particularly since the emergence of Covid-19, they are, however, not killable as is the case of Sacer. Therefore, the notion of *post-Sacer* is proposed as an analytical tool to highlight the biopolitical regime governing their life, but which governance is concerned with the maintenance of refugees' invisibility, on the one hand, and the extraction of value through the management of such invisibility, on the other.

[8] Silvia Federici. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of Commons*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2019).
[9] For these attempts of the respective theorists see: Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*. Trans. G. Burchell (New York: Picador, 2012), Giorgio Agamben. *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), Roberto Esposito. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), Davide Tarizzo. *Life: A Modern Invention.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2017), and Silvia Federici. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of Commons*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2019).
[10] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 105.

The End of Metaphysics & Sacer

As far as the English translations of Agamben's works is concerned, the earliest mention of Sacer and sacrifice can be found in a seminar from 1979-80 published (originally in 1982 in Italian) in English by the University of Minnesota Press in 1991 under the title *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*.[11] In this seminar, Agamben attempts to think the fundamental pillar of metaphysics as negation in the Hegelian notion of *Dieses nehmen* in the first section of the *Phenomenology*, *Sense Certainty* (*Sinnliche Bewußtsein*) and Heidegger's demonstrative pronoun *Da* of *Dasein*. In a criticism of claims on access to the immediacy of experience, Hegel had proposed that the immediate sense certainty is inaccessible to language in terms of meaning but can only be indicated as "this" (Diese).[12] Thus, Agamben locates a "pure negativity" in the demonstrative pronouns as "no-longer-voice" (animal voice) but "not-yet meaning", which he traces to Aristotle's First Ousia of which Aristotle claims that it is neither in a subject nor can be predicated of a subject.[13] Therefore, Agamben can claim that an inherent presupposition of metaphysics has been a rift and break in the continuum between indication and meaning that traverses the entirety of the metaphysical tradition. For Agamben this negativity at the heart of metaphysics is radically disclosed in Derrida's reflection on the *gramma*; however, Derrida's disclosure of this pure negativity cannot amount to an overcoming of metaphysics. Rather, an overcoming of metaphysics must have a radical confrontation with the final concepts of Hegelian and Heideggerian thoughts, namely: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's Ereignis. However, what this pure negativity already indicates is that within the metaphysical tradition the human, at its foundation, is fractured, namely: in the Hegelian *Dieses* and Heideggerian *Da* Agamben finds the indication of human to "negation", which means that the human has no foundation and no ground but her actions. And precisely at this arrival at pure negation which constitutes the human for metaphysics we find the first occurrence of Sacer and sacrifice as that "ancient truth that … constitutes the basis for the oldest religious practice of humanity: Sacrifice."[14]

The next occurrence of Sacer and sacrifice appears in an essay originally published the same year as the above, namely: *'Se: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's Ereignis*.[15] While

[11] Giorgio Agamben. *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. K.E. Pinkus and M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)
[12] G.W.F Hegel. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. In *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke Hegels in zwölf Bänden*. Ed. Otto Weiß. (Leipzig: Verlag Felix Meiner, 1909), 82 – 83.
[13] Aristotle *Categories* 1 b 5 – 6.
[14] Giorgio Agamben. *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. K.E. Pinkus and M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105.
[15] Giorgio Agamben. *'Se: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's Ereignis*. In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

the former work focused on the beginnings of Hegel and Heidegger's thoughts, in the latter essay his concern is a confrontation with the "result" of the two thinkers. For Agamben both notions of the *Absolute* and *Ereignis* are rooted in the Indo-European stem of the reflexive pronoun *self*, in terms of its linguistic designation as **se*, whence the notion of proper is derived in the various languages of the metaphysical tradition such as the ancient Greek καθ'εαυτο, the Latin sui, the English self and the German selbst and sich. Furthermore, according to Agamben the word absolute, too, finds its root in this reflexivity, for absolute is nothing other than what for Plato was the thing according to itself:

> 'The term absolute and absolutely correspond to the Greek expression kath' heauto, 'according to itself'. For the Greek philosopher, to consider something kath' heauto is to consider it absolutely, that is, according to what is proper to it, according to its own *se (heauton).'[16]

If the term Absolute refers to the proper, then to think the human absolutely, that is: to think the human as it is proper to it, then the absolute thinking of the human can only return the human to that very pure negativity with which metaphysics was marked, namely to the groundlessness, to the absence of a foundation but the human's actions. In other words, at the end of metaphysics when the human is finally thought in terms of its proper what discloses itself is that the human has no essence, no *ousia*, and therewith the human is abandoned (without a ground and destiny) to their actions as the only possibility of destining themselves. It is at the point when Agamben attempts to think the human according to its proper, absolutely, namely when he declares that the end of metaphysics means the return of the human to its proper, its *se, which discloses the human as "[–] the animal who has language – is as such the ungrounded, that his only foundation is in his own action, his own giving himself ground" that we find the second occurrence of sacrifice – worded exactly as the previous text as "a truth so ancient that it lies at the basis of humanity's most ancient religious practice: sacrifice."[17]

Thus, we can see that biopolitics – in the form of Sacer – makes its appearance at the end of metaphysics; however, this entrance of biopolitics in theoretical reflections in the aftermath of Hegelian and Heideggerian thoughts is not peculiar to Agamben. In the year preceding the seminar published as *Language and Death* Foucault held a seminar titled *The Birth of Biopolitics*.[18] From this seminar until the end of his life Foucault became

[16] Ibid., 117.
[17] Ibid., 135.
[18] Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. (New York: Picador, 2008).

increasingly preoccupied with life, which one can even claim that it was an attempt of overcoming metaphysics and its last gesture in Heidegger, for in 1984 Foucault states that:

> '… if it is true that the question of Being has indeed been what Western philosophy has forgotten, and that this forgetting is what made metaphysics possible, it may also be also that the question of the philosophical life has continued to be, I won't say forgotten, but neglected.'[19]

While in 1978 Foucault analyzed the link between neoliberalism and the management of life (Gesellschaftspolitik), later he increasingly sought to uncover life also as a site for the struggle for "an other world, that is: "an *other* life, not simply as the choice of a different, happy, and sovereign life, but as the practice of a combativeness on the horizon of which is an *other* world (un monde autre)."[20]

Thus, what distinguishes Agamben and Foucault's approach to biopolitics is twofold: on the one hand, Agamben – using the notion of Sacer – locates biopolitics in the juridico-political grid of the Western thought, while Foucault locates biopolitics in a much more recent and politico-economic grid tied to capitalism and neoliberalism. On the other hand, for Agamben, biopolitics has only a negative manifestation in the juridico-political grid of control, manipulation and even extermination of life, whereas for Foucault – aside of the politico-economic grid of governance of life – there remains a possibility of an "affirmative biopolitics" in the form of the *askesis*,[21] that is exercise and practice, of "an *other* life for an *other* world."[22]

The above two points are significant in analyzing the applicability of Agamben's Sacer to the case of refugees. While one can grant him the analysis of the *Camp as a Paradigm of the Modern* manifestation of the ancient juridico-political notion of Sacer,[23] which culminated in the Nazi extermination camps, the figure of refugee in its contemporary form emerges precisely in the aftermath of this paradigmatic manifestation of Sacer. Furthermore, while one can grant Agamben the argument that from within a jurdico-political grid the camp is the ultimate manifestation of the state's ban and preoccupation with life, what he does not include in his reflections is the possibility of an

[19] Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*. Trans. G. Burchell (New York: Picador, 2012), 236.
[20] Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II* Trans. G. Burchell (New York: Picador, 2012), 287.
[21] This is a Greek term which means both exercise as practice and exercise as training which Foucault uses throughout his last seminar of 1984. Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*. Trans. G. Burchell (New York: Picador, 2012).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

affirmative biopolitics, that is: a politics that takes life as the terrain of struggle against the governance thereof by the biopolitical apparatuses of governance.

These latter two criticisms of Agamben can serve as productive starting points of an application of biopolitics to the refugee situation and camps in Lesbos (Greece) since the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016 and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the camps, particularly the Moria Camp, were not extermination camps; rather, they were and remain camps in which the bare life of the refugee is maintained. Thus, the refugee is not Sacer – killable. On the other hand, the refugee is not in her predicament due to some Western juridical predisposition; rather, they are in this situation for the economic interests.[24] They are – for the most part – the product of economic interests and the state policies that they foster. Furthermore, the refugee and her life are not merely a site of management by the states; on the contrary, from her crossing borders to her struggles in the camps and beyond, the refugee puts her life as a site of struggle against the statist management and the interests of capital. Refusing the distributed food during the Covid quarantine was such a stance and struggle against the management of her life and the profits amassed by the catering companies endowed with the contracts by the Greek state.

Moreover, post 1951 *Convention on the Status of Refugees* and its Protocol of 1967, the refugee cannot be considered as Sacer within the juridico-political grid of the Western states. While the Convention is grounded in metaphysical notions such as "nation", "nationality", and "person(s)",[25] nevertheless, the objective of the *Convention* is to protect the life of the refugee. However, insofar that the refugee's life is the primary concern of the *Convention* the biopolitical paradigm remains operational. The refugee is not killable, and one can even say that the refugee is condemned to living.

Furthermore, while the *Convention* emphasizes the right to social participation, it categorically excludes political participation for the refugees; as such, this living becomes devoid of any potential agency concerning the political decisions made about their situation. Thus, the *Convention* excludes for refugees any potential for effecting change of their circumstances.[26] Moreover, insofar that the refugee is in an in-between stage during

[24] "Capitalist accumulation continues to be the accumulation of labor, and as such it continues to require the production of misery and scarcity on a world scale … a life under the sign of uncertainty … [and] everywhere, because of the impoverishment and displacement globalization has produced, the figure of the worker has become that of the migrant, the itinerant, the refugee." Silvia Federici. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of Commons*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), 22.

[25] See: Roberto Esposito. *The Third Person: Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal,* Zakiya Hanafi (tr.) (London: Polity Press, 2012).

[26] Another dimension of neoliberalism is the active role non-governmental organizations play in and profit from the refugees' "victimhood" and inability to help themselves, see: Lilie Chouliaraki. *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) And furthermore: Siobhan McGuirk and Adrienne Pine, eds. *Asylum for Sale: Profit and Protest in the Migration Industry*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2020).

the period when their asylum claim is processed, when they are "no-longer" sacer but "not-yet" granted asylum, their "living" remains purely at the bare minimum to which refugee camps in, say, Lesbos are a testimony. Maintained as bare life with the provisions for basic survival, the refugee must await the decision on her life. Thus, the refugee is not Sacer, not killable, but they remain under the whim of the biopolitical operations of the apparatuses of governance. Thus, the refugee can be said to be post-Sacer, however they are not outside the biopolitical grid that is manifested in the *Camp as the Paradigm*.

Methodology

The ethnographic material used in this paper stem from an independent and ongoing research in the North Aegean Island Lesbos which started in July 2016 in the aftermath of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. The statements of refugees were collected during the author's participation in direct actions of various kind, such as demonstrations, sit-ins, occupations, and squats of abandoned buildings, but at times also during general help and support such as interpretation for shopping or bureaucratic matters. These statements were not collected as part of formal and semi-structured interviews as is common practice in academic research. Details of circumstances cannot be provided as participants of any direct-action event are identified by the authorities on the island, and the disclosure of details of events would pose potential harms for the participating refugees. Informed consent was obtained verbally during these actions in which I was, in the first place, a participant supporting refugee struggles for their rights, and only secondly did I participate as an academic observer. As co-participants the refugees were always aware and informed about my academic background and academic interests in the situation.

Theoretically, the paper uses what Dieter Thomä termed "text-historical" analysis.[27] Giorgio Agamben has made two entrances into the contemporary socio-political situation; the first instance was in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and the second instance with the emergence of Covid and the pandemic. However, to the knowledge of the author usages and criticisms of Agamben's notion of Sacer do not pursue a text-historical contextualization of the emergence of the notion of sacrifice. A text-historical analysis of the emergence of the notion of sacrifice proves itself beneficial for better understanding the context and the shortcomings of Agamben's notion of Sacer.

[27] Dieter Thomä. *Die Zeit des Selbst und die Zeit Danach: Zur Kritik der Textgeschichte Martin Heiddeggers 1910 – 1976* (Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990).

Lesbos and the Biopolitics of the Camps

Prior to March 2016, the east Aegean islands, such as Lesbos, were merely transit camps for the refugees arriving in the European Union territory. Camps such as Moria or PIKPA served as a place to rest, receive some food and clothing, wait until they received the necessary documentation to move to the mainland Greece – predominantly Athens, from where they would then attempt to move to the Northern European countries.

However, since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement on March 20, 2016, the east Aegean islands have become de facto zones of exception. The usual provisions of the Convention did no longer apply on the islands, for instance, the provision of freedom of movement within the territory of the host state, for alongside the EU-Turkey statement a geographical limitation has been imposed on refugee movement outside the island of arrival. The geographical limitation simultaneously turned Lesbos into a warehouse for newly arriving refugees. Most of the refugees were in Moria camp, named so because of its location next to the Moria village in east Lesbos.

Moria camp is a paradigmatic example for a discussion of the refugee as post-Sacer in the camps. From nutrition to education of children, the camp's function was the bare minimum survival, and at times even that was not in place. The camp was not an extermination camp, but it was a camp where the refugees barely survived. At the time when the camp burned to the ground in September 2020, there were approximately 12,000[28] refugees residing in the camp. These twelve thousand refugees had to line up every day three times a day for a meal.[29] In response to questions concerning food, refugees' responses were a vivid representation of the maintenance of bare life. The following statements are few samples of responses to the question of nutrition: "the food is not eatable" (Mohammed, 18), "if you would give the food to animals they would not eat it" (Khadija, 38), "by the time we receive breakfast and eat it we have to go back in line for lunch" (Karima, 19), "we are not animals, we can cook our food, why don't they give us the produce so we can cook our own way?" (Fatima, 43), "my children and I constantly suffer from diarrhea, because by the time we receive the food it has gone bad in this [summer] heat", "I am scared of bombs and macaroni" (Amal, 6). "My mother takes the chicken,

[28] This figure is in most likelihood the official number of "registered" persons as of September 7, 2020 – a day prior to the fire, see: https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/27083/coronavirus-lesvos-migrant-camp-risks-catastrophe-oxfam However, other sources estimated twenty thousand (20,000) that may have included many who were unable to survive in the utter conditions of lack of any support in Athens and had returned to the "Jungle" (the olive groves around the camp) in order to avoid a complete homelessness in Athens. For this figure see: https://noborderkitchenlesvos.noblogs.org/lesvos-9-2020-a-retrospect/1moriacamp/

[29] In October 2021 thirty-three (33) organizations operating in Lesbos signed a *Joint Open Letter* condemning the lack of provision of food and the nutritional condition in the new camp. https://www.lesvossolidarity.org/en/blog/news/denying-food-instead-of-receiving-protection-people-go-hungry-on-eu-soil?fbclid=IwAR2GAdRiX5rxZbOgc3lDVXMBFRiaxK_DcfKaBF2IrzXO1i17MPKe-9fz0CY

washes them, and cooks them, again, on fire in the Afghan style so we can eat it, but most of the time we cannot eat the meals and we do not take them" (Haroon, 20, Kara Tepe camp). Certainly, the refugees are not only capable of preparing their own meals but also according to their customs and traditions; however, the profits of corporations which are handed the contracts for catering outweighs the regard for the well-being and respect for the humanity of these people.[30] Nutrition in the camps in Lesbos are, therefore, another testimony of the biopolitical paradigm where the management of lives in the service of corporate profits is the sole role of governing bodies.

Sanitation and security were just as dehumanizing as the distribution of meals. In conversations with female refugees the consistent answer to sanitation was that women avoided going to the washrooms at night. Some statements from interviews with refugees: "sorry to tell you this, but some women wear diapers at night, so they do not need to go to the toilet, I myself avoid toilets at night" (Fatima, 45); "I have to accompany my wife and children to the toilets at night as it is not safe" (Murtaza 38). "There are always lines for showers, and if one is lucky and it is a sunny day, there may be lukewarm water to wash oneself" (Farhad, 22), "at least two to three days a week there is no water to wash oneself" (Karim, 26), "the weather is cold, the tents are cold, and the water is freezing, I have not taken a shower in more than two weeks" (Jamal, 26). "When there are fights between Syrians and Afghans the police just watch, I am really worried for my children as everyone is throwing with rocks and the tents will not protect us." (Mohammad, 34). While large sums are allocated by the European Union for the deterrence of refugees and for keeping camps closed with security forces, neither sanitation nor security have been a concern of the authorities particularly during the pandemic.

Educational programs for refugee children and adolescents had neither qualified teachers nor a curriculum that could be remotely considered a formal education, thus rendering the education programs offered by various NGOs, in the words of Mariam, a of mother of three children, into "circuses for the daily entertainment" but "not education". Similarly, "my children have been here almost eighteen months and they are not allowed to go to school" (Narges, 32). The educational gaps created in these limbos are detrimental to the prospects of these young people, affecting the rest of their lives.[31]

[30] A brief look at the report on the conditions of nutrition in the new camp in Lesvos by the local news outlet Sto Nisi will shed some light on the ongoing situation since 2016: https://www.stonisi.gr/post/16315/paidia-mas-vlepoyn-pente-eyrw-th-mera-gia-na-menoyn-nhstikoi-pics?fbclid=IwAR046y562mGvN1_VGHkE8KnRZtHUJF5MtimbFJgToQvoMOqq3Q0EnhEh0PQ#.YHbrS-Bl4

[31] Salim Nabi. *Educational Gaps and Refugee Children: The Case of Afghan Refugees in the Greater Toronto Area and Lesbos, Greece*. Paper presented at *Flight to Freedom: Canadian Refugee Experiences since 1957.* St. Paul University, Ottawa, Canada, October 22, 2017. https://ustpaul.ca/en/flight-to-freedom-the-canadian-refugee-experience-since-1957-_6374_17.htm

In *The Birth of Biopolitics,* Foucault's reading of the German Ordo-liberals, the French and Anglo-American neoliberals ties neoliberalism to biopolitics. Insofar that neoliberalism emphasizes not a reduction of the role of the state, but only a small state in respect to the market and capital, and a strong state in the management of lives (Gesellschaftspolitik, social policy), for Foucault neoliberalism is inherently biopolitical.[32] In the management of refugees, the intersection of neoliberalism and biopolitics is vividly present. The management of nutrition is an example par excellence of how neoliberalism and biopolitics intersect. While undoubtedly refugees can prepare their own meals, the daily meals are contracted to catering companies, thus ensuring profiteering in the asylum industry. In other words, Moria camp and the refugee situation in Lesbos served as a double biopolitical mechanism: on the one hand, the management of the lives of the inhabitants of the camp in the service of profits for industries,[33] and, on the other hand, the deterrence of other lives from becoming visible in the European Union by ensuring harsh conditions for the inhabitants of the camps in order to send a message for future refugees attempting to enter the EU via the islands.

While so far it has been argued that the refugee is not Sacer, albeit still caught in a biopolitical grid tied to neoliberal "social policy" (*Gesellschaftspolitik*), it is noteworthy to turn to the second criticism of Agamben's biopolitical analysis through the notion of Sacer. As mentioned earlier, Agamben, unlike Foucault, does not pursue life as a terrain for a politics affirmative of life.[34] However, the refugee situation in Lesbos demonstrates that life is also the terrain on which struggles against the biopolitics of the camp and the European Union policies is staged. Resistances have ranged from the crossing of borders (despite the danger of the sea and the clear message of the European Union and Greece through the conditions of the camp and geographical restrictions) to the make-shift fire pits for cooking meals in the camps, the creation of an Afghan style bakery inside Moria camp, and self-organized demonstrations such as the demonstration organized and held by women of Moria camp on January 30, 2020 with banners reading "we escaped war and insecurity but here they kill us with cold", or chants of "Azadi" (freedom).

According to Silvia Federici, a radical politics countering global capitalism and neoliberal policies serving the former requires a politics of commons.[35] However, the politics of commons must be grounded in a feminism which is not solely focused on life

[32] Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. (New York: Picador, 2008).
[33] For more on the "Asylum Industry" and neoliberalism see: Siobhan McGuirk and Adrienne Pine, eds. *Asylum for Sale: Profit and Protest in the Migration Industry*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2020).
[34] Agamben's most radical political theorization is conducted in terms of "Whatever Singularities", which notion rests on desire (Quodlibet) rather than life: Giorgio Agamben. *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
[35] Silvia Federici. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of Commons*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2019)

as a singularity,[36] but more so on the communal "reproduction of life" insofar that the reproduction of life is a task beyond any individual and requires a commons that goes beyond the mere human society.[37] According to Federici's interpretation of feminism, it is a politics that is grounded in the reproduction of life; the reproduction of life is precisely the ground for refugees' desire to live, and subsequently to seek shelter and refuge for facilitating this reproduction of life. In the summer of 2016, a young pregnant woman from Afghanistan approached me for information on how to migrate to Canada with the following remarks: "My husband is twenty-eight, I am twenty-six; we have no chance at life, but I want this child to have a chance at life." Similarly, the refugee community in Lesbos has, albeit often in pockets,[38] worked in solidarity and as commons in order to facilitate a sense of normalcy in their lives; for instance, during the pandemic when there were strict movement restrictions in place one individual refugee who would be permitted to leave the camp for medical or other purposes would purchase sim cards or other items of need for a group of families in their community. The case of Farzana was an example thereof: at the COSMOTE store in Mytilene, a female refugee from Afghanistan approached me asking if I spoke English and could interpret for her. She wanted to buy twenty sim cards. The clerk informed her that she can only buy seventeen, and thereafter she would not be able to buy another sim card from COSMOTE under her name. The woman replied: "Tell him that is alright, because I am buying for people who cannot leave the camp, and when I need another sim card, they will buy it for me." Life and its reproduction lie at the heart of the motivations of refugees to pursue the perilous journeys; and often, they must work together and in common to facilitate their survival and the sense of living that is taken away from them from the start of these journeys to the camps in, say, Lesbos.

Thus, one can argue against Agamben's considerations that the refugee severs the fictional link between birth and the nation, and consequently the nation-state, and therewith they pose an unsurmountable difficulty for defining the figure of the refugee politically. The refugee becomes problematic for the state and its juridico-political grid not

[36] Federici's reflections on life, and her "affirmative biopolitics", are opposed to reflections on life by Agamben, Foucault or Deleuze, where the latter are focused on singular lives: Gilles Deleuze *Immanence: a Life …* In *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

[37] Silvia Federici. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of Commons*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2019).

[38] Solidarity among refugees has been an indispensable practice to overcome the isolation and neglect imposed on the population during the pandemic, see for instance: Tsavdaroglou, C., & Kaika, M. "Refugees' caring and Commoning practices against marginalisation under COVID-19 in Greece" *Geographical Research*, (2021) 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12522. However, these practices are not universal insofar that solidarity and communing practices are concentrated on national, ethnic, and linguistic lines. Furthermore, within a large population of Afghan refugees the above-mentioned lines are further divided into other factors that unite and leads to cooperation and solidarity among people, for instance factors such as sharing a boat on the way to Lesbos, acquaintance in Turkey, etc, play a significant role in trust building and solidarity.

just because they sever the fictional link between birth and nation, but moreover, they pose as a challenge to the biopolitics of, say, the EU insofar that the refugee, too, turns life into a terrain for politics. However, this biopolitics is a politics with the aim of accommodating and facilitating the "reproduction of life", the reproduction of life and lives that the contemporary EU biopolitics – both in terms of camps and in terms of its borders – attempts to keep out of sight and invisible with the continuous militarization of borders and the move toward closed camps in, say, Lesbos. In other words, when Agamben claims that:

> 'Refugees … represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state … because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis … the refugee is the first and only real appearance of rights outside the fiction of the citizen that always covers them over. Yet this is precisely what makes the figure of the refugee so hard to define politically.'[39]

Then the argument here is that, as much as this may hold within Agamben's analysis, what is so "disquieting" for the European Union and Western states is precisely that their ban and sovereignty over which lives are visible and which remain invisible is breached. Moreover, this latter breach, simultaneously, exposes the operational biopolitics of capitalism and neoliberal policies, turning life into a terrain for the struggle against these apparatuses.

And just as feminist theorists pointed out the invisible labor of women from which capitalism has been extracting wealth and the reproduction of labor, so, too, one can argue that the intention of keeping refugees invisible is tied to the extraction of value at the cost of the invisibility of their lives and the impossibilities created for their lives, precisely the nexus of capitalism-neoliberalism-biopolitics that Foucault had pointed out in 1978-79.

Closed Camps, Biopolitics and Racism in Lesbos

However, biopolitics takes various shapes. The anti-migrant rhetoric of European and North American politicians is vividly biopolitical. What underlies these racist narratives propagated by politicians and branches of the media in the West is the danger that, apparently, the refugee and migrant poses to the lives, and more particularly the "way of life",[40] of Westerners, not taking into account that often most of the work for the

[39] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 131.
[40] It may turn out to be an interesting undertaking to consider the political right's notion of "way of life" under attack by the refugee and migrant alongside Foucault's attempts to think "an other life" as a praxis of life to counter the neoliberal and biopolitical "way of life" that even Western philosophy cannot detach itself from.

maintenance of Western "way of life" is performed by migrant workers and underpaid refugees,[41] supplemental to the extraction of resources in all forms from the "world" that is attempted to be kept invisible in the Western "world". The allegations of islamization of Europe that so many on the political right have emphasized since 2015 is part of the same biopolitics that ties neoliberalism, biopolitics, and racism as the privilege of certain lives over others.[42] Therefore, the racism that emerges in anti-migrant politics in Europe is part and parcel of a biopolitical paradigm of ensuring that certain lives – out of whose possibility for life there has been a continuous extraction of value – remain invisible in all forms, be they in the form of camps or the borders of Europe Union (Greece, in our case).

In the case of the camps in Lesbos the situation has not been different. The currently governing conservative political party, Nea Demokratia (New Democracy), had an anti-migration policy as a major pillar of its platform in 2019, which has been reflected in the remarks of ministers and ministries concerning significant reduction of new arrivals. The same, biopolitical, social policy was propagated and used as a justification for building a new, but closed, camp in Lesbos, Greece in early 2020. Nevertheless, the Nea Demokratia government's ambitious plan for ensuring the invisibility of refugees met with a widespread resistance from islanders whose motto was "we want our island back, we want our lives back". The slogan itself, displayed on banners during the demonstrations and riots in 2020, shows the biopolitical import in right-wing politics. However, such xenophobic practices of life are aligned with the governing party's anti-immigrant politics, and the wider anti-migration sentiments propagated by politicians and media outlets throughout the Western world, namely: a politics concerning life, but only specific lives.

While biopolitics has been operational on so many fronts, the onset of the pandemic posed new challenges to refugees, those who actively worked in solidarity with the refugees, and even the state. The biopolitics of the camps, as well as the wider society, took a new and metamorphosed shape. According to Agamben, the Sacer is not completely excluded from the law; on the contrary, the Sacer is as much excluded as it is also included in law insofar that the very exclusion of the Sacer requires a legal provision wherein the Sacer must be included for its exclusion. The access to the Sacer is neither freely available nor completely inaccessible, but it is "only accessible for certain people

For remarks on Foucault see: Michel Foucault. *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*. Trans. G. Burchell (New York: Picador, 2012).

[41] Todd Miller. *Beds, Masks, and Prayers: Mexican Migrants, the Immigration Regime, and Investments in Social Exclusion in Canada*. In *Asylum for Sale: Profit and Protest in the Migration Industry*. Eds Siobhan McGuirk and Adrienne Pine (Oakland: PM Press, 2020), 287.

[42] For more on the tie between racism and neoliberalism see: Marzena Zukowska. *The Cost of Freedom*. In *Asylum for Sale: Profit and Protest in the Migration Industry*. Eds Siobhan McGuirk and Adrienne Pine (Oakland: PM Press, 2020).

and according to determinate rules."[43] From the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 the refugee facilities, particularly Moria camp, became only accessible to "certain people and according to determinate rules", which meant official NGO identification and permissions. Moreover, the movement of refugees was equally regulated by "determinate rules" and accessible for a limited number of people on each day of the week, and during specific times. And even though the strict regulations on movement had changed for the rest of the population in Lesbos, even during the summer period when the Greek state opened the borders for tourism, the situation for refugees remained the same: strict measures of access to the camp and access to the outside for the refugees.

It was during the summer months, July and August 2020, that the numbers of Covid cases in Greece started to rise dramatically compared to the months before the opening of the country to tourism. In early September 2020, the authorities built a quarantine section within Moria camp as it was becoming clear that the rise of the number of Covid-19 cases will eventually reach the camp and the refugee population. As a result, it was a demonstration against the quarantine site in Moria that led to what became the final demise of the camp into ashes. It is not clear who exactly set the fire(s) and what was the motivation. What is clear is that during the entirety of the pandemic, refugees in Moria camp continued to support each other – albeit not in a universal way, but in pockets.[44] Moreover, if the fire was set by refugees, then it was equally a resistance of life to biopolitical regimes that have continuously stripped life to its bare survival on this island.

Conclusion

This paper showed that the refugee is not Sacer but post-Sacer insofar that, on the one hand, the protection of her life is mandated by the *1951 Convention*, and, on the other hand, the camps are not extermination camps, but nevertheless they are biopolitically determined. Moreover, I argued that biopolitics in the context of refugees is not solely juridico-political, but more so economico-politically determined – from border militarization to the camps as sites for the accumulation of profits. Furthermore, if the subjective condition of Sacer is that the human can be killed, the subjective condition of post-Sacer is racism for the refugee and migrant, hence the need to maintain the refugees invisible. Combined with Covid, this situation has given rise to the intensification and justification of the pursuit of ensuring the invisibility of the affected lives by restricting movement and moving increasingly toward closed camps. In other words, whether it is

[43] Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 105.
[44] See footnote 38 above.

through the increasing militarization of borders or through the management of refugees' bare lives in the camps, the refugees are the basis for the generation of profits. As such, the refugees are under the whim of a biopolitical regime that extracts profits from the maintenance of their bare lives. This biopolitical regime has been increasingly serving to keep refugee lives invisible and the onset of the pandemic provided the justification for such regime of invisibility. But this biopolitical regime does not reduce the refugees to the subjective condition of Sacer, namely: the killable bare life. Rather, insofar that the extraction of capital takes place through the maintenance of their bare lives as hidden and invisible, the refugees are put into a condition of post-Sacer, that is: *a bare life that is maintained at bare minimum and invisible for the extraction of profits.*

However, life is equally a site, or rather the most appropriate site of struggle against these apparatuses of governance and control of life. While the refugee is a life which has no right to decide upon the laws deciding and determining their life, they are a life that has already proven its determination to decide for themselves by virtue of turning their life into a site of struggle against biopolitical determinations of their life. The lesson that one can draw for the planetary possibilities of our time from the existence of refugees is that life is the term for the site of contemporary struggles. However, this research and particularly this paper have not focused on the broader subjective possibilities of our time, which remains to be researched in order to see as to what extent it applies beyond the refugee to the citizen. Furthermore, it remains to be researched as to how closely neoliberal policies, biopolitics, and profit-making operate on the refugees who have received asylum and move beyond the camp, for instance to mainland Greece. There remains much to learn on part of the rest of humanity from the statement made by the refugees as they turn their very lives into the battlefield against global regimes, namely that *life is the determination to be friction against the biopolitical paradigm of our contemporary global apparatuses of capitalism and neoliberalism. This determination is not for ideological ends nor is it for labor or rights in general but, rather, for the sake of life.*

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Corona, Forced Migration and Human Rights – Review of a Virtual Lecture Series

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Abstract

This paper sums up the discussions held during a series of online lectures on "Corona, Forced Migration and Human Rights" organised in 2020 by the Centre for Human Rights (CHREN) of Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) in Germany within the project FFVT, "Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networking and Knowledge Transfer". The lecture series brought together scientists, journalists, and practitioners in an attempt to analyse the COVID-19 situation for refugees and to identify gaps for future research, policy, and activism. Central to each of these was the human rights classification of the reports as showing that certain human rights are particularly affected by COVID-19. In three online events, experts examined the pandemic´s impacts on refugees and migrants on different political levels: global, European and national/local. The first one focused on Western Africa and Libya, followed by the situation at the EU external borders, more precisely on the Greek island Lesbos. Finally, the national, regional, and local levels were analysed, scrutinizing the accommodation of refugees in Germany and particularly Bavaria, under COVID-19 conditions. This review combines ad-hoc reports of various practitioners working in the field in different regions and may serve as a basis for more in-depth discussions.

Keywords

Coronavirus, Lockdown, Refugees, Forced migrants, Immobility, Border closures, Camps, Human rights

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation of people forced to seek refuge worldwide. Various actors, including UNHCR, see the core principles of refugee protection at risk and urge respect for refugee and human rights. This leads to the questions of what impact does the COVID-19 pandemic have on forced migration? What are its effects on human rights? The Centre for Human Rights (CHREN) of Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) in Germany analysed these questions in its lecture and discussion series "Corona, Forced Migration and Human Rights" held within the project FFVT, "Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networking and Knowledge Transfer") in the year 2020. The joint project FFVT aims to strengthen interdisciplinary refugee research in Germany. As one of the four institutes within the FFVT consortium, the CHREN is mainly in charge of the project's knowledge transfer mandate, i.e., enhancing the dialogue between science, practice, media, and politics. This also implies coming up with innovative formats that are accessible by a broader (partially non-academic) audience.

Pursuing these goals, in 2020, the lecture series "Corona, Forced Migration and Human Rights" brought together scientists, journalists and practitioners in an ad-hoc attempt to analyse the COVID-19 situation for refugees and to identify gaps for future research, policy, and activism. Central to each of these was the human rights classification of the reports as showing that certain human rights are particularly affected by COVID-19. Organized as a virtual lecture series in combination with a Q&A function and the later uploading of the recordings enabled us to reach a much more diverse audience than would have been possible through a face-to-face series.

In three online events, experts examined the pandemic´s impacts on refugees and migrants on different political levels: global, European, and national/local. First, we focused on Western Africa and Libya, followed by the situation at the EU external borders, more precisely on the Greek island Lesbos. Finally, the national, regional, and local levels were analysed, focusing on the accommodation of refugees in Germany and particularly Bavaria. This article sums up the main results of the lecture series with regards to questions such as: what human rights problems in relation to refuge arise from COVID-19 at what political level? To what extent is a global, European, national, or local solution in sight? It is therewith not a usual field report, but rather a review that combines reports of various practitioners working in the field in different regions, and that may serve as a basis for more in-depth discussions.

Human Mobility in Western Africa and Libya

On June 29, 2020, we looked at human mobility in Western Africa and Libya. The lecture started with free-lance journalist and photographer Benjamin Moscovici reporting on the COVID-19 situation in Western and Central Africa. In a nutshell, he stated that the spread of the coronavirus disease could be slowed and controlled comparably well in most of the countries in this region (at that time). In his opinion, the measures of border closures were highly problematic in nearly every country, though. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were about six million internally displaced persons, ten million migrants and 20 million nomads living in the region[4], i.e., people there tend to be very mobile. Due to the border closures, an increasing number of persons stranded in so-called transit centres. The IOM's transit centres are welcome points for refugees on transit or on their way back home. Due to the border closures, however, the IOM could no longer support migrants willing to return to their home countries. Moreover, means for adequately protecting people against the virus were missing. Moscovici provided insights into the transit centre Arlit and into a refugee camp in Mali through videos, in which the people concerned could explain their situation. He summarized: "I fear that we are witnessing a silent catastrophe. Death rates are low, therefore there are no headlines. The new question now is: What will happen when the economic crisis (resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic) affects economies such as in Mali or Sierra Leone? What will happen when people are concerned whose financial resources hardly suffice for one day?"

Psychologist Kristin Pelzer then described her experience in the detention camps in Libya, where she has worked for Doctors without Borders (MSF) for ten months. About 1,500 refugees and migrants were living in detention camps at that time, being exposed to inhumane living conditions, violence, and torture. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation of the people living in the camps had further deteriorated. Due to overcrowding, lack of hygiene and insufficient basic supply, the migrants and refugees faced a high risk to catch the virus. No preventive measures were offered. Migrants had no access to the Libyan health system – which in any case lacks capacities to adequately treat patients with severe courses of COVID-19. In addition, migrants were stigmatized for "spreading the disease", an accusation which led to a deterioration of living conditions even for migrants outside of the camps (such as loss of jobs and homes). Due to travel restrictions, only few humanitarian actors could enter the country; moreover, all

[4] "IOM West and Central Africa Regional Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan COVID-19" (International Organization for Migration, 2020), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20in%20West%20and%20Central%20Africa%20-%20Regional%20Appeal%20COVID-19.pdf.

evacuations of refugees by UNHCR or IOM, i.e. the only safe way to break out of the "circle of violence in the camps", were suspended, said Pelzer. She demanded that "there must be safe ways to leave Libya" as well as that "there must be safe alternatives to detention camps and healthcare for migrants that is not discriminating but provides best possible treatment for all people".

Benjamin Schraven, former researcher at the German Development Institute (GDI), emphasized the enormous mobility restrictions in Western Africa impacting both internal and cross-border labour migration. According to Schraven, the dynamic migration structures are based on historical traditions, often reflected by e.g. multi-local households. Moreover, many children usually commute between countryside and cities for educational purposes. Chaotic scenes followed the lockdown announcement in the big cities in Ghana, when a lot of migrants tried to reach their hometowns as fast as possible. Schraven described the situation as a race for measures calling the instrument of forced immobility an enormous political issue. "Three and a half weeks of lockdown were enough to cause severe damage and to substantially shake the traditional security measures of usual West African mobility", as he underlined.

Finally, Michael Krennerich, FAU-Professor for Human Rights and Human Rights Politics, stressed which human rights were/are especially affected by this situation. According to him, states have a special obligation to secure the protection of prison inmates and people in detention facilities as well as those in refugee camps. Several UN human rights control committees had already asked states to generally call the use of camps as accommodation facilities into question. Moreover, Krennerich demanded that in such a situation, it is paramount to enforce human rights monitoring in camps. Also, he stated that "first and foremost during the pandemic, it is especially important to respect human rights in border regions". He stressed the fact that it is a human right for people to have the chance to return to their home country, and criticised mass expulsions of migrant workers. Finally, he emphasized the necessity of international support and cooperation – also regarding the global distribution of vaccines.

All three reports, as well as their human rights assessment, indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic significantly worsened the situation for refugees and migrants in West Africa. The border closures have had a serious impact on ordinary migration movements and endanger the human right to return to the country of origin. In addition, there is a lack of human rights-compliant care for refugees, as shown in particular by the report from Libya, which has suffered further as a result of the pandemic. As a result, many rights of refugees are under increased threat, such as the right to health and protection from inhumane treatment.

The Situation of Refugees at the Greek EU External Borders

On July 20, 2020, the second panel in the lecture series analysed the situation of refugees at the Greek EU external borders. Free-lance journalist Franziska Grillmeier, who at that time had lived on Lesbos for nearly three years, reported on the situation in the former refugee camp Moria on Lesbos, which had meanwhile burned down. When the event took place, the lockdown of March 22, 2020, which had been imposed on the inhabitants of Moria due to the pandemic, had been prolonged once again. Consequently, the camp inmates could only leave the camp with personalized special permit documents. Already in January and February, the people in the camp had protested against the inhumane living conditions in the camp. The demonstrations, however, had been suppressed by the police with enormous violence. With the opening of the Turkish border in February, the situation at the Turkish-Greek external border escalated when snipers and tear gas were involved. According to Grillmeier, these impulses also influenced the island inhabitants; aggression turned into attacks on NGO-staff and journalists who were regarded to be "foreign actors fostering the arrival of refugees" on the island. At the same time, the Greek government suspended the right to asylum. She described that the structural violence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic "imploded". Finally, Greek authorities suspended financial support payments for one month while, due to the lockdown, any access to education, medical treatment, lawyers or therapy sessions for victims of sexual violence or torture was denied. Only in very urgent cases could patients be brought to a hospital; access to further medical treatment remained impossible. And although resilience and the will to survive in the camp had been immense, according to the journalist, a fact that could be seen in the intensified self-organization efforts regarding food and education, the situation deteriorated due to the constant re-traumatization in the camp during the pandemic. As a result of the lockdown, no one had a chance to escape from the traumatic everyday stress in Moria and to come to rest. "There only is a zipper and no door that can be closed ", said Grillmeier. The journalist also observed that asylum procedures were – in her opinion arbitrarily – accelerated during that time. Even a status as a recognized refugee did often not result in improved living conditions, because as recognized refugees, people had to leave the camp and had to look after themselves. Without any integration programmes, however, it remained difficult to find accommodation or employment. And due to the pandemic, this situation got even worse.

What is the human rights perspective on this process? Anuscheh Farahat, FAU-Professor for Public Law, Migration Law and Human Rights, discussed this issue and stressed the fact that Greece had violated human rights already before the pandemic started. However, the violations had become more obvious since the beginning of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The right to health, which is part of the European Convention on Human Rights, had already been violated before COVID-19 – as it was not adhered to hygiene standards. Due to the lockdown in the camps, the inadequate situation deteriorated considerably. Both Greece and the EU had the obligation to protect the people in the camps and therefore had to provide for healthcare at least. Moreover, restrictions on the right to move must always be proportionate. Yet, "complete quartering in a camp like Moria can hardly be regarded as proportionate in the light of the living conditions there", said Farahat. In addition, protection against inhumane or degrading treatment according to article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights could not no longer be guaranteed in Greece. A huge number of legal cases at the European Court of Human Rights prove this fact. Thus, locking up refugees in camps like Moria amounts to a violation of human rights.

When asked why, despite all those proofs of violations, it is nevertheless hard to enforce the law, Grillmeier answered that independent external control by institutions such as the European border control agency Frontex was missing. Moreover, she emphasized the fact that journalists and human rights organizations had less space to intervene. "Greece becomes something like a laboratory to test to what extent human rights violations are tolerated in order to control borders and to get refugees out of a country without risking prosecution", argued Grillmeier. Farahat added to this by stating that the restrictions faced by civil society, journalists, and lawyers, were alarming, too, and pointed to the fact that effective control could hardly be reached through the protection of private individual's rights. Instead, she regarded a political solution as more realistic than a legal one and pled for a common European approach.

The reports on the accommodation of refugees on Lesbos show that human rights violations are as much a daily occurrence at the European level as they are at the global level. This becomes apparent in the widespread lack of decent housing for refugees and severe restrictions their rights to health, education, and protection. Of particular concern are the human rights violations affecting the right to asylum. Also in the EU, the fulfilment of this right was (and partially continues to be) severely curtailed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Accommodation of Refugees in Germany with a Special Focus on Bavaria

The third panel of the series on December 1, 2020, focused on the accommodation of refugees in Germany and especially in Bavaria. According to estimates, about 330,000 displaced people live in Germany's reception centres. Living conditions there have been

repeatedly criticised not only by journalists and human rights organisations, but also by the United Nations.

Starting the discussion, Olaf Kleist, political scientist and researcher at the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), emphasised the aggravation of this situation through the pandemic, especially for vulnerable groups. He described the socio-psychic distance which these accommodations create, pointing to the fact that, due to COVID-19, asylum seekers and refugees had become even more isolated from the rest of society. Whenever entire facilities were put in quarantine, some kind of "collective detention" for these populations could be observed. Again, migrants and refugees were put under general suspicion to be potential carriers of the virus, which further exacerbated racism and social stigmatisation. Together with other concrete restrictions, which, among other negative consequences, led to less staff in the accommodation facilities, these restrictions also affected concepts of protection against violence. As part of a study developing a monitoring system for concepts for protection against violence, Kleist conducted an online survey among residents in 16 federal state and municipal facilities, which gave valuable insights into the situation – even without being representative for all facilities. While many residents were afraid of COVID-19, other fears were also intensified – such as fears of the security staff, of other residents, of the asylum procedure or of deportation. The residents answered particularly negatively to questions on the provision of medical care and the suspension of educational and care services for children and young people. Although the overall situation was deteriorating, these people's extraordinary resilience could also be noticed. In some cases, even some small improvements could be achieved, such as greater participation of the concerned migrants and refugees in the internal processes at the accommodations, and in the respective protection concepts. In general, Kleist stated that "the situation in the facilities themselves has worsened – but there is also hope that things will get better here and there, yet only on a very small scale."

