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Quarterly on Refugee Problems – AWR Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

The Schengen Enlargement 2025:
Its Potential to Reshape Migration Routes[1]

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"Let 2025 see Schengen become stronger" - said Ursula von der Leyen in November 2024, when Austria, Bulgaria and Romania signed a joint agreement in Budapest for Bulgaria and Romania to join the Schengen Area,[3] enhancing their accession to the Schengen Area. This hope is also fortuitously aligned with the 40th anniversary of one of the EU's most significant achievements in 2025. However, this aspiration can be seen in contrast with recent developments, namely the reintroduction of border controls by the Netherlands and Germany.

The Schengen Area was established in 1985 as a result of an intergovernmental initiative between five Member States (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) with the objective of facilitating the free movement of people without internal border controls. The Schengen Borders Code (SBC),[4] as set forth in Regulation (EU) 2016/399, establishes the regulations governing the control of persons at external borders, the conditions for entry, and the circumstances under which border controls may be temporarily reintroduced at internal borders within the Schengen Area. According to the Schengen Borders Code, border controls are not solely in the interest of those Member States situated at external borders; they are also beneficial to all Member States that have abolished border controls at their internal borders. Controls can assist in the prevention of illegal immigration and human trafficking, as well as the mitigation of threats to the internal security, public policy, public health, and international relations of Member States.

In 2011, the Commission confirmed in the Schengen Evaluation Reports that Bulgaria and Romania had fulfilled all the requisite criteria for full integration into the Schengen Area. It is noteworthy that it was during the first Hungarian Presidency in 2011 that the Member States were afforded the opportunity to vote on the matter of their accession. At the time, the French and Germans were the most vocal opponents, citing the Cooperation and

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[3] With the Council decision taken on 12th of December, 2024 during the second Hungarian presidency, the two countries become full members of the Schengen area from 1st of January 2025. See https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16327-2024-INIT/en/pdf

[4] Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9th of March, 2016, on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code) (codification) OJ L 77, 23.3.2016, pp. 1–52.

Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania (CVM)[5] that was launched immediately after Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007. This was because the two countries were not yet fully ready for EU membership in the areas of justice and the fight against corruption. Consequently, despite the European Commission declaring the two countries eligible for Schengen in 2011, the decision was delayed. The situation was further exacerbated by the influx of refugees in 2015. In the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, hundreds of thousands of individuals fleeing conflict and persecution in the Middle East and North Africa arrived in the Balkans from Turkey. After crossing the Bulgarian or Greek borders, they were compelled to cross an external Schengen border, with Hungary being the closest by air. It is stipulated by principle that asylum seekers must be registered, and their applications processed at the first external border. If they evade detection, they can proceed virtually unhindered elsewhere in the region.

As a result of next years' enlargement, migrants can now enter Bulgaria, or the long-standing member Greece without undergoing any further checks. One potential route is via Hungary to Austria, which has the highest number of asylum applications submitted each year. Austria previously exercised its right of veto, citing the risk of 'uncontrolled' migration. Currently, migrants arriving from Turkey via Greece or Bulgaria to the EU, still have an external Schengen border at Hungary or Croatia. However, this would no longer be the case with the Bulgarian-Romanian accession. A joint security package has been agreed, whereby a joint contingent of a multilateral police contingent of at least a hundred border guards will be sent to the Bulgarian-Turkish border, with the Hungarian government contributing the technical equipment.

The development could also facilitate the Migration and Asylum Pact, adopted in May 2024, should there be a reduction in the number of individuals attempting to enter from the south. The new regulations would introduce a border processing capacity, which would determine the number of applications that national authorities are able to process in a fast-track procedure, and those that they must process in the meantime. The calculation will be based on a formula that aggregates irregular border crossings. Hungary has the highest number of irregular border crossings, although the specificities of the Hungarian system, which violates EU law, have played a role. If the route shifts to the internal border, where there are no controls, the number of known irregular border crossings could also decline significantly.

In accordance with the Schengen rules, routine checks may be conducted in justified cases, and for a limited period of six months. In accordance with the quadrilateral agreement, this will also be implemented at the Hungarian-Romanian and Bulgarian-Romanian borders for a minimum of six months. The Schengen area has also faced significant challenges in recent years. The 2015 migration crisis, followed by a public health crisis, resulted in the implementation of enhanced border control measures. These have remained a popular policy, irrespective of the rationale behind their introduction, whether it be to enhance public security or to protect public health. Some Member States, like Austria, have maintained such a measure continuously since 2015, and they renewed every six months. Migration was a constant reason for border control and later was used

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[5] On 1st of January 2007, the Commission established a Cooperation and Verification Mechanism to assess the commitments made by Bulgaria and Romania in the areas of judicial reform, fight against corruption and – for Bulgaria - organised crime.

in conjunction with COVID-19.[6] The reasons cited by Member States for reintroducing or extending temporary internal border controls after 2015 reflected crisis-driven decision-making on migration, asylum and borders (Carrera et al, 2018). For the time being, it seems that this approach will be maintained in the near future.

References

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Regular Versus Irregular Migration: Does the Humanitarian Pathway Differ?
A Comparative Study Between Two Arab Asylum Seekers in Belgium and Italy[1]

Dr. Rania Mansour[2] and Ban Hudaib[3]

Abstract

In the refugee and migration context, researchers are keen to approach variables that regularly link irregular, political to economic, and original citizenship to asylum seekers. These variables affect people's attitudes towards refugees at individual and governmental levels. This study investigates the humanitarian pathway as an essential track to differentiate migration trajectories in Europe by examining two separate cases: a Syrian man who lived in Lebanon and regularly resettled from Lebanon to Italy supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and a homosexual young Lebanese man who left Lebanon for Belgium through irregular routes, more specifically, the death boat way which refers to the maritime dangerous and tragic route taken by migrants, refugees, or travelers who attempt to cross risky seas in unsafe or overcrowded boats, often leading to fatal consequences, noting that "Central Mediterranean is the deadliest known migration route in the world, with more than 17,300 deaths and disappearances recorded since 2014 (Black, 2021). Based on the researchers' practice work, both agreed to conduct interviews. The Syrian refugee was recruited through his involvement in an integration project of an NGO that provides educational support for Syrian refugee children and facilitates their integration into the host community in Lebanon. The second participant, a Lebanese man, was recruited through one researcher's work in the field of prostitution. The researcher invited him to be a guest speaker in classes on human behavior and the social environment for social work students. The research aims to reveal the differences between the two cases' regular and irregular human rights-based treatment. The qualitative narrative analysis method was employed to collect data on the official governmental attitudes of Italy and Belgium, as well as the detailed processes and procedures individuals undergo before obtaining citizenship in a European country. Four essential themes emerged from the research: intrapersonal, cultural/social, financial, and political factors. The four key themes of the

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participants' stories differ regarding regular and irregular immigration. Despite the differences in their first reception phase process in which the irregular refugee man suffered and needed to overcome the initial reception complications, both refugees were found to have received equal opportunities for citizenship and protection, regardless of their migration path after arriving in the destination countries.

Key Words:

1   Introduction

Due to the many challenges migratory processes bring about, immigration is a concern for both immigrants and the countries receiving them. With the increase in multi-layered crises in developing countries, most notably wars and political instability, or economic and social crises, the number of those wishing to immigrate to countries that offer political, financial, and social security, along with living opportunities that uphold human rights, has significantly risen.

International conventions and agreements on immigration and migrant affairs highlight the restrictions and challenges faced in host countries, as exemplified by policies implemented during recent political, health, and socio-economic crises, such as the Ukrainian-Russian war and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the framework of promoting human rights, many questions arise regarding the issue that links immigration and the rights of immigrants, including how they are received and the different ways they seek safer, more stable places away from their homelands.

Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the differences in how governments handle various immigration cases, whether individuals have entered through regular channels or resorted to irregular methods in search of safety. This is achieved by answering the main research question: Does the humanitarian pathway differ between regular and irregular migration?

2   Contextual Background

2.1   Definitions

In the beginning, it is necessary to provide some definitions for fundamental concepts and a brief overview of the countries this study focuses on to clarify the contextual background.