Stephan Dünnwald, staff member of the Bavarian Refugee Council, painted a similar picture of the situation in the German state Bavaria. He identified the blatant lack of information for migrants and refugees as one of the major deficits at the beginning of the pandemic. Only at the urgent request of the Refugee Council did the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior provide information in various languages specifically for these populations." One main experience we have made is that the authorities learn selectively, yet on the one hand very slowly and [...] in one municipality this way and in another that way", Dünnwald reported. He criticised the lack of coordination among the health authorities regarding the imposition and content of quarantine regulations for migrants and refugees. Dünnwald

described the massive intimidation of residents by security and police as a standard procedure when infection cases occurred. In some cases, no distinction was made between infected persons, contact persons and healthy people, and in one case, residents were only allowed to leave the facility after they had recovered from the disease. The Bavarian Refugee Council filed a criminal complaint, which, however, was not pursued. "We think that something could have been done. More could have been done and earlier. Not to relocate these residents was a decision that was taken relatively early. They will be left in this vulnerable situation in which they have only small chances to protect themselves", Dünnwald said about the situation in Bavaria.

Lea Gelardi, research fellow at the Centre for Flight and Migration at the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (ZFM), then described the problematic living conditions in the former "transit centres", which had been transformed into so-called "AnkER centres[5]" in 2018, i.e., well before the pandemic. She named practices of immobilisation, spatial and social distancing, as well as stigmatisation and criminalisation of the residents. These discriminating practices had been exacerbated by the pandemic, with even stricter controls, repeated warnings, and admonitions, and overstraining local social workers. She also criticised the more difficult access for volunteers." There is a great danger that there will be even less external control and that stigmatisation and discrimination will increase", Gelardi said. She also pled for better networking between the authorities, shorter stays in such centralised facilities and more comprehensive and legally safe procedures.

Dünnwald further called for a review of the restrictions and the reduction of measures not deemed to be necessary. He also suggested that the diverse practical experiences of persons, which some might have gained in the past through pandemics such as Ebola, should be considered when coordinating a response against the coronavirus outbreak. Kleist also stressed the importance of refugee participation at all levels. As actors themselves, they should be involved in decision-making to a greater extent - mutual communication should be expanded, and refugees should be considered an essential part of the host population.

As this last discussion in our series illustrated, we can also observe human rights restrictions of refugees at the local level and in different parts of Germany. Although basic rights such as the right to medical health are required, they tend to be widely neglected. In this context, the violation of the right to non-discrimination is also evident. Instead, vulnerable groups such as refugees are deliberately left to fend for themselves in

[5] AnkER centres are accommodations hosting asylum seekers from their initial arrival until their eventual return to their countries of origin.

vulnerable situations and are exposed to stigmatization - tendencies which can also be observed on the global and European level, as discussed above.

Conclusions and Outlook

The quintessence of the series is that the same key issues must be dealt with on the different political levels repeatedly: Once more, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights how societies deal with different parts of their populations in times of crisis. On one hand, aggravations of already existing inequalities became evident in 2020; in particular, immobilisation, deprivation/restriction of rights, and incidents of stigmatisation of marginalized populations. Related to this, the absence of monitoring of human rights enforcement was identified as a major problem at all three levels. On the other hand, all discussants emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic also reflected refugees' resilience and valuable knowledge. Whenever governments and authorities fail to protect and provide health care for them, it is up to themselves to find ways to cope with it and improve their situation through their skills, knowledge, and initiatives - even within their limited frame of possibilities. These findings thus underline once more the necessity to avoid collective accommodation whenever possible and force actors to take a closer look on what is happening beyond the horizons of mainstream societies. It is essential to vigorously fight against the blatant human rights violations happening at all levels, and at the same time make use of the promising potentials, resilience, and knowledge of refugees in (post-)pandemic situations: On one hand, people who have suffered a lot of hardships can be extraordinarily strong and resilient and thus tend to better cope with difficult circumstances. At the same time, however, it is important to be careful not to justify or play down the existing inhumane and health-threatening circumstances, presuming a resilience of those affected – people who may already have gone through multiple traumatic situations.

Various tasks for researchers and supporting actors may be identified because of these insights: Altogether, adequate research is still missing as to which measures could contribute to strengthening the resilience of forced migrants (in refugee facilities, but also at other places). Here, the open question remains whether and how we can actively support the resilience of specific groups. It is also important to initiate processes within mainstream society, however: What structural conditions help to provide access to human and refugee rights – access to protection, health, housing, food, education, and work? Which framework conditions need to be improved? How do projects and programmes strengthen social cohesion and help to create an environment with less discrimination and

stigmatisation? The COVID-19 pandemic makes it more and more obvious how urgent it is to answer these and other related questions.

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Intersectionality and COVID-19

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COVID-19 Through a Transnational Lens: Migrant Women and Exchange of Care Within Low-Income Transnational Households

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Abstract

COVID-19 has disturbed South-North movements of migrant workers and impacted practices of giving and receiving care in geographically dispersed households. The aim of this paper is to enquire - how can a transnational lens make visible ways in which COVID-19 has reshaped care-provisioning in low-income transnational households? Using the case of Nigeria and drawing upon guided ethnographic interviews conducted with 16 Nigerian returnee women, the first part of the paper underscores the importance of South-North migration of women and the revenue it generates for low-income migrant households, in the pre-pandemic scenario. In the second part, the paper focuses on the post-pandemic scenario. Drawing upon nascent scholarship, the paper discusses how the pandemic continues to transform the lives of migrant workers in the Global North, hampering their ability to remit money, and increasing the burden of care work borne by women. Thereon, this paper argues that COVID-19's impact on migrant women in host countries has been of a kind that travels across borders to their home countries. Therefore, there is a need to employ a transnational framework over one restricted by boundaries of nation-states as epicenters to study the social, economic and gender dimension of the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised communities.

Keywords

Remittances, Care-provisioning, Nigeria, Low-income households, COVID-19, Transnational Migrations

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Introduction

The movement of individuals from countries in the Global South to countries in the Global North has intensified in the last two decades. The intensification is interlinked to rising instances of militia conflicts in Middle Eastern, North African, and Central and Southeast Asian countries, and to the climate change catastrophe, of which West African countries are hotspots. The spillover effects of these 'push factors' are disproportionately borne by women of households. Women from low-income households in countries in the Global South migrate to host countries in the Global North where they believe they will find better income earning opportunities in order to improve the socioeconomic conditions of themselves and that of those members of the households who stay behind.[2] As a gender and migration studies scholar, I have been closely following the case of Nigerian women who are a part of labour migrations from the region of West Africa to mainland Europe. Over the course of conducting ethnographic research in southern Nigeria with returnee women between 2017-2019, I mapped the routes Nigerian women have taken, since the 1980s, to arrive as labour migrants in southern European countries. I came to observe that Nigerian women have built long-standing transnational care networks between Southern European countries and Nigeria by participating in informal and formal economies, remitting a portion of their wages to household members in Nigeria and fostering a relationship of giving and receiving care within the household. However, this was true and typical of the 'pre-COVID' times. As the pandemic evolved over the course of the year 2020, we witnessed a climactic crisis in the health sector and the economy world over. This was accompanied by the erratic closing and opening of national and international borders which affected different sections of the world's population, to varying extents. Nascent scholarship has so far indicated that those most affected included individuals who migrate across national and international borders for the purpose of seeking seasonal or long-term employment opportunities in formal and informal economies abroad. Similarly, the pandemic also affected those who engage in return migration and most importantly, those groups who were compelled to or chose to leave their home countries and seek asylum elsewhere faced with civil war, natural calamities, or other conflicts.[3] COVID-19 has, without

[2] Mirjana Morokvašic, "Birds of Passage Are Also Women …," *International Migration Review* 18, no. 4 (1984): 886–907, https://doi.org/10.1177/019791838401800402; Hania Zlotnik, "Migration and the Family: The Female Perspective," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 4, no. 2–3 (1995): 253–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/011719689500400205.

[3] Melisa Aytekin, "Migrant Workers and Remittances in the Context of COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa," Policy Brief (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4060/cb0184en; Lorenzo Guadagno, "Migrants and the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Initial Analysis," Migration Rsearch (IOM, 2020), https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs-60.pdf; IOM, "How Are Remittances Being Affected by COVID-19?" (IOM, 2020), https://rosanjose.iom.int/site/en/blog/how-are-remittances-being-affected-covid-19.

a doubt, disturbed long-standing cross-border movements of labour, and led to a decline in remittance transfers.[4] By extension, I argue that COVID-19 has also has reshaped interlinked practices of providing and receiving care that have historically existed between migrants who depart from their home countries and members of their household who stay behind.

With this paper, I take thought and seek to underscore the surfacing impacts of COVID-19, particularly on migrant women from source countries in the Global South, such as Nigerian women whose migration experiences I have been closely following during my time conducting field research. The aim of this paper is to enquire - how can a transnational lens make visible ways in which COVID-19 has reshaped care-provisioning in low-income transnational households? I will follow a two-step process in answering this question. First, I will demonstrate how, in the pre-pandemic scenario, women's participation in labour markets in host countries and the money they remit has been an important means for ensuring different family members are taken care of within low-income migrant households in source countries in the Global South. I will use Nigerian transnational households as my point of reference and draw from narratives of Nigerian returnee women I gathered while on field. In so doing, I will demonstrate how the migration of women to southern European countries and the revenue it generates is intricately connected to the provision of informal forms of social protection for all members of a Nigerian household. In the second part of the paper, I will address the post-pandemic scenario by drawing upon relatively nascent scholarship that has so far examined the evolving social and economic impact of COVID-19 on migrant sending and receiving countries. I will discuss how the ongoing pandemic is not only transforming the conditions in which migrants live and work in host countries in the Global North, but it is also hampering the ability of migrant workers to remit money across international borders to their households, particularly to countries such as Nigeria, and increasing the burden of care work that is borne by women. With this paper, I argue that COVID-19's impact on the lives of migrant women in host countries has been of a kind that travels across borders to their households in source countries. Therefore, there is an urgent need to employ a transnational framework over one restricted by boundaries of nation-states as epicenters to study the social, economic and gender dimension of the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised communities. This paper is an attempt to initiate a timely discussion on how COVID-19 and the period that follows will continue to alter how care is being provided and

[4] IOM, 'How Are Remittances Being Affected by COVID-19?'

received within households in countries like Nigeria, potentially leading to the exacerbation of poverty and gendered inequalities in low-income migrant households.

Methodological and Analytical Approach

The thoughts I put forth in this paper are based on observations gathered while conducting (ongoing) fieldwork in southern Nigeria, to explore means by which a relationship of care is cultivated within Nigerian transnational households through the circulation of remittances between Nigerian migrant women in southern European countries and members of the household who stay behind in Nigeria. As a part of this field research, in the initial phases, I engaged in participant observation at reception centers set up by the Nigerian government for irregular migrants and failed asylum seekers returning to the Edo State in Nigeria under the International Organization for Migration's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program in 2018. In addition, I conducted guided ethnographic interviews with 16 Nigerian women who were forced to return 'home' under this program. In this paper, I draw upon the interviews conducted with the returnee women who were between the age range of 19-38 years of age. Some of the women had finished higher education while others had to drop out of school early on because of financial hardships faced by their families. Despite possessing skills that, theoretically, should help them secure average level jobs in Nigeria, the women had travelled along the Nigeria-Libya-Italy migration corridor to seek job opportunities in European countries. Through the interviews I was most interested in exploring what Nigerian women's departure and stay in the host country meant for the women, for those members of the household who stayed behind, and for Nigeria as a source country. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a major setback to my fieldwork plans. I was unable to continue with ethnographic research that would allow me the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with the Nigerian women or with members of their household and pursue questions that would help uncover how COVID-19 has resulted in the reorganisation of care provisioning practices within migrant households.

In this paper, I employ a transnational approach to the analysis of Nigerian women's departure to work and remit a portion of their wages from southern European countries to their households in Nigeria. The framework of transnationalism, developed by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, has over the years helped researchers move away from a fixed focus on nation-states and include an exploration of migrant strategies, transnational forms of family, and migrant identities as a crucial part of the study

of migration processes.[5] What the framework of transnationalism helps highlight is a matrix that is formed between migrants in host countries and members of the household who reside in geographically dispersed locations. Thus, though migrants are located in the host country, there is merit in theorising their experience of migration, of remitting money and participating in care provisioning, as influencing and being influenced by their social, economic, cultural, and political ties with the social group they belong to in the home country, and vice versa.[6] By 'care provisioning', I refer to a range of tasks and activities that promote the personal health and welfare of those individuals within a household who are unable to or are not inclined to perform specific activities by themselves. Care can thus involve providing household members with accommodation, childcare support, looking after their emotional well-being and in the case of migrant households, offering household members financial support by means of sending money across borders.[7] The term used to refer to cash, goods or in-kind transfers sent by migrants to their family members or friends in the home country is remittances. These transfers are made through numerous channels; through banks, money transfer operators, post offices, mobile phones, and other unofficial sources of transfer such as via other migrants who are visiting their families.[8] With this paper, my aim is to make a case for the use of a transnational lens to explore ways in which COVID-19 has affected not only migrant women in host countries, but has also affected, by extension, the transfer of care and remittances to members of their households who stay behind in source countries.

Migrant Women's Transnationalism

Nigerian women's active involvement in internal, national, and international forms of migration is not a recent phenomenon. Historical accounts are illustrative of their inter-regional migration as tradeswomen, within family groups, along Western African trade routes as concubines, or in more recent internal migrations from rural to urban areas within Nigeria.[9] Since the 1980s, in the wake of an oil and economic crisis that hit the country,

[5] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, "Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 645, no. 1 (July 1992): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1992.tb33484.x.
[6] Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *The International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1002–39.
[7] Janet Finch, *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989); Nicola Yeates, "Global Care Chains: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Directions in Care Transnationalization Research," *Global Networks* 12, no. 2 (2012): 135–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2012.00344.x.
[8] Migration Data Portal, "Remittances," Migration and Development (Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, IOM, June 3, 2021), http://migrationdataportal.org/themes/remittances.
[9] Paul E. Lovejoy, "Concubinage and the Status of Women Slaves in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria," *The Journal of African History* 29, no. 2 (1988): 245–66; Mojubaolu Okome, "African Women and Power: Labor, Gender and Feminism in the Age of Globalization," *SAGE Race Relations Abstracts* 30(2) (2005): 3–26; Kathleen

Nigerian women have been participating in international migration. In the past they migrated to Saudi Arabia to work as nurses, to the United Kingdom and the United States of America as students, and to Southern European countries in response to a rising demand in the market for domestic work and sex work.[10] Over the course of engaging in formal and informal conversations with returnee women and other contact persons on field in Nigeria, I was able to understand that for Nigerians, the motivation to leave the country for European countries has been historically tied to wanting to provide for the education of their younger siblings, to support their mothers in taking care of the family, providing for their own young children, or improving their own living conditions. As was the case with one respondent:

> "Because of my mother condition and family condition. We don't have somebody to help us, just felt like let me try to help my family. That's why I left Nigeria. I just asked my mother to pray for me so that this poverty can go away."[11]

With respect to the multiple migration corridors that connect West African countries to mainland Europe, there are known and unknown risks associated with journeys made via irregular land and sea crossings. Yet, migrant women are often willing to undertake these journeys as long as it holds the promise of providing them with the opportunity of being employed in countries abroad; be it in informal or formal economies. The overarching aim, as was the case of Nigerian women, is to find jobs as domestic helpers, in supermarkets or hair salons, or set up small scale businesses and continue contributing towards organising care-provisioning within the household. As caring is conventionally regarded as a feminine trait, women end up taking on a disproportionate amount of responsibility of providing care to all members of their household.[12] As another respondent explained to me,

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Sheldon, *African Women: Early History to the 21st Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), 104.

[10] Aderanti Adepoju, "Trends in International Migration in and from Africa," in *International Migration: Prospects and Policies in a Global Market*, ed. Henry G. Bryant Massey, Douglas S. Massey, and J. Edward Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 67; Jørgen Carling, *Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe* (International Court of Justice, United Nations, 2006), 26; Hein de Haas, "International Migration and National Development: Viewpoints and Policy Initiatives in Countries of Origin - The Case of Nigeria," (International Migration Institute, 2006), https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/nigeria-migration-development.

[11] Respondent, interviewed by the author in Benin (Nigeria), 18th July 2018.

[12] Debbie Budlender, ed., *Time Use Studies and Unpaid Care Work* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), https://www.routledge.com/Time-Use-Studies-and-Unpaid-Care-Work/Budlender/p/book/9780415811026.

> "We take risks in Nigeria, especially the women. We normally take risks. I know I have to travel and do any type of job for me to help my family."

Although the returnee women I met with in Nigeria rarely made a direct reference to remittances, in my view, the women continued to transfer of a portion of their earnings to maintain a relationship of care, the nature and frequency of which is case dependent, with their households in Nigeria following their departure. During conversations, women often brought to my attention elaborately constructed homes of those Nigerian families whose members had migrated to European countries. Some of the women hoped to help family members who stayed behind set up hair salons or open small-scale shops selling food or groceries in the city with the money they send. The others were more concerned with how they would help their mothers run the household on an everyday basis and put their siblings or children through school should they be able to send money home regularly. Transnational activities of Nigerian migrants alone generate over a third of the migrant remittances flowing into sub-Saharan Africa, second only to Egypt in accounting for the largest inflow of remittances into the continent.[13] Studies conducted in the past have demonstrated that money transfers sent by Nigerians from abroad to their family members have led to a growth in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Not only has this money helped reduce income inequality in the country, but it has also helped marginally improve the standard of living of members of Nigerian households.[14] Other studies also indicate that household members in Nigeria use remittances to improve the household's utilisation of public healthcare and education services, improve their access to information and communication technology and in the process, increase the overall productivity of the household.[15] Often remittances serve as a form of transnational social protection that members of migrant households provide and receive. This informal social safety net reduces vulnerabilities and helps mitigate economic risks faced by those members of a migrant household who stay behind in countries like Nigeria where the State fails to adequately implement public policies that are designed to improve the living conditions and ensure the well-being of its citizens.[16] In addition, circulation of remittances

[13] Andrew S. Nevin and Omomia Omosomi, "Strength from Abroad: The Economic Power of Nigeria's Diaspora," (PwC, 2019), https://www.pwc.com/ng/en/publications/the-economic-power-of-nigerias-diaspora.html.
[14] John Chiwuzulum Odozi, Timothy Taiwo Awoyemi, and Bolarin Titus Omonona, "Household Poverty and Inequality: The Implication of Migrants' Remittances in Nigeria," *Journal of Economic Policy Reform* 13, no. 2 (1 June 2010): 191–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/17487871003700788.
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[16] Johanna Avato, Johannes Koettl, and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler, "Social Security Regimes, Global Estimates, and Good Practices: The Status of Social Protection for International Migrants," *World Development* 38, no. 4 (2010): 455–66; Thomas Faist et al., "Transnational Social Protection: Migrants' Strategies and Patterns of Inequalities," *Population, Space and Place* 21, no. 3 (2015): 193–202, https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1903; Karolina Barglowski, Łukasz Krzyżowski, and Paulina Świątek, "Caregiving in Polish–German Transnational Social Space:

is one of the ways in which migrants and those who stay behind continue to engage in the exchange of care resources despite distances, apart from making phone calls, exchanging photographs, sending gifts, writing letters, organising annual visits and participating in key family events like birthdays, weddings and funerals.[17]

In the case of the Nigerian women who I was speaking to, information on the exact nature of work women have to undertake, the amount of money they were able to earn and the portions they remitted or hoped to remit in the future to their families remained unclear. The women had attempted to migrate using irregular means and continued to live in, what Susan Bibler Coutin calls, a space of non-existence, as is the case with many migrants arriving or enroute to southern Europe through land and sea crossings from Libya.[18] To them, I was an outsider, a 'legal' immigrant approaching them through a State-run migration management agency. Understandably they were cautious of revealing information involving the use of means regarded as 'unlawful' to earn an income and send a portion of this income across borders using informal channels, presumably on account of the apprehension that it might jeopardise them. I would have overcome this hurdle had I been able to spend a longer period in Nigeria conducting further ethnographic research, spending time with members of migrant women's households to develop an in-depth understanding of how money remitted by migrant women was shaping the inner workings of the household. However, with COVID-19 and the ensuing restrictions on travel, I was unable to gather data that would allow me to study remittances being sent to Nigerian migrant households in greater detail. What I was able to put together was, that within the Nigerian household, women played key social and economic roles and often took charge of caring for their families in an environment where formal mechanisms of social protection were close to absent. My respondents displayed an unusual level of distrust in their husbands or partners and did not wish to rely on receiving care from men. Instead by investing thought and monetary resources into leaving Nigeria and seeking jobs in southern European countries, they sought to help their family members in all possible ways, while at the same time working towards improving their own living conditions. While in awe of their desire to be socially and financially independent, I was aware of what this

Circulating Narratives and Intersecting Heterogeneities," *Population, Space and Place* 21, no. 3 (2015): 257–69, https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1904; Peggy Levitt et al., "Transnational Social Protection: Setting the Agenda," *Oxford Development Studies* 45, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 2–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1239702.

[17] Sarah J. Mahler, "Transnational Relationships: The Struggle to Communicate Across Borders," *Identities* 7, no. 4 (1 January 2001): 583–619, https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2001.9962679; Katy Gardner and Ralph Grillo, "Transnational Households and Ritual: An Overview," *Global Networks* 2, no. 3 (2002): 179–90, https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00035.

[18] Susan Bibler Coutin, "Illegality, Borderlands, and The Space of Nonexistence," in *Globalization Under Construction: Governmentality, Law, and Identity*, ed. Richard Warren Perry and Bill Maurer (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 171–202.

meant – that Nigerian women, as transnational migrant women, must participate in productive activities in the public sphere. Additionally, they also must bear the burden of social reproduction in the household while engaging in care provisioning, a burden that I imagine only worsened with COVID-19 and the breakdown of healthcare and economic systems world over.

COVID-19: Affecting Migrant Workers, Remittance Flows and Low-Income Households

In my case, as a skilled immigrant woman, residing alone in a European country away from family in India, I have been paying close attention to how the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have significantly altered my ways of maintaining a relationship of giving and receiving care to/with members of my family. The relationship of care I share with my family is typically sustained through annual home visits, when time and money permit, otherwise relying on occasional phone calls and text messages. In the COVID-19 scenario, I have been unable to visit my family for over two and a half years (and counting). I found myself substituting home visits with an increased number of video calls, text messages, audio messages and photographs from my everyday life, purchasing gifts for family members online, and sending money, via digital transfers, for rituals or special occasions with the intention of maintaining a co-presence. Strict, sometimes arbitrary, and forever evolving travel restrictions imposed in both my country of residence and origin have influenced the nature of relationships I continue to build with different members of my family. Needless to say, as a skilled immigrant woman based in a Western academic institution, my access to social capital, migrant networks, financial resources, and the intersecting differences emerging from my class, race, gender, and institutional identity, among other identities, considerably shaped my experience of COVID-19. I have little doubt that my experience of COVID-19 as an immigrant is far much different from that of the Nigerian migrant women I met with over the years while on field. Yet, from a position of empathy I often wondered – how are the many Nigerian migrant women I met with over the past few years and members of their households coping with COVID-19?

Scholarship on the impact of COVID-19, particularly on migrant workers, is beginning to emerge, and understandably remains far from being comprehensive. For instance, one of the areas of research that need to be attended to is the impact of COVID-19 on migrants coming from low-income households. The World Bank's initial assessment of the global pandemic has revealed that those individuals and social groups who were already 'poor' have suffered especially a lot. This includes those whose incomes were already low, those with lower levels of education, and in possession of limited savings and

other assets, those in insecure or low skilled employment, and those whose jobs could not be reconfigured as per evolving 'remote working' arrangements.[19] Furthermore, COVID-19 led to the closing of borders, in nearly all cases for non-nationals throughout most of 2020. What this meant for low-skilled migrants was – for those seeking to join formal or informal economies in the Global North, arriving at and entering host countries, via regular or irregular channels, became harder now than before. In migrant receiving countries worldwide, it was observed that the availability of employment opportunities for foreign/migrant workers dropped at a higher rate in comparison to the opportunities available to native born workers.[20] Migrant workers employed in the catering, manufacturing and the hospitality industry in Europe and North America were severely affected as these sectors were particularly hard-hit.[21] In addition, it is often the case that migrant workers, a lot depending on their migratory status, have limited access to health care systems in host countries.[22] They might not have access to public health insurance, and in cases where services are available, language barriers and limited knowledge of the host country context might pose unforeseen obstructions in times of emergency. Furthermore, that migrant workers are forced to reside in worker's quarters or in overcrowded shared spaces without adequate access to basic amenities exposed them to higher risks of infection throughout the course of the pandemic.[23]

In addition to limiting the ability of migrant workers to cross international borders, arrive at and seek employment and residence abroad, COVID-19 posed further challenges by sending shock waves through economic systems of both migrant sending and receiving countries. For instance, with COVID-19 related lockdown measures followed a drop in demand and a rise in supply of crude oil, ultimately leading to a plunge in the prices of oil and a decline in the revenue generated by oil-dependent economies like Nigeria.[24] Studies revealed that the impact of such a lump in the Nigerian economy was worsened by lockdown measures that brought about the closure of businesses or led to a reduction of hours for which individuals could trade in informal markets. Consequently, households

[19] World Bank, "Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune," Poverty and Shared Prosperity (World Bank, 2020), 7, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34496/9781464816024.pdf.
[20] Dilip Ratha, "Keep Remittances Flowing to Africa," *Brookings* (blog), 15 March 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/03/15/keep-remittances-flowing-to-africa/.
[21] IOM, "How Are Remittances Being Affected by COVID-19?"
[22] Hiranthi Jayaweera, "Health and Access to Health Care of Migrants in the UK," Briefing Paper, Better Health Briefing (Race Equality Foundation, May 2010); Sabrina Doyle, "Migrant Workers Falling Through Cracks in Health Care Coverage," *CMAJ*, 13 July 2020, sec. News, https://www.cmaj.ca/content/192/28/E819.
[23] Lorenzo Guadagno, "Migrants and the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Initial Analysis," Migration Research (IOM, 2020), https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs-60.pdf.
[24] Peterson K. Ozili, 'COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Crisis: The Nigerian Experience and Structural Causes', *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences* 37, no. 4 (1 January 2020): 401–18, https://doi.org/10.1108/JEAS-05-2020-0074.

in Nigeria, on an average lost almost a quarter of their income during the lockdowns and increasingly relied on savings to get by.[25] In the past, development economists have championed the resilient nature of migrant remittances and the ability of these money flows to insure migrant households against economic shocks experienced by developing countries.[26] However, in the COVID-19 scenario, projections released by the World Bank in October 2020 indicated a 14 percent decline in worldwide remittance flows by the year 2021. This was attributed to overall weak economic growth, a drop in employment levels in migrant hosting countries, falling oil prices, slowing down of migrant flows and an increase in return migration.[27] Information on how COVID-19 affected remittances flowing into source countries through informal channels remains speculative at this stage. In the case of Nigeria, close to 54 percent of the country's remittances are sent by Nigerian migrants working in Italy, Spain, France, Britain and the United States of America – countries that were all under a severely imposed lockdown for a major part of 2020.[28] This led to a decline of about 27.7 percent in the remittances sent to Nigeria in 2020, a record low for the country.[29] On the one hand was the decline in the transfer of remittances world over, as per projections by the World Bank, and on the other hand the importance of remittances as a source of external funding for low and middle-income countries amplified in the year 2020.[30] These projections echo the importance of the money remitted by members who work abroad for those members of a household who stay behind, in countries like Nigeria, particularly in the midst of a health and economic crisis such as COVID-19.

As we inch closer towards the end of 2021, medium and low-income migrant-sending countries are still reeling from the social and economic impacts of lockdowns that are past us, while living under the loom of forthcoming COVID-19 waves. We do not know enough about how non-migrant members of migrant households in medium and low-

[25] Kwaw Andam et al., "Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Poverty in Nigeria," *Advances in Food Security and Sustainability* 5 (2020): 145–73, https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.af2s.2020.09.002.
[26] Ninna Nyberg–Sørensen, Nicholas Van Hear, and Poul Engberg–Pedersen, "The Migration–Development Nexus: Evidence and Policy Options," *International Migration* 40, no. 5 (2002): 49–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00211; Hein De Haas, "International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005): 1269–84; Dean Yang, "Migrant Remittances," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (September 2011): 129–52, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.25.3.129; Peter D. Sutherland, "Migration Is Development: How Migration Matters to the Post-2015 Debate," *Migration and Development* 2, no. 2 (1 December 2013): 151–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2013.817763.
[27] World Bank, "COVID-19: Remittance Flows to Shrink 14% by 2021," Press Release (World Bank, October 2020), https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/29/covid-19-remittance-flows-to-shrink-14-by-2021.
[28] Andam et al., "Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Poverty in Nigeria," 151.
[29] Ibid.
[30] World Bank, "COVID-19: Remittance Flows to Shrink 14% by 2021," Press Release (World Bank, October 2020), https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/29/covid-19-remittance-flows-to-shrink-14-by-2021.

income countries experienced not only the shift in remittance flows over 2020-2021, but also the pandemic's general effect on how processes associated with social reproduction were haphazardly reorganised within households. In this regard, emerging feminist perspectives have so far managed to shed light on the manner by which COVID-19 has further reinforced the already gendered organisation of productive and reproductive roles within households and in the global labour markets. Inequality rising from privatisation of social reproduction has always been an issue that middle and low-income households have grappled with. With COVID-19, more so, members of low-income households continue to struggle to cope with care responsibilities. In most cases, women of the household end up stretching themselves too thin and handling the additional burden of domestic work.[31] Thus, in the midst of a pandemic, not only did women's burden of caring responsibilities within households increase, studies have indicated that women were also either forced to reduce paid working time or had to leave the job market entirely.[32] In addition, women experienced higher job losses than men as they were more likely to be employed in worst hit sectors such as retail, food service and hospitality, than men.[33] In more ways than one COVID-19 has, and continues to, exacerbate gender, class and racial inequalities, disproportionately affecting members of middle and low-income households.

Conclusion

At the macro-level, COVID-19, at its core a global health crisis, has enormously destabilised the economy worldwide over 2020-2021. At the micro-level, while it altered most of our everyday living experience, COVID-19 particularly gravely affected those individuals who belong to marginalised communities such as racialised migrants and ethnic minorities. Researchers and policy makers are only now starting to gather themselves and process the copious amounts of qualitative and quantitative data generated in relation to the pandemic. So far, the immediate tendency has been to measure the scale of the spread of the global pandemic and design effective measures to deal with its impact at the national level. At best, this has been done at the regional level. However, COVID-19 has caused a shift in the lives of migrant workers in host countries and consequently in the lives of those

[31] Sara Stevano et al., "Hidden Abodes in Plain Sight: The Social Reproduction of Households and Labor in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Feminist Economics* 0, no. 0 (1 March 2021): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1854478.
[32] Ruth Hill and Ambar Narayan, "What COVID-19 Can Mean for Long-Term Inequality in Developing Countries," World Bank Blogs, January 2021, https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/what-covid-19-can-mean-long-term-inequality-developing-countries.
[33] Naila Kabeer, Shahra Razavi, and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, "Feminist Economic Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic," Feminist Economics, no. 0 (March 1, 2021): 1–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906.

who rely on the migrant workers for remitted money and care resources. In my view, merely by observing these shifts one can argue that the pandemic's impact as it unfolds in one part of the world has proven to be of a kind that travels across borders to households in another part of the world. I have demonstrated through the course of this paper, citing the case of Nigerian migrant women and their households that, migrant women, following their departure, aspire to participate in labour markets abroad and financially support and provide care for their households by means of remitting a portion of the wages they earn in host countries with relatively better employment opportunities to source countries like Nigeria. COVID-19, the ensuing closing of borders for non-nationals and the shrinking of the economy in migrant receiving countries in the Global North has disturbed historically established practices of providing care from across borders within households in migrant sending countries in the Global South. Therefore, we need to study the surfacing social and economic impact of the global pandemic using a transnational framework over one restricted by boundaries that regard nation-states to be epicenters.

What does a transnational approach to understanding the surfacing social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on migrant women and their households entail? Firstly, a transnational lens is required to examine how COVID-19 will reshape migratory flows along historically set routes for a few years to come. It will shed light on newer, lesser known and possibly riskier routes that migrants and refugees will continue to take to arrive at specific countries, depending on histories of migration that connect some migrant sending to other migrant receiving countries. Secondly, a transnational approach will enable gender and migration scholars to re-examine migrant women's experiences of COVID-19 by taking into account how the development of a global pandemic in a host country has an impact that trickles down to the home country where migrant households are located. Earlier, forms of providing, receiving, and exchanging care within a migrant household involved sending and receiving remittances, organising annual home visits, or sending money or gifts through acquaintances who are travelling. With the closure of borders and the continued state of economic precarity certain sections of the worldwide population have been pushed into, former ways of operationalising care have had to be reorganised in transnational households. A transnational approach will help shed light on exactly how the impact of a pandemic occurring within a set region reverberates across borders and has led to newly evolving forms of care provisioning to come into being in migrant households. Thirdly, a transnational lens will highlight how the pandemic, by means of exposing migrant workers to additional health risks on account of their continued presence in the informal economy, not only led to a rising rate of unemployment in host countries, but also thwarted the flow of remittances to low-income households that the migrant workers

aspired to support through their labour abroad. In economies like Nigeria which struggle with weaning off the dependence on oil revenues, it has been crucial for the government to explore means by which Nigeria can tap into the potential of private remittances and improve its GDP. Given that COVID-19 has obstructed remittances flows to Nigeria leading to food insecurity and a rise in poverty levels, as researchers and policy makers we need to turn our attention to examining how can remittances flows be restored to what they used to be prior to the pandemic. To do so, using a transnational approach we can explore, as an example, what happens when Southern European countries that host significant number of Nigerian immigrants begin to tighten or relax entry and exit restrictions, recalibrate their public healthcare facilities, extend services offered by national social protection systems to include members of immigrant communities who are at different stages of regularising their stay in the country. Furthermore, it will allow us to understand how this strengthens the ability of Nigerian migrant workers to transfer remittances and other material and non-material resources across borders to their households in Nigeria and ensure the well-being of those members who stayed behind.

Even as qualitative and quantitative data on the health, social and economic impact of the global pandemic continues to emerge, there is still limited focus on the gender dimension of COVID-19, probably far lesser on the gendered impact of COVID-19 within migrant households. What is known so far is that COVID-19 is aggravating gendered inequalities within the household as the burden of social reproduction continues to rain down on women. But how does this intensify further in the case of migrant women who must juggle their responsibilities in both the private and the public sphere, depending on where they are located within the matrix of class, race identity and migration status in both the host and source country, are areas of inquiry worth pursuing hereon. Here, a transnational approach possesses the potential of revealing how the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in host countries lead to more than a mere decline in inflow of remittances to source countries. That it also possibly results in an increase in the gendered burden of care work on migrant women as they doubly struggle to ensure their households in the host country and their households in the source countries continue to function. Partially, the gap in what is known so far can be covered by researchers seeking to conduct extensive ethnographic fieldwork that allows for COVID-19's experience of both migrant women workers and non-migrant women in migrant households to be made visible. Additionally, a rather in-depth and timely analysis of the social, economic and gender dimensions of COVID-19 in relation to low-income migrant households is required for three main reasons. First, to ensure we move towards the direction of designing public policies that make remittances transfers cost effective to countries like Nigeria, particularly

in times of a health and economic crisis. Second, to ensure that policy initiatives reduce the burden of paid and unpaid care work on migrant women in low and middle-income countries. Third, and ultimately, to ensure that regulations associated with travel and work in host countries are designed taking into consideration the ripple effect of these regulations on low-income migrant households in source countries.

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Return Migration and the COVID-19 Crisis: The Experiences of Somali Female Returnees from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The emergence and course of the COVID-19 pandemic raise a number of critical issues concerning the lives of women in migration who have been impacted by the securitization of borders, criminalization of irregular migrants and the global sexual division of labour that typically constrain women to precarious low paid jobs. The objective of the study was to examine the reintegration experiences of former domestic workers who were involuntarily returned to their home country amidst the pandemic. The data for this study was based on semi-structured interviews with female deportees from Saudi Arabia living in the internally displaced settlements in Mogadishu, Somalia. Findings were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis guided by a feminist intersectional approach. In order to capture the dimensions of their migration experience, the study incorporated the whole migration cycle in the analysis including reasons for migration, experiences in the destination country, and their return and reintegration experiences. Four themes were developed from the data analysis: mixed motivation for migration; experience abroad of exploitation, discrimination and violence; forced return and lack of return preparedness; mixed return perceptions and reintegration challenges. Findings illuminate the gender-specific vulnerabilities and risks faced by women throughout their migration cycle, which were further exacerbated as a result of COVID-19 containment measures. This study raises vital policy implications for governments to ensure the safe migration and dignity of women migrants.

Keywords

Somalia, Return and Reintegration, Deportation, Saudi Arabia, Gender

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Introduction

Historically, migration from within and out of Africa has been male-dominated, leaving women behind to assume family responsibilities.[2] In recent years, the number of females who migrate independently to provide domestic labour in the Middle East has increased. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), approximately 2.1 million people are engaged in domestic work in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[3] Many of these workers are from Asia and increasingly East Africa from countries like Ethiopia and Somalia.

In the context of this feminization of migration, women migrants face gendered vulnerabilities and risks that differentially impact all the stages of migration.[4] Increasing literature documents the exploitation faced by the female domestic workers in the Middle East: including lack of payment or delayed salaries, sexual abuse, confinement and social isolation.[5] In the absence of legal protections for domestic migrant workers, these violations are often committed with impunity due to the Kafala system which ties the migrant worker directly to the employer through sponsorship. This type of system means migrants are bounded to their employers in the case of regular migration and equally, it is related to migrants who also find themselves in irregular migration status should they leave without their employer's 'permission'.[6] Consequently, female migrant domestic workers who attempt to flee the situation even when responding to abuse may be faced with immigration charges and criminal penalties.[7] At the same time, if caught by the police, they may be subjected to indefinite detention and subsequently deported.[8]

COVID-19 crisis has made some migrant workers' employment even more precarious. Women, including precarious workers, have been disproportionately and

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[2] Aderanti Adepoju, "Changing Configurations of Migration in Africa," *Migration Policy,* May 11, 2021, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/changing-configurations-migration-africa.

[3] ILO, "Making Decent Work A Reality for Domestic Workers," accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/policy-areas/migrantdomestic-workers/lang--en/index.htm.

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[5] Meaza Ayalew, Geremew Aklessa, and Nkirote Laiboni, "Women's Labour Migration On The African-Middle East Corridor: Experiences Of Migrant Domestic Workers From Ethiopia," CVM, accessed April 10, 2021, https://www.cvm.an.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ehhiopia_Country_Report.pdf.

[6] Rana Aoun, "COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East," *The GBV AoR Helpdesk,* 2020, https://covid19.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/covid-19-and-impact-on-vulnerable-female-migrant-domestic-workers_english.pdf.

[7] Ibid., 2

[8] "Covid-19 Global Immigration Detention Platform-Global Detention Project," Global Detention Project | Mapping immigration detention around the world, 2021, https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/covid-19-immigration-detention-platform.

negatively affected by both the health and economic impacts of the virus.[9] Non-payment of wages, poor living and working conditions, job losses and deportation are among the challenges faced by the vulnerable migrant workers in Gulf states during the pandemic.[10]

The return experiences of female deportees to Somalia from Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic introduces a new dynamic in the study of return migration especially in the Horn of Africa region. This study sheds light on the influence of COVID-19 in the return and reintegration process of returnee women. In addition, an intersectional perspective to gender migration casts light on the interconnected and overlapping social factors such as gender, class, race, citizenship, family status which are also intertwined with border politics. Therefore, the paper first presents the background of the study followed by a review of theoretical perspectives on return migration and gender. The empirical results are presented in the next section covering the returnee migration motivation, experience abroad, return and reintegration during the pandemic. The final section draws conclusions and recommendations.

Somali Migration to the Middle East

The Somali community have historically been associated with the Arab Peninsula due to trade networks formed during the pre-colonial times.[11] Further, the economic challenges of the 1970s and the need to send remittances back to their families acted as push factors for Somali workers who migrated to the Gulf countries for employment and economic resources.[12] The outbreak of the civil war in Somalia led to a large exodus of refugees within the region. In addition, the protracted conflict has produced a diaspora of over 1.5 million people, mostly based in East Africa, the United Kingdom, North America, Europe, Yemen and Saudi Arabia.[13]

According to International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 138,000 migrants crossed the Gulf of Aden to Yemen in 2019 mostly with the aid of smugglers.[14]

[9] Isobel Archer and Danielle McMullan, "COVID-19: Spike in Allegations of Labour Abuse against Migrant Workers in the Gulf," Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020, https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/blog/spike-in-allegations-of-labour-abuse-against-migrant-workers-in-the-gulf/.
[10] Emmerentia Erasmus, "Executive Summary Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Workers in and from the IGAD Region for the Project on Free Movement of Persons and Transhumance in the IGAD Region: Improving Opportunities for Regular Labour Mobility," ILO, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/---sro-cairo/documents/publication/wcms_763397.pdf.
[11] Zaheera Jinnah, "Unfinished Journeys: An Exploration of Agency within Somali Women's Lives and Livelihoods in Johannesburg" (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013), 17-25.
[12] Ibid., 18
[13] William Avis and Siân Herbert, "Rapid Fragility and Migration Assessment for Somalia," GSDRC, February 2016, 20, https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Fragility_Migration_Somalia.pdf.
[14] IOM, "Journey from Africa to Yemen Remains World's Busiest Maritime Migration Route," February 14, 2020, https://www.iom.int/news/journey-africa-yemen-remains-worlds-busiest-maritime-migration-route.

The majority of the migrants from Ethiopia and Somalia intend to leave Yemen and continue their journey to richer countries in the region, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) for labour opportunities due to the consistently high demand for domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.[15] Yemen has also historically been a country of asylum for Somali refugees and an important country of destination for labour migrants from Somalia and Ethiopia.[16]

In Saudi Arabia, many of the Somalis are undocumented immigrants.[17] Fearing deportation, men rarely venture into public spaces while women, on the other hand, are able to gain work underground as domestic workers or in enclosed spaces such as schools where they provide cleaning and care work.[18] Through these job opportunities, the women sent remittances to their family members back home in Somalia. However, the kind of work opportunities available for the women is often poorly paid with no adequate benefits leaving them to endure exploitative working conductions often with lower wages and longer working hours.[19]

COVID-19 has led to an unprecedented shutdown of borders and restrictions on migration, making the migration projects difficult to complete. As result, many migrants were trapped in their country of residence or along the transit routes. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Return Task Force had identified more than 1.2 million migrants stranded in the region of the Middle East as of July 2020. In Somalia, around 195 migrants involuntary returned from Saudi Arabia were recorded as supported by IOM upon their arrival amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.[20] The rise in increasingly restrictive immigration regimes and hostile environments accentuates the extreme vulnerability for the women returnees.