2.1.1 Refugee Definition

"A refugee is someone who has been compelled to leave their country and cannot return because of a serious threat to their life, physical integrity, or freedom because of persecution, armed conflict, violence, or serious public disorder. It is a legal status that provides an individual with certain rights and protections" (UNHCR, 2024a).

2.1.2 Regular and Irregular Migration Definitions

Regular migration refers to the lawful way to enter a country and have permission to reside there. The goal is to improve the life circumstances of migrants and invest in the host countries' economy and society (International Organization for Migration, 2019). Irregular migration refers to the irregular way to cross a country's borders without having visas,

permits, or other documentation required for lawful entry or residence in a country (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

2.1.3 Asylum Seeker's Definition

"An asylum-seeker is someone who has or intends to apply to be recognized as a refugee, but their application has yet to be processed" (UNHCR, 2024a).

2.1.4 Human Rights Definition

"Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination" (United Nations, 2024).

2.1.5 Brief on Belgium, Italy, and Lebanon

Belgium is a European country in the west of Europe, bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The capital is Brussels. The population of Belgium is around 11.8 million, and it has several official languages, including Dutch, French, and German. Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy with cultural diversity and a high-income economy that depends on critical industries (European Union, 2024a).

Italy is a country in the South of Europe, extending into the Mediterranean Sea. It shares borders with France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia. The capital is Rome. The population is around 60 million, and Italian is the official language. Italy is a parliamentary republic with the third-largest European economy and a prosperous heritage (European Union, 2024b).

Lebanon is an Asian Arab country bordered by Syria, Palestine, and the Mediterranean Sea. The capital is Beirut. The population is around 5.5 million, and Arabic is the official language. The government is a parliamentary democratic republic with many religious groups. Lebanon faces economic, political, and financial instabilities (Al-Jazeera Media Network, 2024).

2.2 Relevant Theories

The following theories provide the framework for the course of the study.

2.2.1 Theory of Borders and Borderlands

The Theory of Borders and Borderlands is primarily used in social sciences, particularly cultural studies, sociology, and geography. It explores the dynamic and often complex interactions that occur in border regions – areas that are geographically or metaphorically at the intersection of different cultures, nations, or identities. Five essential critical points of the theory are presented in the following: (1) Borders as social constructs: Borders are not just physical barriers but social, political, and cultural constructs. They define the limits of state sovereignty, cultural identity, and belonging. The theory argues that borders are fluid, not fixed, and are shaped by historical, political, and social forces. (2) Borderlands as hybrid spaces: Borderlands are the regions or spaces on the edges of borders, often marked by a blending of cultures, traditions, and identities. These areas can become hybrid zones where different ways of life meet, merge, and sometimes clash. People in these borderlands may simultaneously navigate multiple cultural, linguistic, and political

worlds. (3) Cultural interaction and exchange: The Theory of Borderlands highlights how border regions often develop unique identities, practices, and social structures due to their exposure to multiple cultural influences. These areas often involve cultural exchange, adaptation, and negotiation, where different norms and values coexist or intersect. (4) Conflict and tension: While borderlands can be areas of cultural richness, they can also be sites of tension, conflict, and marginalization. The theory explores how power dynamics, such as those between nation-states or dominant vs. marginalized groups, play out in these regions, leading to struggles over territory, identity, and autonomy. (5) Theorists and literature: Scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa and Homi K. Bhabha have contributed to developing this theory, emphasizing the experiences of people living in borderlands, especially in the context of immigration, displacement, and diaspora. Anzaldúa's book Borderlands/La Frontera is one of the most significant works that blend the concept of borders with personal identity and cultural experiences (Al-Hayali & Atallah, 2022).

2.2.2 Identity Theories

Identity Theories encompass philosophy, psychology, and sociology concepts that explore the nature of identity and how it is formed, understood, and expressed. They deal with the relationship between an individual's self-concept (who they are) and the various social, psychological, and physical factors contributing to forming that identity. The critical aspects of identity theories are as follows: (1) Philosophical identity theory (mind-body), which posits that mental states (thoughts, feelings, and consciousness) are identical to physical brain states; (2) Social Identity Theory focuses on how individuals define themselves in their groups. It suggests that identity is not solely an individual construction but is shaped by group memberships, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, or social class. (3) Personal Identity Theory refers to the individual's unique characteristics and continuity over time. Philosophers like John Locke have discussed personal identity in terms of psychological continuity, suggesting that identity is tied to memory, consciousness, and the ability to recognize oneself across different points in time. Personal identity also explores self-awareness, self-concept, and how people understand and relate to themselves in the context of life experiences and choices (Desrochers et al., 2004).

2.2.3 Theory of Cultural Identity

Halls' Theory of Cultural Identity emphasizes cultural identity as a collective experience encompassing social, political, and economic identities alongside cultural inclusivity, which includes aspects such as ideology and theoretical practice. Cultural identity also encompasses rights-related relationships, which may affect the development of other identities. Hall's significance in articulating cultural identity is evident in two key dimensions: First, Hall presents cultural matters stemming from identity. He examines the subject's position within the culture, encompassing the relationships of power and the agency the subject can exert. Second, Hall views identity as an expression of underlying cultural dynamics, contending that the structure and praxis of culture provide the foundation for grappling with identity-related issues. This theory explores how individuals and groups define themselves through the culture(s) they belong to. It emphasizes that identity is not just an individual phenomenon but is deeply influenced by the cultural contexts in which people live, interact, and experience the world. Cultural Identity Theory addresses how people understand their sense of self, cultural heritage, traditions, values, and norms and how they interact with other cultures. The critical elements of cultural

identity theory include its formation, shaped by shared beliefs, values, customs, language, and traditions passed through generations. It is learned through socialization in the family, community, and broader society. It is dynamic and can evolve based on life experiences, exposure to different cultures, migration, or globalization. In addition, the social and group identity element could be based on factors such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or shared practices. This group affiliation provides a sense of belonging and a framework for understanding the world and the impact of Globalization and Cultural Identity, leading to the preservation and blending of cultural identities. While exposure to global cultures can result in more hybrid or cosmopolitan identities, it can also trigger a desire for cultural preservation or resistance against cultural homogenization (Yang et al, 2021).

3   Refugees' Status Worldwide and in Europe

3.1   Regular and irregular migration to the European Union

The European Union grants entry to non-EU nationals through regular procedures, allowing them to reside within EU states to improve their living conditions. This is implemented through laws and regulations, including the issuance of visas, residence permits and work permits, family reunification processes, asylum and refugee protection procedures, and the opportunity to apply for long-term residence (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024b). However, some people also enter the EU through irregular immigration, which refers to unlawful crossing into and remaining in a country, including unauthorized entry without documentation, overstaying a visa, and staying in a country with a rejected asylum application. People are turning to irregular migration due to limited ways of regular migration and push factors such as social and political instability in their home countries. At the same time, the irregular migration journey is not easy; many of these journeys put people's lives at risk. The sea is one of the main obstacles that migrants face, and crossing it represents the most dangerous way of irregular migration. The most common form of irregular migration is remaining in a country after an expired short-stay visa. EU countries put massive efforts into developing strategies, guidelines, technologies, and regulations to manage and secure their borders and limit irregular migration (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024b).

3.2   Migrants' Protection

In interviews conducted with migrants and refugees about their perceptions of protection, their opinions were mainly in line with the Refugee Convention: They see protection as obtaining residency or citizenship to feel safe and as the subsequent process of integration within the new society to reach their desired life (Stevens, 2017). Looking at international laws and agreements related to asylum and protection, we find that they are constructed from a top-down perspective that addresses the concerns of the most potent parties without listening to the voices of refugees and the strategies they follow to reach protection. Asylum policies adopted in the European Union follow human dignity and rights standards and adherence to the Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1976 Protocol. The European Union provides the right to asylum under the Charter of Fundamental Rights, but at the same time, this right remains a subject of debate. With the establishment of a unified asylum policy, fundamental rights for refugees have been recognized, and criteria for accepting asylum applications have been established. However, defenders of refugee rights see this as insufficient, as the states themselves impose obstacles to the arrival of refugees, such as interception at sea, which hinder the arrival of refugees. Considering

these practices, the effectiveness and actual impact of the protection laws have to be questioned (Stevens, 2017).