Return Migration Context in Somalia

Somalia is currently experiencing the return migration of different categories of migrants. Between 2014 and 2019, over 85,000 Somalis had been returned from Kenya to Somalia through the 2013 Tripartite Agreement between the United Nations High Commissioner

[15] Marina de Regt, "Refugee, Woman and Domestic Worker: Somali Women Dealing with Dependencies in Yemen," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 3, no. 1 (January 2010): 109–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630903319904.
[16] Marina de Regt, "Ethiopian Women's Migration to Yemen," *Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, no. 17 (June 6, 2012): 4 https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.1853.
[17] Mulki Al-Sharmani, "Transnational Family Networks in the Somali Diaspora in Egypt: Women's Roles and Differentiated Experiences," *Gender, Place & Culture* 17, no. 4 (July 8, 2010): 499–518, https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2010.485843.
[18] Ibid., 514
[19] Ibid., 514
[20] IOM, "2020 Migrant Movements Between The Horn Of Africa And The Arabian Peninsula," January 26, 2021, https://ronairobi.iom.int/sites/ronairobi/files/document/publications/IOM_Migration%20Overview_Horn%20of%20Africa%20and%20Arabian%20Peninsula_2020.pdf.

for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Governments of Kenya and Somalia.[21] Equally important, the mass deportation of Somalis from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has seen more than 65,000 Somali deportees returning to Somalia since 2012.[22] The conflict in Yemen has displaced over 30,000 Somalis back to Somalia.[23] Others include deportees and rejected asylum seekers from European Union (EU) member states and the United States of America. Even though the conflict continues in several parts of Somalia, scholars have documented alarming trend advocating for return migration which does not lead to a sustainable outcome.[24] The conditions of return are currently not conducive in several parts of the country and those who do return end up in camps for the internally displaced or in areas where living and security conditions are worse than those they experienced before returning to Somalia.[25] Furthermore, COVID-19 has had an impact on the mobility trends in Somalia with migrants being involuntary returned from the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia.[26]

In an attempt to support the migrants who face increasingly restrictive asylum policies, the European Union (EU) and western donors working alongside international organizations fund return and reintegration activities that support returning migrants to reestablish their lives upon return in Somalia.[27] A case in point is the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration programme in Somalia whose objective is to provide returnees with reintegration support.[28]

Theoretical Perspectives on Return Migration and Reintegration

The general conceptualization of return is drawn from Black et al.'s, model which sees return as voluntary, and as being influenced by structural, individual, and contextual

[21] UNCHR, "Figures at a Glance - UNHCR Kenya," accessed March 3, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/ke/figures-at-a-glance.
[22] Human Rights Watch, "Saudis' Mass Expulsions Putting Somalis in Danger," March 18, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/18/saudis-mass-expulsions-putting-somalis-danger.
[23] William Avis and Siân Herbert, "Rapid Fragility and Migration Assessment for Somalia," GSDRC, February 2016, 23, https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Fragility_Migration_Somalia.pdf.
[24] Mohamud Yusuf Garre, *Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees a Case Study of the Involuntary Repatriation of Daadab Refugees* (Mogadishu, Somalia: Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2017).
[25] ILO, "An Assessment of Labour Migration and Mobility Governance in the IGAD Region: Regional Report," February 28, 2020, 36, https://www.ilo.org/africa/technical-cooperation/free-movement/WCMS_740549/lang--en/index.htm.
[26] Halbeeg News (@Halbeeg News), "Second Batch of Somali Nationals from Saudi Arrive in Mogadishu," Twitter, May 31, 2020, 1.11pm, twitter.com/Halbeeg_News/status/1267036036875632640.
[27] European Union Trust Fund for Africa, "RE-INTEG: Enhancing SOMALIA'S Responsiveness to the Management and Reintegration of MIXED Migration Flows," EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa - European Commission, August 3, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/node/199.
[28] IOM, "EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration," 2021, https://www.migrationjointinitiative.org/.

factors.[29] Building on the work of Black et al., Koser and Kuschminder defined sustainable return as occurring when: "the individual has reintegrated into the economic, social and cultural processes of the country of origin and feels that they are in an environment of safety and security upon return."[30] However, the decision to return needs preparation and plans which may not apply to those forced to return through the deportation.[31] Given that deportees experience their return as a disrupted migration project, they are unable to prepare for their return and will experience difficulties reintegrating. Scholarship on deportation highlights feelings of shame, despair and challenges faced upon return.[32] Studies have shown that most of those who are forcibly returned from the country to which they have migrated will have challenges reintegrating and consequently attempt to remigrate.[33] The experience of post deportation stigma is also gendered. Studies have shown that men express their deportations in terms of personal failures while on the other hand, women interpret their forced return through their economic and social obligations to care for their families both at home and abroad.[34]

It is increasingly obvious that if migration is looked at separately from female and male experiences, there are differences. Feminist theories of gender and migration have demonstrated that the processes, motives, and social norms governing migration decisions, roles within households and families, location in the labour market and transnational activities differently position men and women[35]. In the light of the failures of migration theory to attend to gender and women, feminist theorists have proposed a more nuanced understanding of migration that is attentive to the multiple gendered dimensions involved.[36] Intersectionality a term coined by Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989 offers a useful avenue in accounting for the diverse racial, class and gendered experiences in international migration.[37] In advancing an intersectional feminist approach, feminist

[29] Richard Black et al., *Understanding Voluntary Return* (London: Home Office, 2004).

[30] Khalid Koser and Katie Kuschminder, *Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants* (Geneva: IOM Publications, 2015).

[31] Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited,". *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6, no.2 (2004): 253-79.

[32] Shahram Khosravi, "Introduction," in *After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Shahram Khosravi (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–15.

[33] Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi. "What Happens Post-Deportation? The Experience of Deported Afghans." *Migration Studies* 1, no. 2 (May 8, 2013): 221–40. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mns011.

[34] Emma Ratia and Catrien Notermans, "'I Was Crying, I Did Not Come Back with Anything': Women's Experiences of Deportation from Europe to Nigeria," *African Diaspora* 5, no. 2 (2012): 143–64, https://doi.org/10.1163/18725457-12341235.

[35] Floya Anthias, "Transnational Mobilities, Migration Research and Intersectionality," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 102-10, https://doi.org/10.2478/v10202-011-0032-y.

[36] Ibid., 106

[37] Ramon Grosfoguel, Laura Oso, and Anastasia Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies: Framing Some Theoretical Reflections," *Identities* 22, no. 6 (September 8, 2014): 635–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289x.2014.950974.

scholars emphasize that research on refugees and migrants must take into account how those pushed into categories of "refugee," "migrant," and "citizen" are constituted by intersecting systems of capitalism, white supremacy, and hetero-patriarchy, and their dynamics of discrimination, violence, and subjugation.[38]

Research on Somali mobility and migration has predominantly focused on forced migration from Somalia and the diaspora communities in Western Europe and North America. Very few studies have focused on Somali women return migration from the Middle East.[39] In line with intersectionality studies scholars like Anthias the study puts forth an argument that a feminist intersectional approach is critical to understanding Somali women's migration experience and provides us with the lenses to grasp the diverse experiences of the migrants who must navigate multiple layers of social stratification while occupying different social positions and facing multiple categories of oppression across migration regimes.[40]

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed to collect rich oral accounts of the returnee experiences through semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The site location was in Weydow Camp, 30 kilometres from Mogadishu. The site was selected because it hosts many returnees who returned from different countries, including Saudi Arabia, and internally displaced persons who have left their homes as a result of armed conflict and violence, drought, floods and forced evictions.[41] The study adopted a purposive sampling strategy, which aims at reflecting a diversity of cases within the population under study.[42] The women who participated in the study ranged between 22-47 years. They all had children while some were divorced, and others married. When recruiting participants for the study, we adopted two strategies: first was the "top-down" where we obtained a list of names through the local organizations implementing activities in the camp and secondly through the "bottom-up" approach through the use of research assistants' social networks and with the aid of the camp leaders who also acted as

[38] Anna Carastathis et al., "Intersectional Feminist Interventions in the 'Refugee Crisis'," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 34, no. 1 (2018): 3-15, https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/issue/view/2318.
[39] Abdinur Sheikh Mohamed Mohamud, "Forced Migration and Forced Return to Somalia: A Critical Review of the Literature," *Bildhaan* 20 (2020): 114-31.
[40] Floya Anthias, "Hierarchies of Social Location, Class and Intersectionality: Towards a Translocational Frame," *International Sociology* 28, no. 1 (November 28, 2012): 121–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580912463155.
[41] UNHCR, "Situation Horn of Africa Somalia Situation," 2021, accessed November 26, 2021, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn/location/192.
[42] Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Evren Yalaz, *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies* (S.L.: Springer, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76861-8.

gatekeepers. Data was collected between the period of August and December 2020. A COVID-19 fieldwork plan was developed addressing the risk and mitigating actions to be taken by the field team.

The study adopted multilingual research and involved collecting data in the Somali language to allow returnees to express themselves freely in a language that they could understand.[43] To overcome the language barrier and take into consideration the power relations around the lines of gender and ethnicity, one female[44] and male Somali speakers were recruited as part of the research team. Due to cultural commonalities, the local researchers were able to gain the trust of the research participants and build relationships. The female assistant researcher conducted the interviews with the participants and the team worked jointly to transcribe the data. Given their experience working on migration issues for several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Somalia and Kenya, they had the competence required to conduct the transcription in the Somali language. To ensure the accuracy of transcription, a translator was recruited, who also randomly verified some of the original interview recordings and transcripts. The researcher's position was an outsider. Previous professional experience working on migration policy issues as well as experience implementing return and reintegration programs in Somalia influenced how she understood the study themes.

The researcher obtained ethics clearance from the university ethics and review board. All the participants were informed about the research verbally and were made aware that their answers would be confidential, that their participation in the research was voluntary, and that they had the right to stop the interview at any time. Interviews were audio-recorded where this was agreed, and detailed notes were taken.

Data Analysis

Transcription was done in the local language and later translated into English to retain the original meaning. After verbatim transcription, the transcripts were coded and analyzed with the help of MAXQDA software following an inductive thematic analysis process.[45] The research question: How does the migration experience and COVID-19 impact on the women return and reintegration process in Somalia, informed the process. A codebook

[43] Edith Enzenhofer and Resch Katharina, "Collecting Data in Other Languages – Strategies for Cross-Language Research in Multilingual Societies," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection,* ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage Publications, 2017), 131-47 http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070.
[44] Given the participants of the study were women, it was important to have a female research assistant in the team as it was culturally appropriate and allowed the women participants to speak freely.
[45] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

was developed with data-driven codes from the data.[46] The researchers documented their ideas and thoughts on the data throughout the data analysis process which also helped shape the analysis. To limit researcher biases, the data was coded by a team of two qualified qualitative researchers across two different regions.

Results

Data produced various themes representing the meaningful accounts of participants as illustrated in the table below. The findings illuminate how macro and micro-level power relations of gender, race, class, and ethnicity shape the experiences of the women migrants throughout their migration cycle. The findings are discussed in the next section presenting representative quotes from interviews under four broad themes.

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes Based on Interview Analysis by the Author.

Theme 1: Mixed motivation for migration	
Sub-themes Seeking better opportunities Fleeing war and starvation Influence from social networks Improve living conditions for the family Precarious journeys	• *I had many children and no one else was helping apart from my mother they need education, food, shelter and clothing so I felt ashamed putting all that burden on my mother alone, so I decided to leave hoping to get a better life for my children and family… I decided to go to Saudi Arabia because by then we were in a bad situation due to starvation and war, it was the hardest moment of my life. (**Female returnee, 37 years**)*
Theme 2: Experience abroad of violence, hostility discrimination	
Sub-themes Loneliness and feelings of not belonging Exploitation and poor working conditions Mistreatment and wage theft Language barrier	• *Some employers are so merciless, and they force you to work 24 hours without rest, sometimes I go to the toilet to get a rest a little bit and they refuse to pay my salary at the end of the month and I walk away all I can do was to seat somewhere cry until my eyes turn red and I start looking for another job. (**Female returnee, 43 years**)* • *I used to feel loneliness in real sense, people treat you based in your colour and race, if you're not a white person you will treated as if you're a donkey (**Female returnee, 33 years**)*
Theme 3: Forced return and lack of preparedness	
Sub-themes Returning empty-handed Violence and humiliation Feelings of failure and frustration	• *I was forced to come back to Somalia and I didn't achieve my goal of making enough money and resources from that place, the place was also good for children's in terms of studies so I am not happy to return back all. (**Female returnee, 37 years**)* • *I used to work as a housemaid but I was deported and now cannot work like before because I can't lift anything heavy, due to the injuries suffered when I was abroad. I was roughed up while I was*

[46] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Los Angeles, California; London: Sage, 2016).

	*in my house, the police threw me from the stairs and I sustained backbone injuries. They took me to a nearby hospital and after some day they took me back to the cell and later deported me, my employer refused to pay me my salary and I returned empty-handed. (**Interview with Female returnee_007, 46 years**)*
Theme 4: Mixed return perception and reintegration challenges	
Sub-themes Lack of livelihood opportunities Challenges accessing basic needs Feeling shame and loneliness Movement restrictions and insecurity Financial challenges Adapting to a new environment Resilience and hope	• *I am struggling to find work, am still jobless. Movement has been restricted due to COVID-19 and I can't find any work and this is adding to my challenges since I returned. (**Female returnee, 37 years**)* • *I was forced to stop my business selling tea due to movement restrictions. (**Female returnee, 32 years**)* • *The Corona virus pandemic has impacted on the economic situation of our country negatively since there is no movement across countries to conduct business like before… The food prices have gone up and I can't afford to buy food for my children. (**Female returnee, 43 years**)* • *I am happy to return because I didnt have any other option left. And I know it's my country and there is no better place than home. I felt home when I reached Mogadishu, to see my family and friends (F**emale returnee, 25 years**)*

Mixed Motivation for Migration

The findings illuminate the complex migration phenomenon, one that is characterized by evolving macro, meso and micro forces that inform the final individual decision to migrate. According to the study findings, respondents reported drivers of migration mainly as economic resulting from the desire for a better standard of living for their families. Most of the women returnees interviewed were the head of their households and are considered as being nurturing and more sensitive to the needs of their family and children. The study finds that most migration decisions were made out of concern for family welfare. The respondents indicated that they were the primary decision-makers of their migration decision.

Strong social ties were also found to have played a role in the migration journey. For the majority of the respondents, the migration decisions were influenced mostly by friends who were working in Saudi Arabia who promised them better opportunities and access to jobs if they migrate. Some decisions for migration were at times influenced by the family upon discussion and agreeing to explore job opportunities in Saudi Arabia.

Despite the willingness to travel to Saudi Arabia, the majority of the participants did not follow the legal channels for migration and instead took on enormous risks and challenges travelling through Yemen often through dangerous and clandestine routes.

Experience Abroad of Violence, Hostility, and Discrimination

The findings show that the respondents were placed in situations of vulnerability to discrimination and violence due to their migration status and economic position, and because of the risk factors present in the informal and unregulated spaces in which they worked. Before embarking on their migration projects, the returnees had high expectations of getting a job to earn income and improve their livelihoods back at home. However, to the respondents, this dream was not a reality. The women encountered a range of abuses including being overworked, forced confinement, non-payment of wages, food deprivation, and/or psychological abuse with no avenue to seek redress. Some of the women returnees only communicated with their families in Somalia once a week to check on the wellbeing of their children and family.

Respondents reported living in constant fear of deportation due to the lack of legal work documents in the country. In addition, the language barrier was reported as a challenge when interacting with the community and other residents in Saudi Arabia which acted as a barrier in finding better employment. This affected their social and psychological wellbeing as they lacked societal belonging and identity according to the findings.

Forced Return and Lack of Return Preparedness

Return migration literature indicates that migrants who return after a complete migration cycle will have access to opportunities preparing them for return and are likely to reintegrate successfully compared to those whose migration cycle was interrupted as a result of deportation or involuntary return.[47] The findings show that some of the women returnees reported to have had no time to gather resources or prepare for their return and while other were forced to leave without being paid for their labor.

The findings show the immigration policies as a form of structural violence that involves intersecting forms of oppression. The women reported being violently rounded up by the authorities and involuntarily returned to Somalia. Their experiences in the hand of the law enforcement officials and within immigration detention centres also further

[47] Jean P. Cassarino, "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited.," *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 253–79.

exposed them to gender-based violence (GBV) and assault leading to permanent disability as narrated by one of the returnees.

Reintegration Challenges in Somalia and Mixed Return Perceptions

One of the top implications of the COVID-19 restrictions on returnees and the community was the restriction on movement and closed borders leading to people being immobile and consequently losing livelihood opportunities. The movement restrictions had a drastic effect on livelihood opportunities for returnees. Income sources among returnee households are typically day labour and small business in the informal sector that leave the returnee women vulnerable to economic shocks. This was further compounded by the absence of social networks owing to their long stay abroad. As a result, several respondents were unable to continue with casual work such as selling local pastries or domestic work due to movement restrictions. The movement restrictions also led to increased food prices which became out of reach for many and some of the respondents struggled to have two meals a day. The pandemic worsened returnee women's living conditions, increasing precarious situations, in particular for female-headed families as narrated by one of the respondents.

> '…my greatest challenge is access to finances; I don't know people around here since I was away for decades and all have forgotten me. I am living in a new location, but sometimes they help me when they hear my kids crying because of hunger. I have not found any institution to help me in dealing with the challenges I have got.' *(Female returnee_003, 37 years)*

The women returnees reported living in crowded living conditions lacking sanitation and access to public health and social services. The respondents highlighted sharing facilities with several families which often lack the space for physical distancing putting them at high risk of contracting COVID-19. These factors have led the returnees to struggle to establish their lives consequently becoming internally displaced upon their return to Somalia. Some reported being looked down upon within the community to the extent of being called names such as 'Returnees' which affected their self-esteem while interacting with people in the community. Debt accrued during the journey and feelings of failure also had an impact on the returnees' aspirations to re-migrate.

The finding also highlights mixed return perceptions among the returnees. Despite the challenges faced in Saudi Arabia, some of the returnees had a positive outlook on their return situation. A dynamic sense of agency was transparent in their resilience to make

their reintegration experience work for them even though they had undergone a traumatic deportation experience.

Discussion

The study examined the reason for migration, as well as the reintegration challenges faced upon return in Somalia during the pandemic through the lenses of return preparedness theory combined with feminist intersectional analysis. Findings show that returnees face several challenges in their reintegration upon return, in large part due to their involuntary return experience and the post-return conditions in Somalia exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The empirical data presented confirms the literature that argues on the importance of preparedness and the life cycle in return migration, such as having a longer migration abroad.[48] Migrants with an interrupted migration cycle during their migration experience will return without achieving their goals of the initial reason for migration and therefore will have challenges reintegrating. The respondents did not stay long enough abroad to save and mobilize resources, which is necessary for the successful reintegration of returnees. The situation ultimately increased their vulnerability and made their reintegration efforts even more challenging.

Despite traumatic experiences faced in Saudi Arabia, some of the returnees were relieved to have been returned, challenging our understanding of deportation as a negative experience. The findings regard this positive experience of return as possibly influenced by the poor conditions abroad for example due to lack of freedom of movement due to their undocumented status, torture and ill-treatment by the Saudi law enforcement authorities. This is in accordance with findings by De Regt and Tafesse and it may be only a matter of time before the returnees get frustrated due to the challenging circumstances in Somalia.[49] In addition, social networks can play a huge role to promote acceptance into the community and alleviate some of the challenges faced upon return. Those with family responsibilities and elderly returnees felt the need not to re-migrate despite the challenging conditions of return. This resonates with Lietaert and Kuschminder's finding that reintegration processes can vary over time and outcomes differ along gender, motives of migration and return, social network and family composition.[50] In addition, the results highlight that motivations to migrate are multiple and do overlap as

[48] Marina de Regt and Medareshaw Tafesse, "Deported before Experiencing the Good Sides of Migration: Ethiopians Returning from Saudi Arabia," *African and Black Diaspora: An International* Journal 9, no. 2 (September 12, 2015): 228–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2015.1083178.
[49] Ibid., 240
[50] Ine Lietaert and Katie Kuschminder, "Contextualizing and Conceptualizing Reintegration Processes in the Context of Return," *International Migration* 59, no. 2 (February 13, 2021): 142, https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12830.

people's situation change across the migration cycle and shows the complexities in describing a migrant's decision to migrate as entirely voluntary or entirely force as opined by Erdal & Oeppen.[51]

Applying an intersectional lens enriches our understanding of the complexities of migration, the vulnerabilities of the women migrants, and the oppressions built within the migration and labour policies in the country of destination. Findings show that women were recruited into temporary labour schemes in jobs often neglected by Saudi citizens who enjoy greater autonomy, work choices and state protection. In this case, the migrant's powerless position is imposed by the system and society. The informal work contract generates easy opportunities for the exploitation of migrants, reified by the fact that the private nature of the workplace falls outside the purview of the state. This is the point at which poverty and race intersect, creating a dynamic in which the women face hardship due to socioeconomic conditions, but also are confronted with marginalization as a result of racism.[52] Overall, the intersectionality approach reveals the gendered and racialized implications of deportation consequences for the Somali women returnees.

The study acknowledges several limitations with the study. First, findings are not generalizable to the overall population of interest with a known level of precision but can rather be considered indicative of their situation and experience. Despite these limitations, this paper contributes to understanding post-return outcomes in the under-researched case of Somalia. Secondly, the findings are based on short term reintegration experiences and therefore the assessment might differ as the returnees continue to adapt over time. Consequently, there is a need for further longitudinal research to further contextualize women's experiences.

Conclusion

In this article, through the words and perspectives of women who were involuntarily returned from Saudi Arabia, the study sought to examine their migration experience and the impact of COVID-19 on their reintegration experiences in their home country. The empirical data presented shows that migration from Somalia to the Middle East is a highly gendered phenomenon whereby gender norms roles and expectations are deeply embedded in the society.[53] It is apparent throughout the study that the overlapping social

[51] Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (October 18, 2017): 981–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2017.1384149.
[52] Lilian Miles et al., "Advocacy for Women Migrant Workers in Malaysia through an Intersectionality Lens," *Journal of Industrial Relations* 61, no. 5 (January 16, 2019): 682–703, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185618814580.
[53] Marnie Shaffer, "Gender Dynamics and Women's Changing Roles in Johannesburg's Somali Community," *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 33–52, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26229100.

factors such as gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and family status affect different stages of the women migration cycle life including during their migration experience and also the individual agency they use to overcome any obstacles faced upon return. Overall, an intersectional approach highlights that women returnees are not a homogeneous group and their migration and return experiences are shaped by multiple identities such as gender, race, class, age, disability and social status. Migration policies and programs must be flexible to take into account this diversity of experiences - ignoring these intersecting exclusions often fail women who experience multiple oppressions.

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'For Me It Is Double Quarantine Inside'. Experiences of the COVID-19 Pandemic– the Case of Lesbian Migrant Women in South Africa

VERENA HUCKE[1]

Abstract

In the end of March South African president Ramaphosa declared the national state of disaster including a nationwide lockdown with a restrictive curfew in consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has a specific effect on (forced) migrants in South Africa. The consequences arising from the crisis unfold along the intersections of race, class, and citizenship as well as gender and sexuality. Informal migrants are confronted with the loss of livelihoods and often with a lack of provision of basic supplies, exacerbated through xeno- and – for lesbian migrant women – homophobia. Drawing on narratives conducted during the nationwide lockdown in Johannesburg in March and April 2020 with black lesbian migrant women the article examines the experiences of these women including the restriction of movement and how they reorganize their daily life and navigate the all-embracing condition of waiting. The article argues that the fracture of the Rainbow Nation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic is intensified. The lack of access to save housing and protection from discrimination, the omitted inclusion of the experiences of lesbian migrant women explicitly in policy responses to mobility and the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to enforced quarantining – both from society and from their self-identification.

Keywords

Quarantine, Waiting, Rainbow Nation, Lesbian Migrant Women, South Africa, COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

On Sunday 15 March 2020, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the National State of Disaster[2] including drastic steps to curb the spread of COVID-19 by supporting its containment and to enable the health system to prepare for incoming cases. On Wednesday 18 March 2020, some of these actions came into effect, including a range of travel restrictions and the closure of several ports of entry among other non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as encouraging or enforcing physical distancing, quarantining and isolation. Introduced on 27 March 2020 the countrywide restrictive lockdown includes a five-level risk adjusted strategy.[3] During level five the movement of people is strictly regulated and leaving the house is only allowed for essential travel for work or to purchase essential goods. Being outside for so-called non-essential purposes (including exercising), selling alcohol and all public gatherings are among prohibited activities. The first COVID-19 case was reported on 5 March 2020 and the first person died with COVID-19 on 27 March 2020. Especially internationally, the government's quick initial actions were praised and applauded as decisive and efficient.[4] The cases grew until the pandemic reached its first peak in July 2020 and its second peak in January 2021. During the time of writing, South Africa transitioned as of 1 March 2021 to level 1 with over 1.5-million registered COVID-19 cases and over 50-thousand registered people who died with COVID-19 in South Africa since the beginning of the pandemic.

Effecting not only migrants[5], but also a large part of the population the implications of a lockdown for South African society and economy are worrying and non-pharmaceutical interventions such as physical distancing point to the inequality divide in the country. There has been a lot of writing about the 'South African experience'[6] of COVID-19 and 'pandemic stories that are intended to reveal a shared humanity and promote common cause'[7]. Although both citizens and non-citizens are affected by the lockdown

[2] The South African Disaster Management Act 2002 was a result of a long legislative process that started in 1994. It regulates, among others, the disaster management policy, responses to disasters, emergency preparedness and the establishment of decentralised disaster management centres and marks a shift from only responding to disasters to the reduction of disaster risk. The act and its lack of implementation is crucial to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[3] www.sacoronavirus.co.za/covid-19-risk-adjusted-strategy/

[4] Andrew Harding, "South Africa's Ruthlessly Efficient Fight Against Coronavirus," *BBC News*, April 3, 2020, accessed March 4, 2021, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52125713.

[5] Despite having exposed themselves recurringly to the South African asylum system, the participants referred to themselves as 'migrant' or 'foreigner,' rather than as 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'. Therefore, I use the term migrant as an umbrella term for (forced) migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The distinction between migrating people in different (state-defined) categories is often critiqued as an exercise of power and has material consequences for migrating people, see Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis, "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis'," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 1 (2018).

[6] Laurel Baldwin-Ragaven, "Social Dimensions of Covid-19 in South Africa: A Neglected Element of the Treatment Plan," *Wits Journal of Clinical Medicine* 2, SI (2020): 33.

[7] Baldwin-Ragaven, "Social Dimensions of Covid-19 in South Africa," 33.

and its consequences for the South African economy and society, Baldwin-Ragaven suggests being cautious to not only highlight the similarities, but also to not obscure the differences in the effects and experiences of the pandemic.[8]

This article intents to focus on the experiences of a group that is often overlooked in society and research[9] (and not only during the COVID-19 pandemic): the experiences of lesbian migrant women living in South Africa. 'For me it is double quarantine inside'[10] Ruth[11], a lesbian migrant woman describes her experience of the lockdown in March and April 2020 in South Africa. By shifting the focus to lesbian migrant women's experiences in the Global South the paper adds to the expanding field of sexualities[12] and migration studies as well as seeks to initiate a discussion around the intersection of sexualities, migrations and the COVID-19 pandemic. The article draws on narratives recorded during the lockdown in March and April 2020 with black lesbian migrant women who live in Johannesburg and who could potentially apply for asylum.[13] The article argues that the experiences of the pandemic differ for lesbian migrant women from those who hold South African citizenship as well as from those who are not transgressing heteronormative boundaries. Studying the COVID-19 pandemic through an intersectional lens means taking into account that the effects of the pandemic and its policies and actions put in place by the South African government unfold for persons differently along categories such as gender, sexuality, class, and citizenship. This article discusses the narrative of the Rainbow Nation[14] and outlines the asylum process and situation of asylum seekers in South Africa. Followed by a description of the exclusion of migrants from social and economic assistance and the lack of 'migration-aware and mobility competent policies and

[8] Baldwin-Ragaven, "Social Dimensions of Covid-19 in South Africa," 33.
[9] Verena Hucke, "Differential Movements: Lesbian Migrant Women's Encounters with, and Negotiations of, South Africa's Border Regime," in Queer and Trans African Mobilities: Migration, Asylum and Diaspora, ed. B Camminga and John Marnell (Zed Books, forthcoming).
[10] Ruth, 24 April 2020
[11] All names are pseudonyms.
[12] 'Reference to sexuality in the plural does not simply point to the diverse forms of orientation, identity or status. It is a political call to conceptualise sexuality outside the normative social orders and frameworks that view it through binary oppositions and simplistic labels. In other words, thinking in terms of multiple sexualities is crucial to disperse the essentialism embedded in so much sexuality research' see Sylvia Tamale, "Researching and Theorising Sexualities in Africa," in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, ed. Sylvia Tamale (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011), 11.
[13] Several of the interviewees did not move to South Africa solely because of their sexuality, but because of political persecution, family ties, educational and employment opportunities. Therefore, I borrow the notion of 'potentiality of asylum' from Camminga whose 'use of asylum spread to those that could potentially apply for asylum but for various reasons had chosen not to', see B Camminga, *Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa: Bodies over Borders and Borders over Bodies* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 274.
[14] The term Rainbow Nation was coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1994 to describe post-apartheid South Africa's ethnic diversity. In his inaugural speech in 1994 in Pretoria, President Nelson Mandela proclaimed 'We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.'

programmes'[15] during the COVID-19 pandemic. After which I examine the experiences of lesbian migrant women during the lockdown in March and April 2020 focussing how these women reorganize their daily life, experience the restriction of movement and navigate waiting.

The Structure of Asylum and the Narrative of the Rainbow Nation

Despite South Africa's long-standing efforts to limit human mobility[16], the country continues to be a major destination for those fleeing homophobia and transphobia as it is the only country on the continent that offers constitutional protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.[17] Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) persons who flee their country of origin because of homophobia or transphobia may qualify for refugee status according to the South African Refugees Act 1998, read in conjunction with the South African Constitution. The country is not only regarded as a safe haven for LGBT persons but also actively markets itself as a Rainbow Nation and the 'gay capital of Africa.'[18] This results in that the country is perceived as…

> '[…] the most multicultural and egalitarian state on the continent, especially given the growing antagonisms across the continent regarding human rights, issues of sexuality, gender identity / expression and sexual orientation, the legacy of colonial era penal codes, and a rise in a particular kind of unrelenting heteronormativity.'[19]

In contrast to the narrative of the Rainbow Nation, the country shows high rates of xenophobic violence. Deep social tensions around a perceived influx of migrants into the country erupt periodically into widespread violence. However, xenophobic violence is not a problem related to mobility, but as a societal and governmental problem, arising from massive social inequality and the inability of the government 'to truly take on the

[15] Rachel Benavides, Thea de Gruchy, and Jo Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19: Emerging Concerns with South Africa's Response to the Pandemic," Issue Brief 1 (MiCoSA, Johannesburg, 2020), 3.
[16] Roni Amit, "No Refuge: Flawed Status Determination and the Failures of South Africa's Refugee System to Provide Protection," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 23, no. 3 (2011)
[17] Elsa Oliveira, Susan V. Meyers and Jo Vearey, eds., *Queer Crossings*: *A Participatory Artsbased Project* (Johannesburg: MoVE, 2016); Ingrid Palmary, *Gender, Sexuality and Migration in South Africa*: *Governing Morality* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[18] B Camminga and Zethu Matebeni, eds., *Beyond the Mountain*: *Queer Life in 'Africa's Gay Capital'* (Johannesburg: UNISA Press, 2019); Nadia Davids and Zethu Matebeni, "Queer Politics and Intersectionality in South Africa," *Safundi - The Journal of South African and American Studies* 18, no. 2 (2017); Hucke, "Differential Movements: Lesbian Migrant Women's Encounters with, and Negotiations of, South Africa's Border Regime,"
[19] Camminga, *Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa*, 10.

responsibility of governing a deeply divided, angry country.'[20] Politicians as well as parts of society use the current pandemic once again to scapegoat migrants.[21]

Despite the narrative of the Rainbow Nation, South Africa remains a largely hostile environment for LGBT persons. Homosexuality is widely regarded as 'un-African' and sinful, resulting in violent against those seen to transgress sexual and gender norms.[22] Therefore, the combination of homophobia with xenophobia creates 'a complex set of legal and political structures that render them [LGBT migrants] hyper-visible and invisible at different moments and with different consequences.'[23] Thus, lesbian migrant women need to navigate these structures by actively reconfiguring multiple borders at multiple scales, such as processes of exclusion from church for being lesbian and from the labour market for being foreign.[24]

Rather than to address the challenges that have been documented within the country's asylum system since the introduction of the original Refugees Act in 1998, the recent implementation of the South African Refugees Amendment Act on 1 January 2020[25] further limits the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.[26] The Amendment is criticised extensively by civil society[27] and is suggestive of growing efforts by the state to reduce specific forms of (international) mobility and to securitize the country's external borders.[28]

Certainly, the South African state's attempt to control international mobility, coupled with negative perceptions of international migrants, is reflected in the operations

[20] Loren B. Landau, "What's Behind the Deadly Violence in South Africa? The Attacks on Immigrants Are Neither Irrational nor Spontaneous," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2019.
[21] Sharon Ekambaram, "Covid-19 is not a Reason to Hunt Down Illegal Immigrants," *Daily Maverick*, April 29, 2020, accessed March 2, 2021, www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-29-covid-19-is-not-a-reason-to-hunt-down-illegal-immigrants.
[22] Henriette Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
[23] Palmary, *Gender, Sexuality and Migration in South Africa*, 21.
[24] Hucke, "Differential Movements: Lesbian Migrant Women's Encounters with, and Negotiations of, South Africa's Border Regime,"; Verena Hucke, "Sexualities and Borders: Differential Movements of LGBTIQ+ Migrants within the Borderland," in *Sexualities, Transnationalism, and Globalization: New Perspectives*, ed. Y. Rachel Zhou, Christina Sinding and Donald Goellnicht (London: Routledge, 2021).
[25] Although it was stated at the public hearings on the Amendment Act that the Act is a response to the allegedly fraud and abuse of the asylum system, it is more likely that the restrictions are suggestive of a shift toward a security-oriented response to migration.
[26] Scalabrini Centre, "New Refugee Laws Undermine Human Rights of Refugees," News Release, January 10, 2020, https://scalabrini.org.za/news/press-statement-new-refugee-laws-undermine-human-rights-of-refugees/?fbclid=IwAR2PFtyzcdgkNQdfF5G1gj6jFNGAl1t3-VgOa6LsL3zI2ugfxRXjvnhcOxU.
[27] Nation Nyoka, "Amended Refugee Act Restricts Fundamental Rights," *New Frame*, January 16, 2020, accessed August 31, 2020, www.newframe.com/amended-refugee-act-restricts-fundamental-rights/; Scalabrini Centre, "New Refugee Laws Undermine Human Rights of Refugees."
[28] Amit, "No Refuge: Flawed Status Determination and the Failures of South Africa's Refugee System to Provide Protection,"; Sergio Carciotto, "Making Asylum Seekers More Vulnerable in South Africa: The Negative Effects of Hostile Asylum Policies on Livelihoods," *International Migration*, 2020; Kathryn Mathers and Loren B. Landau, "Natives, Tourists, and Makwerekwere: Ethical Concerns with 'Proudly South African' Tourism," *Development Southern Africa* 24, no. 3 (2007), accessed March 21, 2019; Gregory Mthembu-Salter et al., "Counting the Cost of Securitising South Africa's Immigration Regime," Working Paper 20 (Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium, 2014).

of the country's asylum system that is shaped by a dysfunctional bureaucratic system and delays.[29] Upon entering South Africa and indicating an intention to claim asylum, a person is granted a non-renewable Section 23 Permit, which gives the holder five days to lodge an asylum claim at the nearest Refugee Reception Office.[30] To complete this process, the person is required to present their Section 23 Permit, proof of identification from their country of origin and any travel documents. In the initial eligibility interview, a Refugee Reception Officer records a person's personal data and their reason for applying for asylum. After the interview, a temporary Section 22 Permit is issued that is usually valid for a period of up to six months and allows the applicant to stay in South Africa until the final adjudication is made. According to Department of Home Affairs (DHA) regulations, the merits of the asylum claim should be assessed through a second interview with a Refugee Status Determination Officer, who has the power to grant refuge, reject the application or refer it to the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs. In practice, applicants wait many years, sometimes decades, for the second interview, forced to survive on temporary permits that must be renewed every three or so months.[31] This leaves applicants in a state of limbo, forced to expose themselves repeatedly to interrogation by DHA officials or to live without papers. Research suggests that the eventuality of being granted asylum is highly improbable for most applicants.[32] Reasons for this range from 'corruption to inaccessibility of the system to appallingly poor decision-making by the Refugee Status Determination Officers.'[33]

Limited Access to Social and Economic Assistance during the Pandemic

The COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines state that 'South Africa has a unique challenge of a large vulnerable immunocompromised population living in overcrowded conditions.'[34] Physical distancing is in many townships almost impossible,

[29] Mandivavarira Mudarikwa, Miriam Gleckman-Krut, Amy-Leigh Payne, B Camminga and John Marnell, *LGBTI+ Asylum Seekers in South Africa: A Review of Refugee Status Denials Involving Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity* (2021)
Janet McKnight, "Through the Fear: A Study of Xenophobia in South Africa's Refugee System," *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008).
[30] The following description of the asylum application process is a summary of the overview on the Department of Home Affairs' website: www.dha.gov.za/index.php/immigration-services/refugee-status-asylum (accessed 1 September 2020).
[31] Camminga, *Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa*.
[32] LeConté J. Dill et al., "'Son of the Soil … Daughters of the Land': Poetry Writing as a Strategy of Citizen-Making for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Johannesburg," *Agenda - Empowering for Women for Gender Equity* 30, no. 1 (2016); John Marnell, Elsa Oliveira, and Gabriel H. Khan, "'It's About Being Safe and Free to Be Who You Are': Exploring the Lived Experiences of Queer Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in South Africa," *Sexualities* 24, 1-2 (2021).
[33] Palmary, *Gender, Sexuality and Migration in South Africa*, 16.
[34] Department of Health South Africa, "Covid-19 Disease: Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines," accessed March 4, 2021,

food security is threatened, and the South African Police Service violently enforces the lockdown.[35] However, the pandemic has a specific effect on migrants in South Africa who are confronted with the loss of livelihoods and often lack basic supplies, such as shelter, food and access to health care.[36] The lack of 'migration-aware and mobility competent policies and programmes'[37] in general and specifically in the health care sector, housing and food security that existed prior to the pandemic, is now showing its consequences.[38] Individuals intersectional social position determines how they in fact can practice rights enshrined in the South African constitution and access the asylum system.

The lockdown closes large part of the informal economy that makes up a significant number of the South African economy in which a considerable amount of migrants' work. During the first weeks of the lockdown in 2020, the South African government did not provide any social and/or financial assistance for non-citizens, albeit the government spent around R37-million to build a 40km-fence at the border with Zimbabwe.[39] The lack of financial or social support became apparent as non-citizens were not included in the state's response to the pandemic and lockdown, e.g. access to social grants and food parcels, were not enabled. The government created the Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRD) as a monthly payment for a 6-month period that was limited to citizens, permanent residents and acknowledged refugees.[40] Asylum seekers, holders of special permits and undocumented migrants were not included. On 19 June 2020, the Scalabrini Centre won a court order over the exclusion of non-citizens in the SRD.[41] Thereafter, asylum seekers and holders of special permits were eligible for the SRD. If non-citizens were registered through their employer, they had also access to the Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme (TERS). However, undocumented migrants and those who work in the informal economy remained largely excluded.[42]

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http://health.gov.za/covid19/assets/downloads/policies/Infection%20Prevention%20and%20Control%20Guidelines.pdf, 3.

[35] Baldwin-Ragaven, "Social Dimensions of Covid-19 in South Africa," 35; Lester Kiewit, "'Frustrated' Police Resort to Force," *Mail & Guardian*, April 2, 2020, accessed March 15, 2021, https://mg.co.za/news/2020-04-02-frustrated-police-resort-to-force/.

[36] Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 3.

[37] Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 3.

[38] Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 3–4; Ferdinand C. Mukumbang, Anthony N. Ambe, and Babatope O. Adebiyi, "Unspoken Inequality: How Covid-19 Has Exacerbated Existing Vulnerabilities of Asylum-Seekers, Refugees, and Undocumented Migrants in South Africa," *International journal for equity in health* 19, no. 141 (2020): 3.

[39] Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 6.

[40] Robin Arends, Thea de Gruchy, and Jo Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19: A Review of South Africa's Policy Response to the Pandemic," Issue Brief 2 (MiCoSA, Johannesburg, 2020), 5; Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 9.

[41] Scalabrini Centre, "Victory in Covid-19 Social Relief Grant Court Case," News Release, June 19, 2020, accessed March 2, 2021, www.scalabrini.org.za/news/victory-in-covid19-social-relief-grant-court-case/.

[42] Arends, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 11; Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 9.

With the implementation of the lockdown in March 2020 all Refugee Reception Offices (RRO) were closed and the DHA announced that everyone whose permit became invalid during the lockdown would have the opportunity to renew it within 30 days after the lockdown had been lifted, but a 'temporary stay on having to renew permits during the pandemic is, however, at best merely perfunctory.'[43] Hence, the backlog of new asylum applications and applications for permit renewal of the already overburdened and dysfunctional asylum system was increasing.[44] The closure of RRO during the lockdown resulted in multiple challenges for those who need to access or renew documentation and are not able to do so. They faced challenges in accessing social grants, health care, banking services as well as food parcels and were in danger of arrest, detention and deportation.[45] This is especially challenging for LGBT migrants who often cannot rely on social networks such as family and/or community of origin as those were often the reason for their migration. This highlights the need for the LGBT (migrant) community to organize themselves with the support of others with projects for the community by the community to avert the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic.[46]

Albeit the lack of 'migration-aware and mobility competent policies and programmes'[47] there is a need to be cautious that the policy development during the pandemic might be used to advance the restriction and securitisation of migration and mobility further[48] and to create an even more hostile environment especially for LGBT migrants.

Case Descriptions

The narratives of the two cases presented in this article were conducted during the first lockdown in South Africa in April 2020 with two lesbian migrant women who migrated from other African countries to South Africa. Ruth, a lesbian migrant woman in her mid-thirties, migrated from an Eastern African country[49] to South Africa only recently and applied for

[43] Franzisca L. Zanker and Moyo Khangelani, "The Corona Virus and Migration Governance in South Africa: Business as Usual?," *Africa Spectrum* 2020, no. 1 (55): 102.
[44] Only recently the DHA signed an agreement with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to deal with the backlog of more than 150-thousand pending asylum applications, see UNHCR, "Work to Revamp the Asylum System Begins in South Africa," News Release, March 8, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/south-africa/work-revamp-asylum-system-begins-south-africa.
[45] Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 3.
[46] The African LGBTQI+ Migration Research Network (ALMN), the Fruit Basket and the Holy Trinity LGBT Ministry, with the support of the GALA Queer Archive and other partners coordinated a fundraiser campaign to support members of the LGBTQI+ community in South Africa with an emergency fund. During this campaign priority was given to LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, sex workers as well as trans and intersex people, see www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-amp-lgbtqi-people-in-south-africa.
[47] Benavides, de Gruchy and Vearey, "Migration and Covid-19," 3.
[48] Zanker and Moyo Khangelani, "The Corona Virus and Migration Governance in South Africa," 104–5.
[49] To preserve anonymity, interviewee's country-of-origin information and exact ages will be omitted.

asylum on the basis of political persecution. She stays with a family who also migrated to South Africa from the same country of origin as herself. Ruth does not have a lot of personal contacts or friendships in Johannesburg.

Amahle, a lesbian migrant woman in her late twenties, lives in the metropolitan area of Johannesburg. Born in a Southern African country, she followed her mother to South Africa as a young adult. After several attempts she was able to obtain documentation – a temporary permit. Before the lockdown she was working in restaurants and in marketing while also advancing her formal education. She rents a room in a big yard where other persons live as well. She has stable friendships in Johannesburg and an ambivalent relationship with her mother who also lives in Johannesburg.

The narratives were conducted after I was on my second field research in February and March 2020 in Johannesburg for my PhD-project. As I had to leave unexpectedly due to the COVID-19 pandemic the narratives were conducted via WhatsApp messenger with persons who already participated in the research project during the first and second field research stay in Johannesburg. They were contacted via WhatsApp and asked to participate and share a written text or an audio message on how they feel, both in terms of health and mood, how they spend their waithood. In other words, I was interested in understanding where, with whom and how they were experiencing the lockdown, what impact the lockdown had on their life and living spaces, how they reorganized their daily life, and what this experience made them discover of new. The cases of Ruth and Amahle were selected since they both represent different and contrasting cases in terms of current age, age during migration, duration of stay, social network in South Africa, and housing situation.

Double Quarantine Inside: Staying at Home during the Lockdown as a Lesbian Migrant Woman

During the lockdown in March 2020, Ruth stayed with a family that hosted her in their apartment while Ruth was struggling to find shelter as South Africa does not enforce encampment.

> 'I stay with a big family of eight persons who gave me shelter in their apartment in Johannesburg. After they knew about my self-identification, which is different from what they believe in their culture, I found a loss of sympathy and faced kind of harassment. My luck was that they did not threw me out openly, because although they are here for many years, we all exiled our country for the same political issues.

> I cannot search for another place in my community here, because I am afraid of a total loss when I still struggling to find my way out.'[50]

Although Ruth was trying to hide her self-identification as a lesbian, the family eventually found out about her. Whereas the family did not accept her self-identification and Ruth subsequently faced harassment and a lack of understanding, they still provided Ruth shelter at the family's apartment.

> 'I cannot forget to thank two persons in many who can even remember that I am a living one, ask how I am and gave support in this hard time.'[51]

In the above excerpt, Ruth described an encounter with two persons who supported her not in terms of basic supplies or shelter as the family did, but in terms of acknowledgment and acceptance. Both encounters point to different forms of solidarity. The family supported her because they faced the same political persecution in their country of origin. The two persons Ruth met supported her in terms of emotional solidarity that is different from the solidarity the family provided, as it is not on an abstract level, but a real interest in her as a living human being. The differentiation becomes clearer when Ruth describes the situation at the family's apartment during the lockdown.

> 'In these days of nationwide lockdown, it forces everyone to stay home. It is a challenge. None of them [the family] understands and wants to live and share the same place and other needs with someone […] who has nothing for contribution than [being] a lesbian – what they call evil. So, in those unfamiliar living conditions, […] mood is down to everyone. To me it is double quarantine inside. In the beginning I suffered a depression, went to the hospital and the doctor prescribed tablets for a whole month that I still swallow every night.'[52]

Ruth described the different facets of quarantine. For her, the lockdown at home doubled, as she also had to quarantine inside while she stayed with the family, because they did not accept her self-identification. The family also framed Ruth's self-identification as evil which points to the perception of homosexuality as 'un-African' and sinful.[53] The notion of *double quarantine inside* points to the fact that homosexuality for a long time was and in many countries is still seen as a disease in which a homosexual person must be separated from the others. Ruth's case shows the specific burden lesbian migrant women had to face

[50] Ruth, 24 April 2020.
[51] Ruth, 24 April 2020.
[52] Ruth, 24 April 2020.
[53] Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*.

during the lockdown and that discrimination can resonate affectively and lead to depression or the internalisation of discrimination.

As Ruth, Amahle also described being forced to stay at home as a challenge. She was renting out a room in a big yard where other persons live as well. Keeping good relations with everybody was essential for her as 'now you have to spend each and every [day] with them.'[54]

> 'I have been trying to keep healthy […] by jogging and doing exercises, but now it is limited, because you cannot go outside and run and take walks freely. My mood this time is a bit worse, because you have to stay indoors actually the whole day. It is like we do not have any purpose or whatsoever. […] Sometimes I go to visit my family, but I am mostly reading and studying. […] I am just making sure that I do what I usually do every day. Like wake up in the morning instead of me waking up late. So, I try to wake up in the morning and do the housework duties. Just to keep busy so that the body does not get tired and try and eat properly, not overeat or not eat less and.'[55]

During the lockdown in March, Amahle spent her time studying for her degree. Like Ruth, the effects of the lockdown and the restriction of movement and especially being forced to stay inside challenged Amahle's mental health. Besides reading, she tried to hold up a routine, to keep busy during the lockdown. In contrast to Ruth, Amahle had family in South Africa, namely her mother and brother, to whom she could turn to. Amahle described the relationship with her family as ambivalent as during the time of her coming out as a lesbian her family did not accept her self-identification and she faced violence and discrimination from them. During the lockdown the relationship with her mother became essential for Amahle, especially when she had a bad car accident, and her mother took care of her during her recovery. In some way the lockdown brought her closer to her mother. This was also possible because she was able to leave her mother's place for her own flat when they had dispute. Amahle's and Ruth's housing situation as well as their social networks differed from each other which also related to their different duration of stay.

> 'At least I see family unity even if I am not a part of it. But it also brings for me more work in the house for being busy and forget my rejection and loneliness. Washing dishes, cleaning, and reading. Nothing changed for my routine life like before lockdown, because I was jobless despite sometimes, I went out to search for something to do, to try and so on.'[56]

[54] Amahle, 29 April 2020.
[55] Amahle, 29 April 2020.
[56] Ruth, 24 April 2020.

Ruth is attempting to draw something for her own from the happiness of the family unity she can observe. Albeit her own feelings of loneliness and rejection that she tried to process through keeping a routine and taking over housework for the family – work usually done by members of a family or who are seen as part of the family.

Clearly, the experiences of the lockdown for lesbian migrant women in South Africa intensify as they face confined living conditions and were forced to stay inside – sometimes with people who did not accept their self-identification and who harassed and discriminated against them for being lesbian. This exacerbated through other forms of social marginalisation. Economic exclusion such as the exclusion from social grants as well as xenophobic violence which in combination with homophobia regulated the life of these women, such as being in danger when going outside or staying at home with persons who devalued these women.

Re-Organizing Daily Life and Routines

Amahle and Ruth both reorganized their life through keeping a routine and being busy to – as Amahle put it – making sure, 'the body does not get tired'. This highlights not only the effects of the lockdown on the mental health, but likewise on physical well-being. Furthermore, the relation to persons with whom they shared their living spaces gained more importance. Ruth especially highlighted the challenges arising from the fact that everybody stayed at home.

> 'I see barriers are still the same even more than before, because they [the family] used to go out and come back late with minimal time of talk, some were at school.'[57]

As she was not able to avoid closer contact with the family during the lockdown, processes of exclusion, experiences of discrimination, and lack of safe housing increased for her and she did not have any alternative places to go to or to stay. This also refers to the restriction of movement during the lockdown. Both women were stuck at their apartments and had to wait. This resonates with the asylum process in South Africa that leaves applicants in a state of limbo and forces them to wait for a decision on their asylum application – sometimes for decades. Ruth and Amahle navigated this time of waiting through keeping a routine and being busy, but their approaches differed. Although describing challenges to her mental health, Amahle highlighted some positive aspects of staying at home.

[57] Ruth, 24 April 2020.

> 'The experience is making me discover a whole lot of new things like where I want my life to be next year, my new values, what else I might be good at doing and I am actually enjoying working out indoors.'[58]

Ruth highlighted the challenges of the loss of livelihoods and the lack of food security and related them to the broader situation of refugees in South Africa.

> 'But inside things changed clearly in the eyes of the house members, where you see fear of hunger, missing every day needs and afraid of next time of missing food. Like other struggling refugees who don't have stable income.'[59]

In the beginning of the lockdown, non-citizens were excluded from financial and social support grants like the SRD and informal migrants are still excluded from those grants. Before the lockdown, the family was able to provide Ruth with shelter and food, but with the loss of livelihoods, this became a challenge.

Conclusion: Double Quarantine Inside and the Fracture of the Rainbow Nation

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown in general and in South Africa do not affect all people the same way. From an intersectional perspective it is suggested that the impact of the lockdown is related to the social position of an individual both in terms of the hetero-patriarchal as well as the racialised-national order.

The narratives of Amahle and Ruth show the different facets and levels of the effects arising from the lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic. The already challenging and contradictory situation of lesbian migrant women in South Africa prior to the pandemic became intensified. This refers to, among others, the lack of access to economic and social assistance as well as to save housing, protection from discrimination and violence. While contrasting the cases of Ruth and Amahle, we can see that the access to safe housing and protection from discrimination are important factors in relation to the experiences of lesbian migrant women in general, and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The so-called Rainbow Nation was fractured already prior to the pandemic that means that the South African society was and still is divided to a certain extent, especially in terms of class. From an intersectional frame: migrant communities face xenophobic violence; the LGBT community faces homo- and transphobia. In particular, the fracture of the Rainbow Nation becomes clear through the situation of LGBT migrants and lesbian migrant women, who are not ever-present in organisations, projects and programs. The fraction has been exaggerated through the global COVID-19 pandemic, the enforced

[58] Amahle, 29 April 2020.
[59] Ruth, 24 April 2020.

lockdown and the lack of 'migration-aware and mobility competent policies and programmes'[60] particularly for lesbian migrant women. The omitted inclusion of the experiences of lesbian migrant women explicitly in policy responses to mobility and the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to what Ruth described as 'double quarantine inside': enforced quarantining both from society and from their self-identification. Individuals of the most vulnerable groups are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown in South Africa the most. While this is not a new finding, we can see that policy responses to mobility and sexuality in general, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic need to be re-surveyed from the perspective of intersectionality. This can be achieved through the study of the experiences of lesbian migrant women in South Africa and bringing forth their ability to re-organize their lives and their experience of waiting.

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Welfare and COVID-19

Bridging the Gap - Response of Civil Society Organisations Towards the Stranded Migrant Labourers in COVID-19 Lockdown: A Study of Bengaluru, India

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Abstract

To curtail the spread of COVID-19 the government of India announced a nationwide complete lockdown, on 25th March 2020, within just four hours, which tremendously impacted the socio-economic condition of stranded migrant workers of India. Within that context, this article elaborates the hardships faced by migrant workers working in informal sectors in India, particularly in Bengaluru city. It also aims to identify the response of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bengaluru which assisted these migrant workers during the lockdown period where government's relief measures failed to reach. A descriptive study, based on both primary and secondary data, it analyses the condition of stranded migrants and the welfare measures provided by CSOs to them. Considering the performance of CSOs, in bridging the gap where government welfare measures fail to reach, it concludes that a well-coordinated functioning mechanism between the Government and CSOs is desirable during trying public health times like a pandemic.

Keywords

COVID-19, Lockdown, Stranded Migrant Workers, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Welfare Measures, India

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in India has impacted its citizens and government deeply, making it one of the worst affected countries in the world[3]. The country recorded its first case of COVID-19 infection on 30th January 2020 and by the end of March 2020 the number of cases started increasing slowly.[4] In order to curtail the spread of the virus at a very early stage, the Central Government of India had no other options but to announce the first phase of nationwide complete lockdown[5] on 25th March, 2020 which continued till May, 2020.[6] This first lockdown, which was initiated within a very short notice period of only four hours, halted all socio-economic activities and had an unprecedented impact on the livelihoods of a large section of society, particularly on the informal sector[7] and migrant[8] workers. Migrant workers, having to hurriedly travel back to their native homes, abandoning the shelters in cities where they were working, faced job loss, depletion of savings and an uncertain future.[9] Many migrant workers working in the informal sector became stranded due to the complete nationwide lockdown. This informal sector stranded migrants' poor condition during initial weeks of lockdown forced the Central

[3] 2,42,348, 657 Confirmed Cases 4,927,723 Total Deaths as on 22nd October 2021. See "*India Situation Report*," World Health Organisation (2021). Accessed October 25, 2021. https://www.who.int/india/emergencies/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)/india-situation-report

[4] According to the World Health Organisation report total number of COVID-19 cases were 360 on 22nd March "*Novel Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) . Situation Update Report-8",* World Health Organisation India.(2020). Accessed June 4, 2021. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wrindia/situation-report/india-situation-report-8.pdf?sfvrsn=cd671813_2.

[5] The first lockdown was announced in India by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 24.03.2020 which had mandated a complete restriction on all non-essential travel and services. "Circular for COVID-19." *Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.* (2020). Accessed June 4, 2021. https://www.mha.gov.in/notifications/circulars-covid-19.

[6] In this context, it is to be mentioned that in the beginning of April 2021 the second wave of pandemic has hit the country and in response to those different states in India is again facing a partial or complete lockdown since May 2021.

[7] The informal or unorganised sector comprises of units that operate at a low level of organisation, with little or no division between labour and capital as factors of production and on a small scale. Labour relations, where they exist, are based mostly on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees.
See "Glossary of Staistical Term," *OECD Statistical Portal*, (2003).Accessed October 20, 2021. https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1350
Unorganised sector; Some examples: landless labourers, workers in brick-kilns, construction, beedi-making, incense stick. workers in local transport, shops, domestic servants, community services like street cleaning, street vendors, garbage collectors.

[8] Migrant worker is a person who has been engaged, is engaged or has to be engaged in any paid activity in a state of which he or she is not a usual resident. See "International Migration Law- Glossary on Migration," *International Organisation for Migration*,(2019).Accessed October 15, 2021. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf

[9] See,Damini Nath. " *Migrant Workers Face Debt, Job Loss and Separation from Families". The Hindu.* (2021).Accessed June 4, 2021. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/migrant-workers-face-debt-job-loss-and-separation-from-families/article34117669.ece

Government of India to announce a large number of support measures.[10] Along with Government, civil society organisations (CSOs)[11], non-government-organisations (NGOs), along with individual people, housing complexes, schools and colleges, came forward and extended their help and assistance.

This paper aims to shed light on the management of welfare aid and care for stranded migrants in the context of the nationwide welfare measures provided by the Government of India. It particularly addresses the work of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) with migrant workers who were stranded in Bengaluru city in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, and were unable to go back to their hometowns, due to the complete lockdown. In this context, we also attempt to explore the challenges faced by the stranded migrants and CSOs while providing relief measures.

The megacity of Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka (a southern state of India), has been chosen as a field of this study for several reasons. Karnataka receives a large number of migrants from its neighbouring states[12] since it shares its border with six major states in India namely Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana[13]. During the 16th century, the demography of Bengaluru city was built through three waves of migration: the first occurred during the time of British era, the second during 1950s-60s when the major public sector undertakings like Bharat Electronics and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) made their base in this city, and the third one in the late 1980s when Bengaluru became the Silicon Valley of India with the boom in the IT industry[14]. Currently, internal migrants who come from other parts of the country, comprise 42 per cent of Bengaluru's population[15].

This article is organised in four sections. First, we present a brief theoretical and empirical review of literature and identify the research gap in the field. Next, we describe

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[10] Nikunj Ohri, *10 Government Measures to Help Poor through Lockdown.* Bloomberg,(2020). Accessed May 28, 2021. https://www.bloombergquint.com/economy-finance/10-government-measures-to-help-poor-through-lockdown.

[11] A civil society organization (CSO) or non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, civil society organisations (CSOs) perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions. See "Civil Society," United Nations, (2019), Accessed October 19, 2021. https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/page/about-us

[12] A Priyadarshini, "*Evaluation Study of Migrationof Labour to and from Karnataka".* Government of Karnataka (2017), Accessed May 20, 2021. https://kmea.karnataka.gov.in/storage/pdf-files/Reports%20and%20other%20docs/Migration%20of%20Labour.pdf.

[13] Sridhar Vivan,Vivan, *Karnataka will have 6 State Borders with the Addition of Telengana.* BangaloreMirror.(2013). Accessed April 26, 2021. https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/others/karnataka-telangana-border-most-states/articleshow/26974655.cms.

[14] Arun Dev, "*Three Waves of Migrations that Shaped Bengaluru."* Hindustan Times. (2021). Accessed May 25, 2021. https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/3-waves-of-migrations-that-shaped-bengaluru-101615660544003-amp.html.

[15] Mohit M Rao, *Migrant Constitute 42% of Bengaluru's Population.* Bengaluru: The Hindu. (2019), Accessed July 20, 2019.

the research design and methodology used for the study, followed by background information explaining the hardships faced by the migrants who were stranded. The findings are divided into two segments: the first subsection unveils the welfare activities of the Government of India organised for stranded migrant workers during lockdown and its extent of reach, and the second subsection, before concluding, explains the challenges faced by CSOs in providing welfare measures.

Review of Literature and Research Gap

The neoclassical macro theory of international migration considered labour migration as a consequence of economic development and regional disparity.[16,17] On the other hand, the neoclassical microeconomic model states that migration is individual's decision which is based on cost benefit calculation and on expected positive net return from movement. In recent years, the assumptions and conclusions made by neoclassical theories[18] are challenged by new economics of migration and it is said that migration decisions are taken jointly by the family members of a household in order to maximise the expected income and minimise the cost associated with migration.[19] Civil society is considered as a main organising entity in both classical and contemporary social theory. Empirical research suggests that civil society has the potential to promote and bring better public accountability to global governance[20] .For successful community building and advocacy work, non-profit organisations need recognition and trust.[21]

While the pandemic magnified all existing inequalities,[22] it left a disproportionate socio-economic impact on immigrants and their children.[23] These communities reliant on tourism, remittances, seasonal and trade-related mobility linked livelihoods were affected

[16] Michael P Todaro and Lydia Maruszko. 1987. "'Illegal Migration And US Immigration Reform: A Conceptual Framework'." *Population and Development Review.* 13 (1): 101-14.

[17] Micheal.P. Todaro and Stephen C.Smith. 2014. *Economic Development. India.* Vols. 115-20; 345-50..

[18] Oded Stark and David Levhari. 1982. "On Migration and Risk in LDCs.' ." *Economic Development And Cultural Change.* 31 (1): 191-96.

[19] Eliakim Katz and Oded Stark. 1986. "Labor Migration and Risk Aversion in Less Developed Countries." *' Journal of labor Economics.* 4 (1): 134-49

[20] Jan Aart Scholte, "Civil Society and Democratically Accountable Global Governance." *Government and Opposition.* (2004), Accessed May 22, 2021. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/government-and-opposition/article/abs/civil-society-and-democratically-accountable-global-governance/2E1963B53F9446423E5ABF40B8C33E3D.

[21] Kathryn L Chinnock et al, "Determinants of Nonprofit Impact: A Preliminary Analysis." *Fifth International ISTR Conference.* Cape Town, South Africa. (2002), Accessed May 25, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lester-Salamon-3/publication/242075314_Determinants_of_Nonprofit_Impact_A_Preliminary_Analysis/links/550214040cf231de076da258/Determinants-of-Nonprofit-Impact-A-Preliminary-Analysis.pdf.

[22] António Guterres, *The pandemic is Exposing and Exploiting Inequalities of all Kinds, Including Gender Inequality.* UN. (2020), Accessed February 22, 2021. https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/pandemic-exposing-and-exploiting-inequalities-all-kinds-including.

[23] OECD Policy Responses to Corona Virus (COVID-19). (2020)

largely due to travel restrictions[24].The pandemic had a severe impact also on public health, particularly for immigrant workers' who are on constant move.[25] CSOs played an effective role in order to combat the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, yet the relation between the Government and NGOs did not change much after the pandemic.[26] In India, COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of migrant labourers to a large extent.[27] Migration is an old phenomenon, but in India it took a lockdown for the government to realise the existence of migrant workforce that provides cheap labour to the industry and to the urban service sectors. Apart from immigrants and refugees, emigrants and returnee migrants also faced hardship during the outbreak of the pandemic due to the lack of coordination in planning between Central and State Governments of India[28] Here, migrants' religion and caste played an important role in the impact of the lockdown on the different groups of migrants.[29] During this pandemic and lockdown, the focus should have been on upholding human rights, practice of good governance, no hatred against migrants, and strengthening the health care system.[30] Instead, some marginalised groups fell through the gaps like informal sector migrant workers, particularly those stranded. [31]

This brief review makes it evident that limited research has been conducted on relief measures provided by different CSOs, especially their challenges faced in delivering welfare services during the current pandemic. The field area chosen is Bengaluru city as there is little academic work in this region. While documentation has focused on migrant movements out of cities back to their homes facing job loss during lockdown, the marginalised groups that did not receive much attention were migrant workers who were left stranded, unable to get back to the safety of their native places. Moreover, some NGOs

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[24] *"*COVID-19 and Tourism-Assessing the Economic Consequences.*" UNCTAD-Division on International Trade and Commodities Report.* (2020). Accessed May 20, 2021. https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/.

[25] *"Lack of skills and low levels of financial literacy make migrant communities vulnerable: IOM report*." (2020), Accessed August 16, 2020. https://www.iom.int/news/lack-skills-and-low-levels-financial-literacy-make-migrant-communities-vulnerable-iom-report.

[26] Ágnes Kövér, *The Relationship between Government and Civil Society in the Era of COVID-19.* De Gruyter. (2021), Accessed May 23, 2021. https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/npf-2021-0007/html.

[27] Irudaya Rajan, S., Sivakumar, P. & Srinivasan, A. *'The COVID-19 Pandemic and Internal Labour Migration in India: A 'Crisis of Mobility'.* Ind. J. Labour Econ. 63, (2020), 1021–39, Accessed May 18, 2021. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41027-020-00293-8.

[28] R.R Bhagat et al. " *The COVID-19, Migration and Livelihood in India.Background Paper for Policy Makers International Institute for Population Sciences*.' (2020), Accessed August 10, 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341756913

[29] Kesar et al. *'Pandemic, Informality and Vulnerability Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in India'* . Working Paper. (2020-21), Accessed August 19, 2020. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000428008 .

[30] UN Policy Brief Report. *"Policy Brief on Impact of COVID-19."* 2020.

[31] 50 percent or more migrants (including from Karnataka) left Bengaluru in the first few months. They were mainly from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and from other districts of Karnataka. See "*Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods of Informal Sector Workers and Vulnerable Groups in Bengaluru*". Azim Premji University. (2021), Accessed May 26, 2021. file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/COVID19-Impact-on-Informal-Sector-Bengaluru.pdf.

have been working extensively for migrant workers in this crisis period, which till now has not been highlighted in any current research in this region.

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive, based on both primary data and secondary data. The primary data was collected using convenience sampling. To understand the situation of stranded migrants, individual interviews were conducted through virtual and telephone calls[32] with 30 migrant workers stranded in Bengaluru. To analyse the welfare measures provided by CSOs and the challenges they faced, key members of 15 groups ranging from members of a residential complex, individual participants of NGOs[33] from Bengaluru, were interviewed virtually.[34] The migrant participants were asked questions about their demographic profile (gender, age, education qualification, origin, etc.) and about the challenges they faced during the lockdown. The CSO representatives were asked a set of questions on the types of relief measures provided and the challenges they faced to provide such support. The data collected was analysed and is presented using tables and graphs. Secondary data was also used to explain the extent of welfare measures provided by the Government and their impact on the livelihood of migrants as a background of the study, sources being working papers of the Centre for Sustainable Employment (CSE) study 2020-21, SWAN Team Data[35] and Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) portal.

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The Background Story: The Impact of The Lockdown on Stranded Migrant Workers

In India more than 90 per cent of the total workforce in the informal sector is characterised by low wage rate, dependence on daily earning, unhealthy work environments, and no or little socio-economic protection or job security[3637]. The faster growth rate of the cities as compared to villages attracts a large number of rural people to migrate to big cities in

[32] Given the pandemic conditions of the lockdown and social distancing.
[33] For example - Ex-SAB Miller group, Sampark NGO, Mr Manilal Ganguly, Mr Rishi Mukherjee , Platinum City Residential Complex, and PN residential Complex. All have consented to their names being shared here.
[34] 1st round interview conducted on March, 2021 and second round in May, 2021
[35] Anindita Adhikari,.et.al. "Manufactured Maladies: Lives and Livelihoods of Migrant Workers During COVID-19 Lockdown in India". *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Springer, (2020),969-997,Accessed November 12, 2020. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41027-020-00282-x.
[36]ILO Report. '*Informal Employment Trends in The India economy: Persistent Informality But Growing Positive Developmen't.* Employment Working paper No 254. International Labour Office. (2019), Accessed March 5, 2021.https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_734503.pdf.
[37] Yamuna, A, et.al. "Understanding and Addressing the Inequalities Affecting Workers in Informal Sector in India." *Health,Safety and Well-Being of Workers in the Informal Sector in India* (Springer Link) 3-12. (2019), Accessed June 6, 2021. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-13-8421-9_1

search of jobs and better livelihoods.[3839]As per India's last census survey in 2011,[40] 29.9 per cent of India's population is internal migrant by their place of birth. Migrant workers in the informal sector play a significant role and pandemic-induced lockdown has affected these individuals the most. They lost their jobs, were left without savings and food and often were forced to abandon their shelters in the cities where they had been working. To add to their misery, when the Government issued circular on sealing[41] the interstate and district borders, it forced a large number of migrants to return to their villages by walking on roads and highways in desperation, otherwise they became stranded in the cities where they were working.[42,43,44] However not all were fortunate to leave for their native places and many were left stranded in cities like Bengaluru where they had based themselves for livelihood.

The Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN)[45] revealed the ground reality of stranded migrant workers across India during the lockdown.[46] The Network showed[47] that during the first three months of the lockdown almost 50 per cent of emergency calls came to SWAN from stranded migrants related to no food and money. The majority of these workers (57 per cent) were construction workers and many (80.2 per cent) did not receive their pending wages from their employers. Hence, most of them (91.2 percent) had to borrow money to meet their daily expenses. Furthermore, 72.3 per cent of these workers had ration left for less than two days. This depicts the helplessness of Indian informal stranded migrants during the lockdown.

It has been mentioned earlier that Bengaluru city in India is a favoured destination of internal migrants in India. It was observed that, in the first phase of the lockdown until

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[38] Sundari.S. "Migration as a Livelihood Strategy: A Gender Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 22/23: 2295-303. (2005), Accessed June 7, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4416709.

[39]Arup Mitra,*"Migration, Livelihood and Well-being: Evidence from Indian City Slums."* Urban Studies 47, no. 7: 1371-390. (2010), Accessed June 3, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43079919.

[40] "Census Data 2011". *Ministry of Home Affaires, Government of India*, Accessed January 26, 2021. https://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/migrations.aspx.

[41] "Circular for COVID-19". *Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India. (2020),Accessed June 4, 2021. https://www.mha.gov.in/notifications/circulars-covid-19

[42] Bharti Jain, *Centre Asks States to Provide Shelter to Migrants, Seal Borders as Exodus Continues.* New Delhi: Times of India. (2020), Accessed January 22 , 2021. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/centre-asks-states-to-provide-shelter-to-migrants-seal-borders-as-exodus-continues/articleshow/74874429.cms.

[43] Geeta Pandey, *Coronavirus in India: Desperate Migrant Workers Trapped in Lockdown.* BBC News. (2020), Accessed June 3, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52360757.

[44] Jaydeep Hardikar,*'It was as if the Entire Country was Walking'.* PARI People's Archieve of Rural India. 2021

[45] For more on SWAN see "*Stranded Workers Action Networks*," (2021). Accessed January 20, 2021. http://strandedworkers.in/

[46] "*Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods of Informal Sector Workers and Vulnerable Groups in Bengaluru".* Azim Premji University. (2021), Accessed May 26, 2021. file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/COVID19-Impact-on-Informal-Sector-Bengaluru.pdf.

[47] Anindita Adhikari et al. "*Manufactured Maladies: Lives and Livelihoods of Migrant Workers During COVID-19 Lockdown in India,"* The Indian Journal of Labour Economics 63, (2020).

17th May 2020, a large number of migrants labourers (0.6 million) who were stranded in Karnataka state in India, registered to return to their hometowns, and half of these registrations were from Bengaluru.[48] Most of these migrants worked in construction sites[49] due to the fact that currently Bengaluru is one of the fastest growing cities in India with over 47 per cent growth during 2001-11[50]. In this city during the lockdown period, over 400,000 migrant construction workers lost their jobs.[51] Therefore, in collaboration with the government, civil society also generated solidarity networks and provided relief measures.[52]

The sample of 30 stranded migrant workers from the construction sector in this study, who were left behind in Bengaluru during the lockdown were mainly male (76 per cent), illiterate (60 per cent) and belonging to the age group of 20-40 years (57 per cent). The workers were from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Odisha, stayed in informal settlements, and worked in small construction companies. Most of them stated that they did not own a television, radio, or a smart phone and therefore, due to the sudden announcement of the lockdown, they were caught by surprise. Most of them failed to receive their pending wages from their employers and on top of that, the Government relief measures did not reach them. As a result, they had to deal with shortage of cash (80 per cent) to buy ration for the upcoming few days or to pay their rent, job loss (60 per cent), no food (40 per cent), absence of shelter and poor health condition (20 per cent). At the same time, luckily, they were not infected by COVID-19 (See Figure 1). They could not return to their hometown also due to the closure of interstate borders. Along with financial stress, they were in an emotional turmoil, thinking about the helpless conditions of their families in their home towns and about their uncertain future.

Figure 1. Source: Data Collated from Field Work

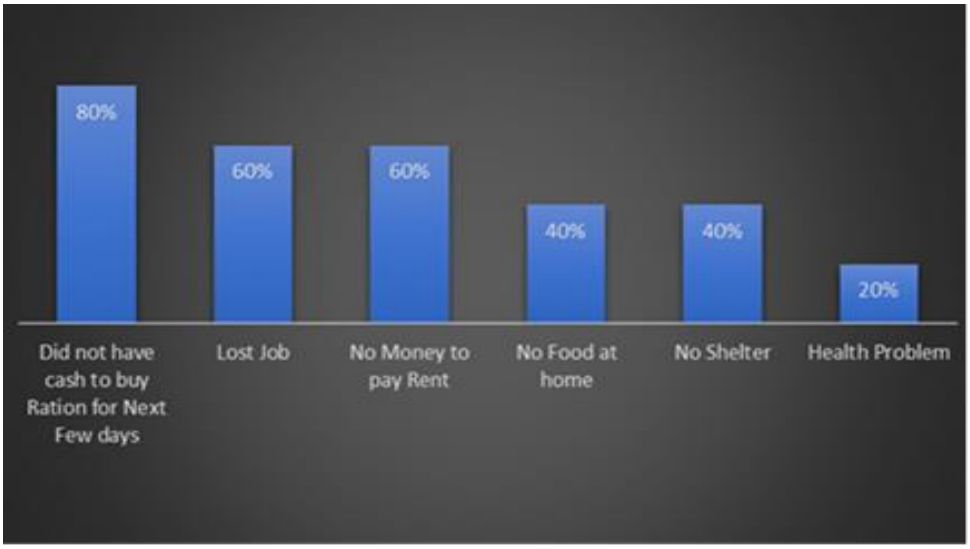
[48] Madhur. *Migrant Workers In Karnataka – A To Z.* Karnataka.com. (2020), Accessed May 19, 2021. https://www.karnataka.com/govt/migrant-workers-in-karnataka/

[49] Bhaskar Hegde, "*Migrant crisis in Karnataka reveals dark underbelly of Bengaluru's Economy, and How Recruitment Agencies Exploit Labourers".* FirstPost. (2020), Accessed May 15, 2021. https://www.firstpost.com/india/migrant-crisis-in-karnataka-reveals-dark-underbelly-of-bengalurus-economy-and-how-recruitment-agencies-exploit-labourers-8343041.html/amp.

[50] Subodh Varma, *Centre of Gravity is Shifting from Metros to Suburbs:B'lore Bucks the Trend in Population.* Sunday Times. Times of India. 2014

[51] Sampark. *COVID19 Relief to 4,000 Migrant Workers Bangalore.* Project Report, Bengaluru: GlobalGiving. (2020), Accessed January 15, 2021. https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/sampark-covid-19-relief-migrantworkers/.

[52] IOM UN Migration Report. *Standing in Solidarity with Migrants: Supporting Civil Society and Other Stakeholders in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic.*(2020),Accessed December 29, 2020. https://www.iom.int/news/standing-solidarity-migrants-supporting-civil-society-and-other-stakeholders-responding-covid.



Interviews conducted with the Bengaluru based NGOs like Sampark[53] mentioned that construction workers in Bengaluru working under reputed construction companies received full salary even during the lockdown period though they had no work. They were also provided shelters inside the construction site, which were hygienic, so the migrants did not get infected by COVID-19. These employers were very particular about not sending the migrant workers back to their home because they would not return and thus, construction work would get stalled. This was often completely against the will of the migrant workers and impacted them psychologically. The situation of migrant workers who worked for small construction companies or as independent individuals was also a nightmare. They temporarily or permanently lost their jobs, did not receive their last salaries, and had no shelter. These migrant workers made informal settlement arrangements in vacant construction sites but they had to pay a high rent for their stay, electricity, water, and so on. Thus, despite the evident efforts of CSOs, many stranded migrant workers were left more vulnerable without any relief.

The Role of the Government and Civil Society Organisations during The Lockdown

Welfare Measures Provided by the Government of India: An Impact Assessment

Two days after the announcement of the first complete lockdown, the Central Government of India, in an attempt to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19, announced a transfer of 1.42 trillion INR to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) financial framework which includes cash transfer to Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan

[53] Sampark's mission is to help vulnerable and poor people, especially women, to gain direct control over and improve their lives. For more see *SAMPARK.* Accessed December 20, 2020. https://www.sampark.org/.

Yojana (PMJDY) Accounts[54] and a transfer of 1000 INR to each pension beneficiary. Under this scheme, the Government also announced a transfer of 2000 INR to the beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri KISAN (PM-KISAN) scheme.[55] Moreover, the Government also announced that the Public Distribution System (PDS) beneficiaries[56] would receive additional food grain.[57] It was also declared that loans would be given to the Self-Help Group members.[58] Under the Ujwala Yojana scheme,[59] the government decided to provide free gas cylinders[60] to the beneficiaries during the lockdown.

Ironically, there were no specific facilities announced specifically for migrant workers. Later, realising the severity of the impact of the lockdown on stranded informal migrants, the Central Government extended free availability of ration under the PDS program for 800 million poor people for another five months. However, this extension was not meant for the 80 million stranded and returnee migrants . It was only on the 45th day of the lockdown that the Central Government announced that the 80 million migrants were entitled to get free ration under PDS for two months and furthermore, three meals a day would be provided to the shelters for homeless people.[61] Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (PMGKRY) scheme, a 125-day employment program was announced in 116 districts of six major states all over India for unemployed migrants who returned to their villages, with the objective of providing them jobs.[62] Moreover, to prepare

[54] The PMJDY is a national mission of financial inclusion to ensure access to financial services, namely, basic savings and deposit accounts, remittance, credit, insurance, pension and so on. See "*Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) National Mission for Financial Inclusion*", PIB , Government of India, New Delhi, (2020). Accessed September 27, 2021. https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1649091

[55] Under the PM KISAN scheme, an income support is provided to the small and marginal families having a combined land holding of 2 hectares. See "*PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi*". Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Famers Welfare. Minsitry of Agriculture and Famers Welfare. (2021). Accessed May 30, 2021. https://pmkisan.gov.in/.

[56] In India Public Distribution System (PDS) plays a very significant role in distributing essential items for mass consumption as through it wheat, rice, sugar, pulses are distributed through fair price shops or ration shop to the below poverty level (BPL) families who hold a ration card. See "*Public Distribution System".* Department of Food and Public Distribution, National Food Security Portal: Government of India. (2018),Accessed October 15, 2021. https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/PDS_page.

[57]Adhikari et.al. "Manufactured Maladies: Lives and Livelihoods of Migrant Workers During COVID-19 Lockdown in India,".

[58] M.Srikanth et al. "*How Self-Help Groups can Sustain during Covid".* The Hindu Business Line. (2020), Accessed May 30, 2021. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/how-self-help-groups-can-sustain-during-covid/article31557348.ece.

[59] Women belong to below poverty level without having liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) connections are entitled to Ujwala Yojana beneficiaries' scheme. See Bhaskar,. "*Ujwala Beneficieries Can Get Free Domestic Cooking Gas Cylinder Till September." Mint*.(2020). Accessed September 15, 2020. https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/ujjwala-beneficiaries-can-get-free-domestic-cooking-gas-cylinder-till-september-11594208731651.html.

[60] PTI. *Govt allows Ujjwala beneficiaries time till Sept to avail free LPG.* The Economic Times. 2020.

[61]Surbhi Kesar-et-al. "*Pandemic, Informality and Vulnerability Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in India*".Working Paper.(2020-21), Accessed August 19, 2020. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000428008 .

[62] Adhikari et.al. "Manufactured Maladies: Lives and Livelihoods of Migrant Workers During COVID-19 Lockdown in India,".

the currently unemployed workers for the future job market, 1.5 lakh[63] migrant workers were trained under the Short Term Training (STT) and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme, while another 1.5 lakh migrant workers were scheduled to be certified.[64] However, mere announcements are never enough. It is then critical to examine the reach of the measures and to what extent they actually supported the beneficiaries.

Regarding migrants' access to these relief measures, it has been shown[65] that 24 per cent of migrants were unable to access ration and 73 per cent did not receive any kind of cash transfer. More particularly, 50 per cent of migrants did not receive the Jan Dhan transfer, and 58 per cent the PM-Kisan transfer. As far as pension transfer is concerned, 66 per cent of migrants did not receive it. Clearly, the welfare measures announced by the government for migrant workers during the lockdown had not reached most of the intended beneficiaries and the largest discrepancy can be seen in the realm of cash transfers.

One of the many reasons why the cash transfer programs by the Government missed migrant workers was the absence of an official data base about these stranded migrant workers along with their bank account details and information of their Aadhaar number.[66] The Government had a detailed data base of only those migrant workers who had taken shelter in relief camps provided by the Government. However, data was unavailable for a huge number of migrants who were either stranded in the cities where they worked or of those who were on the way back to their homes. When it comes to the implementation of the relief measures, the states were able to distribute only 10.9 per cent of cereals like wheat, maize, millet and rice that they had collected from the Central Government. This was due to the fact that a large number of migrant workers moved from cities to rural areas in the month of May 2020 once the lockdown was lifted[67] and the PDS was unable to account for those mobile migrants[68] ,as well as due to not having an Aadhar

[63] A lakh is a unit in the Indian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand.
[64] PIB. "*Skill India Commences Training of 3 Lakh Migrant Workers From 116 Districts Identified Across 6 States under Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan".* Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. (2020). Accessed January 4, 2021. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1672306.
[65] Kesar et al., "Pandemic, Informality and Vulnerability Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in India," *CSE Working Paper* 1, (June 2020).
[66] Aadhaar Card is the single source of identity verification of a citizen across India. It was launched in 2010 and the 12-digit Aadhaar number on the card is considered as the unique identity or social security number given by the government of India that every Indian citizen need to have mandatorily. Government of India, *"Unique Identification Authority of India,"* Accessed June 8, 2021. https://uidai.gov.in/.
[67] Zia Haq et al."*Only Quarter Percent of 80 Million Migrants Got Govt Food Aid".* Hindustan Times. (2020). Accessed February 1, 2021. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/only-quarter-of-80-million-migrants-got-govt-food-aid/story-HBnQrzNtYhrrPqPn1npWvO.html.
[68] *"Food Security and COVID-19: Why India's Public Distribution System Requires an Overhaul".* EPWengage. (2020). Accessed April 20, 2021. https://www.epw.in/engage/article/food-security-and-covid-19-why-indias-public.

card[69] or a ration card.[70]The relief measures under PMGKRY covered a very insignificant per cent of the returnee migrants[71] but did not cover the unemployed stranded migrants at all[72]. Moreover, this employment program was only a temporary solution for the rural jobless returnees[73] .Therefore, the above analysis clearly indicates that there was a gap between the planning and execution of relief measures announced by the Government of India in order to combat the issues of joblessness and the lack of food and shelter for stranded migrants. As the Government's relief failed to reach a large portion of the target group, CSOs extended their help towards them, showing solidarity during this difficult period of the lockdown.

Welfare Measures by Civil Society: An Impact Assessment

In this situation despite being severely restricted in mobility and activity during the lockdown, CSOs like NGOs, housing societies and other individuals extended their help towards the stranded migrant workers when the relief funds and welfare measures provided by the Government failed to reach them. Primary data collected from CSOs shows that at least 2500 stranded informal sector migrant workers in total in Bengaluru received relief measures provided by CSOs. These CSOs provided help both in cash as well as in terms of food and non-food essentials. Analysing the data (See Fig 4), it can be said that 80 per cent of the participating CSOs[74] provided cooked food items and 60 per cent provided non-cooked food items like rice, pulses as well. Furthermore, 40 per cent of the CSOs mentioned that they have provided medicines and helped the migrants to return to their hometown. Additionally, 20 per cent of the CSOs organised health check-up facilities, hygiene kits with soap, sanitisers, and masks. Sanitary napkins and nutritious food were also provided to women migrant workers, particularly to the lactating mothers and pregnant

[69] Siraj Hussain, *COVID-19 Lockdown: How India Can Provide Food Grains to Stranded Migrant Labourers.* The Wire. (2020). Accessed April 30, 2021. https://thewire.in/rights/covid-19-lockdown-india-food-grains-stranded-migrants.

[70] Ration card in India is a popular document of address and identity proof, that makes Indian households eligible to purchase subsidised food grain from the Public Distribution System. e-ration card is a seamless facility provided by several state governments for households to obtain a ration card. "Ration Card – Applicability, Eligibility & E-ration." *Cleartax*. (2021.) Accessed June 8, 2021. https://cleartax.in/s/ration-card

[71] Liz Mathew, *67 lakh Migrants Return to 116 Dists in 6 States.* The Indian Express. (2020), Accessed December 2, 2021. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/coronavirus-lockdown-67-lakh-migrants-return-to-116-dists-in-6-states-6453084/.

[72] Amarjeet Kumar Singh, *India to ProvideFree Food Grains to Millions of Migrant Workers.* Alzazeera. (2020), Accessed January 17, 2021. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/14/india-to-provide-free-food-grains-to-millions-of-migrant-workers.

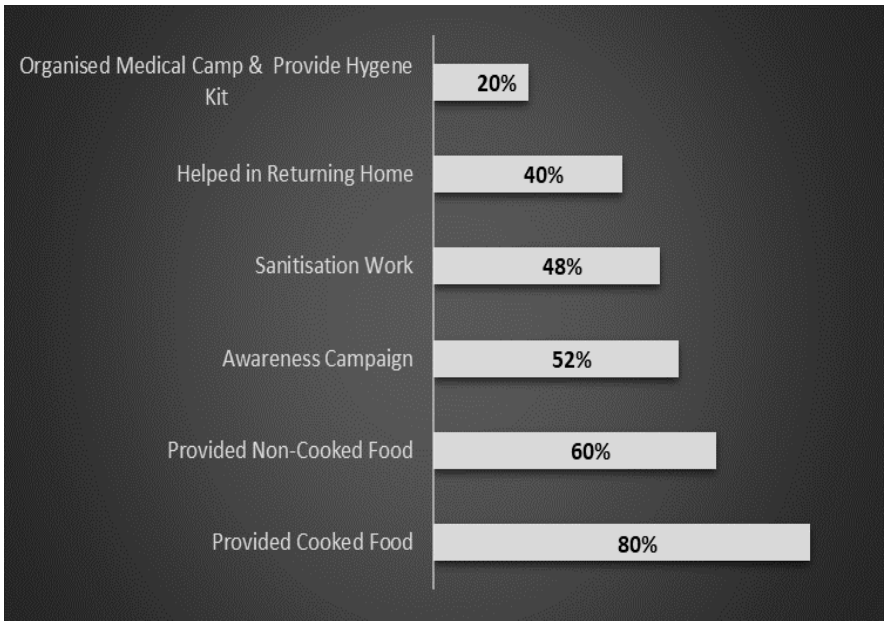
[73] Ratho.et.al. '*Rethinking MGNREGA in the Post COVID19 eEa'.* ORF Observer Research Foundation. (2020), Accessed June 6, 2021.https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/rethinking-mgnrega-in-the-post-covid19-era/.