Syrians have started migrating to European countries attracted by favorable asylum policies and the benefits they provide. For this journey, they board smuggling boats from the Mediterranean coast, which cost them thousands of euros. As the numbers increased, European countries lost control over their borders. Consequently, the Turkish Aegean Sea emerged as an alternative to reach Greece and complete the journey through Serbia, Hungary, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. However, these countries soon took measures to restrict the arrival and entry of refugees and implemented deportations. Ultimately, the European Union countries took action to protect Greece's borders. However, smuggling operations persist, with fluctuating numbers (Hudson, 2018).

3.3 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Trans-sexual Refugees and Asylum Seekers

During the journey to European Union states, asylum seekers from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual communities face a lack of adequate protection, as they are exposed to harassment, discrimination, and violence, which prompts them to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity in the camps in which they are temporarily located. Police may commit these acts, UNHCR personnel, or camp employees who lack adequate training (Rodriguez, 2023).

There is no standard asylum regime in the European Union, which allows individual states to interpret the international institutional framework for claiming asylum regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Civil society organizations advocate for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual asylum seekers by working to reformulate existing policies and strategies and enhance the overall level of protection they receive (Schnyder, 2020).

3.4 Syrian Refugees in Italy

Since 2011, more than 1.1 million Syrian asylum seekers have arrived in the EU. Germany hosts the most Syrian refugees in Europe, with over 800,000 Syrians, followed by Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, and Greece (UNHCR, 2021). In 2022, around 132,000 first-time asylum applications were from Syria. 94% of Syrian applications received first-instance decisions, making them the top recipients. In 2022, Syrians represented the most significant population residing irregularly in the EU (Eurostat, 2023).

Italy's position in the Mediterranean Sea often makes it the first strategic destination for immigrants who try to reach Europe. For decades, Italy has hosted waves of immigrants from the Balkans and North Africa. However, taking the sea route to reach Italy has always been very risky; many people have died or been lost in the Mediterranean Sea (Statista Research Department, 2024b).

Italy is a developed country that supports the essential rights of displaced individuals. It empowers them to build their futures, focusing on protection, integration, and sustainable life conditions (UNHCR, 2024b). Moreover, Italy, Belgium, and other countries support the migration section in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes immigration as a driver of sustainable development for migrants, their families, and host communities (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

Italy ranked as the fourth most popular destination for immigrants in 2021, hosting approximately 248,000 individuals, which accounted for around 11% of all immigrants to the EU. Additionally, Italy issued 338,000 residence permits to non-Eu citizens in 2022, placing it fourth among EU countries. Of these permits, 40% were given for family reasons. In 2020, Italy ranked fifth in the EU for the highest number of first-time asylum applications, accounting for 9% of the total, with 72% of applications resulting in positive final decisions (Eurostat, 2023).

On the other hand, Italy, like other European Union countries, faces challenges with irregular immigration. In 2022, Italy recorded the highest number of refusals at sea borders and ranked third among EU countries, accounting for 12% of irregular immigrants in the EU (Eurostat, 2023).

In 2022, Syrians were among the four most common nationalities seeking to immigrate to Italy (Statista Research Department, 2024b).

3.5   Lebanese Refugees in Belgium

Lebanese immigration began in the mid-nineteenth century during the Ottoman period, with migrants heading to America, Mexico, and the United States. After World War II, the migration process resumed, and the regions of destination expanded to Australia, France, and West Africa. In the late 1950s, economic conditions played an essential role in driving the migration of skilled workers to the Gulf countries. Many Lebanese migrated after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, with Canada and Australia being among the most prominent destinations offering humanitarian asylum. After that, Germany and Scandinavia emerged as new countries of destination. After the 2000s, challenging economic and political conditions pushed Lebanese to leave their country. Over the years, economic, political, and social conditions have played an essential role in Lebanese migration (European University Institute, 2017).

The European Union hosts a large Lebanese population in France, where 11,934 Lebanese people live (Statista Research Department, 2024a), as well as in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Belgium supports refugees by establishing several programs and policies for their integration, including language learning opportunities, economic and social participation, and everything that supports and facilitates their lives and future (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024a).

In 2023, 5.2% of Belgium's population were third-country nationals, which equates to around 606,600 people. Most are from Morocco, Turkey, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. About the status of subsidiary protection in particular, most beneficiaries in 2022 were from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Palestine. In 2024, Belgium granted temporary protection to approximately 77,645 Ukrainians (Migration & Home Affairs, 2024a). Belgium's residence permits are primarily issued for family reasons, accounting for around 49%, followed by permits for employment and study purposes (Eurostat, 2023).

Belgium decides on asylum applications according to the criteria established by the Geneva Convention and the related harmonized legal standards of the EU. Its integration program includes language, civic education, and vocational training. Asylum seekers cannot work immediately but must wait months after submitting their applications. Children have the right to attend school, and every person is entitled to essential

assistance (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024a). The exact number of Lebanese in Belgium is unclear, as it is not considered one of the nationalities with a significant population.

4   Migration and Social Work

Migration studies involve multiple economic, social, and political aspects. Poverty is one aspect that plays a significant role in migration, as migration and development are closely interlinked, driving progress and contributing to economic growth. The family also plays an essential role in someone's decision to migrate, and it is the task of social workers to intervene to understand the dynamics of families and to work to address them. In addition, this process is also facilitated through the social networks of those migrating.

Social workers intervene professionally through three essential dimensions: considering the immigrant himself and his family if they exist (Micro-intervention), the group of immigrants (Mezo intervention), and the macro level, which considers the hosting communities, advocacy, and policymaking (Mansour, 2021).

Migration is regulated by policies that can be restrictive and disadvantageous to migrants, necessitating social workers to advocate on their behalf and remove the obstacles and barriers they face. Migrants may also face exploitation, which highlights the critical role of social work in addressing these practices. Following the migration process, social and cultural changes affect migrants, requiring social workers to intervene and support them in managing these transitions (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Massey et al., 1993).

5   Methodology

5.1   Methods

This study employs a narrative research method focused on the experiences of two refugees. Narrative research emerged from the need to access individuals' experiences through their stories and the context in which these stories were lived (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research has become more accepted as a postmodern research method through which personal stories can be transformed into valid knowledge (Fraser, 2004). As a qualitative approach, narrative research fits the need to explore individuals' lives through their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In social work, the narrative approach helps understand people's stories based on what individuals disclose through their talks, facial impressions, body language, and context. This gives authority and value to people's stories (Fraser, 2004).

Narrative methodology in social science contexts also employs storytelling as an interpretive approach to understanding how people interpret events and actions. Researchers obtain narratives using interviews as a data collection method. These interviews examine subjectivity and how culture and identity impact the human experience. In addition, this method documents various perspectives and analyses gathered information to distinguish similarities and discrepancies in experiences and behaviors (Mitchell, 2003).

To conduct narrative research, the research problem must be suitable for this approach. If this criterion is fulfilled, the stories of one or more individuals are selected to gather different types of data and information, which are later analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As with any research method, the narrative approach has strengths and limitations. Its strengths lie in providing depth and a rich understanding of people's experiences despite their complexity, making it a flexible and insightful method. On the other hand, narrative research tends to be subjective, as the researcher's perspective is often evident. It is a time-consuming endeavor that lacks generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5.2 Sample

The study applied a non-probability, purposeful sampling technique. It adopted a qualitative approach and collected data simultaneously. The sample consisted of two refugees who left Lebanon for the European Union. Participants were selected through professional and personal relationships, following a non-probability purposive method.

The sample represented both regular and irregular migration pathways. Data was collected through interviews, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes, guided by semi-structured questions. The interviews covered 18 key topics, including migration decisions, costs, the journey, feelings, opinions, and other relevant details. The complete list of questions is included in the Appendix.

5.3 Analysis

In the analysis, storytelling was considered a natural part of being human; by analyzing data and examining participants' stories, we assumed we could gain insight into cultural, political, and personal contexts.

The collected stories were analyzed using several phases of line-by-line analysis. First, the stories and experiences were attended to by focusing on feelings, speaking tone, and body language. Next, the transcripts of these stories were reviewed, followed by interpreting the data by categorizing them into sets of ideas and narratives. Every story was broken down into parts for analysis. The researcher then revisited the results of previous phases, exploring different domains of experience, linking them, and identifying similarities and differences before formally writing the narrative (Fraser, 2004).