[74] Total 15 CSOs were part of this study (See p. 3 Research Methodology for details).

women. Some of the organisations had provided toys and distributed sweets among children during to comfort them in this gloomy situation. Clearly, the shortage of food due to paucity of funds was the biggest challenge for the stranded migrants. Most of these migrants were uneducated and unaware about the seriousness of the pandemic. It was becoming difficult for them to understand awareness campaigns in local languages, as they came from other states and did not speak Kannada. The CSOs helped them by conducting awareness campaign about the pandemic in the migrants' languages and the NGOs in particular organised regular sanitisation drives to the temporary settlement areas.

A few NGOs also provided day care facilities for migrant children so that working women migrants could resume work. Even though these creches are now closed, since the beginning of the lockdown until now, the Sampark NGO sends daily nutritious food packs to children at home. Besides this support, 34 teachers in total went to 17 migrant settlements where informal migrant workers stay temporarily, to teach the migrant children and to spend time with them. In the first wave of the pandemic the major challenges that NGOs faced was related to raising awareness about the corona virus among migrant workers, providing necessary support to the migrants in lockdown situations and the lack of proper information about stranded migrant workers in Bengaluru.

Figure 2. Relief Measures by CSOs. Source: Data Collated from Field Work



In this context, it can be mentioned that Sampark had gone a little extra and reached 45 construction sites and more than 17 migrant settlements all over Bengaluru with a team of 54 volunteers. They have gathered information about these migrant workers during the lockdown period with the help of 'Shramik Mitras', the representatives of the

migrant workers who acted as a medium of communication between the migrants and the Sampark volunteers. Based on the information provided by them, Sampark volunteers reached out to migrants in need, paid special attention to the groups of people who were most vulnerable, and distributed a total of 2.200 hygiene kits, 9.920 dry grocery kits, 16.000 cooked meals, uncooked food, medicine and other basic necessities in April 2020. For those migrants who were returning back to their hometowns, the NGOs helped them to enrol to the SEVA SINDHU portal.[75]

Another challenge was to organise medical camps during the lockdown. As far as medical assistance is concerned, in normal circumstances, NGOs like Sampark or Platinum Bango Samity always organise general health camps on a regular basis with the help of doctors working in public health centre (PHC) where free health check-up is done. During the lockdown period until the month of July 2020, organising health camps was not possible because doctors were busy attending the huge number of COVID-19 cases in hospitals. After July 2020, they started organising health check-up camps on a regular basis in collaboration with Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), an administrative body responsible for civic amenities and some infrastructural assets of the Greater Bengaluru metropolitan area. As per one of the interviewees, from March to July 2020, when organising the health camp was not feasible, BBMP supplied hygiene kits including soap, sanitiser, masks and so on. This distribution continued even after they joined work after July 2020.

Most of the CSOs had to organise a fund-raising drive in order to bear the expenses related to providing relief measures. There were residents of housing complexes and people of different localities who came forward and donated cash to these CSOs, and 80 per cent of the funds were raised through online cash transfers. On the other hand, there were individuals who supplied cooked food from their own kitchen and non-cooked packaged food as well to support the relief drive of the CSOs. One of the interviewees mentioned that while some individuals of the society spontaneously helped the CSOs, others were reluctant to contribute as migrants were stigmatised because of COVID-19. Moreover, very few people were aware about the extent of the crisis that the stranded migrants were going through. On top of this, getting food and non-food essentials and distributing them was a challenge for these organisations due to movement restrictions. Additionally, it was stated that no proper/authentic data or information was released by the Government which could have been helpful for the CSOs to reach out to the migrants

[75] SEVA SINDHU portal is a common citizen service portal of the Government of Karnataka to provide government related services and other information in one place.

in a more a effective way. However, these organisations clearly stated that they did not receive any monetary contribution from the local, State and Central Government.

Conclusion

The second wave of the pandemic, which started in India in the end of April 2021, posed a new set of challenges.[76] Sampark NGO mentioned that in the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, since the lockdown was initiated at a very early stage, the number of COVID-19 infection cases among migrants were not high. However, in the second wave of the pandemic, COVID-19 entered into migrant settlements to a larger extent, since the second lockdown started very late. At the same time, migrants who had returned to their villages came back to Bengaluru meantime due to unavailability of jobs in the hometown. In the second phase of the lockdown, informal construction workers again faced job losses and financial challenges. Therefore, the NGOs now must bear a double burden of the costs of food and of medical expenses provided for migrants. Clearly, they needed funds and manpower. Besides, in the second wave, the severity of COVID-19 in India is much more devastating than during the first wave in 2020. As a result, people's participation in welfare activities had decreased in 2021. Moreover, the donors were keener on donating medical kits like thermometers or oximeters instead of providing financial help because the financial crisis of the migrants in the second wave had not been highlighted anywhere. In this situation for the COVID infected migrants, NGOs are working in collaboration with BBMP and the local primary healthcare centres and the police. Continuing with all the services they provided during the first lockdown period, they now raise awareness, provide psychological counselling, and take care of children whose parents have tested positive for COVID-19. Thus, despite all help received, civil society organisations still require financial assistance as well as voluntary participation of citizens to carry on assisting migrants impacted by the pandemic.

In conclusion, while lockdowns might have been the answer to preventing the spread of COVID-19, the way it was implemented by the Central and State Governments, left plenty of room for improvement, particularly for the stranded migrant workers. It is evident that in India and in Bengaluru as well, the welfare measures of the Government did not show a desirable outcome mainly due to lack of coordination between the Central and State Governments. What became evident was the lack of effective implementation of some major macroeconomic policies and the lack of information on details of migrant workers for the Government. However, in every corner in India where Government's help

[76] The second wave was ongoing at the time of the writing of this paper.

did not reach the migrant workers, there are the stories of assistance from volunteering groups or individuals. This is despite the fact that civil society organisations have always faced challenges due to shortage of funds or manpower and lack of information about migrants. Therefore, the collection and availability of proper information about migrants and running multilingual campaigns to raise awareness about the pandemic should be the utmost priority of the Government. A well-coordinated functioning mechanism between the Government and CSOs is desirable in this demanding period. CSOs must be given public recognition by the Government using social media platforms, newspapers, radio, television channels and so on. This would improve the outreach mechanisms of CSOs as well. The largest intangible asset in countries like India, are the migrant workers. Times like the current pandemic serve as a stern reminder that ignoring migrants' human rights and welfare needs happens at our own peril.

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Immobilities, Mental Health, and Livelihoods - Perspectives from Portland (US)

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Abstract

In the summer of 2020, Portland (OR) became an epicenter for racial justice protests that made the city resemble war-zone like spaces. This war-zone like resemblance, coupled with the presence of the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement as well as the imposed states of emergency and curfews, significantly impacted the mental health of refugees. Fear, isolation, and immobilities were heightened, and regressions in mental health (resurfacing post-traumatic stress) were experienced by many. In this report, we share findings from our interviews with fifteen refugees and representatives of organizations working in the context of migration during the unrests in Portland. We situate our findings in broader interconnected dynamics of immobilities, mental health, and livelihoods, and provide lessons learned from the field. Premised on our community-based/informed practice, we contend that discourse and politics around mental health must become part of broader discussions and measures on health in the context of migration altogether.

Key Words

Mental Health, Refugees, Racial Justice, Protest, Portland

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Introduction

"The greatest crisis after COVID-19 will be a mental health crisis".[4] This foresight by the president of a community-based refugee organization in Portland, Oregon (US) frames our report on immobilities, mental health, and livelihoods.[5] During the COVID-19 pandemic, community efforts such as providing telehealth appointments with multilingual psychiatrists and sharing videos that feature emotional well-being advice have been imperative to refugees' mental health based on our interviews and observations.

While the pandemic has impacted Portland in various ways, the city also faced unparalleled unrest during the summer of 2020 when Portland became an epicenter for racial justice protests that made the city resemble war-zone like spaces. This, in addition to the presence of the Department of Homeland Security and increased activities by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, significantly affected the mental health of refugees. Fear, isolation, and immobilities were heightened, and regressions in mental health (with post-traumatic stress (PTSD) resurfacing) were experienced by many. Portland ranks 11th among US cities in resettling refugees with nearly 68,000 refugees having arrived since 1975.[6]

Over two months (May–July 2020), we conducted interviews with fifteen refugees and representatives of organizations working in the context of migration. We complemented these interviews with observations of community efforts that support refugee livelihoods during this pandemic. Based on our interviews and observations - focusing on the livelihoods of refugee women - we identified three aspects that have affected refugee livelihoods in Portland: restricted access to resources and services, lack of information about resources and services, and fear due to ever-changing policies on migration and social protections. Overshadowing these aspects were concerns about health, particularly mental health.

From losing jobs and healthcare to becoming essential workers and to finding oneself *again* in unprecedented situations of limited mobility, refugees in Portland have been confronted with mounting concerns about sustaining their livelihoods during the pandemic and beyond. These concerns took on a specific form over the summer of 2020 given the unrest that unfolded in the city, reminding refugees of spaces that they had fled

[4] Personal communication, May-July 2020.

[5] We use the concept of livelihoods to comprise the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living.

[6] City of Portland, "People and Programs," 2021, Accessed July 7, 2021. https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/article/448753
State of Oregon, "Refugees in Oregon Data," 2018, Accessed July 7, 2021. https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ASSISTANCE/REFUGEE/Pages/data.aspx

from such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Myanmar, and Syria. In analyzing these impacts within a framework of mental health, we hope to raise awareness around an often overlooked aspect in migration discourse and politics, and to connect varied dynamics that have affected refugee livelihoods in Portland. Our findings are situated within local and national legal-institutional structures, yet our lessons learned carry global implications as we believe that mental health measures in the context of migration require a global response. This report is guided by our community-based/informed practice given our positions at a human rights NGO and a Portland-based university. Our project on migration, gender, and COVID-19 is ongoing.

Protests, Justice, and Re-traumatization: The Case of Portland

In March 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) temporarily suspended refugee resettlement.[7] This suspension was often coupled with full or partial border closures.[8] Restrictions to mobility, however, have not only applied at international borders, but also within national borders. In the US, for instance, state-specific travel restrictions have left many confined to localized spaces.[9] Limited mobilities in Portland were heightened during the summer of 2020 as the city became an epicenter for racial justice protests. With curfews and states of emergency in place, Portland resembled war-zone like spaces for weeks.

Protests first erupted on May 28 as demands for justice of the killing of George Floyd echoed across the country. More than 100 protestors gathered outside the Multnomah County Justice Center and marched for several blocks.[10] The following day, Mayor Ted Wheeler declared a state of emergency as damaged properties were reported overnight. The mayor's curfew prohibited all residents from traveling on any public street or in any public place. Exemptions were made for those traveling to or from work, seeking

[7] International Organization for Migration (IOM), "IOM, UNHCR announce temporary suspension of resettlement travel for refugees," *IOM*, March 17, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.iom.int/news/iom-unhcr-announce-temporary-suspension-resettlement-travel-refugees.
[8] Sabrina Rodriguez, "Trump to partially close U.S.-Mexico border," *Politico*, March 20, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021. https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/20/us-mexico-ready-to-partially-close-border-138946.
[9] Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Travel During COVID-19," *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2021, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html.
[10] Mark Graves, "100 days of Black Lives Matter protests in Portland: Timeline and photos trace the arc of events," *The Oregonian*, July 5, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2020/09/100-days-of-black-lives-matter-protests-in-portland-timeline-and-photos-trace-the-arc-of-events.html.

help in an emergency or those experiencing homelessness. Violations of the curfews carried fines of up to $500.[11]

On June 5, thousands gathered to march over the Burnside Bridge into Downtown Portland. While protests soon also sprang up in other places in the state of Oregon, the protests in Portland received national and international media coverage as the marches continued.[12] Thousands of protesters shut down Interstate 84, stalling traffic while shouting "Whose streets? Our streets!" on Day 12, leading to the resignation of Portland Police Chief Jami Resch.[13]

As protests grew and became more dispersed over the month of June, police responses intensified. On June 25, for instance, Portland Police used tear gas and other weapons to diffuse crowds. Tensions between protesters and police also clashed outside of the police union headquarters in North Portland on June 30, with Portland Police declaring the events a riot.[14] A critical element of the protests during the month of June was the taking down of federal statutes (i.e. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, etc.) which prompted former President Donald J. Trump to speak about the Portland protests at a rally on June 21.[15]

Subsequently, Trump issued an Executive Order (13933) on June 26, commanding the protection of federal monuments, memorials, and statues.[16] The order stated that several federal agencies, notably the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of Defense, and the Attorney General, shall provide assistance by deploying personnel "as appropriate and consistent with applicable law" (Section 5).[17] The order was set in place for six months unless otherwise extended.

On July 2, several federal law enforcement agencies were deployed to Portland, including the US Marshals Service, the Federal Protective Service, Immigration and

[11] Tess Riski, "Mayor Ted Wheeler Calls on Federal Officers to Leave Portland: "We Do Not Need or Want Their Help," *Willamette Week*, July 14, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.wweek.com/news/city/2020/07/14/mayor-ted-wheeler-calls-on-federal-officers-to-leave-portland-we-do-not-need-or-want-their-help/.

[12] Dave Killen and Beth Nakamura, "Protests continue in a peaceful fifth night in Portland." *The Oregonian*, June 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.oregonlive.com/galleries/G4O3PPYJDRCQ3F4LNT7SHXXWBQ/

[13] Mark Graves, "100 days of Black Lives Matter protests in Portland: Timeline and photos trace the arc of events."

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] National Archives, "Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence," *Federal Register*, July 2, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/07/02/2020-14509/protecting-american-monuments-memorials-and-statues-and-combating-recent-criminal-violence.

[17] Ibid.

Customs Enforcement, and the Department of Homeland Security.[18] The deployment did not come at the request of the city or state government, and led to significant backlash by officials.[19] Portland Mayor Wheeler repeatedly called for federal agencies to leave the city: "I told the acting secretary that my biggest immediate concern is the violence federal officers brought to our streets in recent days, and the life-threatening tactics his agents use…We do not need or want their help."[20] Similarly, several state lawmakers issued a statement condemning the actions of federal law enforcement which included the use of teargas and other harmful tactics, as well as the use of unmarked vehicles to grab protesters off the streets far from their intended deployment near federal monuments, memorials, and statues.[21] Subsequently, protests arose against these actions and the presence of federal agencies, leading to a deal between Oregon Governor Kate Brown and the Trump administration for federal agents to withdraw to standby locations. According to reports, federal agencies ultimately left Portland by the beginning of August.[22]

It is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests in Portland that we conducted interviews with refugees and representatives of organizations working in the context of migration. Although the focus of our conversations was about refugee women's livelihoods, the unparalleled situation in Portland was omnipresent as we spoke about challenges and needs at the time. Many of the women interviewed shared their reflections on the protests and racial justice more broadly, while most of the organization representatives interviewed told us about the mental health impact that the protests and the pervasive racial injustices had and will continue to have on refugees. Apart from one refugee woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo, none of the other refugee

[18] Tess Riski, "What Have Six Weeks of Portland Protests Wrought?" *Willamette Week*, July 8, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.wweek.com/news/2020/07/08/what-have-six-weeks-of-portland-protests-wrought/

[19] Ben Fox and Gillian Flaccus, "Homeland Security gets new role under Trump monument order," *KOIN*, July 9, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, http://archive.is/4OC7h#selection-1049.3-1049.61.

[20] Tess Riski, "Mayor Ted Wheeler Calls on Federal Officers to Leave Portland: "We Do Not Need or Want Their Help."

[21] Kaitlin Flanigan, "'Intolerable': Lawmakers blast federal response to Portland protests," *KOIN*, July 15, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.koin.com/news/protests/intolerable-lawmakers-blast-federal-response-to-portland-protests/.
Jonathan Levinson and Conrad Wilson, "Federal Law Enforcement Use Unmarked Vehicles To Grab Protesters Off Portland Streets," *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, July 16, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.opb.org/news/article/federal-law-enforcement-unmarked-vehicles-portland-protesters/.
Sergio Olmos, Mike Baker, and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, "Federal Agents Unleash Militarized Crackdown on Portland," *New York Times*, July 17, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/us/portland-protests.html.

[22] Adam Taylor, Nick Miroff, and David A. Fahrentold, "Calm returns to Portland as federal agents withdraw," *Washington Post*, July 31, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/calm-returns-to-portland-as-federal-agents-withdraw/2020/07/31/3606b35a-d364-11ea-9038-af089b63ac21_story.html.

women reported being directly engaged in the protests, yet the impacts thereof were felt by all: whether it was through fears of going outside, PTSD resurfacing based on local media coverage, reflecting on their own flight for safety, or worrying about their neighborhoods and communities, refugee women were deeply affected by the protests.

For instance, the protests came up in a conversation with a Rohingya refugee woman as we talked about the impacts that the pandemic has posed to the livelihood of her family. She stated: "We are worried. If we go outside, we are worried. Every family is worried about what will happen."[23] This worry was compounded by the presence of immigration officials, anti-migrant rhetoric and policies across institutional levels, and a general fear of authoritarian responses to protests. Although the woman described Portland as her new home, she remained vigilant in understanding what was unfolding during the summer of 2020. "Whatever we have to face, we will face," she noted when speaking about Black Lives Matter and "how different places come with different challenges."[24] In this context, the woman mentioned the work of community-based organizations that have provided information not only on COVID-19 measures, but also on racial injustices and the histories and legacies thereof in the US.

In our conversation with a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the protests came up in regards to the woman's future plans and her experiences in higher education. When talking about pressing needs of refugee women after the pandemic, the woman mentioned worries about children and young adults, such as herself, falling behind in education because of persistent racial inequalities. She shared that her involvement in the protests was not supported by her educational institution, raising concerns about "where to go from here."[25] The woman further elaborated: "There is no guide for migrants to go in the right direction. Most of us go in circles…There is no one leading the way."[26] Having changed majors four times and being a first-generation student, the refugee woman called for more professional development opportunities to navigate upward mobility in a system poised by inequalities. "It's hard to keep the goal alive," she states, speaking here of her professional goal to become a lawyer.[27]

The importance of education coupled with the additional challenges posed by COVID-19 also framed our conversation with an Afghan refugee woman. The woman brought up the Portland protests as we were talking about her professional goals, namely

[23] Personal communication, May-July 2020.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

to become a dentist. In learning about her life in Afghanistan, the woman shared that although in her home country "there is a lot of fighting" and that many freedoms are restricted, she was able to receive an education.[28] In the US, however, her educational attainment has been hindered by financial constraints. In this context, she referenced the protests, especially the broader calls for racial justice, which to her were about freedoms more generally: "The first thing in the US is freedom and equality. I keep looking and looking, I can't find it… This is the land of opportunity for whom?"[29]

This probing question reveals the deep reflections that many of the interviewed refugees shared with us about their life and livelihoods in the US during the pandemic and beyond. The question also points to the impacts on mental health that migration, particularly forced migration and displacement, triggers during flight and in destination countries. Together, these varied experiences have been pronounced in the context of educational and financial worries in that the pandemic has interrupted educational attainment and language learning while also pushing many into precarious labor absent of receiving social protections, for instance.

Mental Health and Migration: A Crisis within a Crisis

"There is no health without mental health" - United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres shared in his call to action in May 2020.[30] In his appeal to the international community, Guterres specifically emphasized the impacts of COVID-19 on mental health, noting that the virus is not only "attacking our physical health, it is also increasing our psychological suffering."[31] In this context, Guterres mentioned isolation and restrictions on movements, and highlighted the exacerbated mental health toll of those displaced. According to a World Health Organization survey, COVID-19 has partially disrupted mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide at a time of upsurge in the prevalence and severity of mental health issues.[32]

Disruptions in the access to mental health resources and services during flight and in destination countries are detrimental to the well-being of refugees. With federal and state-level social protection systems in destination countries often being categorized by

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] United Nations, "UN chief on COVID-19 and the need for action on mental health," *United Nations*, May 14, 2020, Accessed March 22, 202, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=XLJlqcFYfeM&feature=youtu.be.

[31] Ibid.

[32] World Health Organization, "The impact of COVID-19 on mental, neurological and substance use services," *World Health Organization*, October 5, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/978924012455.

migration status, refugees face specific challenges and needs during this pandemic and beyond. In the US, for instance, access to social protections in the context of health derives from welfare reforms in the 1990s.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (or Welfare Reform Act - WRA) constituted a major overhaul of US welfare policy, including important changes to migrant eligibility to social protections. A four-tier system based on migration status was created: the broadest eligibility was reserved for US citizens; next came refugees and asylees; limited access was imposed on regular migrants; and, irregular migrants remained ineligible for almost all social protection programs.[33]

In matters of health care, refugee eligibility for Medicaid, which is a joint federal/state program administered by states that provides basic and emergency health care, became limited with WRA. Before the reforms, refugees were eligible for full Medicaid, while after the reforms, refugees became eligible for full Medicaid only for their first five years in the US, although coverage may be extended after that period at a state's discretion.[34]

State discretion in refugee eligibility to social protection programs has played an important role during the pandemic and frames our research findings in significant ways. Oregon - our ethnographic field site - provides eligible refugees (as legal status) access to some social protection programs. Important to note here is that the term 'refugee' encompasses groups who have been designated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement as being eligible for services as refugees. The Office provides cash and medical assistance (administered through the states) for up to eight months upon arrival.[35]

Beyond this initial support and in an effort to assess eligibility for social protection programs based on specific migration status, refugees are generally encouraged to consult with designated Refugee Resettlement Agencies (RRA). In Oregon, there are three designated RRAs, all of which we interviewed as part of our research. These RRAs assist refugees in applying for assistance and provide case management services for up to sixty months after arrival in the US.[36]

It is within this complex structure of social protection programs across institutional levels (international, national, and state) and of the protests in Portland during the summer of 2020 that our findings are situated. In connecting dynamics of increased immobilities,

[33] Thomas J. Espenshade, Jessica L. Baraka, and Gregory A. Huber, "Implications of the 1996 Welfare and Immigration Reform Acts for US Imigration," *Population and Development Review* 23, no. 4 (1997): 769-80.
[34] Ibid.
[35] State of Oregon, "Service Resources," *Oregon Department of Human Services*, 2021, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/ASSISTANCE/REFUGEE/Pages/service-areas.aspx.
[36] Ibid.

increased mental health concerns, and increased fears about livelihoods, our interviews with representatives working in the context of migration reveal important insights.

For example, in our conversation with a professional in the legal field, we learned about the additional challenges that COVID-19 has posed in providing legal resources and services to refugees, and how this has led to severe mental health impacts. The representative shared that given the frequent changes in asylum policy during the Trump administration and specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, asylum applications have become more extensive and asylum interviews have become more complex. In this context, the professional spoke to the stress that asylum procedures pose on asylum claimants, their families, and their lawyers: "The desire of trying to attain some sort of support or resolution or immigration relief has become less attainable and more anxiety producing, more stressful, both for the client and the legal support team, the attorney, the receptionists, the paralegals, everyone involved."[37]

During the time of our interviews, this increased anxiety was further amplified by the presence of the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement in response to the protests. The organization's representative emphasized that although these developments did not directly relate to immigration *per se*, the mere presence of federal agencies alongside already compounded fears affected the mental health of many refugees in Portland. One of the main challenges that the representative identified in this context concerned the provision of culturally and linguistically responsive mental health resources and services:

> "The hardest, most difficult thing has been to find culturally competent psychologists and therapists. I spoke to a renowned therapist here in Oregon and I said 'Look, with COVID-19 and everything that's happening, I need some resources, do you have somebody? You know I got your contact info from so and so, and I'm trying to compile a list so that I can give it to clients.' And she just laughed, and I said 'Why are you laughing?' She was like, 'Because pre-COVID-19, we were struggling with this, so now with COVID-19 there is definitely none.' And she said, 'I laughed cause I don't want to cry and I don't want to get mad, it's my coping mechanism.' And I said 'Okay, well that's not good news."[38]

The challenge of providing culturally and linguistically responsive mental health resources and services also came up in our interview with a program director at one of Oregon's three RRAs. The program director noted that there has been "a heightened need for emotional health support because of the stressful situation in Portland," speaking here

[37] Personal communication, May-July 2020.
[38] Ibid.

specifically about the ongoing protests.[39] The organization's representative shared that many refugees have come back for additional mental health resources and services even though the official period of support by the RRA had ended. Obstacles mentioned in this context concerned remote engagement as it pertains to emotional and mental support, noting that telecommunication therapy comes with certain barriers such as digital access and digital skills.

The program director linked this heightened increase in demand for emotional and mental support directly to the protests. The protests have been "confusing" and "scary" to refugees in Portland, so the organization's representative said.[40] She pointedly stated: "Portland Downtown looks like the war-torn crisis they [refugees] fled from."[41] The re-traumatization of flight and the regressions in mental health triggered by the protests has significantly impacted refugees' livelihoods while access to resources and services remain restricted.

This restricted access to resources and services was also a main point of discussion in our conversation with the president of a community-based refugee organization. Indeed, when asked about the main challenges faced by refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization's president noted: "The greatest crisis after COVID-19 will be a mental health crisis."[42] The representative further elaborated that this mental health crisis is already on the way as her organization similarly saw an increased demand for emotional and mental health support:

> "When we look at the topic of mental health, we need to remember… that they [refugees] are all fleeing trauma, their focus is survival, they are in survival mode. It has taken many years to become stabilized, they [refugees] are starting to understand the systems. Suddenly COVID hits… The stress in the home is very high, PTSD will kick in. Clients are falling into deep depression, anxiety, fear. How will they be able to readjust? How much time will it take them to readjust?"[43]

The stress of COVID-19 coupled with the fears prompted by the presence of the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement due to the protests significantly impacted the process of healing that the organization's president described. Prior to the pandemic, the organization ran a community-based program with psychologists in the form of monthly social gatherings that address trauma and healing. These programs were discontinued due to restrictions on gatherings, yet the organization

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

continued to provide mental health resources and services through telehealth appointments with multilingual psychiatrists and by sharing videos with emotional well-being advice.

Finding ways to continue to provide mental health resources and services as exemplified in our interviews with Portland-based organizations has been critical in supporting refugee livelihoods during this pandemic. In the case of Portland, the already heightened anxieties and concerns experienced by refugees were amplified by the protests that made the city resemble war-zone like spaces that refugees indeed fled from. As we learned, increased fear and regressions in mental health (with PTSD resurfacing) were prevalent among refugees during the summer of 2020, and we have yet to see the long-term effects thereof.

Lessons Learned from Portland: Immobilities, Mental Health, and Livelihoods

"It [the protests in the US] brings back a lot of memories… I did not know this could be happening over here too."[44] These reflections by a Cameroonian refugee speak to our findings from Portland and highlight the interconnectedness between immobilities, mental health, and livelihoods that have amplified experiences in regards to restricted access to resources and services, lack of information about resources and services, as well as fear due to ever-changing policy on migration and social protections. As a collection of interviews with refugees from across the world demonstrates, these dynamics are global in scope and require a global response to the challenges and needs faced at the time.[45] In sharing our findings from the field in the context of our work at a human rights NGO, several key lessons can be drawn.

We find that culturally and linguistically responsive mental health resources and services, such as providing mental healthcare in various languages and being open to non-Western approaches to health, are key in discussions around access to social protection systems. This is not only the case during flight, but also in destination countries. Given the complex and varied structures of social protection systems in destination countries that are often based on migration status, an appeal to universal health coverage must be made. Universal health coverage promotes a more coherent and integrated approach to health

[44] Kate Morrissey, "Learning About the Past of One's Place by Encountering Others' Stories," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 3, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/immigration/story/2020-07-03/asylum-racial-justice-protests

[45] United Nations Refugee Agency, "Refugees raise voices to push for racial justice," *Medium.com*, July 3, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://medium.com/@UNHCR/refugees-raise-voices-to-push-for-racial-justice-dc5ec3fa8de5.

that is inclusive of all, irrespective of migration status. We hold that this appeal must include mental health as part of broader health provisions.[46]

We also hold that community-based/engaged approaches are critical in addressing the interconnected dynamics of immobilities, mental health, and livelihoods, and their impacts on refugees. We specifically call for community-based/engaged approaches in programs and activities that speak to current developments, such as the protests in Portland at the time of our research. As we learned from refugees and representatives of organizations working in the context of migration, community efforts can provide proximate and context-specific resources that adapt to developments as they unfold.

Another key lesson learned from Portland is the importance of combating hate and discrimination in destination countries. In the case of Portland, the city's history and legacy of white supremacy and racism continues to affect minoritized groups in unparalleled ways.[47] The presence of hate groups such as the Proud Boys, the Patriot Front, and the Oregonians for Immigration Reform affect the mobilities, mental health, and livelihoods of refugees during times of unrest and beyond.[48] We contend that the rise in far-right groups and discrimination against migrants presents a global phenomenon and hereby requires a global response.

Relatedly, we find that the increased policing and militarization of spaces, as seen in Portland through the presence of the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement - and as seen at borders around the world -, must be addressed in efforts of ensuring the mobilities, mental health resources and services, and livelihoods of refugees.[49] The use of tear gas and other harmful tactics by federal agencies during the protests in Portland, coupled with the imposed curfews and state of emergencies, made the city resemble war-zone like spaces. As we learned about the intricate impacts of the protests on the mental health of refugees in our interviews, a call for the de-securitization of spaces is pressing, during flight and in destination countries.

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[46] World Health Organization, "Migration and universal health coverage and quality," *World Health Organization*, 2021, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.who.int/migrants/about/mh-qhc/en/.

[47] Karen J Gibson, "Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment, 1940-2000," *Transforming Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2007): 3-25.
Alana Semuels, "The Racist History of Portland, the Whitest City in America," *The Atlantic*, July 22, 2016, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/07/racist-history-portland/492035/.
Ari Shapiro, "How Portland's Racist History Informs Today's Protests," *National Public Radio* July 30, 2020. Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/07/30/897298379/how-portlands-racist-history-informs-today-s-protests.

[48] Southern Poverty Law Center, "In 2020, 11 Hate Groups Were Tracked in Oregon," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2021, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.splcenter.org/states/oregon.

[49] Mixed Migration Centre, "The ever-rising securitisation of mixed migration," July 17, 2020, Accessed March 22, 2021, https://mixedmigration.org/articles/the-ever-rising-securitisation-of-mixed-migration/

The compounded anxieties and stress invoked by the interconnectedness of limited mobilities, restricted access to mental health resources and services, and imperilled livelihood creation, have been further heightened by ever-changing policies on migration and social protections. With regards to the US, changes in admission policy as well as regulations around usage of social protection resources had significant impacts on refugees in Portland. For instance, changes in the public-charge rule, expanding the criteria for determining whether applicants for permanent residency can be denied on the basis of past use of social protection programs, was a key point of concern in our interviews.[50]

We would like to conclude our report by echoing the statement: there is no health without mental health.[51] While the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests in Portland have laid bare the importance of access to mental health resources and services, it is our hope that by sharing these findings from the field and by outlining lessons learned, discourse and politics around mental health in the context of migration become part of broader discussions and measures on health altogether. In addressing needs and challenges of refugees during the pandemic and beyond, we urge for a critical engagement with the deeply intertwined historical, structural, and institutional frameworks that shape (im)mobilities, mental health, and livelihoods of refugees in Portland and across the world.

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[50] Hamatual Bernstein, Dulce Gonzalez, Michale Karpman, and Stephen Zuckerman, "Amid confusion over the public charge rule, immigrant families continued avoiding public benefits in 2019," *Urban Institute*, May 18, 2020. Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.urban.org/research/publication/amid-confusion-over-public-charge-rule-immigrant-families-continued-avoiding-public-benefits-2019.
[51] United Nations, "UN chief on COVID-19 and the need for action on mental health," *United Nations*.

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Coronavirus Prevention Techniques and Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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Abstract

This field report examines the case of the COVID-19 pandemic and Syrian refugees in Jordan. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Jordanian government enacted some of the world's strictest lockdown and quarantine measures. They included country-wide curfews; a complete lack of movement outside of one's home, including bans on driving or taking out one's trash; and systematic governmental distribution of bread and medicines to the entire country. Over the months to follow, these extreme measures were lifted, and instead implemented in targeted hotspots. However, fears of widespread outbreaks remained. While the rather severe lockdown measures were received quite well domestically, they proved unsustainable for the longer-term livelihoods of the more than 650,000 registered Syrian refugees in the country. Most of these Syrian refugees live in a variety of urban areas (81 percent), with a significant number also residing in camps (over 125,000), which means that these coronavirus prevention techniques have different outcomes in the two groups. Using 305 quantitative surveys distributed to Syrian refugees in both urban areas and camps, we found that 91 percent of all the respondents indicated that coronavirus had a significant impact on their lives. The field report discusses that out-of-camp refugees reported distinctive vulnerabilities under the coronavirus prevention measures, most acutely through decreased mobility, which reduces incomes, prevents continuation of in-person schooling, and increases loneliness and isolation more than their peers residing in camps.

Keywords

Syrian Refugees, Jordan, COVID-19, Prevention Techniques, Economy, Lockdown, Pandemic response

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Introduction

On March 14, 2020, the Jordanian government announced that, to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus, the government would enact a complete closure of its borders, schools, and many non-essential businesses; implement country-wide curfews; enforce a policy of being home-bound with a complete lack of movement outside of one's home, including bans on driving or taking out one's trash; and reach out through a systematic governmental distribution of bread, water, food, necessary medicines, and even cigarettes to the entire country's citizens, foreign residents, and refugees.[4] In what was one of the strictest sets of Covid-prevention measures in the world, the multi-pronged strategy was enforced by police in the form of arrests, heightened surveillance of the populace, and checkpoints for road closures. Within the following ten days, 1,657 were arrested for breaking curfew, and 600 cars were impounded.[5] Irbid, a major urban area in the north of the country, came under strict military lockdown. It emerged as a coronavirus "hotspot" due to a wedding that took place on March 13 (the night before the government's announcement of closures).[6]

While the rather extreme lockdown measures were initially well-received amongst Jordanian nationals, they proved unsustainable for the longer-term livelihoods of the domestic population, including an estimated 1 million Syrian refugees in the country,[7] of which more than 650,000 are officially registered with the UNHCR.[8] Most of these Syrian refugees live precariously in Jordan's northern urban and peri-urban areas (81 percent), and they are reliant upon informal labor without a regular contract for a significant portion of their income, and also struggle to access healthcare when needed.[9] Many Syrians also reside in refugee camps (19 percent), which are more densely populated than urban areas and have fewer interactions with their Jordanian hosts.[10]

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[4] Ersan, M. "Plan to feed Jordanians under curfew sows chaos." *Al-Monitor*. (March 25, 2020). https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/03/nebulosity-plagues-jordan-amid-curfew.html

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[10] ibid

These coronavirus prevention techniques prompted important and distinctive challenges for the entire population of Syrians in Jordan, but most especially for those refugees that reside in urban areas. This field report reveals the distinctive vulnerabilities that out-of-camp refugees have when it comes to their economic status and income as well as their connections to other Syrians and Jordanian hosts. Nearly 80 percent of Syrians residing in urban areas reported that the coronavirus crisis has a "significant impact", which is four-times the rate reported by those that reside inside the refugee camp. Namely, affected urban Syrians indicated (64 percent) that the crisis has a significant impact primarily because it results in reduced mobility, which impacts their ability to retrieve financial remittances and humanitarian aid, seek comfort and social interactions from friends and family, and attend work, all of which they are more dependent upon than their peers that reside in camps. While a majority of the Syrians we interviewed reported a significant impact of the covid restrictions, those that reside outside camps reported feeling its repercussions most acutely.

Explaining the COVID-19 Restrictions in Jordan

Compared to other countries, Jordan's response was quite austere, with some analysts calling it "draconian."[11] The three-pronged approach of 1) a nationwide curfew, 2) closed borders, and 3) active military patrols with arrests was considered one of the world's toughest. However, as of that time, the country registered just over 100 positive COVID tests. As of April 26, 2020, Jordan registered fewer than 450 cases with a daily growth of only 4-10 cases, on average. This raises the question: why has the Jordanian government been so tough? There are three primary reasons:[12]

The first reason is that such measures can be and are justified by reference to the Jordanian health care system's capacity: hospitals only have 1.5 beds per 1,000 people,[13] which is lower than the global average of 2.89.[14] The second reason is that Jordan's government has a well-developed coercive capacity and martial strengths. The approach of "playing to one's strengths" of emergency governance with the military in Jordan

[11] Dhingra, R. "Refugees at risk in Jordan's response to COVID-19." *Middle East Research and Information Project* 8 (2020). https://merip.org/2020/04/refugees-at-risk-in-jordans-response-to-covid-19/

[12] Schon, J. "Protecting Refugees in the Middle East from Coronavirus: A Fight against Two Reinforcing Contagions." In Lynch, Marc. "The COVID-19 pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa." *POMEPS Studies* 39 (2020): 1-80.

[13] The World Bank Data. "Hospital Beds (per 1,000 people) – Jordan" *The World Bank.* (2017). https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MED.BEDS.ZS?locations=JO

[14] The World Bank Data. "Hospital Beds (per 1,000 people)" *The World Bank.* (2019). https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MED.BEDS.ZS

attempts to make up for the lower capacities for governance in other areas such as bureaucratic or civil service.[15]

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has had dreadful implications for public health that compound with economic problems, which Jordan has been experiencing dramatically in recent years. Before the pandemic, economic life in Jordan was poor at best: 15.7 percent of Jordanians lived below the poverty line; unemployment rates were nearly 40 percent amongst youth; and 46 percent of workers were employed in informal/non-regularized labor, especially in micro- or small- enterprises.[16] From 2012-2018,[17] the Jordanian government had enacted austerity policies as mandated by their agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), including the lifting of government subsidies on such basic commodities as petrol, electricity, grain, and fodder, which hit everyone's budgets hard. In 2019 and 2020 the Jordanian government had planned to move away from these austerity policies, and instead expand welfare policies including a sales tax exemption and new economic stimulus packages that would better fund public services such as education and healthcare for its citizen and non-citizen residents, and to begin to remedy domestic economic challenges.[18]

However, due to the coronavirus, the economy has now experienced tremendous income losses. The strongest impact has been felt amongst day laborers and informal sector workers; COVID-related unemployment is now over 70 percent.[19] The public sector, which is considered historically enviably secure employment, saw a 25 percent job loss and nearly another 50 percent of public employees cited income loss.[20] COVID-related economic losses have surely wiped away welfare policy possibilities and budget lines that could have otherwise improved public services for all in Jordan, including Syrian refugees both inside and outside camps.[21]

In addition to loss of income, price increases and inflation on goods immediately went into effect countrywide. While the government has worked hard to limit price gouging and enforce price ceilings, as well as limit the exporting of certain foodstuffs, the

[15] Hoffman, A. "The Securitization of the Coronavirus Crisis in the Middle East." In Lynch, Marc. "The COVID-19 pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa." *POMEPS Studies* 39 (2020): 1-80.

[16] UNICEF. "Geographic Multidimensional Vulnerability Analysis – Jordan." *Amman: United Nations Children's Fund.* (2020). https://www.unicef.org/jordan/Geographic-Multidimensional-Vulnerability-Analysis.

[17] Schwedler, J. "Jordan's austerity protests in context." *Atlantic Council*. (June 8, 2018). https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/jordan-s-austerity-protests-in-context/

[18] Hoffman, A. "The Securitization of the Coronavirus Crisis in the Middle East."

[19] Hartnett, A. S., al-Natour, E., & al-Ajlouni, L. "Drastic measures: coercive enforcement and economic effects of pandemic suppression in Jordan." In Lynch, Marc. "The COVID-19 Pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa" *POMEPS Studies* 39 (2020): 65. https://pomeps.org/drastic-measures-coercive-enforcement-and-economic-effects-of-pandemic-suppression-in-jordan

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

market has responded to the rush, and at times profiting greatly.[22] All signs point to continued economic hardship. The coronavirus in Jordan made a bad situation worse.

Months after the initial country-wide lockdown, the government changed to a strategy of targeted and partial lockdowns to maintain a balance between public health and the devastating outcomes on the economy.[23] The government also provided partial financial support to Jordanians and Syrians who had been employed formally and with a work permit and lost their jobs in the private sector due to the lockdown implications and reduced working/opening hours. With businesses in various sectors closing, government revenues dropped significantly, making the government incapable of maintaining these supports as the pandemic has been prolonged with unexpected future implications.

Vulnerabilities of Syrian Refugees in Jordan to Coronavirus

According to UNHCR,[24] most Syrian refugees in Jordan (nearly 50 percent) are between 18 and 59 years old. One-third are children under the age of 11. The remainder are teens between ages 12 and 17 (14 percent), and those over age 60 (4 percent). There are slightly more males than females (50.6 percent : 49.4 percent). Nearly half of Syrian refugees in Jordan originate from nearby Daraa.[25] Half have started or completed primary education, and 15 percent of adults older than 20 have achieved a secondary or post-secondary degree.[26] Most live outside camps (81 percent).[27]

Within this greater context of Jordan, there are two major challenges to protecting Syrian refugees in Jordan specifically from coronavirus: 1) the virus itself and 2) grinding poverty made worse in this context.[28]

Firstly, vulnerability to the virus itself is important to consider. Syrians in Jordan have higher rates of comorbidities through chronic illness for which they may receive more

[22] Allen, A. "Jordan caps commodity prices to prevent Covid-19 price gouging." *Procurement*. (March 31, 2020). https://www.cips.org/supply-management/news/2020/march/jordan-caps-commodity-prices-to-prevent-covid-19-price-gouging/

[23] Kebede, Tewodros Aragie, Svein Erik Stave, Maha Kattaa, and Michaela Prokop. "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enterprises in Jordan." *International Labour Organization.* (2020). https://www.undp.org/content/dam/jordan/docs/DRR/Jordan%20Enterprise%20Report.pdf

[24] UNHCR. "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Total Registered Syrian Refugees." *UNHCR*. (August 31, 2021). http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36

[25] Tiltnes, Å.A., Zhang, H., & Pedersen, J. *The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan: Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps* (Fafo-report 2019:04). Oslo: Fafo. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67914.pdf

[26] ibid

[27] UNHCR. "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Total Registered Syrian Refugees." *UNHCR*. (August 31, 2021). http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36

[28] Schon, J. "Protecting Refugees in the Middle East from Coronavirus: A Fight against Two Reinforcing Contagions." In Lynch, Marc. "The COVID-19 pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa." *POMEPS Studies* 39 (2020): 1-80.

intensive medical care than their Jordanian counterparts, including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease. Thus, while Syrians tend to be younger and more likely female than their Jordanian neighbors, they are also more likely to live with conditions for comorbidities.[29]

Second, Syrians in Jordan tend to live in high density areas, especially Jordan's northern cities and the poorest areas of Amman, as well as refugees in camps. Two-thirds of households living in Jordan's Syrian refugee camps have more than three people per room, making effective self-isolation impossible.[30] Social distancing in public is also difficult in the two densely populated main camps, Zaatari (hosting about 76,000 refugees) and Azraq (about 36,000).[31] In urban areas, Syrian refugees live in similarly crowded settings, with dwellings consisting of two or three rooms for households of five or more.[32] One neighborhood in urban Amman, Hashmi Shamali, is home to a large portion of the cities' poorest refugees and has experienced several rounds of complete lockdown due to its status as a "virus hotspot."[33] In addition to challenges to social distancing in high-population density areas, water shortages continue to plague Jordan, making frequent hand washing a challenge.[34]

Poverty and the challenges of employment and income compound this. Approximately 80 percent of all Syrian refugees live under the poverty line and only 2 percent of households have savings.[35] Most refugees do not have the economic means to stock up on supplies necessary for a lockdown. Specific for Syrian refugees, the labor market sectors they most frequently occupy are the construction, agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and food service. These service-sector jobs are not compatible with work-from-home demands, and since most of the labor is informal, they are then simply out of income. For those in the refugee camps, their hard-earned mobility out of the camps for work is now entirely closed, as the camps are sealed off from outside contact entirely.

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[29] Doocy, S., Lyles, E., Akhu-Zaheya, L., Oweis, A., Al Ward, N., & Burton, A. "Health service utilization among Syrian refugees with chronic health conditions in Jordan." *PLoS One,* 11(4), e0150088 (2016). https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?type=printable&id=10.1371/journal.pone.0150088

[30] Dhingra, R. "Refugees at risk in Jordan's response to COVID-19." *Middle East Research and Information Project* 8 (2020). https://merip.org/2020/04/refugees-at-risk-in-jordans-response-to-covid-19/

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Lane, A. "Voices from the Middle East: Providing Urgent Aid to Refugees in Amman, Jordan." *Middle East Research and Information Project.* (April, 2020). https://merip.org/2020/04/voices-from-the-middle-east-providing-urgent-aid-to-refugees-in-amman-jordan/

[34] Nonay, C. & R. Advani. "From emergency response to resilient recovery: How we are helping the water sector in MENA cope with COVID-19." *The World Bank Blog: The Water Blog.* (August 3, 2020). https://blogs.worldbank.org/water/emergency-response-resilient-recovery-how-we-are-helping-water-sector-mena-cope-covid-19

[35] Dhingra, R. "Refugees at risk in Jordan's response to COVID-19."

Supply chains continue for food into the camp and other necessary infrastructural support, but earlier fears of state surveillance are being felt under this lockdown.[36] Syrians in the camps are also asked to remain at home and practice social distancing, adding to concerns about increases in domestic violence and children's absence from schooling.[37]

The loss of income compounds challenges accessing health education and care. Many Syrian refugees have reported that they do not know what to do if they develop symptoms or want to report a suspected case.[38] While Syrians in Jordan receive subsidized access to government hospitals, one report indicated that 82 percent of Syrian refugees needed to borrow money in order to access urgent health care.[39] We can assume that the high costs of health care treatment would drive at least some Syrians away from formal, hospitalized care and into self-care and at-home treatments.

Poverty, in this case, is also challenging because it can contribute to misinformation and the seeking of alternative care, which may not be regulated.[40] In the earliest days of the pandemic, misinformation about the coronavirus was undeniably harmful to everyone around the world. Syrians in Jordan often report reticence to attract too much attention to themselves for fear of stigma and enhanced surveillance.[41] At least some Syrians are reluctant to seek medical attention outside the home, especially in some urban areas where healthcare can be difficult to access.[42] Thus, some Syrians may prefer to rely on other alternatives at home, such as folk medicine and herbal treatment recipes shared by their family members and friends, which carries with it the possibility of being vulnerable to misinformation.[43]

The Jordanian government has worked hard to counter misinformation and encourage an environment in which adherence to the law is the norm.[44] There are now

[36] Tobin S. A. et al. (2020). *Figurations of Displacement in Jordan and beyond:Empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal connections of Syrian refugees*.
[37] Plan International. "Jordan sees increase in domestic violence, poor access to family planning." *Plan International*. (May 20, 2020). https://plan-international.org/news/2020-05-20-covid-19-jordan-domestic-violence-poor-access-family-planning
[38] Schon, J. "Protecting Refugees in the Middle East from Coronavirus: A Fight against Two Reinforcing Contagions."
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[41] Tobin S. A. et al. *Figurations of Displacement in Jordan and beyond: Empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal connections of Syrian refugees.*
[42] ibid
[43] Al-Zoubi, H & RCO Jordan. "Protecting refugees from COVID-19 misinformation." *United Nations.* (2021). https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/first-person-refuge-covid-misinformation
[44] Tal, B. "In crisis: Jordan battles COVID-19 and misinformation." *Enheduanna: The Wilson Center.* (April 20, 2020). https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/crisis-jordan-battles-covid-19-and-misinformation

legal penalties for spreading misinformation, and the government is countering misinformation through daily news briefings and even open Facebook pages with announcements and information vetted by science. However, the poverty faced by the Syrians can contribute to their vulnerabilities to misinformation.

Study Field Sites and Research Methods

While much attention has been given to the Syrians in Jordan's refugee camps, the overwhelming majority of registered and non-registered refugees live in non-camp settings in urban areas (81 percent), with a smaller number in rural areas.[45] The estimated half-million Syrians living in urban areas concentrate mainly in four governorates (Amman, 29.5 percent; Mafraq; 24.8 percent; Irbid; 20.6 percent; Zarqa, 14.6 percent), with another 120,000 Syrians in refugee camps.

The greater Irbid area is the first research field site for this study. Before the influx of Syrian refugees, Irbid city was the second-largest urban area in the country (after the capital city of Amman) and was well-known for its high population density and a large number of institutions for higher education.[46] In 2016, about 30 percent of the country's urban Syrian refugees lived in the greater Irbid area.[47] The second field site, the city of Mafraq, is approximately 15 km from the Syrian border.[48] Pre-Syrian crisis, Mafraq was a small border town of 90,000 people that one could stop in while en-route to the Syrian border. Mafraq was one of the earliest sites for Syrian refugees to congregate in Jordan, given its proximity to southern Syria, where the anti-Assad regime demonstrations were quickly and violently repressed. The greater Mafraq area is now home to over 200,000 people, many or most of whom are Syrian.[49] Mafraq governorate is now considered the poorest in the country.[50] The last field site is Zaatari Camp. The camp opened in 2012. It

[45] Ledwith, A. Zaatari: The instant city. *Affordable Housing Institute*. (2014); UNHCR. "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Total Registered Syrian Refugees." http://sigus.scripts.mit.edu/x/files/Zaatari/AHIPublication.pdf

[46] UNHCR. *UNHCR Factsheet: Jordan: Field Office Irbid (October - December 2016)*. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unhcr-jordan-factsheet-field-office-irbid-october-december-2016

[47] Tiltnes, Å.A., Zhang, H., & Pedersen, J. *The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan: Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps.*; UNHCR. (2016). *UNHCR Factsheet: Jordan: Field Office Irbid (October - December 2016)*. https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unhcr-jordan-factsheet-field-office-irbid-october-december-2016

[48] Tiltnes, Å.A., Zhang, H., & Pedersen, J. *The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan: Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps.*

[49] ibid

[50] Al Sharafat, A. "Spatial inequality in Jordan." *Journal of Economics & Management*, (2019). 36, 71-83. https://doi.org/10.22367/jem.2019.36.04

was once home to about 100,000 Syrian refugees[51], but now has about 76,500 residents.[52] The camp is run jointly by UNHCR and the Jordanian government, with a large number of international and national NGOs assisting.

The data in this field report were collected as part of the EU-funded Horizon 2020 project "Transnational Figurations of Displacement" (TRAFIG – www.trafig.eu). From 2019 to 2022, the project brings together twelve partner organisations as they investigate long-lasting displacement situations at multiple sites in Asia, Africa and Europe and analyse options to improve displaced people's lives, including Syrians in Jordan. The project asserts that a key prospect for getting out of protracted displacement includes the role of mobility and social networks, including family- and kin-based ones.[53] We collected data for the larger project using mixed methods over 18 months during 2019/2020, including a quantitative survey (N=305), semi-structured interviews (N=100), Life Histories (N=30), Focus Group Discussions (N=12) and other Participatory Methods (such as Transect Walks; N=12).[54] This field report discusses specifically the results of three questions in the quantitative survey which were tailored to understanding the reported impact of Jordan's COVID prevention measures on Syrian refugees.[55]

The three questions include:

1. *Did the corona crisis have a significant impact on your life?*
2. *How has the corona crisis impacted your life?*
3. *How is your current economic situation compared to before the corona crisis?*

Results and Discussion

Our research participants generally reflect the larger demographic trends of Syrians in Jordan, but not perfectly. Our survey sample is narrower in age (over 80 percent are between ages 20 and 49). Our sample also favors males to a slightly larger degree (53.4 percent), and a larger portion of our sample is from Dara`a (70 percent). More than half our sample (58 percent) have started or completed primary education, and 12 percent have achieved a secondary or post-secondary degree. The data are provided in Figure 1.

[51] Tobin S. A. et al. (2020). *Figurations of Displacement in Jordan and beyond: Empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal connections of Syrian refugees*.
[52] UNHCR. "Registered Persons Of Concern Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Jordan." *UNHCR*. 2020. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73473
[53] Tobin S. A. et al. (2020). *Figurations of Displacement in Jordan and beyond: Empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal connections of Syrian refugees*.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

Figure 1: Demographic breakdown of respondents in the quantitative survey (n=305)

	Participant	*Percent* (N=305)
Gender	Male	55.0
	Female	44.0
Age Group	16-19	2.6
	20-29	24.9
	30-39	28.8
	40-49	29.1
	50-59	10.4
	Above 60	4.2
City of Origin	Daraa	70.2
	Homs	17.8
	Aleppo	5.5
	Damascus	2.6
	others (Idlib, Hamah, Qunitra, Ar Raqqah)	3.9
Educational Background	None/illiterate	5.2
	Primary school	35.3
	Primary school attended, but not completed	23.6
	Secondary or high school	8.1
	Secondary School attended, but not completed	18.5
	Tertiary education - university, colleges or polytechnical	9.1
	others	0.3

Question 1: Did the corona crisis have a significant impact on your life?

Overall, 19.5 percent of those respondents who live in Zaatari reported a significant impact, while 79.8 percent of respondents who live outside the camp reported the same. The lower reported result for those inside Zaatari camp could be attributable to the fact that refugees who live in the camp have relatively ready access to many necessary health and information services.[56] Another possible explanation is that those in the camp have fewer connections to the host community and are, therefore, insulated from the larger lockdown measures outside the camps. In our larger study we found that most Zaatari respondents socialize regularly with 0-1 people outside their home,[57] which would limit the negative social impact of lockdowns.

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

As for those who reside outside Zaatari, our larger study showed that they reported socializing regularly with 2-4 people outside their home, who are usually members of one's family or the greater Syrian community.[58] Furthermore, according to our larger study,[59] our non-camp-based respondents are far better connected outside their immediate social circles than those in Zaatari: 73 percent of non-camp-based respondents indicated that they have translocal and transnational networks. In comparison, only 26 percent of Zaatari-based respondents indicated the same.

As one would expect, our larger study found that such connections are often a positive force for refugees' lives and livelihoods: translocal and transnational connections bring additional financial support in the form of remittances; more job opportunities; possibilities for schooling and education; sources for aid information and housing support; and social and psychological support.

The better-connected, non-camp-based refugees indicated (64 percent) that the crisis had a significant impact because it resulted in reduced mobility, which impacted their ability to retrieve financial remittances, humanitarian aid, seek comfort and social interactions from friends and family, and attend work. While translocal and transnational network connections provide much needed support to non-camp-based refugees, such benefits are frequently mobility dependent.[60] The coronavirus restrictions limited mobility for non-camp-based refugees and, therefore, undercut the erstwhile benefit of translocal and transnational connections.

Question 2: How has the corona crisis impacted your life?

For this question, the respondents prioritized the three aspects that they believed most impacted their lives from a possible nine options.[61] The frequencies and percentages revealed that four key issues were the most frequently selected, which together formed 82.6 percent of the total responses. They include:

1. My/our living situation was very difficult (N=215; 27.2 percent)
2. I and/or other family members could not work and earn an income (N=181; 22.9 percent)

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] The possibilities offered in the survey included: 1) My/our living situation was very difficult; 2) I and/or other family members could not work and earn an income; 3) I/my children could not go to school; 4) I could not meet others and felt lonely and isolated; 4) I had respective symptoms and health problems myself; 5) I could not travel/go to other places; 6) Family members or other persons close to me had health problems; 7) Financial transfers from family members not living here were reduced or stopped; 8) I could not access legal support or advice related to my status or asylum procedure; 9) Family members or friends died due to the coronavirus.

3. I / my children could not go to school (N=135; 17.1 percent)
4. I could not meet others and felt lonely and isolated (N=122; 15.4 percent)

The results indicate that Syrian refugees have had difficulty in their living situations, broadly speaking. Their earnings and income suffered, threatening their ability to meet their family's needs. Further, with schools closed, children were at home, and many reported feeling lonely and isolated.

These findings relate to the previous question in a direct way, which is that they speak to the distinctive needs of out-of-camp refugees, as most of our respondents are living outside of Zaatari (84.1 percent). Our larger project[62] demonstrated that out-of-camp refugees are more likely to work without a contract and in the informal sector. Many urban refugees are forced into the informal sector because of the lack of viable work options and/or the pervasive exclusion of Syrians from the job market. This occurs within a context of high unemployment: there are simply too few jobs to go around. Interestingly, amongst those in our study that reported formal employment with a regular contract, 85 percent lived in Zaatari. By contrast, most Syrian refugees working in the informal sector and without a contract were from out-of-camp areas (93 percent). Thus, the loss of mobility experienced in the lockdown may have an important negative income impact on precariously employed out-of-camp Syrian refugees.

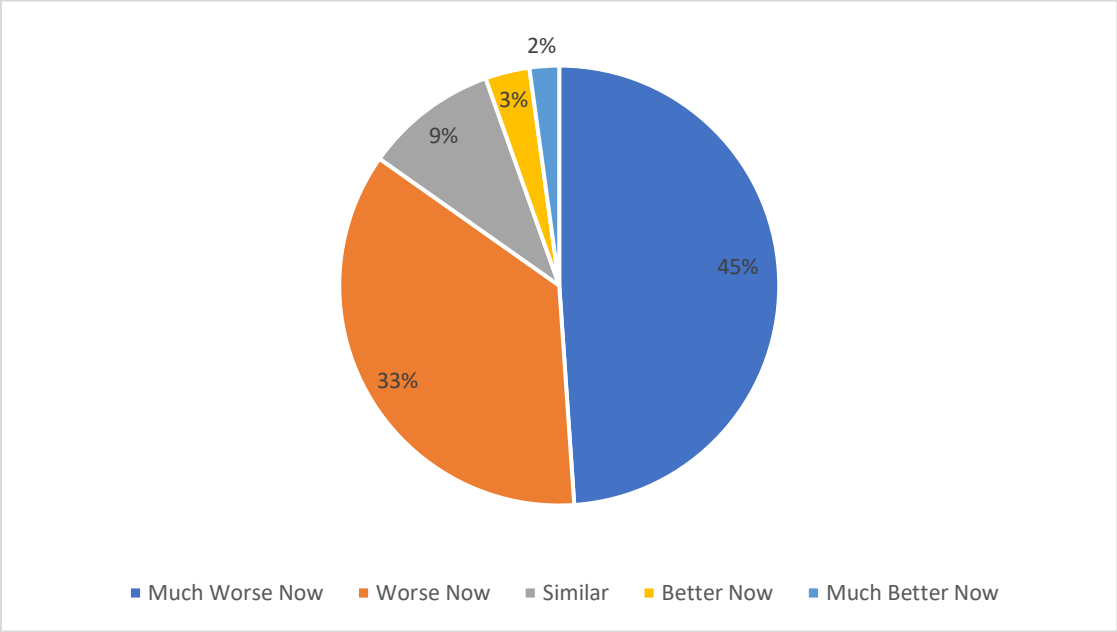
The lockdown included out-of-camp school closures as well. While many lessons were delivered via alternative methods such on the state TV channel and some official internet platforms, they require facilities such as televisions with reception, smartphones, tablets, or laptops, which are beyond most of the Syrian refugees' capabilities.[63]

Question 3: How is your current economic situation compared to before the corona crisis?

For this question, the respondents selected the one answer that most accurately described their economic situation. Figure 2 shows the results.

[62] Tobin S. A. et al. *Figurations of Displacement in Jordan and beyond: Empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal connections of Syrian refugees*.
[63] Ibid.

Figure 2: Current Economic Situation Compared to Before COVID-19



45 percent indicated that their situation is "much worse now" (98 percent of whom live outside Zaatari). 33 percent indicated that it is "worse now" than it was before (75 percent of whom live outside Zaatari). 9 percent indicated that it is "similar" (50 percent of whom live outside Zaatari). 3 percent indicated that it is "better now" than it was before (44 percent of whom live in Zaatari), and 2 percent indicated that it is "much better now" (100 percent of whom live in Zaatari camp). These responses demonstrate that, overall, the coronavirus lockdown measures were believed by our survey respondents to have generally worsened their economic situations, especially for those that live outside the camp. In sum, the combined survey results indicate that the majority of our respondents – notably those that reside outside Zaatari – believe that they are facing a worsening economic situation under the COVID restrictions.

As mentioned above, the out-of-camp refugees have larger and wider social networks, which combined with the demands of everyday life require mobility: out-of-camp refugees must be able to and do travel to the bank or financial service center to receive a remittance or humanitarian aid; travel to work, school, and hospitals; move to new housing units; and see family and friends in person for care and support. The intense lockdowns in Jordan and the criminalization of movement for all persons – not only Syrian refugees – brings into the relief the importance of mobility for urban refugees. As for respondents within the camp, their mobility was already largely within the refugee camp before the coronavirus crisis, and they continue to receive regular in-kind assistance within

the camp during the COVID-19 lockdowns, which may buffer them to some degree during these challenging times.

Conclusions

As this paper discussed, Syrian refugees in Jordan are vulnerable to the coronavirus and challenged to access and afford healthcare and treatments during the global pandemic. Our study also showed that Syrians reported feeling negative impacts – economic, educational, and mental health – due to the lockdowns that the pandemic necessitated, and the Jordanian government enacted strongly. It was especially the case that our out-of-camp respondents reported these at higher rates than our Zaatari respondents.

This pandemic has exacerbated a decades-long trend of increasing economic precarity for the labor force in Jordan, which now includes Syrian refugees. Without an end to the pandemic and a serious reopening of the sectors in which Syrians tend to work in Jordan, including construction, agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and food service, Syrians will be forced to remain outside the labor force even longer, prolonging financial strain and challenging social and psychological well-being with extended isolation from friends and loved ones.

One bright spot is that Jordan has become one of the world's first countries to include the refugees in their COVID-19 vaccination national plan, in coordination with the UNHCR.[64] It provides hope that Syrians too will be included in the government's plan to recover from the coronavirus and its negative economic impacts. Increased vaccination could provide the necessary preconditions to resume mobility to work, school, health care centers, and beyond. While vaccination will not provide Syrians in Jordan with a permanent resolution to their protracted displacement, it may enable them to live in a healthy and safe place until one is found.

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Acknowledgements

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Old Age Home
বৃদ্ধাশ্রম

GUNA MORAN[1]

Translated to English by BIBEKANANDA CHOUDHURY

গুণ মৰাণ

খাবলৈ শুবলৈ নিজাকৈ
মোৰো অলপ সময় আছিল
তাকো তোকে দিলোঁ

বিপদে-আপদে
জীয়াই থাকিবলৈ দুপইচা থৈছিলো
তাকো তোৰ নামতে খৰচ কৰিলোঁ

অঘৰী নহ'বলৈ দুকঠা মাটি
পিতায়ে মোক দি গৈছিল
তাকো তোৰ নামত নামজাৰি কৰিলোঁ
নাতি-বোৱাৰীসহিতে থাকিম বুলি মই
ঘৰ এটা সাজিছিলো
তাতো মোলৈ ঠাই অকণমান নহ'ল
শেষত ঠেলি-হেঁচি মোক বৃদ্ধাশ্রমত থৈ গ'লিহি
পিছে মোৰ নিলাজী মনত অনবৰতে তহঁতৰ
মুখবোৰ ভাহি থাকে

বোপাই
তহঁত পঢ়া-শুনা শিক্ষিত মানুহ
মনক কাবু কৰা দৰৱ এটা আৱিষ্কাৰ কৰিবিচোন
বৃদ্ধ হ'লেই যাতে
দৰৱটো খাই
আপোন মানুহক পাহৰি ইয়ালৈ গুচি আহিব
পাৰে

Had a little time for myself
To eat and to sleep
I gave you all

Put aside a little amount
From that I spent for you
To tide over the tough days

Father handed me a little plot
To save me from being homeless
Got it registered in your name

Built a house
With the intent to stay together
with my daughter-in-law and grandchildren
But there
space fell short for me
After doling out everything
I took refuge as an old horse at your house
You pushed me out and dumped here
But my mind stayed back there
Every moment your memory haunts me

Sonny
You are all educated
Please invent a medicine to control the mind

So that
Once one turns old
Can just imbibe it
and move to
Old Age Home

[1] **Guna Moran** is an internationally acclaimed poet and book reviewer. His poems are published in more than 160 international magazines, journals, webzines, blogs, newspapers, anthologies and have been translated into thirty languages around the world. He has three poetry books to his credit. He lives in Assam, India.

Selfish Healthy

YOHANES SOUBRIOUS DE SANTO[1]

Concept

In the midst of the spread of the COVID-19, the use of disposable medical masks is quite dominant. However, mask waste is often neglected issue, even though here are many cases of environmental pollution caused by this mask waste. There are even some people who recycle mask waste for sale. Used and reused by many people, purely for the benefit of personal pockets, of course this is a worrying condition. Amid the spread of the virus, instead of getting better at self-improvement, the ego's hegemony for personal gain and personal health are dominating. Let's prevent this by reminding each other of the dangers caused by deviating from the recycling of disposable masks.[2]

[1] **Yohanes Soubirius De Santo** is a young Indonesian artist from Bali. Yohanes has won several arts awards across the local, national, and international scale. Yohanes takes inspiration from his surroundings, according to his personal experiences or observations, highlighting the ways in which each of our environments and our experiences of those environments is unique.

[2] Media: Pen On Paper, Size: 30 Cm X 21 Cm, Year: 2021

COVID-19 and Changes in Professional Lives

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The Intersectional Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees and Asylum Seekers and the Role of Social Workers in the Management of the Pandemic in a Reception Center in Bologna (Italy)

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Abstract

Migrants, especially women, are affected by multiple mechanisms of oppression and discrimination. The spread of COVID-19, combined with containment measures introduced by governments, amplified inequalities and decreased the availability of a wide range of services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (RASs), challenging their well-being. Due to the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 and the challenges most RASs face in gaining employment, migrants (especially women) were the first to be affected by the *syndemic*. This field report analyzes the effects of COVID-19 on the lives of women in a reception facility with an intersectional lens: a multi-dimensional framework that considers the multiple systems of discrimination characterizing the conditions of women in reception centres. The data was collected through anonymous surveys, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. Although social and healthcare workers introduced measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, these strategies had shortcomings, resulting in an increase of mistrust. RASs demonstrated strong resilience to counteract these repercussions. Empowerment can be further enhanced by introducing participatory health promotion activities that involve RASs in all the phases. It is necessary to invest in the reconfiguration of the reception system and the implementation of gender-sensitive policies to reduce the intersectional effects of the *syndemic* on migrant women.

Keywords

Securitization, Intersectionality, Discrimination, Migrant Women, COVID-19, Health Promotion

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Introduction

The direct and indirect consequences of the syndemic[4] differentially impacted individuals by interacting and overlapping with context-specific drivers of vulnerability and marginalization, including, but not limited to, gender, 'race'/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, migration/refugee status and other structural conditions, such as precarious housing, employment, and political and environmental stressors.[5] These mechanisms are rooted in structures of privilege and oppression shaped by patriarchy, structural racism and colonialism, and are responsible for the unequal impact of the COVID-19 emergency on women.[6]

Due to the complex relationship between migration and health, and the vulnerability that being a migrant entails, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (RASs) are particularly affected by the syndemic. Indeed, in the Italian context they are reported to have a higher risk of encountering COVID-19 and, if contracted, are expected to have worse health outcomes.[7] In order to guarantee equitable protection and assistance in response plans, it is necessary to recognize and tackle the existing inequities in our societies and delineate the heterogeneity of risks and consequences of COVID-19 across population groups.

Based on the evidence, this field report aims to describe the management of COVID-19 in a reception facility in Bologna (which can host up to 30 women) including the procedures used to prevent the spread of the virus, the workers' experiences, the effects of the syndemic on the health of migrant women, and the variety of perceptions towards COVID-19. By using an intersectional approach, we intend to take into account the intersecting inequalities which underline the condition of women in reception centres (i.e., poverty, racism, and sexism, denying people their rights, and equal opportunities).[8] This

[4] In the paper, we use the term syndemic and pandemic differently to differentiate two different phenomena: pandemic refers to the diffusion of COVID-19, while syndemic indicates the interlinked health problems (including poverty, structural violence, and other factors) which were caused by the diffusion of COVID-19 and confinement measures which impact on the Social Determinants of Health and interact synergistically and exacerbate the prognosis and burden of disease. See Richard Horton, "Offline: COVID-19 is not a pandemic", *Lancet*, 396 (10255) (2020); Merrill Singer and Barbara Rylko-Bauer, "The Syndemics and Structural Violence of the COVID Pandemic: Anthropological Insights on a Crisis", *Open Anthropological Research* 1, no. 1: 7-32, (2021).

[5] Nessa E. Ryan and Alison M. El Ayadi, "A Call for a Gender-responsive, Intersectional Approach to Address COVID-19", *Global Public Health* (2020).

[6] United Nations, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women,* 2020.

[7] Massimo Fabiani, Alberto Mateo-Urdiales, Xanthi Andrianou, Antonino Bella, Martina Del Manso, Stefania Bellino, Maria C. Rota et al., "Epidemiological Characteristics of COVID-19 Cases in Non-Italian Nationals Notified to the Italian Surveillance System", *European Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 1 (2021): 37-44. This work states that non-Italian citizens were diagnosed later and had worse health outcomes compared with Italian cases, especially if from low-HDI countries.

[8] The intersectional approach shows the way that people's social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination giving us the opportunity to see the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other (i.e., being a woman and a refugee). Michelle Lokot and Yeva Avakyan, "Intersectionality as a Lens to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Sexual and

framework allows us to understand the dimensions of power, historical structural inequalities, and the social determinants that delineate the experiences of migrant women. The data was collected through anonymous surveys, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. All the information was analyzed and integrated with the experiences of the researchers (members from both social and health sectors).

Setting of the Study

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were about 220.000 RASs in Italy. Of these, only 84.400 were hosted in refugee centres, and 1983 of them in the city of Bologna, where this study was conducted.[9] 60% of them were between 18 and 35 years old and approximately 71% were males and 29% females, four (0.2%) of which were trans women.

The reception system in Italy is articulated in various phases and types of centres which offer different services can be summarized as follows (See also Table 1).

1. Hotspots: These are the centres that are set up in the principal places of disembarkation, where people are offered housing, first aid, and initial identification procedures. Although this phase should last up to 48 hours, during the pandemic, people were quarantined on rescue boats or in specific hotspot areas for at least 14 days. Then, they were transferred to Governmental or Temporary Reception Centres on the basis of the availability of spaces and the relocation quotas among local prefectures.
2. Governmental or Temporary Reception Centres - C.A.S.: These are the places where a first "assistance" phase is carried out in order to assist RASs in the filing of their international protection request and preparation for the audition of the Territorial Committee (CT) - the competent authority that evaluates the international protection requests.[10] On average, this process takes between 12 and 16 months depending on the story of the person. However, due to the overload of the Italian judiciary's system, which was further slowed down during the pandemic, these procedures can take up to 6 years, especially if a RAS appeals for a new judgement after a denial. Once a person obtains the Refugee Status, the Interior Ministry Central System evaluates his/her request and organizes the transfer to a SIPROIMI center according to his/her needs and national availability.
3. SIPROIMI system: This is a network of small Reception Centres, which offer a

Reproductive Health in Development and Humanitarian Contexts", *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 28, no.1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/26410397.2020.1764748

[9] Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, *30° Dossier Statistico Immigrazione*, Roma, IDOS [Available in Italian] (2020).

[10] D.Lgs. 28/01/2008 n.25 (https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/08025dl.htm) D.Lgs. 17.02.2017 n.13 (https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/18/17A02767/sg) [Available in Italian]

"proper" reception phase in small centers (with access provided as soon as possible and prioritized if in the case of vulnerable people).[11] The permanence in these centers should take six months, as institutions consider it long enough to strengthen RAS abilities to be a fully independent citizen; however, it is possible to extend the length of the stay as needed, depending on the resources of the RAS.[12]

Table 1. The reception system for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. [13]

Facility	**Nature and capacity**	**Location**	**Time of permanence**	**Services**	**Regulatory Authority**	**% of places**
Hotspots	Permanent, high capacity	Arrival port cities	48 hours/max. 20 days (15 of fiduciary isolation-quarantine)	- Housing - First aid - Identification procedures	Interior ministry - Local prefectures	5,4%
Temporary Reception Centres - C.A.S.	Temporary, high capacity	Throughout the country	Time strictly necessary to be moved to SIPROMI - on average 2-3 years	- Housing - Medical assistance - Legal support	Interior ministry - Local prefectures	79,8%
SIPROIMI system	Permanent, small capacity	Throughout the country	6 months, with extensions if needed	- Housing - Medical assistance - Psychological support - Services to support integration (legal support, language courses, job placement etc.)	Interior ministry - Local municipality	14,8%

[11] As a result of the application of the Security Decree n. 113/2018, migrants had access to this type of facility only if they obtained the Refugee Status. During this study, this SIPROIMI system was converted into the SAI system and returned accessible to asylum seekers with the Decree 130/2020; however, its implementation is still being processed making C.A.S. responsible for the integration process without having the appropriate resources and services.

[12] D.Lgs. 28/01/2008 n.25 (https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/08025dl.htm) and Circolare Prot. 0001724, 20/02/2015 (https://viedifuga.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/circolare-20-febbraio-2015_Morcone.pdf) and D.Lgs. 17.02.2017 n.13(https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/18/17A02767/sg) [Available in Italian]

[13] Openpolis & Actionaid. *The Certainty of Exclusion: Italy's Centres in October 2019.* https://www.actionaid.it/app/uploads/2019/10/CentridItalia_2019.pdf [Available in Italian] (2020).

The aim of the reception system in Italy is to support new migrants and integrate them into a new society. This is carried out through a multi-disciplinary approach: *'lavoro di rete'* (working in a network), which consists of providing beneficiaries with learning opportunities, formative projects, legal and paralegal support, and medical and psychological assistance. In general, the educational and integration support revolves around a mindful presence of social workers who support RASs in their daily activities.

This study focuses on the experiences in Casa X - a Temporary Reception Centre in Bologna - which is under the responsibility of the local prefecture and managed by a Social Cooperative. These local institutions are required to adhere to specific guidelines and standards established by local prefectures along with ministerial guidelines in order to be funded and are involved in the reception system with the role of taking care of the first needs of the new RASs. In each center, social workers (hired from the Social Cooperative) support RASs in screening procedures, demographic, social and financial registration in local and national registries, and access to educational opportunities (e.g., enrollment in Italian schools, vocational/professional-learning courses). To do so, each RAS is provided with a tailored individual programme with the aim of supporting him/her in the settlement in the local community.

The facility can host up to 30 women and is divided into eight rooms, each with a bathroom, a living room, and a kitchen area. Due to its structural characteristics, it is unfortunately difficult for the women to find a private space. At the time of the study, there were 22 guests from different countries living in the centre. Of these, 17 were women between the age of 20 - 50, and 5 were children, while there were 2 social workers working in the centre.

Methods

This field-report was inspired by the principles of Participatory Action Research following the principle of a self-reflective inquiry undertaken by researchers and participants, focusing on history, culture, local context and embedded in social relationships and especially on power relationships and people's lived experiences[14]. According to this approach the researched cease to be objects and become partners in the whole research process with the aim of codeveloping new processes and solutions.[15]. This work was carried out in various phases:

[14] Alice McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research", *Qualitative Research Methods Series* (Sage Publication 2007), 12-13.
[15] Fran Baum, Colin MacDaougall, Danielle Smith, "Participatory Action Research", *Journal Epidemiol Community Health*, 60, no. 10 (2006): 854-857.

- March 2020-December 2020: Participant observation, organization of workshops, and first collection of the data through internal meetings, focus group interviews and field notes.
- December 2020 - February 2021: Second round of data collection through different modalities (see Table 2) on the basis of the main themes that resulted from the analysis of the field notes:
- Semi-structured interviews on the impact of COVID-19 were carried out in English with 7 of the 17 women hosted in the reception facility.
- Questionnaires on the impact of COVID-19 were completed by 4 of the 17 women hosted in the reception facility.
- Questionnaires on working conditions were filled out by 15 social workers (14 females, 1 male) that operate in the same Social Cooperative, which is responsible for the management of many reception centres in Bologna, including Casa X.
- February 2021-March 2021: Final analysis of the data through graphical and descriptive statistics (questionnaires) and the framework method (for field notes, the results of the workshops, and the semi-structured interviews).[16]

The participant-observation of the research team complemented the interview results. It also provided insights into the emotional impact Covid-19 had on both RASs and social workers. Investigating the experiences of both RASs and social workers allowed an analysis of the different perspectives.

Although researchers tried to establish a horizontal interaction, we have to recognize that asymmetries and existing relationships between interviewers and interviewees may have influenced the interview data. Additionally, differences in participants' literacy level and the impossibility of involving cultural mediators during all qualitative data collection should be mentioned as limitations of this study.

Questionnaire results were submitted anonymously to guarantee privacy and the personal details of key informants were excluded from all results.

[16] The Framework Method is a deductive and inductive approach appropriate for multi-disciplinary health research. Nicola K Gale, Gemma Heath et al., "Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research". *BMC Med Res Methodol* 13 (2013): 117.

Table 2. Characteristics of the interviewees and the interview

	Key-informants	**General themes covered in the questionnaires and interviews**
Questionnaires	▪ 4 hosted migrant women ▪ 15 social workers	- The response of the national government to the emergency crisis. - The protocols and contrast measures that were implemented during the epidemic. - Their experience and perceptions of the syndemic. - The impact of the syndemic on their life, health, and employment.
Interviews	▪ 7 hosted migrant women	

Findings and Discussion

With the triangulation of the information obtained through the field work and the interviews, it was possible to capture a holistic understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on both the formal (managerial and administrative) and the informal (personal and relational) level.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, national and local institutions introduced various measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 in reception centres. However, these norms were often stricter than the ones applied to the general population and reflected the discriminatory approach that institutions can have towards RASs. Our findings pointed out that RASs were assumed to be incapable of estimating the risks of COVID-19. Thus, they needed to be monitored and limited more extensively than the general population.

Most RASs were disproportionately affected by the bureaucratic inactivity and the introduction of confinement and isolation measures which led to increased emotional and psychological distress. The study highlighted that women were even further discriminated against due to their condition of disadvantage (i.e., their field of employment).[17] On the other hand, social workers operating in reception centres were required to perform more activities, and were not always supported by local, regional, and national institutions resulting in an overall tiredness and sense of dissatisfaction.

Both parties of the reception center found themselves unprepared for this *"new emergency"* that influenced their daily-interaction and relationship, as they were left alone to weather the pandemic. However, with the organization of workshops, activities, and collective discussions, it was possible to partially offset the sense of distrust and frustration whilst investing in the empowerment process of migrant women.

[17] United Nations (UN). *Intersectional Feminism: What It Means and Why It Matters Right Now* (2020) UN WOMEN.

An Effort to Prevent Outbreaks: Governmental and Territorial Measures Between Securitization and Discrimination

With the first prime ministerial decree n.6, 23/02/2020, migration issues were classed as "optional". For this reason, the migration offices that issue residency permits were shut down until mid-September, Commissione Territoriale (CT) auditions were suspended until April 13, 2020, and then until September 2020. Simultaneously, the renewal of all residency permits was postponed, consequently their validity was extended until 31 August 2020 with the decree n.18 *"Cura Italia"* (Cure Italy). The whole reception system was halted, new arrivals were not redistributed throughout the country and were instead abandoned in hotspots and other Temporary Reception Centres which could not guarantee the same number of services and resources compared to ordinary centres.[18]

On 25 March 2020, the national government established:

- An extension of all contracts and concessions to Social Cooperatives for the management of centres until 31 December 2020 and further extensions according to local prefectures through 31 December 31, 2021.
- Permission for all RASs to stay in the reception system until the end of the emergency, regardless of their legal status.[19]
- The implementation of hygiene and preventive measures in reception centres.

These requests were formalized in the Ministerial memorandum, on 1 April 2020 which provided each local prefecture with the guidelines to be followed in reception centres, including:

- Constant monitoring of symptoms and risk assessments,
- Provide adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and information about the virus, its symptoms, risks, and prevention,
- Supporting sanitization and constant cleaning,
- Establish an area for the isolation of positive cases,
- Enforce physical distancing.

[18] Evan Easton-Calabria, "*The Global Compact on Refugees and the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum: The Ripples of Responsibility-Sharing"* in *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in Light of the United Nations Global Compact on Refugees,* ed. Sergio Carrera and Andrew Geddes (European University Institute 2021): 125.

[19] COVID-19 reduced access to humanitarian assistance, along with their confinement and prevention measures, reduced migration mobility leading to a situation of 'Limbo Mobility' as in our case of halted transfer of new arrivals and 'Reaction Immobility' with the closure of borders. Biao Xiang and Sørensen Ninna Nyberg. *Shock Mobility: Long-term Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Lock-down*, DISS Policy Brief, 2020.

When the first containment measures were introduced, each local prefecture introduced containment practices and rules in reception centers to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread. Social Cooperatives were then responsible for their implementation and monitoring. Ever since that moment, to keep track of critical health situations and practices, social workers had to fill out a daily report that included:

- Performed sanitizing procedures
- Fever monitoring
- Night absences
- Tracking of entries and exits of guests.

In addition, each centre had to supply PPE for hosts and workers without any type of support from institutions. Due to the lack of economic resources, it was difficult to guarantee sufficient quality and quantity of appropriate PPE, leaving on RASs the burden to purchase PPE out of their pockets. Considering that a beneficiary has on average 80 euros of pocket money a month, PPE was unaffordable, especially during the first lockdown when demand resulted in inflated prices.

Furthermore, while the general population was allowed to exit their homes for essential reasons (such as working, shopping, seeking medical assistance), migrant women were allowed to leave the centre only for legal appointments, medical assistance, and their work. Social workers were forced to interfere with the privacy of RASs by asking each person who wanted to leave the center why they were leaving, from when to when, and the address.

> 'I felt like I was in a prison, I could not understand how at the beginning we had to stay home, no going out, no groceries, no sleeping outside, no school, there was basically nothing we could do. Social workers were even asking us where we are going, when we are coming back, and at the end they told us that they did not want to mind our business, but they had to send an email writing who was entering and who was leaving. I wondered if it was the same for all people living in Italy, or if it was just for us, living in center.' (Nigerian woman, 24 years old, two years in the center)

This prohibition reflected the discriminating and racially biased norms of institutions. Indeed, these norms assumed RASs could not estimate the risks related to COVID-19. Thus, they needed to be monitored and limited more extensively compared to the general population. However, these measures were partly justified by the infrastructural characteristics of reception facilities and the overcrowded living conditions of RASs. However, the introduction of these severe limitations seemed to have limited the

spreading as in the whole period of research no COVID-19 case was registered in Casa X.

The Implications of Confinement Measures: Slowing the Spread While Increasing Vulnerability

To prevent the spread of the virus, the introduction of confinement measures led to the demolition of the network of services including language courses, professionalizing schools, and medical and psychological assistance.

Language courses were suspended for the first two months and then moved online. Due to the different levels of literacy, conflicting time slots, lack of digital devices and of silent places, classes were often inaccessible. RASs were required to be good users of various tools (e.g., Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, emails, links, Word-PDF documents). To overcome technical issues, most people needed to be supported by social workers. However, when online classes were available, all RASs did their best to participate, although in some cases RASs refused to take part in this form of distant-learning education as it made them feel uncomfortable and amplified their learning difficulties.

Classes were then alternated between online and in person with a weekly plan that was difficult to follow and communicate to RASs. Although migrants were supported for the enrollment exam in early October 2020, some of them were randomly allocated in the waiting list and were contacted only in February 2021. Eventually, since offices were closed or working at reduced capacity, only half of the students were allowed in class, while out of a total of 14 people, six RASs were excluded from school activities from the beginning.

> 'I don't understand why they did not let me go to school. We just have to stay home and try to not get too bored.' (Nigerian woman, 26 years old, almost three years inside the center)

Vocational schools were also suspended or moved online. Given that these courses offer a professional certificate, RASs showed better performance and resilience when attending them also during COVID-19. However, compared to pre-COVID-19 times, RASs' expectations and enthusiasm decreased in parallel with the forced social isolation.

> 'Everything stopped. All courses became online, with all their troubles, along with the fact that we have seen a reduction of many things.' (Nigerian woman, 27 years old, almost three years inside the center)

During this period, it was also possible to observe the impact of the economic

consequences of lockdown procedures.[20] Many RASs lost their employment, jeopardizing the income of the women hosted in the centre. Out of 17 women living in the centre, only 4 maintained their employment while 13 lost their jobs. According to the data, the loss of employment rate in this centre was much higher compared to another "male-only centre" managed by the same Social Cooperative in which only 4 out of 30 men lost their jobs. This difference can be explained by the sector of employment: while male RASs are often employed for logistics, delivery and transportation, women are more likely to work in the hotellerie-food industry[21], which was more negatively impacted than other sectors. This phenomenon is in line with national and international trends and reflects the oppression and stigmatization women face in their employment.[22]

As healthcare facilities were overwhelmed by the management of the emergency, RASs' access to healthcare services was hindered. Access to health services was particularly critical in the sector of gynecological and psychological services. As also reported in other studies, while routine and non-urgent procedures were being postponed in the areas most affected by the epidemic, the exceptionality of the situation negatively impacted women's right to a safe abortion.[23] Furthermore, according to the research team on the field, it was more difficult to provide care for survivors of violence or sexual abuse. RASs also reported a peak in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Prior to the pandemic, gynecological assistance was a low threshold service that migrant women could access easily and freely, however, when the pandemic broke out, it became mandatory to have an appointment to gain access to the gynecological clinic. This led to an increase of healthcare barriers, a higher latency period between the onset of STD symptoms and gynecological assistance and likely hindered the development of trusting doctor-patient relationships.[24] The local mental health centres simultaneously suspended all their services beyond emergency care.

RASs' Perception of the Pandemic and Reaction to Confinement Measures: From

[20] Helen Dempster, Thomas Ginn, Jimmy Graham, et al., *Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion,* 179. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development and Refugees International, 2020.

[21] International Labour Organization. *A Policy Framework for Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis,* ILO Policy Brief on COVID-19 (2021); Maike Isaac and Jennifer Elrick, "How COVID-19 may Alleviate the Multiple Marginalization of Racialized Migrant Workers", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 5 (2020): 1-13.

[22] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), *Guidance Note: Addressing the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Migrant Workers.* UN WOMEN 2020

[23] This phenomenon is further argued in the paper: Roya Rashidpouraie and Mohammad Nader Sharifi. "COVID-19 and Abortion Right", *Obstetrics & Gynecology Science* 63, no. 6 (2020): 743-744.

[24] World Health Organization (WHO). *Gender and COVID-19: Advocacy brief, 14 May 2020*. No. WHO/2019-nCoV/Advocacy_brief/Gender/2020.1. World Health Organization (2020).