6 Ethical Concerns

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI-IRB-2024-F07). Both participants were given an informed consent form, which they signed before the interview. The form explained that participation is voluntary, that withdrawal can happen at any moment, and that their data would be kept secure and anonymous. All data was securely stored on a password-protected computer, with hard copies in locked storage. Participants' names were removed prior to the analysis.

7 Results and Discussion

7.1 Study Sample

Table 1: Interview Participants' Characteristics

Personal Characteristics	Refugee 1 (to Italy)	Refugee 2 (to Belgium)
Age	47 years	33 years
Nationality	Syrian	Lebanese

Marital Status	Married – 3 children (10 years/ 9 years/ 6 years)	Single
Level of education	Bachelor in Primary Education	High School
Job description (before immigration)	Syria: Teaching and Freelance Work Lebanon: School Principal for Syrian Students	Theater dancer
Job description (after immigration)	-Bus Driver in a Center for Special Needs -Cultural Mediator for the Humanitarian Corridors Program, Syrian Refugees Section, and Member of an Interfaith Dialogue Organization	Clothes shop
Birth Order	The oldest brother in a family of ten siblings	The youngest in a family of nine siblings
Residential Area (before immigration)	Al-Qusayr in Syria Akkar in Lebanon	Jnah in Lebanon

This research has collected two stories. The first story refers to a regular migrant on a direct flight from Lebanon to Italy, which took a few hours. The second story refers to an irregular migrant who travelled for ten days from Lebanon, crossing Turkey, Lesvos Island in Greece, Athens, Macedonia, Serbia, and Germany until he arrived in Belgium.

7.2   Narrative Analysis

This analysis followed the phases of Fraser's (2004) line-by-line analysis to examine the participants' stories.

The first phase entailed analyzing the emotions experienced throughout the story. Listening to the story of the first refugee (story 1), we found him confident and fluent in sharing his narrative. He told his story clearly and presented all the details despite several years since the journey. This reflects how the immigration procedures appeared straightforward and organized for him. All stages of his regular immigration procedure, from Lebanon until his settlement in his new home, were planned out for him by the receiving party.

Contrarily, the refugee in the second story (story 2) told his story briefly, focusing on the answers to the interview questions, without mentioning many details compared to story 1. Certain events, such as the order of the countries he passed through on his journey, had been forgotten or were unclear due to the number of crossed countries and the chaos of the journey. However, we also noticed that this refugee focused on the result: reaching Belgium. Enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment were apparent in the interview through his focus on achieving what he wanted.

In phase two, both interviews were transcribed and translated from Arabic (Lebanese colloquial dialect and Syrian colloquial) to English.

In phase three, each transcript was interpreted, divided into sets of ideas and scenes, and organized into lines (Fraser, 2004). The first story (of a Syrian refugee) is 137 lines long, while the second story (of a Lebanese refugee) is 89 lines long. These stories contained different themes within four primary contexts:

• Intrapersonal factors, including feelings, hope, decisions, danger, and loss.
• Cultural/social factors, including support, challenges, integration, values, and disintegration.
• Financial factors refer to the cost of migration.

- Political factors, including regulations, human rights, and public policies.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth phases involved reviewing the previous domains of experience in both stories, linking the "personal" and the "political," and identifying commonalities and differences between the two participants (Fraser, 2004).

The researchers composed the article through a scientific and critical lens in the seventh phase. By diving deeply into the four primary contexts of the stories' themes, each section reviewed what the interview participants had said. Their contributions were analyzed and subsequently compared to human rights.

7.3 Intrapersonal: Feelings, Hope, Decisions, Danger and Loss

In the feeling domain, the participants expressed various sentiments, which varied between the two stories and within each. Refugee 1 (story 1) expressed fear and worry in Lebanon. Before leaving Lebanon, inner peace had not been found. At the same time, there was always a dream present to return to Lebanon one day. The second refugee's feelings were different (story 2). They were generally positive. He expressed feelings of excitement, happiness, and pleasure. In addition, he found inner peace in his country of destination.

By the nature of his work before immigration, the first refugee finds hope in helping people in Syria, while the only hope for the second refugee is found outside Lebanon.

Another significant difference between the two stories is the migration decision. In the first story, the participant made a forced decision, which was considered after many trials to find solutions to his current situation. In the second story, the desire for migration was in the participant's mind without hesitation, and a sense of adventure and discovery led him to migrate.

Refugee 1 was threatened and lived in a dangerous situation before migrating to Lebanon, which forced him to leave. The second refugee was threatened during his migration journey, which exposed him to many dangers. The trajectory path was multidirectional, and diverse means of transport, such as airplanes, boats, trains, and walking, were used to reach the destination. The participant was also exposed to death on his journey.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes many individual rights: security, freedom of movement, asylum, a dignified life, and a sense of hope and peace. The two stories reviewed make it apparent that some aspects mentioned are consistent with these rights, and others violate them.

In the first story, the refugee lacked a sense of security while in Lebanon, as he was threatened, which prompted him to decide to migrate after he had lost a sense of inner peace. This contradicts Article 3 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates the individual's right to "life, liberty, and security of person", and Article 5, which stipulates that "No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (United Nations, 1948).

Furthermore, the refugee sought assistance to leave Lebanon after feeling pressured and unable to stay due to the threat to his right to life. This is consistent with Article 14 of the Universal Declaration, which affirms the individual's right to seek asylum to escape persecution (United Nations, 1948).

The refugee in the second story did not have access to this right and consequently resorted to irregular immigration methods at the beginning of his journey. On his migration path, he faced many dangers and challenges through the means of transportation used, including death boats. This contradicts the first and third articles of the Universal Declaration, which emphasize human dignity and the right to life (United Nations, 1948).

Despite the differences in the reasons for migrating in the two stories, what unites them is the desire to live a dignified life and feel hope, among the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration to every individual. The refugee in the first story could not freely choose his destination, as he was restricted by the association that assisted him in leaving, thus limiting his options to choose his residence. In contrast, the second refugee had the freedom to choose his destination. The refugee in the first story also aspired to achieve self-fulfilment and help others through his work with civil institutions, which aligns with Article 29 of the Universal Declaration that imposes duties on individuals towards their communities (United Nations, 1948).

7.4   Cultural/Social Support, Challenges, Integration, Values and Disintegration

Regarding the border dimension, the support participants received from their surrounding environment played an essential role in their journey. Both participants received human support. Family members accompanied the first participant to his migration destination and received unlimited support as he described it. Similarly, a friend accompanied the second participant to his migration destination.

At the same time, both participants have also faced challenges; at specific points in their journeys, they lived under the pressure of insecurity and threats.

The participants adapted and learned how to interact with the locals by living in their countries of destination. For the first refugee, his active participation in interfaith dialogue significantly aided his integration process, as he engaged in conversations with people of Christian faith and participated in positive interfaith activities, such as praying in a church and attending Ramadan Iftar there. These activities helped him integrate quickly, become familiar with, and form meaningful connections with others. In contrast, during his time in Lebanon, he faced challenges engaging in interfaith dialogue with Muslim clerics.

Being homosexual, as the second refugee expressed, made him suffer and affected how people treated him in Lebanon, where he considered his gender-based choice as a right. His relevant values were considered significantly throughout his narrative.

On the other hand, not knowing a foreign language made the integration process difficult for both participants. The first refugee also expressed difficulties with getting accustomed to the local food.

A set of rights can be identified by examining the broader context of local communities, their culture, integration within them, and the challenges faced. The second refugee expressed the hate that he faced from the other refugees who were non-homosexuals that he met on the border of host communities that he crossed, which experienced such adverse treatment because of his belief (being gay) as the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration (United Nations, 1948). In the same context, being homosexual, the police facilitated his asylum procedure to prevent clashes with the others. This contrasts with the first refugee who

received strong support in Italy and found an opportunity to integrate into the new society through participation in interfaith dialogue, strengthening this freedom.

The refugee in the first story initially faced difficulties in integrating due to language barriers, highlighting the importance of empowering refugees and giving them the right to education regarding language acquisition.