Skepticism to Acceptance

Although confinement measures seem to have prevented outbreaks in Casa X, they hindered the integration process and the well-being of migrant women, who felt disproportionately spied-on and discriminated against.[25]

> 'I could not go to sleep outside the center, to see my friends. I felt trapped. I perfectly understood the measures, I could read them online. I appreciated social workers explaining them to us, but it was too much. Every time we have to read and sign a paper, what people think of us that we can't understand the severity of the situation, we do. It is happening even in Nigeria, and we fear for our relatives too! We are scared and we will do what is necessary to protect us, we don't need to be treated like this. I understand they wanted to monitor big communities, but it is too much and there is no respect for personal affairs.' (Nigerian woman, 29 years old, four years in the center)

According to the interviews, guests were initially opposed to all measures, considering COVID-19 as a disease *"affecting white people more"* and highly exaggerated by the media. Consequently, when the Social Cooperative prohibited the exit from the centre and night sleepovers, RASs found this norm extremely limiting to their personal and civil freedoms and self-organized a meeting with the manager of the centre and requested to meet with the President of the Social Cooperative.

> 'That was too much, it happened during the early time of COVID. No one could sleep outside, and we were asked to say where we were going and when we were coming back. I felt that social workers were like my parents! In the end we did not understand if it was the Prefettura or the Association that wanted us inside! But that was not fair, I guess Italian people were going to sleep outside or to see their boyfriends. What if your husband lives somewhere else and he has to see his son, why are they stopped from meeting? I was not happy with that decision, but I had to abide anyway.' (Nigerian woman, 29 years old, four years in the center)

Although this measure was not implemented by other Social Cooperatives, and not even local or national governments were prohibiting night sleepovers, after three months RASs accepted this norm. The narration from the interviews demonstrated a common path of removal - negation which, after almost five months, evolved into total acceptance. As time went by, RASs seemed to have internalized and accepted the norms as necessary, without further questioning. Gradually, they were deemed necessary and thus respected

[25] The confinement measures on a national and Social Cooperative level resemble the implications of the ones implemented in Germany. Marie Tallarek, Kayvan Bozorgmehr, and Jacob Spallek, "Towards Inclusionary and Diversity-sensitive Public Health: The Consequences of Exclusionary Othering in Public Health Using the Example of COVID-19 Management in German Reception Centres and Asylum Camps", *BMJ Global Health* 5, no. 12 (2020).

without questioning.

> 'In the end, even though the rules were too much, it was right to put them in place. There are on average 25 people living here, many come and go, and it is difficult to stay apart, we need to abide by all regulations, or it will be a mess.' (Nigerian woman, 25 years old, three years inside the center)

This coincided with RASs' process of understanding and accepting the pandemic which was also advanced through the implementation of a "News Project", where RASs were invited to discuss international news with social workers to gain deeper knowledge of the progress of the pandemic and share interesting insights into differing perceptions of COVID-19.

Although RASs accepted the confinement measures, they continued to have repercussions on their well-being. The interruption of classes, courses, and employment caused the disruption of their migratory process and routines which led many RASs into a state of depression and a sense of *'being stuck and purposeless with an uncertain future, now on hold'.*

> 'I felt very down and meaningless. I was having a nice life. Then I had to see everything stop and I almost lost track of time. All days are all similar, also other girls are saying it, we talk about this. We try to fill our day, but it is difficult. We all share the same house, and we have roommates. It is different from people that have their own house. This lock down made me reflect on our differences, chances, and lives in general.' (Nigerian woman, 30 years old, three years in the center")

Furthermore, interpersonal dynamics in a space like a reception center can be unstable and susceptible to temporary alliances and personal issues. Thus, when confined by mass quarantine measures and isolation, these tensions became more acute.

> 'It affected my mental health very badly. When I lost my job, I could not speak to anyone inside the house about it or they would have mock me. I could not go out, so no friends of mine to speak with, I felt trapped inside with people I dislike, it was kind of a torture. I want to leave soon; this is what this experience made me realize.' (Nigeria woman, 27 years old, two years inside the center, due to Covid-19 she lost her job contract as a cleaner)

Another critical area was the psychological triggering that many RASs had during the pandemic. The suspension of all opportunities, compounded by boredom, caused many to fall into memories of their painful and often unresolved past, resulting in the development of anxiety, depression, and complex-PTSD. [26]

[26] Gabriele Sani, Delfina Janiri, et al., "Mental Health During and After the COVID-19 Emergency in Italy", *Wiley Online Library* 74, no. 6 (2020): 372-372.

One woman in the reception centre experienced PTSD episodes from her childhood traumas, leading her into a state of panic, lack of sleep, and daytime anxieties. She was able to address her emotions only after two months with the support of a psychotherapist from the Anti-violence Center that the Social Cooperative had previously implemented. However, given that in-person sessions were halted, support was passed through the grapevine, from therapists, to operators, and then RASs; this emotional burden fell over the operator, who had found herself needing to learn and practice for a new (improvised) task.

When the pandemic and restrictions took place, RASs were more vulnerable and in need of support. Indeed, three quarters of the migrants residing in Casa X asked to be listened to by social workers. Engaging in these conversations had a clear impact on the wellbeing of social workers who were faced with having to address traumas and mental breakdowns without any professional training.

> 'I would have liked to get the chance to ventilate my chest more often to a therapist, because I was living the pandemic as everyone else, but I was also listening and welcoming the anxieties and frustrations of all others. I kept piling up and still I do.' (Social worker 9).

Workshops and Activities to Support RASs: 'Female Health and Sexuality' - A Horizontal Project

To reduce the effects of the syndemic such as the sense of depression and the gender-specific consequences on the health of migrant women, social and health workers organized multiple activities together with RASs including movie forums, culinary workshops, formative and learning experiences, workshops on active citizenship, webinars on the objectives and the modality of access to territorial services, and discussions on women' rights and reproductive healthcare.

Specifically, in the months of June, November, and December 2020, the guests of the reception center Casa X. were involved in health promotion activities proposed by a European project dedicated to RASs with the aim of lowering access barriers to health care. The workshop covered themes like personal hygiene, female anatomy, and physiology, additionally providing a framework on the available healthcare facilities and how to access them, and hosting discussions on other topics, such as consent, sexuality, and contraception.[27] Four informational meetings were held, through the support of a

[27] Michelle Lokot and Yeva Avakyan, "Intersectionality as a Lens to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Development and Humanitarian Contexts", *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters,* 28, no.1, (2020), doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/26410397.2020.1764748

cultural mediator: the first one was held inside the reception center and the others were arranged online due to the limitation imposed by the pandemic. Every meeting was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation or other multimedia information materials and followed by a QA session and an anonymous questionnaire. With these modalities, it was possible to structure the activities around the health needs that RASs and social workers felt were most compelling, and eventually adjust them on the basis of RASs' feedback.

All "women talks" were generally welcomed by the majority of the women as they kept them busy in a time of *"limbo and lockdown"*. The rationale was to address a knowledge gap which was previously neglected by the reception and health system (such as the functioning of health services), whilst teaching self-diagnosis and sensitization to STDs.[28] Many women described the workshop on Female and Sexual health as an enriching moment that helped them to gain self-esteem, accept their own body, understand issues and available options. These activities also allowed RASs to have a collective moment of sharing and learning, but also to have a comparison session with healthcare professionals which due to the pandemic were not always available. The creation of these informal moments gave RASs the opportunity to talk about the issues they were experiencing and had not known how/where to address. For example, many women reported how their sexual partners were not interested in their pleasure during sexual intercourse. By discussing this theme collectively, its occurrence and its hypothetical reason, women felt "less alone" and more confident. These moments were conceived to promote a shift of perspective and experience of the pandemic, moving from exclusionary measures, power subordination, silence, and non-participation to more empowering and inclusive practices that favoring communication and involvement in public health, promote awareness and consciousness.[29]

The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Self-assessing Analysis of Work-related Wellbeing

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, social workers were assigned multiple roles along with an increase of daily bureaucratic procedures. Suddenly, they simultaneously had to balance their newfound authoritarian roles of ensuring confinement compliance, with the deteriorating mental health of RASs. For these reasons, we decided to gain a grasp of what social workers experienced and the consequences of the syndemic on themselves and their working conditions. For this purpose, the team developed a questionnaire

[28] Ibidem.

[29] Marie Tallarek, Kayvan Bozorgmehr, and Jacob Spallek, "Towards Inclusionary and Diversity-sensitive Public Health: The Consequences of Exclusionary Othering in Public Health Using the Example of COVID-19 Management in German Reception Centres and Asylum Camps", *BMJ Global Health* 5, no. 12 (2020).

involving all 15 camp coordinators across all reception centers within the Social Cooperative.

The questionnaire tried to capture the mental well-being of camp coordinators given the stress and demands they faced during the pandemic. The results confirmed what was previously mentioned: 70% of the workers believed that the pandemic in their work sector had not been managed properly; only 25% thought the opposite, while the remaining 5% added potential room for improvement. Professionals felt impotent (30%), tired and alone (20%), demotivated and without perspective (13%); with only 20% reporting that nothing had changed. A few additional responses mentioned depression and a sense of initial fear.

86.7% of all interviewed workers kept working regularly, whilst only 13.3% cited an increase of their workload. 80% of them kept working in-person and only 20% had the possibility to work remotely, as the Prefecture and Social Cooperatives considered "reception workers" as essential professional figures who could not work remotely. This consideration was shared by most of the workers: 76% agreed that social workers should continue an *"in -person job even during the pandemic"*. The remaining 24% indicated that it could be performed remotely.

Most workers reported monitoring and limiting RASs movements as an addition that 'overload' and 'overwork' them. 53.3% of the workers agreed that bureaucracy, beneficiaries' monitoring (53.3%), new COVID-19 reports, and separate specific accounting for COVID-19 expenditures (40%) were the most demanding and tiring tasks during the pandemic.[30] While monitoring RASs, 72% of the workers felt like "policemen and controllers," 7% felt as doing it only sometimes, and only 22% felt fine with this new job requirement. For those who answered that they felt like a "controller," 55% reported to have been stressed by it, 27% reported to have felt somewhat stressed, and the remaining 18% did not perceive any variation.

The responses regarding the relationship between workplace and health security showed a broader variety. On a 1-10 scale[31], with 1 meaning completely insecure, and 10 meaning totally safe, 52% felt safe while the remaining participants scattered their answers between, testifying an overall sense of mediocre, but diffuse safety. According to 89% of the workers, what made them feel unsafe was an extreme deficit of COVID-testing; only 11% declared to have done the test regularly.

[30] Due to the pandemic local prefectures allocated a special budget for COVID-19 to implement sanitizing and stricter procedures, thus it was required to have a separate accounting additional to the mandatory regular one. So, the workers' view of an incremental workload.

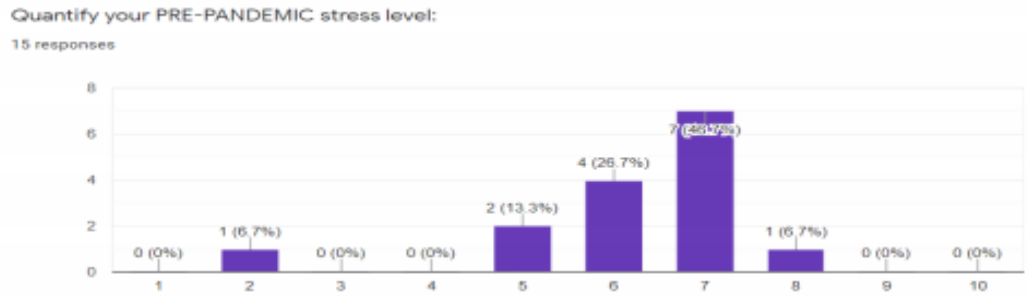
[31] In the self-safety assessment scale 1 means completely insecure and 10' totally safe.

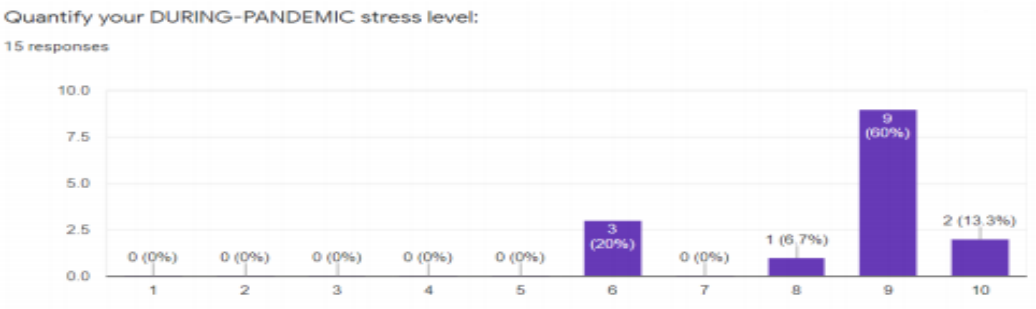
RASs at Casa X were screened only once in 13 months despite their living and working in a vulnerable community and thus being more exposed. It was the same for workers—thirteen workers out of fifteen were tested once, or if they did a second time, it was via private request. The lack of screening was mainly attributed to the Prefettura (70%), to the national health system (14%), and to the employer (16%).

Regarding the services and integrative projects available for RASs, 93.4% of workers reported a reduction in opportunities and quality. As described previously, only 6.6% referred to a similar quality and availability. The sector that workers reported to be the most hindered was the mental and psychological support. According to 80% of workers, these services were limited and interrupted abruptly; this corroborates both the hypothesis that there was a reduction in services, and that this triggered beneficiaries to pour out their anxieties over workers (90%).

When asked to quantify their pre- and post- pandemic stress levels, workers responded as seen in Graph 1 and 2.

Graph 1 - 2. Results gathered with a self-assessment value scale on the level of stress which was proposed in the workers questionnaire





The last question was open-ended: workers were kindly asked to talk briefly about the feelings that characterized their work life during the pandemic. What emerged clearly is a synthesis of all aspects previously presented; workers felt stressed, overburdened by work, and they felt like controllers. They reflected frustration, fears, and a sense of

impotence, but some have framed this distress in relation to their work and contractual-retributive situation.

> 'Working during the pandemic has been somewhat distressful, tensions among guests and the relationship we have to carry out daily with them have become more frequent and tense. Explaining new rules and implementing them had mined the trust we established with RASs living in our centers. We were both left in procedural darkness.' (Social worker 8)

Overall, interviewed workers referred to a sense of feeling *"forgotten"* and *"dismissed",* mainly by the local prefectures which did not implement sufficient screening and support, instead incrementing the workload by demanding more RASs monitoring. Additionally, the national framework, due to the severity of the pandemic, further aggravated RASs' 'vulnerable situation, magnifying the already difficult and precarious working conditions of social workers.

Conclusions

This report tried to give a broad account of what happened during the syndemic within the reception system, showing that COVID-19 had disproportionate, discriminatory, and exclusionary consequences over RASs. Indeed, RASs experienced a high amount of structural violence, which was even higher in the case of migrant women due to the multiple mechanisms of oppression that influence their experiences.

New norms aiming to limit a possible outbreak within reception centers restricted the freedom of migrants, considering RASs as incapable and in need of stricter guidance. Confinement measures hindered their legal status, prevented the renewal of their residency permits and caused the suspension of language courses and other educational activities. These circumstances, together with the loss of employment, contributed to deteriorate RASs' mental well-being, and might result in the development of a sense of shared depression, purposelessness, and lack of motivation. These vulnerabilities were further magnified by the bureaucratic and decisional limbo that characterized the pandemic. To contrast the effects of the syndemic and manage the health emergency, social workers were forced to develop new abilities and cope with the shortcomes of the reception system, which ultimately overworked them. Many of the reported issues reside in the way local and national institutions conceive migration. The emergent approach of institutions towards this phenomenon makes it impossible to create a well-funded reception system with long-term stability. However, many other challenges are caused by the strong gender gap that is already present in our society, which is not mitigated by systems that exist to address the multiple iniquities of women's condition. Finally, the

pandemic emphasized social differences, inequities, and biases, deepening traumas, psychological wounds, and exclusion.

Based on the results of the study, we argue RASs require an oriented approach that encompasses their background and considers them as a resource for hosting communities. Consequently, there is a need to invest resources into the reception system and promote empowering activities. For such purposes, together with the suggestions given by social workers, personnel in reception centres should be well trained and supported by institutions. This could be done by investing more resources and hiring extra staff in the reception system. It is also necessary to develop gender-sensitive policies to contrast the intersectional effects of the syndemic on migrant women, including financial and social support for the women who lost their jobs, freely accessible gynecological clinics, and measures to offset gender-based violence.

Due to the complexity of the phenomenon, to ward off the impact of COVID-19, it is necessary to act on multiple levels with initiatives ranging from educational prevention to workplace measures together with the reconception of the whole reception system.

Disclosure statement

One of the co-authors (Maria Benedetta Cabitza) works for the Social Cooperative that manages the reception center. Acknowledging this fact, we did our best to conduct this study under the highest standards of intellectual honesty and independent empirical research.

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Arab Migrant Artists and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Resilience Revisited

RUBA TOTAH[1]

Abstract

Since 2015, hundreds of artists have joined the migrating masses from the Arab region with support from various international channels. The European performing arts scenes implemented solidarity programs which turned into a framework for forced migrant artists' cultural participation and production. This paper investigates migrant artists' biopolitics as they experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in a new country and where there has been an interruption of performing arts institutions' solidarity and integration endeavours. It describes the problematics of participation in an environment that has urgently limited engagement and face-to-face intercultural collaborations. Through explaining migrant artists' resilience under multi-layered challenging conditions of migration and pandemic, the paper provides an understanding of the effect of the pandemic on transnational performing arts. It contributes to defining post-pandemic identity politics of migrant artists.

Keywords

Arab Migrant Artists, Transnationalism, Resilience, Integration, COVID-19, Interculturalism

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Introduction

"*The condition of a plague victim who dies without any material destruction, yet with all the stigmata of an absolute, almost abstract disease upon him, is in the same condition as an actor totally penetrated by feelings without any benefit or relation to reality. Everything in the actor's physical aspect, just as in the plague victim, shows life has reacted to a paroxysm, yet nothing has happened.*"[2]

In the past five years, migration from Arab countries has had a vigorous impact on European host countries' social and cultural policies. Performing arts institutions took part in welcome culture programs[3] by engaging migratory themes and inviting migrant artists to European stages.[4] Whether migrants' engagement involved professionals, amateur artists, or specific social groups such as children or youth, the main aim of their engagement has been to enhance reflections on experiences and feelings through intercultural dialogue for assimilation or integration into the host society. Their engagement, although problematized by critics of migration policies in Europe, aimed at forming hubs for personal encounters, which scholars in the fields of art and performance such as Bourriaud[5] call 'social interstice', and that Wannous[6] describes as collaborative spaces for social events. Migrants' engagement may also constitute, according to Bishop[7], spaces for antagonistic encounters. However, five years after the solidarity endeavors of welcome culture initiatives, the recent COVID-19 pandemic crisis has struck the rolling wheel of interculturalism, when governments have urgently imposed social distancing regulations and limited face-to-face intercultural collaborations.

Instead of these solidarity forms, governments in Europe and beyond shifted their interventions towards initiating small award funds to help artists achieve short-term individual productions that support their survival during the first ten months of lockdowns and closures of theatres. Most of these funds encouraged creating digital performance spaces where artists could communicate both their internal and external conditions during the lockdown. Until December 2020, two Arab cultural institutions, the Cultural Resource and The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), collaborated in launching the "*Support the Artists*" exceptional grant, in solidarity with artists and independent cultural practitioners under confinement across the Arab region, including Arab migrant artists outside the Arab

[2] Artaud, Antonin, and Victor Corti, *The Theatre and Its Double: Essays* (Montreuil: Calder, 1970), 16.
[3] For example, in 2016 the German Federal Government incorporated cultural participation programmes targeting migrants in its Culture and Media Policy believing that cultural participation helps boosting cohesion in a heterogeneous, ethnically diverse society.
[4] Totah, Ruba, and Krystel Khoury, "Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus'—A Case Study in Solidarity," *Arts* 7, no. 4 (2018): 90. doi:10.3390/arts7040090: 1-14; Totah, Ruba, "Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe," *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques* (June 15, 2021): 1-16. Accessed July 06, 2021. https://www.critical-stages.org/23/transnational-subjectivities-of-arab-artists-in-europe/:
[5] Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), 5.
[6] Wannous, S., *All works* (Damascus: Alahali Publishing, 1996).
[7] Bishop, Claire, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", (October 2004): 51-79. doi:10.1162/0162287042379810.

area. International cultural funding bodies launched similar programs[8]. One of these productions[9], *3 x 13* (2021), consisted of short films by 12 artists worldwide who shared in their personal accounts of parenthood, loss, race, exile, and dreams. Other theatres that host migrant artists inside Europe such as the Münchner Kammerspiele and Theatre An der Ruhr-Collective Ma'louba, initiated online readings and talks between artists and the public.

The support provided for digital cultural projects has broadened the underlying dimensions of cultural institutions' ongoing, or exceptional strategies in dealing with the last two decades' geopolitical conditions of wars, military occupations, conservatism, and populism waves accompanying forced migration from Arab countries. These conditions were captured by, and reflected through, the richness of theatre produced by Arab artists of this era and its ability, as a tool, to play a political role in the public sphere. However, the COVID-19 pandemic situation challenged the essence of this tool, re-questioning the relationships between performers, space, time, and audience, as well as its mechanical ability to resume its political role. New vocabularies of fear, caution, infection, closure, and distancing occupied the performance discussion circles.

I argue that the COVID-19 pandemic, embedded in complex historical circumstances of migration, confronted the cultural sectors worldwide by revealing an unspoken lapse of the participatory-based integration programs for migrants in European countries. The digital cultural programs attempted to compensate or partially resume the solidarity approach of cultural institutions; however, they were not able to transcend artists' complex circumstances of corporeal and social uncertainty in isolation, nor could they avoid the complexity of these newly emerging conditions from being combined with uncertainties linked to their state of exile. As such, the main question of this article is how artists in exile interact with a new layer of power over their body and relationships: the one concerned with the COVID-19 pandemic. The article relies on the Foucauldian understanding of "biopolitics" to explain migrant artists' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic era. On one hand, power has its ways to administer artists' lives, ensuring and sustaining dominance over their life order.[10] On the other hand, artists developed ways to react, cope with and generate perspectives about these powers, formulating a mechanism

[8] The French Institute of Jerusalem supported several dancing initiatives in Palestine, such as the *False Awakening* production (2020) by Stereo 48 dance group and individual dance initiatives such as Salma Ataya in her production *Pandemic Diaries* in Ireland (2020).
[9] Transnational productions were supported by Arab cultural institutions such as A.M. Qattan Foundation and international ones such as Dance/NYC's Coronavirus Dance Relief Fund. The producer offered the production as an intimate glimpse into the performers' inner and outer worlds, where artists expressed themselves through a common choreography for body and camera to overcome distancing forms under the pandemic.
[10] Foucault, Michel, *The will to knowledge: The history of sexuality vol. I.* (New York: The Random House. 1978).

of resilience, which is referred to by Bonanno as the ability of adults who were exposed to disruptive events, life-threatening conditions, and isolation, to maintain a stable and healthy physical and emotional functioning.[11]

Thus, the article investigates biopolitics of resilience among migrant artists from the Arab area, as they experience a new layer of uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic in European host countries. The article describes migrant artists' intercultural experiences in Europe before and during the pandemic, their cognition of their role, and what constitutes their resilience mechanisms under hardships. The article builds on a study about migrant artists' engagement with cultural participation programs in hosting societies in Europe.[12] The study provides that artists' life trajectories together with the robust solidarity systems in the European migration context hamper artists' attempts to achieve freedom. These attempts emerge from an existential drive[13] of artists subjects of achieve a free will. By introducing the recent world crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic as a challenge to artists' transnational experiences, which has shaken the economic, social, political, and intercultural solidarity systems of nation- states, the article discusses how, beyond the intercultural experience in a pandemic free world, artists' resilience mechanisms during the pandemic contribute to understanding of migrants' identity politics.

Migrant Artists Intercultural Experiences in a Pandemic Free World

A wide range of studies on migrant artists' intercultural practice focus on the self and how its subjectivity cultivates beyond the boundaries of culture.[14] Definitions of interculturalism provide a view on how the self develops through encountering forms of otherness.[15] Interculturalism is defined by Holledge and Tompkins[16] as a process of celebrating difference by seeking to utilize encounters around genres, subjects, and audiences. Birringer[17] introduced the notion of *transcultural imaginaries*, that refers to incorporated

[11] Bonanno, George A., "Loss, trauma, and human resilience: have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?" *American Psychologist* 59, no. 1 (2004): 20.
[12] Totah, Ruba, "Negotiating "Home" Borders: Creative Processes Hosting Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Europe," *Eastap Journal*,2(June 05, 2020):424-461. Accessed July 06, 2021. https://journal.eastap.com/eastap-issue-2/.
[13] Sartre refers to freedom as an existential passion which drives individuals' infinite relationships and interest to themselves and their destinies and their sustained effort of becoming or reaching the finite. Jean-Paul Sartre, and Wade Baskin, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965):5.
[14] Meerzon, Yana, David Dean, and Daniel McNeil, *Migration and Stereotypes in Performance and Culture* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Totah, Ruba, "Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe," 1-16.
[15] Totah, Ruba, "Cultural Transnationalism and The Arab Uprisings: Migrant Artists from Syria in Europe," (PhD diss., Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, 2021), 1-168.
[16] Holledge, Julie, and Joanne Tompkins. *Womens Intercultural Performance*. London: Routledge, 2000.
[17] Birringer, Johannes, *Performance on the Edge: transformations of culture* (A&C Black, 2002).

theatrical institutions in collaborative performances beyond all sorts of borders. Bharucha[18] defines interculturalism as a process of confrontation affected by the age of globalization that attempts to decentralize the hegemony of western cultural forms. He explains that the western dominant culture, which prevails because of globalization, turned the performance practice into an intracultural one, instilling disparities among individuals and self-criticism of privileged citizens and unprivileged travelers. Zarrilli[19] also understands interculturalism as a form of confrontation but perceives performance as a cultural negotiation process of meanings and experiences rather than a form of cultural expression.

For artists, such perspectives on interculturalism imply confrontations at the levels of the self (cognitive and corporeal), peers, and power structures in an intercultural space. Artists' confrontations also constitute their resilience mechanisms in these spaces,[20] especially when facing nation-states' hegemonies. Some studies show how, during intercultural practices, artists engage in discussions on Europeanization and forms of centrism, and their impact on artists' bodies and consciousness. In a study on migrant Dominican performance productions,[21] performance is shown to have provided a space that enabled authors, actors, and audiences to recreate homes and discuss issues beyond the cultural boundaries of the host country. Identity formations became diverse and de-territorialized through these transnational performances. Although these performances are not as pervasive as larger economy markets,

> ' (…) the performance event offers a unique setting where new styles and ideologies are 'rehearsed' in front of a collective body of people who may identify or disidentify with them."[22]

Another study by Ferrari[23] about intercultural approaches of a theatre in Asia demonstrates that trans-Asian alliances have been occurring below and beyond the nation-state's scope through cross-border grassroot exchanges on a micro- or "minor" scale. These alliances resulted in transnational practices of deconstruction and hybridization in contemporary performances which override the Western-centric predispositions of dominant knowledge structures. It is by perceiving the intercultural

[18] Bharucha, Rustom, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theatre in an Age of Globalization* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).
[19] Zarrilli, Phillip, "The Broadest Spectrum of Pluralities: Performance Studies, Theatre Practices, Theatre Histories, and Beyond," In *The Rise of Performance Studies*, (2011): 177-90. doi:10.1057/9780230306059_12.
[20] Totah, Ruba, "Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe," 1-16.
[21] Stevens, Camilla, ""Home Is Where Theatre Is": Performing Dominican Transnationalism," *Latin American Theatre Review* 44, no. 1 (2010): 29-48. doi:10.1353/ltr.2010.0011.
[22] Ibid, 31.
[23] Ferrari, Rossella, "Asian Theatre as Method: The Toki Experimental Project and Sino-Japanese Transnationalism in Performance," *TDR/The Drama Review* 61, no. 3 (2017): 141-64. doi:10.1162/dram_a_00678.

practices, such as those in the Asian and Dominican productions' examples, as interactions with forms of hegemonies to recreate ideologies around centrism and identity formation, that interculturalism in the pre- COVID-19 era is mainly constructed. Therefore, there is a need to examine how intercultural practices have been affected by an additional challenge posed by the pandemic.

Moreover, some studies revealed that migrant artists' intercultural relationships in the western world feed into nation-states' inclusion and exclusion schemes.[24] A study by Varney[25] revealed that performances putting refugees and transmigrants on stage enacted the politics of exclusion, where 'the stage' itself has become a representation of the nation and national life's practice. The stage politics turn Eurocentrism into a process of displacement, and by doing so, reveals some of the challenges of theatre in a post-national era. Complications of inclusion in this post-national era extend during the pandemic, as a new factor of exclusion emerges from the forced lockdowns and in what Bharucha[26] described as the global civic obedience One dimension of exclusion is that the pandemic recapitulates the boundaries of theaters through limiting artists' opportunities to interact with nation states' power structures. Therefore, the question arises how this new layer of uncertainty, stemming from the pandemic, governs migrant artists' transnational practices and resilience mechanisms. For migrant artists, their biopolitics of resilience during the pandemic comprises interactions beyond the power connected to the migration experience, nationalism, and inclusion. Their resilience demonstrates the ways to maintain stable, healthy, and physical functioning as performers in the era of social distancing and confinement.

Specifically, migrant artists from the Arab area appeared in hundreds of intercultural collaborations with European performance bodies in the past five years. Many theatres around Europe organized performing arts projects that gathered artists from various backgrounds and welcomed migrant artists' performances around their migration experiences. Some examples for these initiatives are, for instances, *Collective Ma'louba* ensemble, *Yalla* ensemble, *The Open Border* ensemble in Germany, the *Arabesque* Ensemble in Sweden, as well as other productions not affiliated with any ensemble but based on production series, such as Laila Rabih's *Chronic of an Orphan Revolution*,

[24] Bullock, Philip Ross, "Ibsen on the London Stage: Independent Theatre as Transnational Space," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 53, no. 3 (2017): 360-70. doi:10.1093/fmls/cqx018; Balme, Christopher, "Theatrical Institutions in Motion: Developing Theatre in the Postcolonial Era," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 31, no. 2 (2017): 125-40. doi:10.1353/dtc.2017.0006.
[25] Varney, Denise, "Transit Heimat: Translation, Transnational Subjectivity and Mobility in German Theatre," *Transit* 2, no. 1 (2005). doi:10.5070/t721009711.
[26] Bharucha, Rustom, "Theatre and the Coronavirus: A Speech-Act in Nine Episodes," Lecture, Freie Universität Berlin, Calcutta, October 2020.

Sulaiman Albassam's *In the Eruptive Mode* (2017) and I Medea (2021), Wael Ali's *Reine Formsache* (2019), and Omar Abu's Sada *Ifigenia* (2017). The theatre institutions hosted these collaborations for reasons of solidarity, enabling these transnational performing arts experiences to bring new perspectives to artists' intercultural practices in Europe, particularly those related to the host societies' power relations. By joining these intercultural projects, migrant artists actively raised questions of nationalism, hegemony, resilience, and interaction with power structures in exile.

A previous study on Arab migrant artists' cultural participation in host countries demonstrates that migrant artists have developed strategies to cope with newness in the transnational spaces they joined.[27] These strategies paved the way to solidarity because they comprised various representing mediums for artists that enhanced their agency. Yet the artists questioned this form of solidarity since the creative process and intercultural medium was subject to conditional funding and limited duration. This in turn conditioned the migration phenomenon to a limited temporary social determinant and limited the space for broader solidarity. The solidarity spaces enabled intercultural practices but did not achieve sustainability for artists' agencies. Another study indicates that artists' resilience mechanisms are counter-performative attributes that stand against authoritative states, patriarchies, and other forms of hegemony, based on their behaviors as artists at home or in the host society.[28] However, in this study, artists' capabilities to recreate their identities throughout the migration journey were not enough to break free from the power structures they encountered during their migration experience. Hence, control over artists' decision was nurtured, affecting what Sartre calls the subject's "Free will".[29] As such, the pandemic era inherits artists' identity problematic of not being able to achieve free will, and introduces new challenges of lockdowns, closure of theatres, and social distancing. Under these new circumstances of complex and problematic identities, it is necessary to re-investigate or revisit artists' resilience mechanisms.

Intercultural Experiences of Arab Migrants and The Covid-19 Pandemic

Early in 2021, the U.N. produced a *'Special Rapporteur in the field of culture'* to the Human Rights Council,[30] declaring,

[27] Totah, Ruba, and Krystel Khoury, "Theater against Borders: 'Miunikh–Damaskus'—A Case Study in Solidarity," 90.
[28] Totah, Ruba, "No Room for Bare Life on Stage: Biopolitics of Syrian Migrant Artists Performativity," in *Borders in Perspective. The Biopolitics of Borders in Time of Crisis*, *vol. 7.*, eds. Astrid M. Fellner, Eva Nossem, and Tetyana Ostapchuk, (Sarrland University: UniGR-Center for Border Studies, 2021, forthcoming).
[29] Jean-Paul Sartre, and Wade Baskin, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965):18; Totah, Ruba, "Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe," 1-16.
[30] "Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights," OHCHR, Accessed July 08, 2021. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/SRCulturalRightsIndex.aspx.

> ' (…) the (COVID-19) pandemic is a cataclysm for cultural rights threatening of a global "cultural catastrophe" with severe, long-lasting consequences for human rights if effective action is not taken immediately.'[31]

The rapporteur emphasizes the positive potential of culture and cultural rights on building resilience to cope with the pandemic adversities and their potential role in cultural renewal. Simultaneously, the report states that art workers experience restrained freedoms and movement conditions and find their work increasingly difficult and underpaid, indicating a tight connection between economic and cultural rights. By recognizing the role of digital culture during the pandemic, the rapporteur acknowledges that the flow of material and content was useful to the various communities working in the art fields but deepened the divides and discrepancies with the 60% of the world population who do not have access to the internet. Regarding migrants' cultural rights, the report emphasizes the negative impact of integration centers' closures during the successive lockdowns of the pandemic. Moreover, the report emphasizes the connection between funding and artists' role during the pandemic. It introduces artists' roles and responsibilities in promoting well-being and resilience, guaranteeing artists' access to information, encouraging awareness and tolerance, and building capacities to imagine the future society under the ongoing global upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic.[32] Despite having a crucial role in achieving these goals, without adequate support, it is challenging for migrant artists to move beyond focusing on their primary survival in a new society. The report also argues that solidarity during COVID-19 must be extended internationally by creating a global culture fund to enhance multiculturalism and interculturalism in envisioning the management of the crisis.[33] Regarding Arab migrant artists in exile, they are in a state of asylum, or exile, being slightly supported by digital cultural funds. They are situated in the space between surviving and taking other roles of responsibility. At the same time, policy makers see artists' intercultural experiences accumulated during the pre-COVID-19 era to be at risk under the pandemic. While they emphasize the potential of art and the responsibilities of artists, they do little to investigate how the pandemic era is perceived by artists, especially migrant artists.

In parallel, a series of talks by Bharucha[34] attempted to investigate the perception and disposition of artists under the pandemic. He demonstrated a historic account of artists' situation during pandemics focusing on the Elizabethan Theatre in London during

[31] Ibid, 3.
[32] Ibid, 8.
[33] Ibid, 10.
[34] Bharucha, Rustom, "Theatre and the Coronavirus: A Speech-Act in Nine Episodes," October 2020.

the plague and the Spanish flu in London and Bombay and draws comparisons with performances during the coronavirus period nowadays. One of his main contributions deals with the temporality of the epidemic in which time is broken up into ruptures and jumps with highs and lows, formulating the Plague into a recurring phenomenon. He contends that, when thinking of the 2020 years' experience under the COVID-19 crisis, the recurrence of theatre closures had not been routinized yet, but many theatre institutions' aesthetic approaches remained in a state of shock and obedience to governments' pandemic emergency regulations.

Bharucha also observed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, new issues emerged, such as questioning the unquestionably physical architecture of theatres, actors' breathing techniques, and spectatorship's privilege, that became subject to new levels of scrutiny, along with the fear of infection or causing death. Regarding artists' wellbeing, Bharucha mentioned struggles during the Plague and the Spanish flu with contagions, infection, and stigma, hate, unemployment, horror, and poverty. He compared them with artists in India today who fear COVID-19 less than poverty. Politically, Bharucha discussed the relationship between artists and nation-states during the pandemic, where an extremely regulated-by-law theatre practice including laws of theatre contracting, insurance laws, fire laws, pass controls, and many others have been made vulnerable. During the Spanish flu, theatres were not closed, because the authorities tried to hide the flu's severity to avoid its effect on soldiers at war. Beyond Bharucha's examination of past pandemics, in a digital lecture taking place in May 2021, Balme demonstrated how theatres had been moving to focus on the future which holds larger margins of uncertainties. Theatres were announcing dates of re-opening theatres again in near futures despite uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, Balme's contribution described theatres' uncertainty as means of conveying a gesture of hope, but not protest.

Based on the pre- COVID-19 pandemic intercultural situation in the performing arts, and the UN report, a need emerges to contextualize how migrant artists who have engaged in intercultural programs of the European theatre scenes, those who have proven an intracultural global force to achieving diversity, have formulated their identity politics in the pandemic era of uncertainty, where complexities and contradictions of migration multiply, and where integration and social distancing became new determinants of the intracultural perspective. If intercultural practices in the pre- COVID-19 era constituted artists' interactions with forms of hegemonies to recreate ideologies around centrism and identity formation, then the COVID-19 era turns these practices into mere resilience practices hindering opportunities of exchange and agency to recreate ideologies. By investigating artists' narrations about their life routines during the COVID-19 pandemic in

the countries hosting them in Europe, I examine what constitutes the basis of migrant artists' interactions with power structures during the pandemic era. I argue that artists' resilience mechanisms to cope with the theatre boundaries they encountered, as well as their resilience mechanisms to fulfill their strive for free will come together in the new constellation of biopolitics during COVID-19.

Research Material and Method

The article uses transnational biographical interview analysis to collect and analyze the research material.[35] Based on a database of migrant artists built by Mophradat[36] organization, the research targeted artists of theatre and dance who have lived for at least three years in Europe, and who have received at least one funding grant from Mophradat and another from a European state funder for migrant artists. The artists, aged between 25 and 40, originated from various countries: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, Palestine, and Egypt, and have at least five years of professional experience in the performing arts. At the time of the research, they were located in Paris, Marseille, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, Rotterdam, and Scotland. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted via Zoom that was nearly the main means of communication between people in Europe and outside it during the first year of the pandemic. The biographical narrations produced by the artists during the interviews focused on their life experiences in Europe and their life conditions during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the networks they have been creating or aiming to create as they lived in Europe in the era following the Arab revolts. The analysis relies on the transnational biographical interview method defining experienced life events process and how interview partners structure them into actions we know through their biographical narrative to lead creative transformations on their lives. Through textual analysis which deals with the narrative, argumentative, and descriptive excerpts of the interviews, the article highlights what artists identified as experienced intercultural events or processes. It provides and understanding on the way artists structured these events through actions and how they led creative transformations on their lives and decisions.

Biopolitics of Migrant Artists Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

[35] Cassell, Catherine, and Gillian Symon, *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (London: Sage, 2014); Charmaz, Kathy, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2014); Apitzsch, Ursula, and Irini Siouti, "Transnational Biographies," *Zeitschrift Für Qualitative Forschung* 15, no. 1-2 (2015): 12-23. doi:10.3224/zqf.v14i1-2.21324.
[36] Mophradat creates opportunities for artists from the Arab world through an inventive approach to funding, commissioning, collaborating, and gathering. https://mophradat.org/.

Resilience and Theatre Boundaries

A previous study found that migrant artists' resilience mechanisms are counter-performative attributes that stand against authoritative states, patriarchal, and other forms of hegemonies over artists' behaviors in the host society[37]. The new era introduced another layer to this resilience: one concerning interactions with the management of the pandemic's regulations, power relations and conditions. As a result, artists' cognitive approaches of the self and of the pandemic showed resilience in the first year of the pandemic in 2020. One cognitive approach was intentionally engaging with governments' responses to the crisis, for example by tracking the rafts of updates on health and cultural policies during the pandemic. In doing so, migrant artists combined the pandemic condition within their circle of concerns by actualizing comparisons with previous experiences of hardships and requestioning their roles amidst the new uncertainties. Artists were uncertain about several issues, for example, receiving continued funding for their artistic work in exile. For instance:

> 'The Pandemic is not creating a challenging reality for me as did the existing theatre boundaries in France, which are nearly impenetrable and costly to cope with.' *A Syrian artist in France.*
>
> '…all cancellations of events are happening to all shows, not mine only as an Arab.' *A Lebanese artist in the Netherlands.*

Both these artists relied on theatre relations and mechanisms before the pandemic to explain what they encountered during the pandemic. While the first quotation refers to existing theatre boundaries, the other draws on categories of an 'Arab' - existing already before the pandemic era. These observations describe the pandemic experience as part of an overall migration experience and point to the layers of boundaries migrant artists encounter in the host country. The pandemic experience reveals—even deepens—the existing regularization of migrant artists' relationship with theatre and being categorized as an 'Arab'. Interviews with the other artists too relied on these arguments as a departure point to their positions and interaction with regulations imposed on them during the pandemic, such as the lockdowns and distancing measures. As such, artists' resilient performative attributes during the pandemic expanded to include a routine of regenerating reflections on previous experiences and producing arguments about their artistic practice based on past experiences. Their resilience becomes continuously reliant

[37] Totah, Ruba, "Transnational Subjectivities of Arab Artists in Europe," 1-16.

on these past experiences, turning the pandemic condition into a cross-dimensional aspect of their exile experience.

Another cognitive approach was related to the artists' preparedness to extend their coping mechanisms in exile by seeking connections between their career choices and the pandemic's emerging realities. Some of these choices were made before the pandemic but found greater justification during it. For example, in Belgium, a Lebanese artist explained that she decided to shift her genre and start working on video arts in the past two years. The main reason was that the production's funding and marketing were getting harder over time, and she increasingly became interested in digital culture and mainly video art, that reaches out to more people through social media than through performances in closed theatres. She also found that performances in theaters (as in physical buildings) required much more complicated funding applications. She found that her shift to video art has become more sensible during the COVID-19 crisis.

For some artists, these proactive choices and coping mechanisms expanded to influence their artistic networks, personal relationships, and internally, their feelings. For instance, an artist considered paying his team despite the cancellations and uncertainties of the pandemic. He lamented,

> 'I do not know how they all are going to survive. Also, I am worried about how my family and friends in Morocco are going to pass through this. It is quite a complex feeling.' *A Moroccan artist in Belgium*

Artists' engagement and preparedness to extend their coping mechanisms led to life transformations that deepened their internal and external confrontations with newness and uncertainty. These new confrontations (combined with their exile condition) transformed their exile into a way of life where the pandemic has become part of difficulties they encountered. If artists were obliged to abandon their theatre spaces due to war or migration, the pandemic did not bring a new reason to their abandonment experience but added a new dimension to it. That said, the pandemic, with its many constituents of fear, unemployment, turn to digital culture, and risk of the unknown, become an additional factor to the artists' resilience under exile's instability which now includes migration and pandemic management regulations.