The two refugees faced problems related to the right to have a standard of living adequate to health, including access to food, as stipulated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration (United Nations, 1948). The first refugee and his family had access to adequate free food from their arrival in Italy but did not accept and liked local food. However, the second refugee had to pay for food while arriving in Belgium.

Respect for human rights in the countries of destination positively impacted both refugees. It facilitated their integration and stability, helped them open up to others, and respected their culture.

7.5   Financial: Costs

For the first refugee, the migration journey did not cost anything; everything was covered at the host country's expense. The second refugee bore the high cost of migration himself.

Financial costs play a significant role in the migration process. According to the Geneva Refugee Convention, host countries bear the costs of assistance and support for refugees who cannot afford it according to the same standards accorded to their nationals (Art. 23 Geneva Refugee Convention). The first refugee received full financial support for his migration, while the second had to bear the very high cost. This disparity creates a gap between migrants, making financial status a controlling factor in the migration process. Therefore, there is a difference in how far both could seek asylum, according to Art. 14 para. 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, the role of financial support in protecting the rights of refugees and facilitating their migration humanely and safely indicates the need for enhanced international cooperation to ensure that refugees have equal opportunities to migrate, regardless of their financial status.

7.6   Political: Regulations, Human Rights, and Public Policies

The process of the migration trajectory for the first refugee was straightforward and clear. It was a direct journey from Lebanon to the country of destination; he got an airplane with his family, they were accommodated in a house, and he was treated very well. On the other hand, the second refugee's journey was more complicated. He crossed several countries to reach his destination, and the accommodations were in camps with strict regulations. To avoid bullying, a transgender friend of the second refugee informed the police of the border to facilitate the process required at the border. Returning to the research's central question, "Does the humanitarian pathway differ between regular and irregular migration?" the analysis of the narratives reveals a paradox: while there are differences between regular and irregular migration concerning human rights, there are simultaneously no differences.

To explain this in more detail, we look at the second story, in which we find differences between regular and irregular migration regarding human rights. The second refugee made the decision to apply for subsidiary protection in his country of destination based on his sexual identity. In addition, the immigration process was prolonged, complicated, and

not guaranteed, with constant dangers throughout his journey, which spanned multiple countries. He paid for the whole journey, which was expensive, and he had to stay in crowded camps.

To explain the second part of the answer provided to the research question, namely that there are no differences between regular and irregular migration in terms of human rights, it needs to be highlighted that the immigration process for both participants was manageable, and they both received human support. After they arrived in the European Union, both refugees experienced stability and safety. Both were entitled to the right to citizenship of their host country, and the process was transparent, and they became Belgian and Italian citizens.

Regarding the relationship between public policies and human rights, we find that the regular migration path of the first refugee was direct and organized since it followed established migration policies. On the other hand, the second refugee's irregular migration involved numerous risks and harsh conditions. Upon arrival, the first refugee found safety, whereas the second refugee was forced to reside in camps under strict regulations. Despite the second refugee's irregular migration path, he was granted protection upon disclosing his sexual identity, which aligns with the protection of the rights of minorities, as outlined in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).

Upon arrival in their countries of destination, both refugees received equal opportunities for citizenship and protection, regardless of their migration path and reasons (political protection and safety from rejection and bullying for life. Thus, the European Union's policy appears in line with Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the right to nationality (United Nations, 1948).

In conclusion, while regular migration provides a safer environment at the beginning, countries that adhere to human rights ensure that refugees, regardless of their migration path, have the opportunity for a stable and secure life in the long term.

8   Strengths and Limitations

Finding refugees willing to be interviewed about the topic under study is difficult, especially when detailing experiences with irregular migration. This study contributes to the literature on refugees' rights within humanitarian pathways in regular and irregular migration. Two participants with differing stories and backgrounds were selected for the study. Interviews were conducted with these participants to enrich the collected data and obtain as much detail as possible. It was noted that certain groups, such as immigrants, those with unstable housing, survivors of natural disasters, war-affected individuals, marginalized sexual communities, and underrepresented ethnic groups, are often challenging to reach through surveys (Bacher et al., 2019).

Limited time and restricted human resources prevented the inclusion of a larger sample in the study. Therefore, a larger sample is recommended for future studies to uncover more stories and offer broader perspectives. Additionally, combining quantitative and qualitative methods would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the issue and the potential for generalizable findings.

9 Conclusion

This study presented the journey of two refugees from Lebanon to Europe in relation to human rights considerations through a line-by-line analysis of data collected through interviews. The key themes of the two stories emerged within four primary contexts: intrapersonal, cultural/social, financial, and political factors.

The emerging themes in their stories show divergences between regular and irregular immigration. However, they also align with Halls' Cultural Identity Theory, as they reveal collective experiences encompassing social, political, and economic identities and cultural inclusivity through daily routines and professions. Additionally, according to their narratives, both participants were exposed to multiple cultural influences, resulting in the development of unique identities in both countries, as is explained by the Borderlands Theory. This is further confirmed by the fact that, after arriving in their destination countries, both refugees were granted equal opportunities for citizenship and protection, regardless of their migration path.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

- Question 1:   How did the idea of immigration come about? What is the reason?
- Question 2:   How did you make the decision?
- Question 3:   Where was your desired destination?

- Question 4: Did you tell anyone? Who?
- Question 5: What was your immigration method? How long did it take from the decision day to the actual day of leaving?
- Question 6: What did you take with you?
- Question 7: How much did it cost?
- Question 8: What was your feeling (desirous/excited/scared)? Why?
- Question 9: Did you successfully leave Lebanon and reach your destination country for the first time?
- Question 10: Tell me the trip's details. Which hour? What were the arrangements from leaving Lebanon to arriving? What did you eat? What did you drink?
- Question 11: Who was receiving you? What did they do?
- Question 12: Were you scared when you arrived? Why? Of what?
- Question 13: Tell me what happened to you from when you entered the first transit country to when you arrived at your destination.
- Question 14: How did they treat you?
- Question 15: What challenges did you face?
- Question 16: What are the advantages and opportunities that the country of immigration has granted you?
- Question 17: Would you recommend others to follow your path and immigrate? Why?
- Question 18: Would you do this again if time went back?

| QRP

"This Damn War!"
Family Dynamics and Resilience in Za'atari Camp in Jordan[1]

Christine Huth-Hildebrandt[2] & Nour Hammash[3]

"We all depend on each other in this family. If you go hungry, we go hungry. What we buy for ourselves, we buy for you."

Ali Aymar to his daughter-in-law

Abstract

Jordan is one of the countries most affected by the Syrian crisis, as it hosts the second-highest percentage of refugees per capita globally. In the aftermath of the Syrian crisis, 1.3 million refugees arrived in Jordan, but only about 740,000 are officially registered with the UNHCR. They mainly come from Syria but also from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, new refugee camps have been established to house the people who have fled. In the twelfth year of the crisis, many still live far from their homes, and in these camps initially established as emergency shelters. Za'atari is the largest and best-known of the northern Jordanian camps near the Syrian border. Since its establishment in 2012, Za'atari camp has become a symbol of the displacement of Syrians throughout the Middle East and now houses around 82,500 people. As part of a qualitative study, we interviewed 30 families who have lived in Za'atari camp for over ten years. It was to find out what life is like for them today, what each individual's vision of the future is, and what their ideas are for making these visions a reality within their families.[4] Among the families were also couples who have opted for a polygamous way of life. The family of Ali Aymar with his two wives Lina and Reem is one such case. This article is about reconstructing the life story of this family in its familial contexts. In a polygamous constellation, in which not only two, but three families of origin are interconnected, more complex questions or problems arise that affect everyday survival in a camp situation. This is particularly true when new decisions must be made due to displacements or shifting geopolitical dynamics, and families are required to navigate new paths while considering the future aspirations of all involved. The Aymar family is not an isolated case, neither within the camp nor outside. Karasapan (2017) assumes that polygamy has increased both within Syria and among displaced

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[3] Nour Hammash is an alumni of the School of Applied Social Sciences at the German Jordanian University, Jordan.
[4] A study conducted by Nour Hammash on the basis of these discussions with families in the Za'atari camp will be published shortly.

populations[5]. The case shows how essential it is to have background knowledge of the complexity of such polygamous constellations during counseling sessions in the camps. Only in this way can a joint search for feasible options take place during the mediation process when diverging ideas arise, so that the future aspirations of the individuals do not become unrealistic dreams for all concerned due to insurmountable obstacles.

Key Words:

displacement; Jordan; polygamy; life and family reconstruction; refugee camps

1   The Importance of Diversity in Arab Refugee Families in Jordan

Displacement and life in a refugee camp have a profound impact on the way of life and social life of the people affected. Qualitative research approaches not only make it possible to capture these living environments, but also help understand the perspectives of those who have experienced the associated changes. Accordingly, these approaches serve to explore new aspects about which very little is known, and to integrate experiential knowledge from the perspective of those affected into the research results, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their circumstances and future plans (Oliver, 2012).

Displacement not only changes the physical environment of the people affected, it also brings about changes in familial structures and relationships due to the emergence of dramatically different living situations. As opposed to couples and families with local roots, displaced individuals and families have to develop a culture that is geared towards adhering to certain guidelines and regulations of the host society and reconciling them with their own values and traditions (Glick & Van Hook, 2002).

This process can sometimes lead to dilemmas that can only be solved with professional support. Knowledge of existing family contexts and cultural backgrounds is therefore essential for professional social work within this context (Shellenberger, 2007).

To plan targeted and effective support processes and interventions with Syrian refugee families within refugee camps, a solid understanding of the existing diversity is important. Shaped by the cultural, religious, and social diversity in the region, heterogeneity is reflected in the family structures of Syrian refugee families in Jordan. Both traditional and modern family structures coexist, and polygamous lifestyles still exist in the region alongside monogamous family structures. An awareness of these differences is important and enables counseling processes, and interventions that are accepted by the families, and are not based on unrealistic or inappropriate recommendations.

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[5] Polygamous marriages accounted 30 percent of registered marriages in 2015, whereas in 2010 it was only five percent. One of the possible reasons is the relative shortage of men as they go off to fight and are killed, wounded, maimed or go missing. Since polygamy is legal in Syria and all its neighboring countries except Turkey, it makes it an option for women and girls seeking safety (Karasapan 2017).

2   Family Networks in Crisis Regions

The MENA region[6] is still characterized by a strong family orientation (Rusli, 2020). Family and kinship cohesion helps many people living in poverty to survive. War, flight, or arrests and death have a significant impact on this cohesion: After flight, for example, connections must be re-established with family members who are scattered across different locations. New local and virtual communities emerge in which family life is rebuilt. These communities raise hopes for new opportunities, such as joining relatives on the European continent or in the United States (Grote, 2017). However, networks are also vulnerable due to loss or due to the separation of members from each other. For example, approximately 36.5 percent of all registered Syrian refugees in Jordan are separated from at least one member of their immediate family, with only a small proportion officially registered (McNatt et al., 2018).

Family cohesion signifies stability, is crucial for integration, and well-being in Jordan, as well as to cope with one's own life (Hadfield & Ungar, 2018). In this regard, more complex family relationships, including the present case of a polygamous marriage, can become a source of distress, and insecurity for its members, but also contribute to stability and security (Al-Krenawi, 2014). Polygamy is possible in Jordan under Islamic law. Although polygamy is rejected by the majority of the population today (Sarhan, 2012), there continue to be considerations, such as necessities or even constraints, that lead families to choose such a life style, especially since there are no legal prohibitions against it.

As of January 2023, about 80 percent of refugees in Jordan were living outside camps, with relatives or in their own accommodation (UNHCR, 2023). Nevertheless, a large number remain dependent on continuing to live in the camps and planning their next steps for their future from there, to the extent that such planning is possible. After an initial emergency phase, in which a tent city was built from scratch with international aid, Za'atari has now developed into a desert city that has become a home base for many refugees (Giebel & Kolbe, 2019). Some of them are becoming increasingly accustomed to the idea of staying and no longer hope to return to their home country. The case presented below describes one such family that has been living in Za'atari Camp for ten years.

In our interviews, we aimed to find out what everyday life is like for families today, what visions for the future individuals have, and what ideas exist within the family context for implementing and realizing these visions. The interviews provide insights into the subjective views, interpretations and attitudes of the interviewees. These insights were gained through questions that were specifically tailored to the perspective and biography of the individual (Schütze, 2016). It is important to note that the answers are tied to the moment of speaking, from which retrospective and prospective narratives, evaluations, and other reflections were made. Despite this temporal context, the interviews provide knowledge about the subjective perspectives, interpretations and attitudes of the interviewees, without which it is difficult to provide well-founded advice on everyday conflicts and future prospects. In the case presented here, we were particularly interested in the subjective views that the family members of a polygamous family have of their family

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[6] MENA stands for 'Middle East and North Africa'. The acronym refers to the region from Morocco to Iran and includes the Arabic-speaking world and Iran.

structure and way of life. As well as how polygamous marriage affects the unity of the family and the individual future plans of each member.

Fig. 1: The Za'atari Camp extends to the horizon. It hosts over 80,000 refugees and is close to the Syrian border (Al Jazeera Staff, 2022).

Source: Christine Huth-Hildebrandt

Fig. 2: A store on the Champs-Élysée in Camp Za'atari, named by UNHCR staff after the hustle and bustle of the famous Paris street.

Source: Christine Huth-Hildebrandt

The Ali Aymar family[7] came to Jordan relatively early in the Syrian crisis, between 2012 and 2013. This means that they not only have a long experience living as displaced persons, but that they have also witnessed the camp's development from its early days to its current situation. This is including the development of the camp administration, and the support system provided by the organizations working there.

We were interested in the subjective views of family members of a polygamous family, specifically pertaining to family structure and lifestyle, and how polygamous marriage affects a family unity and their individual members' future plans. Since their arrival in the camp, the three spouses have interacted in ways that each partner interprets individually and in part differently in their own narratives. These interactions are influenced by both, the immediate physical constraints of the camp, and their broader family contexts in and outside the camp. Furthermore, their experiences are shaped by the legal, economic, and social conditions of the host country, which are intertwined with the cultural and religious context of both their home and host countries. All these factors create a complex framework that needs to be taken into account when analyzing the stories they tell here and in later counseling and support processes (Onnen-Isemann & Wimbauer, 2004).

3 The Family Aymar

3.1 Normative

Ali is the head of the family. He was born in Syria in 1972 and lived with his family of origin in a village in the Daraa region. He characterizes the situation there as a happy life: "My family lived close to each other in our houses on our lands and grew all kinds of vegetables. We were happy in Syria".

Ali comes from a large family. Three of his siblings still live in Syria. His oldest brother has passed away. All of his male siblings are older than he is. He has three sisters for whom he feels responsible. "If my siblings need me, I won't leave them, even if I have to beg for it". But his priority is "of course my mother, then my siblings, and then my cousins".[8]

Before the polygamous family came into being, Ali was married to Lina. She came from the family of a friend from Kfar Sousse. They were engaged for 8 months and married in 1993. Their first daughter Mariam died after birth. Next, Loay was born in 1998, then Fadi and Raéd, and in 2006 their daughter Ghadeer.

After years, Ali fell in love with another woman, whom he also wanted to marry. However, when she found out about his first wife Lina, she was shocked, fainted, and had to go to the hospital. Nevertheless, Ali's father tried to negotiate a marriage contract for him, which was unsuccessful. After six years had passed without any more children, his mother-in-law convinced him to expand his family further. He had three more children with his first wife in addition to the four that were already born: Hind, Lama and Ahmed. They were then expecting twins, but they were stillborn in the seventh month.

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[7] Based on ethical requirements for social science research, the names of the interviewees have been anonymized and permission to use the interview has been obtained.

[8] While more and more families in the region are living in nuclear households, extended kinship ties remain important, including not only parents but also cousins. A household may therefore consist of a married couple, the unmarried children, and possibly other relatives for whom the head of the family feels responsible.