Moreover, the artists situated the pandemic within the temporality of their struggle to become artists in general, without centralizing their artistic identity around migration and the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, an artist commented:

> "…at a certain age, a person can no longer live on making single initiatives without sustainability and consistency." *A Lebanese artist in France.*

Leaving Lebanon, where instabilities in economic and cultural upheavals distorted her artistic ambitions, finding a sustainable job in France was a decision that affected her work strategies and resilience mechanisms also during the pandemic. Although the artist refused to use pop-words such as 'post-Arab spring organizations' or 'post-pandemic eras', such encounters of war and pandemic affect the way cultural organizations deploy her condition as a migrant to steer the host countries' cultural programs. These cultural programs not only impact the 'artist' part in her migratory experiences, but also affect all aspects of her life. Interchangeably, whatever complexities she encountered; they were reflected in her artworks. The complexity of the revolt in Lebanon in 2019, the migration experience, the Lebanese port explosion in 2020, and the pandemic altogether changed her perception of the self and her artwork dramatically. This experience caused changes and postponements in her choreography within the performance she was producing in September 2020. These changes led a natural artistic response, on the body's movements, and on the ways the performing group, which she belongs to, gave meaning to those movements.

Another artist in Berlin provided a positive view on the current pandemic, stating that it shook and broke the existent institutional paradigm and enabled networking opportunities outside the economy of culture prevailing globally. The pandemic coincided with his geographic and genre shifts, and it encouraged braver career choices. It also widened opportunities for artists who were dissatisfied with existing theatre structures.

In summary, Arab migrant artists' preparedness, interactions, and reflections on the self during the pandemic's first year revealed how their cognition, behaviors, artistic choices, positions, and coping processes were regularized by power structures in their homeland and in the host societies. During the first year of the pandemic, they have been internally and externally engaged with the policies, structures, and categorizations of their conditions as migrant artists. Some have taken advantage of the chaos resulting from the pandemic, and others were tried to find means to retrieve the level of stability they had before the pandemic began. The minimization of personal exchange and theatre engagement imposed by the pandemic kept artists away from stages and speech podiums where they could achieve political change in public spheres. That said, their biopolitics remained connected to and dependent on hosting nation-states' policies and regularized by their measures.

Resilience to Approach Subjectivity

By remaining resilient amidst the many boundaries of migration and pandemic, the Arab migrant artists defined survival mechanisms to distance their feelings from the

surrounding. The survival mode during the pandemic lockdowns brought issues of well-being, funding, and gender roles to the centre of their interests. The artists turned their daily surviving duties into routines during the lockdowns and spoke of them as major achievements of the COVID-19 pandemic era. Many artists realized that the pandemic was triggering stressful moments, and they did not reflect on these experiences artistically because either they were still being lived, or the locked theatre spaces were not enabling them to reflect. Nevertheless, the artists found the lockdowns an opportunity to calm down and contemplate via refining their daily routines in activities such as reading, cooking, or running and learning the language of the host country. Other artists continued demanding duties such as childcare, resumed planning artistic work, or fulfilled previously unachieved networking goals and application submissions despite the cancelations - since these were the only source of income.

Aesthetically, some artists found other ways to maintain original working standards and to manoeuvre stress and drastic changes in their work visions during the lockdowns. For instance, an artist expressed that she kept a quarantine with friends:

> 'In the beginning, we all stayed alone, but then we quarantined together. I collaborated with an artist on a project, and not being together affected the work more than us personally. The progress was very slow until we decided to do the quarantine together.' *An artist in the Netherlands*.

Another artist from Iraq in Belgium has found ways in the theatre project he was working on to avoid narration, obliged as a technique due to the COVID-19 crisis to avoid travel of artists to stage locations and excessive number of performers on stage. He also denounced online theatre showing because it weakens the production. Furthermore, a Palestinian artist in Scotland has tried to avoid online dance performances because, in the artist's view, it affected the performer-audience relationship and challenged the essence of performance as an interactive tool with the audience. This artist expressed that one way for her to overcome the lockdown's adversity was to compare the conditions with the curfews she experienced under the Israeli occupation when she was in Palestine. These curfews were harder than this lockdown experience and within a different context, but they limited her mobility, and she found herself trained to tolerate and able to develop mechanisms to cope with this lockdown as long as it was not threatening her existence.

Whether artists' mechanisms focused on surviving nation-states' hegemonies, personal anxieties, or previous tensions, they were resilience mechanisms to maintain the development of the self and the theatre boundaries. If resilience is the process of bouncing back from adversities that migrants are facing within professional venues at institutions of

the host country[38], their resilience mechanisms connect organizational and individual aspects in two contexts: in extreme events and in everyday life. Branicki and other researchers provide a comparison of these dimensions, finding that extreme events expose organizations and individuals to rapid and unexpected disruptions in the flow of activities and routines and create unusual settings and uncertainty, which call for new patterns of action. If they provide that resilience lays in the positive organization in the face of extreme events[39], these events could be the current pandemic context. Migrant artists' positive organizing in this pandemic was about finding mechanisms to overcome the anxiety about not knowing what the future was and not knowing where they were going. Therefore, the pandemic adds to the difficulties they were prepared to handle because of their experiences in the homeland and in exile which constitute the strive of their subject to its freedom, borrowing Sartre's phrase 'we are condemned to be free'.[40]

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated artists' engagement, preparedness to expand coping mechanism, and means to reflect on their human and artistic identity and survival as main forms of resilience to the challenges of migration and the pandemic. Their resilience resumed throughout their intercultural experiences in Europe before and during the pandemic and impacted their cognition on the role of the arts in this era. Resilience also shaped their interactions with sorts of hegemony imposed on their corporeal and the cognition of their art. This study revealed that the artists relied on layers of boundaries with the host country that governed their relationship with theatre under the category of being Arabs. This experience formed their departure point when reflecting on the pandemic's impact on their life, career paths and search for free will. Even though these migrant artists stayed home most of the time during the lockdowns they remained connected to and dependent on hosting nation-states' policies. Therefore, the pandemic experience constitutes another challenge migrant artists need to confront while surviving nation-states hegemonies in their homeland and during their migration journey.

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Varia

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Protection Gap: The Case of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

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Abstract

Around 192,000 Palestinian refugees reside in Lebanon today. The disjuncture between the Lebanese national legislation and commitments to international and regional agreements has resulted in protection gaps that are vividly demonstrated in employment, property ownership and inheritance, education, and healthcare leading to entrenched patterns of poverty, marginalisation, and the deprivation of basic socio-economic rights for Palestinian refugees. I argue that protection gaps exacerbate vulnerabilities and result in deeper entrenchment of the informal labour market, thereby unleashing a vicious cycle of impoverishment for Palestinian refugees. I underscore this argument by further highlighting human rights abuses committed by Lebanese authorities that have deprived Palestinian refugees of their basic socio-economic rights. Over the last decades, manifold struggles governed the lives of Palestinians either in their home country through facing forced evictions and acts of violence by Israeli police and settlers, or in their host countries that adopted restrictive policies, through being subjected to discriminatory practices. This resulted in gross violations of a range of internationally recognised human rights. Therefore, it is critical to propel Palestinian voices and this issue to the top of the international agenda to help secure their socio-economic rights. This opinion piece proposes an understanding of the legal frameworks and the current situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and highlights the urgent need for establishing the enforcement mechanisms of human rights in Lebanon vis-à-vis Palestinian refugees.

Keywords

Protection Gaps, Refugees' Rights, Palestinian Refugees, Vulnerable Groups

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Introduction

On the 15th of May 1948 - marked as *Nakbah* or 'Catastrophe'- Palestinian refugees were forced to leave their country and settle in the neighbouring countries - mostly Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon - for the reason of previous bilateral and later, international assents in order to build a Jewish state in Palestine. The arrival of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was accompanied by widespread civil wars and conflicts in the 1970s and also precipitated events such as the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.[2] As a result, the Lebanese state has, over the years, inaugurated increasingly restrictive policies towards Palestinian refugees despite its ratification of international obligations such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)[3]. CESCR and CERD list human rights that everyone is entitled to, including foreigners and refugees. Therefore, these conventions can, perhaps, protect the Palestinian refugees' rights since their rights are not protected by the Lebanese government which heightens the need for international protection. Signatory states to such conventions agree to condemn racial discrimination and segregation and ensure that everyone can have the right to work, own and inherit property, and access education and healthcare without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or other social origin, property, or other status.[4]

Lebanon is hosting the largest number of refugees per capita and practicing restrictive policies that have resulted in negative consequences on refugees of different nationalities like Syrians, Ethiopians, Iraqis, Sudanese, and other nationalities.[5] This paper thus highlights how the Lebanese state's breach of international obligations have resulted in human rights abuses and protection gaps for Palestinian refugees. In reflecting on the peculiar status quo of Palestinians in Lebanon, I contend that protection gaps stemming from Lebanese policies such as the Lebanese ownership and inheritance law (No. 11614 of 1969), in addition to its subsequent amendment 296/2001, and the Lebanese labour law (No.17561 of September 1962) have created immense vulnerabilities for refugees.

[2] Sherifa Shafie, "Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", *Yumpu*, 2007, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/21054060/palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon-forced-migration-online.
[3] Jaber Suleiman, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, "No Refuge: Palestinians In Lebanon.", *Refugee Study Centre*, 2010, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp64-no-refuge-2010.pdf.
[4] OHCHR, "International Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination.", OHCHR, 1969, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx.
[5] UNHCR, "2021 Planning Summary", UNHCR, 2020, https://reporting.unhcr.org/lebanon.

Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: A Brief History

The birth of Israeli occupation of Palestine dates back to the Balfour Declaration - a letter sent from the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, to the head of British Jewish community, Rothschild, during 1917, promising the Jewish people to support their establishment of a homeland in Palestine.[6] When the World War I ended in 1918, the League of Nations approved to grant Britain a mandate for Palestine, hence Britain facilitated, encouraged and legitimised the occupation of Palestine by offering it as a homeland for the Jewish people.[7] This situation has increased the Jews' emigration from the whole world to Palestine. Therefore, various political events occurred between the Jewish people and the Palestinian inhabitants under the British rule. The British mandate in Palestine ended in May 1948, when Israel became an independent state.[8] The first Arab–Israeli war took place in 1948 as a response to the official recognition of the Jewish State of Israel by some countries such as France, Britain, United States, and Russia.[9] Since then, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has continued to escalate in part due to questions around who gets what land and how it is controlled; the Israeli police continued to forcibly evict Palestinians from their homes to make way for Jewish settlers, and in other terms, to pursue ethnic cleansing of Palestine from Arab inhabitants. Such events have constantly been infuriating the Palestinians and pushing them to respond through violent and/or non-violent activities.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) is a resolution that defines the principles for reaching a final settlement and returning Palestinian refugees to their homes. Accordingly, the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 created the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) to assist the governments and authorities concerned to find a durable solution and provide protection for the Palestinian refugees. Paragraph 11 of such resolution outlined the framework for a durable solution which allowed for the repatriation of those Palestinian refugees wishing to return and live peacefully with their neighbours and provided financial compensation for property to those choosing not to return.[10]

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[6] Mark Levene, "The Balfour Declaration: A Case of Mistaken Identity," *The English Historical Review* 107, no. 422 (1992): 54 -77, http://www.jstor.org/stable/575676.
[7] Lauren Banko, "Historiography And Approaches To The British Mandate In Palestine: New Questions And Frameworks", *Contemporary Levant* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1-7, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20581831.2019.1594618?scroll=top&needAccess=true
[8] Ibid.
[9] Samir Ahmed, "The Palestinian Presence In Lebanon: A Study on the Palestinian Humanitarian Rights in Lebanon." (Master's diss., Lund University, 2016), 1-70.
[10] United Nations, "194 (III). Palestine -- Progress Report Of The United Nations Mediator", United Nations, 1948, https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A.

Most Arab states, including Lebanon, maintained a unified stance that the lasting solution of the problem of Palestinian refugees was mainly based on their right to return, and disregarded the financial compensation for property to the Palestinian refugees choosing not to return due to the fear of their permanent resettlement in the Arab host countries. Therefore, the Arab League adopted resolutions in favour of the right to return such as the Resolution 231 of 17 March, 1949, which stated that, "The Council considers that the lasting and just solution of the problem of the refugees would be their repatriation and the safeguarding of all their rights to their properties, lives and liberty, and that these should be guaranteed by the United Nations."[11] Additionally, the Arab League also rejected the proposals put forward by the UN Secretary General that aimed at involving the refugees in the socio-economic development of the Middle East, since they are linked to the issue of resettlement of the refugees. As a consequence, the forty-five representatives of nine refugee organisations that were based in Lebanon rejected the proposals thereof.[12] The Lebanese policymakers and the successive Lebanese governments kept enforcing restrictive policies against the Palestinians to discourage the permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, such as subjecting the Palestinian refugees to laws pertaining to foreigners and not to refugees, the fact that has denied them their socio-economic rights. This approach was affirmed when the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, in 1994, supported the relocation of Palestinian refugees to other countries.[13] It is worth acknowledging that the inconsistency of decision-making among the policy makers has resulted in letting people live in limbo and has influenced host societies' attitudes towards refugees.

Under these various oppositions towards the Palestinian refugees, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was founded in 1964, as an umbrella organisation of resistance movements, political parties, popular organisations and independent personalities and figures. Therefore, it was recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by the Arab League and the international community.[14] The major goal of its establishment revolved around self-determination or, more precisely, liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation. Thereafter, political

[11] Jalal Al Husseini, The Arab States and the Refugee Issue: A retrospective view, *Israel and the Palestinian refugees* (Berlin: Springer, 2007), 435-464.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations New York. "Palestine Liberation Organisation". Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations New York, n.d. http://palestineun.org/about-palestine/palestine-liberation-organization/.

situations drastically shifted in Lebanon during 1967 when several Lebanese political groups called for the right of Palestinians to begin guerrilla warfare against Israel from the Lebanese territories.[15] In response, in 1968, the first Israeli incursion into Lebanon took place[16]. Such a move precipitated hostile Lebanese attitudes towards Palestinian refugees, the latter of which came to be looked upon as a threat to Lebanon's political stability.

During the 1970s, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) gained political power in Lebanon as it became known as the Palestinian state-within-a-state;[17] it became larger than a party, yet relatively quasi-state entity due to the financial and military support of foreign sponsors, who believed in the Palestinian cause and aimed at bringing independence to Israeli-occupied territories in Palestine. In addition to its main national and political goals, the PLO started dealing with other tasks vis-à-vis the life of Palestinian people in their main communities and across the world through building institutions and providing facilities in the realms of health, education and social services, and forming a quasi-government with its own information offices, security services and foreign policy.[18]

Thus, the PLO was allowed to enjoy de facto control in Lebanon, which was a weak and fragile state with intra-religious differences and multi-sectarian power-sharing political structure. Over time, the PLO gained almost complete control over areas of Lebanon using their own police forces, which were supported by the Lebanese political left and their allies. It has also played a leading role in weaponizing the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, destabilising the Lebanese government as well as extending financial and military support to the Lebanese left-wing Muslim factions, which has caused severe unrest in the political arena of Lebanon.

The forced displacement of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon has contributed to the shifting of the demographic balance in favour of the Muslim population, and the fear of their naturalisation has threatened the country's sectarian balance. Solidarity to the Palestinians was mostly expressed by the Muslims in Lebanon. As the Muslim political groups and the left wing (Lebanese National Movement, Communist Party, the Progressive Socialist Party, and Amal the Shiite Movement) formed an alliance with the Palestinians, the tension between Christian political groups (Phalanges Party, the Free Tigers, and the Guardians of the Cedars) and the PLO escalated. Another triggering factor of the 1975 civil

[15] Sherifa Shafie, "Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", *Yumpu*, 2007, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/21054060/palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon-forced-migration-online.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations New York. "Palestine Liberation Organisation". Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations New York, n.d. http://palestineun.org/about-palestine/palestine-liberation-organization/.

war was the Palestinian guerrillas' use of Lebanon as a platform to launch their operations against Israel.[19] However, the 1969 Cairo agreement allowed the Palestinians to start military operations from Lebanon to Israel. The Muslim groups supported the Cairo agreement, whereas the Christian groups opposed the Palestinian military presence.[20]

On April 13, 1975, members from the Lebanese Christian Phalanges party opened fire on a busload of Palestinians in Ain El-Remmaneh, Beirut, marking the beginning of the Lebanese civil war and the Palestinian involvement into this war.[21] Gradually, sects and different political groups were drawn into the conflict. In 1976, Beirut was divided by the green line, a line of demarcation that separated East Beirut - led by Christians - from West Beirut - led by Muslims. The ensuing cleavages and retaliations among various political factions resulted in prolonging the Lebanese civil war for fifteen years, where non-combatant Palestinians also came to be attacked. This situation was further aggravated in 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon to evacuate the PLO. Again, as in 1968, Israeli invasion of Lebanon caused massive losses to both Palestinians and Lebanese and worsened Lebanon's economic and political instability. The civil war ended with the signing, by Muslim and Christian political groups, of the Taif Accord that entailed the reform of the Lebanese political system, restitution of the Lebanese independence and the restoration of Lebanon's political and administrative institutions.[22]

In the wake of these events, Lebanese attitudes towards Palestinian refugees became increasingly more hostile, the fact that hindered their resettlement, curtailed their presence, and imposed restrictive laws upon them. The number of Palestinian refugees who are registered with UNRWA has reached 479,537,[23] whereas the predicted number of those currently residing in Lebanon is estimated at 192,000.[24] Some Palestinian refugees fled to different continents such as Europe, Australia, and the Americas through regular and irregular channels, escaping dire living conditions and wishing to lead a more decent life. In addition, countries such as the United States and Canada have adopted a family reunification programme, which enables one or more family members in a certain country to bring the rest of the divided family or specific members of the family to immigrate to

[19] Samir Ahmed, "The Palestinian Presence In Lebanon: A Study on the Palestinian Humanitarian Rights in Lebanon." (Master's diss., Lund University, 2016), 1-70 https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Palestinian-Presence-in-Lebanon%3A-A-Study-on-the-Samir/12dc415401e67afb0c8b2f29d2f923e376f1b1c5#paper-header.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Joseph Chamie, "THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES", *World Affairs*, 139, no. 3 (1976): 171 -188. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20671682?refreqid=excelsior%3Aed0da574d2b3ada71caba46c4e1beb3d .
[22] Ibid.
[23] UNRWA. "Where We Work". UNRWA, 2019. https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon.
[24] UNICEF, "Palestinian Programme", UNICEF, 2017, https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/palestinian-programme.

that country. Therefore, many Palestinian refugees have started a new life with their families in such countries. Palestinian refugees who continue to reside in Lebanon due to a number of reasons ranging from their inability to return to Palestine to the hope of gaining Lebanese citizenship and thereby ameliorating their living standard. Today, 62 percent of Palestinian refugees live in twelve recognized refugee camps of Lebanon that particularly host Palestinian refugees, while the rest reside in areas surrounding these camps[25]. According to a joint survey conducted by UNRWA and the American University of Beirut (AUB)[26], the majority of Palestinian refugees live in poverty (66 percent) with 6.6 percent categorised in extreme poverty. Since the Palestinian refugee population is a young population (50 percent below 25 years of age), more than 70 percent of children and adolescents live in conditions of deprivation[27], where only 10 percent of young adults above the age of fifteen have attended schools[28]. These demographic characteristics raise serious questions and indicate that protection gaps seriously impinge upon the everyday lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Legal Framework of Refugees in Lebanon

Before I argue the discrepancy between the Lebanese commitments to international agreements and everyday practices that have created the protection gap that has in turn resulted in further vulnerabilities for Palestinian refugees, I reflect on the legal framework of refugees in Lebanon. It is worth acknowledging that the refugees in Lebanon are treated under the Lebanese law as foreigners, and not even granted a special legal status. The Lebanese government adopted the *Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon and their Exit from the Country* (1962 Law) as the domestic legislation that governs the lives of refugees in Lebanon[29], which prevents the refugees, generally, and the Palestinian refugees particularly from granting socio-economic rights similar to the rights granted for the Lebanese nationals. They also cannot grant refugees' rights under refugee law and relevant international bodies because Lebanon is not a party of the Convention

[25] Jad Chaaban et al., ""Socio-Economic Survey Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon."", *UNRWA*, 2010, https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011012074253.pdf.
[26] Jad Chaaban et al., "Socio-Economic Survey Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon.", UNRWA, 2010, https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011012074253.pdf.

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Issam Saliba, "About This Collection | Legal Reports (Publications Of The Law Library Of Congress) | Digital Collections | Library Of Congress", *The Library Of Congress*, 2016, https://www.loc.gov/collections/publications-of-the-law-library-of-congress/about-this-collection/lebanon.php#_ftn5.

related to the Status of Refugees of 1951 or even its 1967 Protocol[30], which includes provisions vis-à-vis refugees' rights in host countries. Therefore, Lebanon merely adopted the 1962 Law as the domestic legislation in addressing the status of refugees. In this sense, there is no process of refugee status determination that could help in protecting the refugees' basic human rights. Accordingly, we realise that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are stuck in a state of limbo because of being unable to return to their country of origin as well as being deprived from their basic socio-economic rights. Drawing from these observations, the human rights conventions may guarantee legal international protection for Palestinian refugees, whose rights are neglected by the Lebanese state. In this paper, I argue that the rights declared in international conventions must be granted to everyone, including refugees and foreigners, and the Lebanese state must fulfil its duties and grant refugees' rights in line with the international agreements.

Protection Gap

Although Lebanon is a signatory to core international human rights instruments that include provisions vis-à-vis refugees, the state seems to fall short in securing refugees' rights to work, shelter, education, and health. For example, Lebanese national legalisation and policy-in-practice are in conflict with Lebanon's obligation to some international and regional agreements. One case is the Cairo agreement in 1969 that was signed between the Lebanese government and PLO to improve the standards of living of refugees. Even as the agreement sought to ensure freedom of mobility, labour rights, and residency for Palestinian refugees, these socio-economic rights remain on paper without execution.[31]

Contradictions as such have led to the emergence of protection gaps creating humiliating conditions that have further intensified the socio-economic problems of Palestinian refugees. Such gaps can be identified in the field of employment, property ownership, education, and healthcare.

Firstly, regarding employment, Article 6 of the CESCR stipulates that everyone should have the right to work.[32] And yet, the three core principles of the Lebanese labour law (No.17561 of September 1962) that hamper Palestinian refugees' access to employment entail: *national preference, the requirement to obtain a work permit prior to*

[30] Ibid.
[31] Sherifa Shafie, "Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", *Yumpu*, 2007, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/21054060/palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon-forced-migration-online.
[32] OHCHR, "International Covenant On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights.", OHCHR, 1976, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx.

employment, and reciprocity of rights and obligations.[33] Not only is it hard for Palestinian refugees to access work permits, but also receiving such a work permit does not entitle Palestinians to benefit from the Lebanese social security system. This is because the Lebanese social security system is reciprocated internationally, and since Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are considered stateless, they do not have any state through which such social benefits can be accessed. Since the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have always been considered a burden on the Lebanese economy, granting them the right to work in Lebanon limits the job opportunities available for the Lebanese nationals. Based on this fact and aforementioned principles, the Ministry of Labour has specified a list of jobs that can be undertaken by Lebanese nationals only. The Ministerial Decree No. 621/1 issued in 1995, for instance, consists of a list of fifty professions including trade and private sector jobs.[34] As a result, the Lebanese employment law, in fact, seems to exclude Palestinian refugees from the labour market, which forces refugees to accept precarious employment in the informal market with low wages and non-existent social protection.

Secondly, Article 5 of the CERD states the right for everyone to own and inherit property,[35] along with the right to access 'adequate housing' including facilities, infrastructure, social security, and protection. The Lebanese law, Article 3 of Decree No. 11614 of 1969, provided the right of all Arab citizens, including Palestinians, to own property of up to 3000 m^2 in Beirut and 5000 m^2 in the rest of Lebanon without the requirement of a license.[36] However, on 3rd April, 2001, the Lebanese parliament amended the first article of the decree to prevent any person who is not a national of a recognised state from owning and inheriting properties, regardless of what had been bought previously, or any person whose property ownership would contravene to the provisions of the constitutional prohibition of *tawteen* 're-settlement'.[37] Such a move further deteriorated the situation of refugees living in camps due to overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and substandard housing conditions. The fear of Palestinian refugees' re-settlement in Lebanon pushed the Lebanese state to adopt such restrictive policies since Palestinians are considered a key element for weakening the complex sectarian balance among the Lebanese political groups. Hence, Palestinians are excluded from the formal labour and housing markets and

[33] Jaber Suleiman, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, "No Refuge: Palestinians In Lebanon.", *Refugee Study Centre*, 2010, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp64-no-refuge-2010.pdf.
[34] Ibid.
[35] OHCHR, "International Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination.", OHCHR, 1969, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx.
[36] Jaber Suleiman, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, "No Refuge: Palestinians In Lebanon.", *Refugee Study Centre*, 2010, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp64-no-refuge-2010.pdf.
[37] Ibid.

often have to depend upon verbal and informal agreements, which make them further vulnerable to exploitation.

Thirdly, the CERD also advocates the right for education and health for all, regardless of national origin, race or colour. Nonetheless, Palestinian refugees are unable to access medical services provided by the Lebanese government due to restrictive laws, and they remain heavily dependent on UNRWA healthcare services (e.g. medical checks, radiology and dental care); NGOs; and Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS).[38] However, these organisations struggle to encapsulate all-inclusive medical services and, on that account, refugees have to visit other clinics for further treatment. For those with complex cases or chronic illnesses, private clinics prove to be extremely costly and push people further into debt.[39] With regard to education, the Palestinian refugees are entitled to 10 percent of the overall places reserved for foreigners at government secondary schools due to the national preference principle that circumscribes this quota by prioritising nationals over foreigners.[40] As a result, Palestinians have to either access the sixty-nine UNRWA schools (primary and secondary) or attend private schools, which remain out of reach for a vast majority due to high financial costs.[41] This trend also continues in tertiary education, where Palestinian refugees have limited access to faculties at the State University. For instance, the Faculty of Arts in the State University is reserved for Lebanese students only.[42] Lebanese policies on work, property ownership and inheritance, education and healthcare have thus led to a hostile environment for Palestinians with limited access to their basic rights.

Vulnerability in Lebanon

Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon can be divided into four categories:

- "Registered" Refugees: This category consists of Palestinian refugees who have registered with both the UNRWA and Lebanese authorities. Their estimated number is 479,537 (UNRWA, 2019)[43];

[38] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Jaber Suleiman, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, "No Refuge: Palestinians In Lebanon.", *Refugee Study Centre*, 2010, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp64-no-refuge-2010.pdf.
[41] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[42] Jaber Suleiman, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, "No Refuge: Palestinians In Lebanon.", *Refugee Study Centre*, 2010, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp64-no-refuge-2010.pdf.
[43] UNRWA. "Where We Work". UNRWA, 2019. https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon.

- "Non-registered" refugees: This category consists of Palestinian refugees who are only registered with the Lebanese authorities. Their estimated number is 35,000[44];
- "Non-ID" refugees: This category consists of Palestinian refugees who are not registered in both UNRWA and Lebanese authorities. Their number ranges from 3,000 to 5,000[45]; and
- Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS): This category consists of those Palestinian refugees who fled to Lebanon due to the Syrian crisis in 2011. Their number is estimated to be around 29,145[46].

In this section, I classify the two *vulnerable groups* as follows: documented Palestinian refugees including "Registered" and "Non-Registered" refugees, and undocumented Palestinian refugees including "Non-ID" refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS). Both groups experience different types of insecurities and forms of exploitation due to their exclusion through law and limited access to socio-economic rights.

a. Documented Palestinian Refugees

Below, I discuss the impact of the Lebanese legislation and related state practices on the lives of Palestinian refugees and their basic rights.

Freedom of Movement

Palestinian refugees who hold identity documents enjoy greater freedom of mobility in Lebanon than those who are undocumented. Palestinian refugees who are registered with both Lebanese authorities and the UNRWA can obtain travel documents extending up to five years through the Lebanese General Directorate of General Security or General Security Office (GSO), to leave and re-enter Lebanon. On a more general level, Palestinian refugees from Lebanon experience diverse limitations in applying for visas to a third country because of their legal status as refugees[47]. In addition, they are also vulnerable to arbitrary political changes such that may restrict their movement. For instance, the former Prime Minister of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, exiled 15,000 Palestinians from Libya, including those who held Lebanese residency because they demonstrated against the Oslo Accord

[44] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[45] Ibid.
[46] UNRWA. "Emergency Appeal 2019". UNRWA, 2019. https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2019_syria_ea_final.pdf.
[47] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.

of 1995.[48,49] Such a move precipitated legal ramifications in Lebanon in September 1995, when the Lebanese Minister of Interior and Municipalities passed a decree stating that Palestinians outside Lebanon were required to obtain an entry visa to re-enter Lebanon.[50]

Property and Housing

In addition, even documented Palestinian refugees have limited access to housing as they are forced to either reside in one of the twelve recognized camps under harsh living conditions or rent accommodation outside the camp, which is unaffordable for most refugees. Consequently, several Palestinian refugees depend upon semi-legal and informal agreements with Lebanese acquaintances to either buy property or keep property bought pre-2001 on their behalf, and thus put the Palestinians at risk of losing their properties.[51] For example, a Palestinian family had an informal agreement with a Lebanese landowner who allowed the family's stay on his land in exchange for working in his agricultural fields. This family had built and owned a house on this land.[52] After the landowner died, his daughter took legal action and evicted the family without any compensation due to the lack of official papers that would have protected the right of this family to own the house.[53] In 2016, 53 percent of documented Palestinian refugees lived in camps, suffering from congestion and inadequate infrastructure (e.g. sewage, poisoned water, lack of electricity).[54] For instance, an Al Jazeera article of 2017 reported how refugees residing in Beddawi camp suffered from poor upkeep of their premises; one resident narrated how his son was electrocuted and had to be hospitalised when he accidently touched electric wires that were wet due to water that had leaked on them.[55]

Employment and Livelihoods

[48] Oslo Accords are a set of agreements signed between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization between 1993-1995 to advocate the peace building process stemming from Resolutions 242 and 338 of the United Nations Security Council.
[49] Jaber Suleiman, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, "No Refuge: Palestinians In Lebanon.", *Refugee Study Centre*, 2010, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp64-no-refuge-2010.pdf.
[50] Ibid.
[51] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[52] United Nations, "Property Rights Scarce for Palestinians in Lebanon", United Nations, 2013 https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-206940/.
[53] Ibid.
[54] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[55] Lisa Khoury, "Palestinians in Lebanon: 'It's like Living in a Prison," Human Rights News | Al Jazeera, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/16/palestinians-in-lebanon-its-like-living-in-a-prison/.

This group stands excluded from over seventy commercial and administrative professions.[56] As a result, most in this group work in the lower segments of the market in jobs like construction, agriculture and sanitation. Barred from professions such as medicine and law, Palestinian refugees are forced to work jobs with less security, lower wages and no benefits,[57] often earning less than 500,000 Lebanese pounds a month, which is less than the minimum average wage.[58] In this sense, school drop-out rates have skyrocketed in recent years because of the inability to get a job due to restrictive laws that demotivates children to complete their education. Nearly 20 percent of Palestinian refugees between the ages of six and fifteen drop out of schools, and are often forced to work when their parents cannot.[59] They have become the breadwinners in their families. For example, a child works ten-hour shifts at a mechanic's shop every day and earns $3.33 weekly.[60] This amount of money is insufficient to feed one person per day keeping into account the fact that the extreme poverty line is set at $2.17 for one person per day.[61] The scarce job opportunities that are offered to Palestinian refugees constitute an interplay between poverty and exploitation and have caused an increase in the percentages of Palestinian child labour.[62] According to the American University of Beirut socio-economic survey,[63] 56 percent of the Palestinian population in Lebanon are unemployed, which has skyrocketed the levels of poverty especially in the camps. Palestinian refugees' poverty head count ratio (HCR) stands at 66.4 percent, a figure that is higher than the Lebanese poverty HRC, which stands at 35.1 percent.[64] All these factors illustrate how Palestinian refugees face social and economic exclusion, particularly from the labour and housing markets that deprive them from their basic rights and thus engender poverty.

[56] International Labour Organization, *Palestinian Employment in Lebanon - Facts and Challenges: Labour Force Survey among Palestinian Refugees Living in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon*, (International Labour Organization, 2014), 148, https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_236502/lang--en/index.htm.
[57] Simon Haddad, "The Palestinian Predicament in Lebanon," Middle East Forum, 2000, https://www.meforum.org/68/the-palestinian-predicament-in-lebanon.
[58] International Labour Organization, *Palestinian Employment in Lebanon - Facts and Challenges: Labour Force Survey among Palestinian Refugees Living in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon*, (International Labour Organization, 2014), 148, https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_236502/lang--en/index.htm.
[59] Lisa Khoury, "Palestinians in Lebanon: 'It's like Living in a Prison," Human Rights News | Al Jazeera, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/16/palestinians-in-lebanon-its-like-living-in-a-prison/.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Jad Chaaban et al., "Socio-Economic Survey Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon.", UNRWA, 2010, https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011012074253.pdf.
[62] Ibid.
[63] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[64] Jad Chaaban et al., "Socio-Economic Survey Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon.", UNRWA, 2010, https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011012074253.pdf.

After discussing the restricted legal, political, economic and social conditions within which the Palestinians are forced to endure, it is significant to shed light on the security conditions in refugee camps that further exacerbate the situation of Palestinian refugees.

Security Conditions

Palestinian refugees in camps have repeatedly denounced security conditions of the camps. This is because Palestinian refugees are subject to the rule of various Palestinian factions as well as Lebanese security forces, both of which exercise arbitrary arrest and detention towards Palestinian refugees. Insecurity within the camps is due to the frequent clashes and fights that break out among different Palestinian factions who have weaponry and militants.[65] Before the Cairo agreement of 1969, the Palestinian camps in Lebanon had been governed according to the state of emergency policy. The Palestinian governance within the camps was facilitated through the 1969 Cairo agreement and the 1975 Lebanese civil war. The 1969 Cairo agreement facilitated the presence of PLO in Lebanon, and provided a framework for the Palestinian governance within the camps by allowing the Palestinian weaponization in order to launch military operations from Lebanon to Israel[66]. The l975 Lebanese civil war gave the Palestinian factions the opportunity to expand their political presence. The Lebanese political factions spent fifteen years fighting against each other in an attempt of every Lebanese political faction to control and run the country, which led the Lebanese state to collapse. In such wise, the Palestinians gained political and military power all over the Lebanese areas, where, at the time, Lebanon was not considered a sovereign independent state as its government controlled neither most of the territory of the state nor its people. After the civil war ended, there was a tacit Palestinian- Lebanese agreement in 1991 that neither the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) nor the Internal Security Forces (ISF) would have access into the camps,[67] while the Lebanese Security Forces became only present at the entrance of the camps (armed checkpoints) to check identities and/or vehicles. This agreement paved way for the arms smuggling inside the camps despite the armed checkpoint at the entrance, and promoted the Palestinian control there. Since then, the refugee camps have become a place of uncontrolled weaponry and sporadic fighting. As a result, there is a serious crisis of governance in camps, at present, which allows dozens of armed factions including Palestinian factions, pro-Syrian factions, and radical Islamist groups; and criminal networks,

[65] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[66] Sari Hanafi, "Reconciliation, Reform and Resilience," Conciliation Resources, 2012, https://www.c-r.org/accord/lebanon/palestinians-lebanon
[67] Ibid.

such as drug smugglers, to access the camps. Such factions have their own security apparatus which functions outside the Lebanese state control. Again, Palestinian refugees are at risk of being abused, harassed or killed at hands of militant factions in the camps.

b. Undocumented Palestinian Refugees

The second vulnerable group involves Non-ID Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), both of whom lack identity documents. The lack of a valid legal status impinges on their freedom of movement and access to services. Therefore, undocumented Palestinian refugees have very limited access to mobility, jobs, education, healthcare and other civil services such as birth and marriage registrations. Most of Non-ID Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have no IDs because they fled Jordan to Lebanon in the 1970s after Black September events in Jordan.[68] Others came to Lebanon amidst the civil war of 1975 to fight.[69] In 2008, the GSO issued temporary Special Identification Cards (SICs) to Non-ID Palestinians. However, these SICs have only served as a proof of identity. The holder can neither be recognized as a refugee in Lebanon nor access civil services such as birth, death and marriage registrations.[70] More importantly, not all the members of the Lebanese Internal Security are familiar with SICs, which further restricts the movement of Non-ID Palestinians.

The PRS are reliving the political upheaval and adversity of statelessness through the Syrian conflict. Between August 2013 and April 2014, the PRS were denied entry into Lebanon.[71] Afterwards, restrictions were imposed to obstruct their movement to Lebanon, which included a verified embassy appointment in Lebanon or a flight ticket and visa to a third country - conditions that most of the PRS were unable to meet. Therefore, since then, it has not been possible for them to access Lebanon for "humanitarian reasons" or seek international protection either.[72] Once in Lebanon, the PRS are also obliged to limit their movement outside the camps for the fear of being arrested, detained and deported by Lebanese authorities, which restricts their access to civil registrations due to their undocumented status. Even though the UNRWA provides limited services such as schools and health clinics to them, and close to 95 percent of PRS receive cash assistance from

[68] Black September is a conflict between Jordan Armed Forces and PLO, and it occurred between 16 and 27 September 1970.
[69] Sherifa Shafie, "Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon",*Yumpu*, 2007, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/21054060/palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon-forced-migration-online.
[70] UNHCR, "Refworld | The Situation Of Palestinian Refugees In Lebanon", Refworld, 2016, https://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

UNRWA to pay for food and housing,[73] they nevertheless suffer from inadequate access to services, which can be ceased when registered Palestinians are given priority.

This vulnerable group is unable to secure proper housing due to high rental prices as the average monthly rent for PRS families accounts to $207 inside the camps and $303 outside the camps.[74] According to the UNRWA's report on the vulnerability of the PRS in Lebanon,[75] "60 percent are sharing accommodation with one or more families, and one in ten families live in overpopulated conditions with a space less than 3.5 m^2 (the minimum living space required for healthy living) per person", and 3.5 percent of PRS live in tents and underdeveloped shelters.

As I mentioned earlier, this group has mobility restrictions that leads to difficulties in accessing health care because most of the UNRWA-contracted hospitals are placed outside the camps.[76] In matters of education, this group cannot sit the official exams and receive school certificates even if they are attending the UNRWA primary schools since they lack legal documentation.[77] In addition, this group cannot access formal employment and thus seek jobs in the informal economy that is neither registered nor protected by the state. In other words, such refugees are compelled to get involved in activities where they are exposed to exploitation, have to work long hours in treacherous places, and receive very low incomes. Many refugees are forced into this sector due to the threat of being deported or arrested.[78] Findings of a survey conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics demonstrate that Palestinians work, despite precarious employment and exploitative conditions, in an effort to alleviate livelihood pressures.[79]

Here, I aim to contribute to the theoretical understanding of "adverse incorporation" that enriches our understanding on how livelihood pressures exacerbate vulnerabilities and exploitation in the informal markets and these conditions further produce and reproduce poverty.[80] The latter shows the cycle that reflects the theoretical framework of the circular dynamics of "adverse incorporation" which focuses on the experience of poverty not only due to the exclusion of workers from the labour market, but also because

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] International Labour Organization, *Palestinian Employment in Lebanon - Facts and Challenges: Labour Force Survey among Palestinian Refugees Living in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon*, (International Labour Organization, 2014), 148, https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_236502/lang--en/index.htm.
[80] Nicola Phillips, "Unfree Labour and Adverse Incorporation in the Global Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Brazil and India," *Economy and Society* 42, no. 2 (2013):171-196, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2012.718630.

of their incorporation into it through adverse terms.[81,82] In the case of the Palestinian refugees, the Lebanese labour market is highly segmented. Job opportunities are not only framed by education and skills, but also by race, gender, legal status procedures and ethnicity.[83] For example, Amnesty International reported how the legal status of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon impedes them from attaining their career goals by exemplifying an El Buss camp resident, who faced a job rejection from an IT company after he was asked for his nationality and recognised as a Palestinian refugee.[84] Therefore, the legal status has entrapped the Palestinian refugees in chronic poverty and has forced many of them into survival emergencies, whereby Palestinians are unable to plan and secure future aspirations and escape deprivations as they have to attend to their immediate basic needs.

This situation has led to a situation of *hyper-precarity*, resulting from the ongoing interplay between free markets and highly restrictive immigration systems and asylum polices that set the structure and/or deprivation of basic rights to residence, work and welfare, thereby creating precarious working conditions for migrants.[85] This relational concept functions through 'adverse incorporation.'[86] In other words, Palestinian refugees are incorporated into labour markets through adverse terms (legal status) which place them at the lower segment of the market with no health and safety protection. On the whole, the undocumented Palestinian refugees are in the same dynamic circle of poverty as the documented Palestinian refugees, but with more extreme conditions due to their lack of a legal status.

Apart from the Lebanese policies that have deprived the Palestinian refugees their basic human rights and have resulted in protection gaps, I also argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has further deepened the issues of poverty and vulnerability among marginalised communities. As touched upon previously, the majority of the Palestinian refugees suffer from substandard housing conditions and poor sanitation, where also physical distancing is almost impossible, some cases of more than one family (five up to ten persons) sharing the same accommodation, the fact that has accelerated the spread

[81] In the case of the Palestinian refugees, the adverse term is their legal status (stateless or refugees).
[82] Nicola Phillips, "Unfree Labour and Adverse Incorporation in the Global Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Brazil and India," *Economy and Society* 42, no. 2 (2013):171-196, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2012.718630.
[83] Stephan Castle and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed. (New York: The Guilford press, 2009).
[84] Amnesty International, "Lebanon - Exiled and Suffering: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," Refworld, 2007 https://www.refworld.org/docid/4715bc6f826b.html.
[85] Hannah Lewis et al., "Hyper-Precarious Lives," *Progress in Human Geography* 39, no. 5 (2015): 580-600, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132514548303.
[86] Ibid.

of COVID-19.[87] Keeping in mind that the vulnerable communities tend to have poorer baseline health conditions, this situation has heightened their vulnerability to poor conditions leading to increased mental and physical health problems among the Palestinian refugees. Additionally, during the periods of lockdown, many Palestinians who make a living through low-paid jobs have lost their jobs without any compensation from the state or employers, thus fuelling the trends of informality, child labour, and cycles of poverty. As a result, COVID-19 has been the latest event in a series of recent dreadful events to a community that has suffered marginalisation and uncertainty for decades.

Conclusion

The thrust of this opinion article is to reflect on the contentious status quo of Palestinian refugees as a result of the restrictive policies of the Lebanese government. I argue how Lebanon's breach of international obligations has deprived Palestinian refugees from their basic rights, and resulted in protection gaps that have exacerbated vulnerabilities and created cycles of impoverishment. The Lebanese state has plunged into recurring political and economic crises since the civil war, which makes it difficult for the state to deal with the refugees' problem, and thus results in the deterioration of the refugees' conditions in Lebanon. A long-term solution requires a radical approach that is international in scope rather than focused on the nation-state. What is needed is an efficient and comprehensive refugee response framework to be adopted by the Lebanese state with the help of civil society organisations and the international community. In other words, closing the gaps means an active engagement of the international community including NGOs that would support the government in terms of key policy changes, advocacy and lobbying, innovative and resettlement programmes, thereby enhancing the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It is also highly significant to expand the scope of the UNHCR mandate and revisit the limitations imposed upon its responsibilities to Palestinian refugees; Palestinian refugees are never eligible for the UNHCR resettlement/Humanitarian Admission Programme. Focusing on involving Palestinian refugees in the resettlement programme alleviates the acute vulnerability faced by them in Lebanon. Resolving this issue requires a thorough scrutiny aimed at long-term solutions that include integration, repatriation, and resettlement. Instead, understanding the legal frameworks and the current situation of Palestinian refugees gives us a mechanism for

[87] McCloskey, Stephen. "Covid-19 Has Deepened the 'Pandemic of Poverty' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," openDemocracy, 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/covid-19-has-deepened-pandemic-poverty-palestinian-refugees-lebanon/.

determining a course of action to solve the problem. The lack of governmental protection and, more broadly, international legal protection mandate for Palestinians leave them at stake, particularly during humanitarian emergencies, armed conflicts, and political crises.

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