Fig. 3: Genogram of the Aymar family. Ali sees himself as the head of the family, even though he has older brothers. Graphic: Nour Hammash
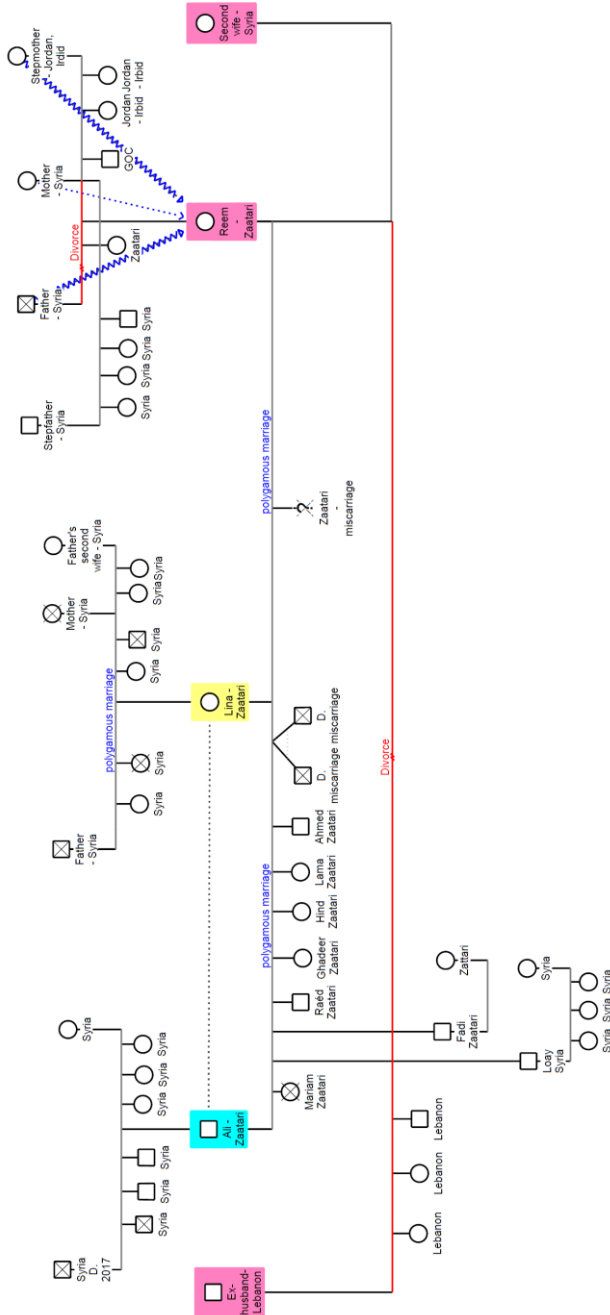
In September 2012, Ali was arrested and charged for being acquainted with terrorists and harboring terrorists in his basement. He remained in prison for 13 days. After his release, he left his village and crossed the border into Jordan with his wife and children. They planned to stay there for "one to three months" until the situation calmed down. They were housed in Za'atari Camp:

> "On April 2, 2013, we arrived at the camp and were given tents. We started from scratch and did everything ourselves, from making and pouring concrete, to buying a TV, a refrigerator and a washing machine. We built our lives from scratch."

In the camp, he then married a second wife, Reem, in 2015, emphatically stating that he had not planned to marry again and considered this marriage as a kind of "destiny and providence". He does not talk about his personal reasons. According to him, this second marriage is not a problem for family cohesion: "On the contrary, we have great respect for my second wife, from the youngest to the oldest family member". He emphasizes that his son's wife, who lives in the camp with him, also respects Reem, and considers both women as her mother-in-law and treats them with the same love and respect. No children resulted from this second marriage.

However, Ali plans a different future for his daughters than for his wives. He expects them to be able to make independent decisions about their lives, irrespective of marriage, and therefore attaches great importance to their education. He is also against early marriage and considers such a marriage to be an obstacle to a decent life later on. He wants his girls to study in disciplines that are socially considered prestigious, as a guarantee for a future without further deterioration of their circumstances. A degree is

> "their weapon. Without asking their husband, brother or father for help, they will remain independent no matter what, even if they are girls. Maybe one ends up marrying someone who ruins her life, maybe he divorces her, and she's screwed. Whatever happens to my daughters in their future marriages, education will serve as a social guarantee for them to live a comfortable life."

Ali has not yet found an opportunity to work in Jordan:

> "Since my arrival, I have submitted applications and requests for work. But I have not been hired. I don't know who gets priority and what this is based on. God help me! If my children did not work, I would not be able to live properly. But even if my sons work, it is not reasonable for them to take care of their sisters and me. I am the father, and this is my responsibility."

The fact that he is unable to provide for his family, is the most stressful element of camp life for him. He says he is surrounded by men who are providers for their families, some of whom have even been able to open own businesses or small enterprises in the camp. This puts immense pressure on Ali, and he worries about his standing in the camp community. From his point of view, the social fabric and the position of the families have changed in the course of their presence in the camp. There are now those who have managed to fend for themselves and those who continue to be completely dependent on the help of humanitarian organizations.

He does not want to return to Syria and at most, would only consider returning for his son. His son, who was expelled from the camp three months after their arrival and sent back to Syria because he was found outside the camp without papers.

> "Honestly, we are lost. This damn war! What can I do? How can I take care of 18 people for whom I am responsible? Here in the camp, I have my late brother's son with me, also my youngest brother's son and the daughter who is married to her cousin. And there are my three sisters and my oldest son in Syria with his children. Conditions are safe here, but we wish for a better life. But there is no future for the better, and wherever the refugee goes, he has no future."

However, if he saw a way to get to Europe, he would leave the camp and continue to migrate. He concludes the conversation by describing examples in Europe "where people are better off, and they have everything".

3.2   Lina

Lina, Ali's first wife, came from Cham. Her family circumstances were not easy. Her father died when she was six years old. Her mother wanted her to attend school. She finished ninth grade and started working as a seamstress.

At seventeen, she married Ali, who was twenty years old at the time. She got pregnant, but her daughter died at birth. Since her marriage, Lina has lived with Ali at her in-laws' home and has now been married for 35 years. She describes her life in Za'atari as "very difficult":

> "When I arrived at the camp, I had no acquaintances or relatives, nothing except my children and my husband. We have been living in Za'atari for ten years now. The first years were very difficult. When we arrived, my youngest daughter was six months old, and Hind got asthma. We lived in tents for three years until we got a trailer."

She misses her eldest son Loay, who was sent back to Syria years ago.

> "Now he's an officer in the army there, married and has three daughters I've never seen. Raéd, had to drop out of school after Loay's deportation to help take care of the family".

In the camp, Lina observes changes in social interactions and interprets them as fundamental changes in gender relations:

> "I feel like gender roles have completely changed here. A woman starts to play the role of a man. The NGOs here in the camps offer work opportunities mainly for women, hardly any for the men. When a woman works, the man stays behind to take responsibility for the household. How difficult this is for a man's status!"

Coming from a rural background, Lina naturally took on the chores in the camp. For her, taking a job outside the family environment and earning a wage is something reserved for men. If a man does not fulfill this task of providing financially for his family, she believes it damages his reputation and rank in the community. Lina herself felt very uncomfortable during her six months working for an NGO in the camp and explains that she felt less worthy in this new role and even ashamed of it. She believes that if she had stayed in Syria, her sons never would have allowed her to agree to paid work.

Lina suffered greatly from her husband's second marriage. She reports that Ali's nephews persuaded her husband to marry a second wife. She received a video from relatives showing the wedding festivities. She then spent four months in psychotherapy. "I was pregnant with my youngest son at the time, I was very angry and left the camp. But I couldn't stand living outside the camp in the long run and trying to get a foothold there."

At some point she made peace with the second woman, went back to the camp and gave birth to her child there. She justifies this decision by saying that Za'atari has become her

new home, and she feels safer there. She also thinks of her children, who would have lost their father.

> "I have three daughters, so I surrendered to my situation. Now I feel like I don't have a man in my life anymore. He doesn't sleep in the house anymore except for the first two weeks".9

Still, Lina stands by Ali and forgives him. "Even after everything he's done, I still love him. I married him at a young age, and he was more than a husband, a father figure and a whole world to me."

Fig. 4: Numerous schools have sprung up in Za'atari. The first opened just two months after the crisis began. Displayed here is a school container of a project by the German Jordanian University, donated by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

Source: Christine Huth-Hildebrandt

She interprets Ali's second marriage as a reaction to the changed living conditions and relaxed manners in the camp. "I think if we were in Syria, my husband would not have married again." She continues, "In Za'atari, there is more contact with women. Women also have more freedom in the camp, and men are exposed to a worse social and financial situation". So, she can process her personal injuries due to her husband's second marriage, without blaming any family members, and ignores the fact that it was members of her own family who encouraged Ali to marry for a second time.

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9 Since in a polygamous marriage the wives are to be treated equally, he sleeps two weeks a month in his first wife's trailer and two weeks a month in his second wife's trailer.

3.3   Reem

Reem is Ali's second wife. She was born in Damascus. Her family of seven consists of her, her sister, her half-brother, two half-sisters, her father and her stepmother. In the early years of her life, she grew up believing that her stepmother was her biological mother. She did not meet her biological mother until she was six years old.

At the age of 21, she met her first husband, a Syrian-Palestinian merchant. The marriage lasted ten years. During this time, her husband married another financially independent woman, ten years older, without informing Reem. She was pregnant at the time. The marriage lasted two more years before Reem filed for divorce.

During the war, Reem's father died, and she lost her half-brother, "who died a month after being sent to prison. He was mistakenly kidnapped because his name was similar to one of the people wanted in Syria." She saw his body, cruelly mutilated by torture, in a video.[10] All this hit her hard and she decided to leave the country. Since her children are Palestinian, she feared that they would not be eligible for refugee asylum in Jordan and would not be able to stay in UNHCR camps. Therefore, she handed the children over to their father before leaving Syria. However, this decision was so distressing that she suffered a mental breakdown. Her husband sought refuge in Lebanon with the three children and she made her way to Jordan with her sister.

Arriving at the camp, she thought it would only be "for about 20 days", but it turned into years. She describes the situation as stressful and threatening: "I cried for three months, mourning the events and what I had to endure in the camp. They gave me a secluded tent. My emotional and mental state deteriorated." Since it was known in the district that she lived alone in the camp, she was afraid someone would break into her tent at night. At the time, Za'atari was still a field camp under construction with many problems. The fear kept her awake, so she suffered from permanent sleep deprivation. She explains that if she were to cry out as a victim of a night raid, she would be exposed and shamed for the rest of her life. But if she remained silent, she would have to carry that shame and suffering alone.

Reem felt foreign in the camp, as most of the people in her camp district were Huaranis originating from Daraa. She did not feel as if she belonged because of her dialect, even though she had lived in this region during her first marriage.

When she received the news that one of her sons was sick, Reem left the camp and visited him. This was possible because Jordan did not keep its border completely closed to Syrian refugees. However, there were times when restrictions on entry were tightened, especially when there were security concerns and shortages in reception capacity (Achilli, 2015). When she wanted to return to the camp, the border had just closed, leaving her stuck in the border area for three months.

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[10] The many personal accounts from such prisons around the world make it understandable why people who have escaped or been released from these violent institutions leave their country as quickly as possible, especially if they see no prospect of political change in the country (cf. Baker, 2022).

Fig. 5: The Za'atari Camp with its subdivision into districts.
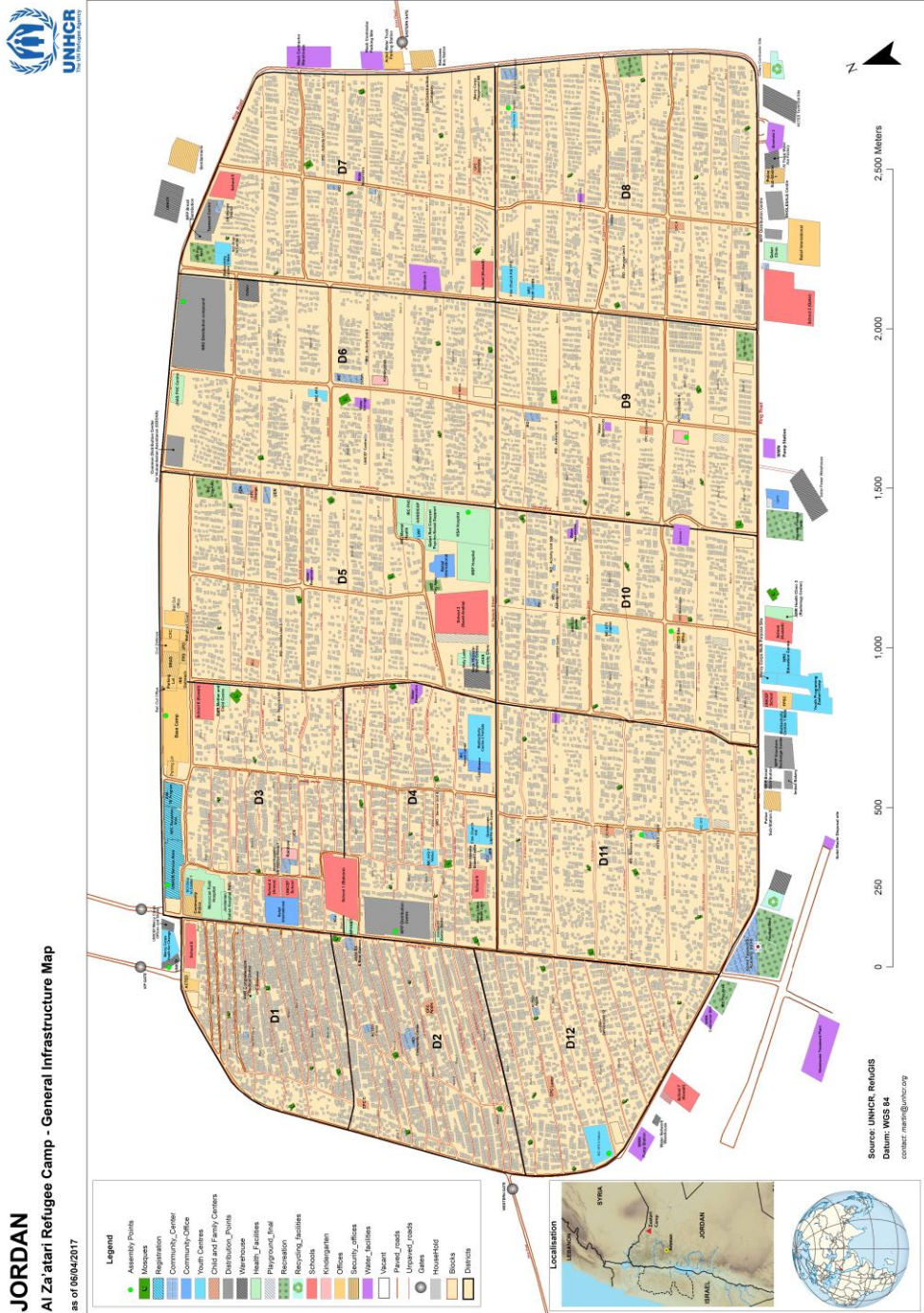
Source: UNHCR open street map

Once back in the camp, Reem was shocked to discover that her tent was missing, and all her furniture and belongings were gone. She implored the camp management to give her a trailer so she would feel safer than in a tent, but her wish was not granted at the time. She "really hated the camp from the bottom of my heart." She became more and more withdrawn and changed from a social, lively, and energetic person to a scared and isolated woman. In 2015, she started working in the camp in different NGOs. However, her feeling of strangeness remained with her. She describes that the work made her tired, depressed, and sick: "I have stomach ulcers, asthma from the weather, and varicose veins in my legs from walking for so long while I was working."

While working, Reem met her current husband. Although she refused to marry a married man, she nevertheless decided to accept his marriage proposal to secure her livelihood. The lonely life in the camp and rumors that the Syrians would be sent back again were another factor that tipped the scale.

> "If I had to go back to Syria, I would have no one, no house, no siblings, no father, I can't live with my mother for various reasons. And when I met Ali, I thought of all these possibilities and decided to marry him."

Based on her own experience, Reem knows how it feels when a husband takes a second wife. She even recommended to Ali's first wife that she should not agree to the second marriage. However, since Lina was convinced that she could not dissuade Ali from his plan, she did not intervene but surrendered to her fate. Thus, Reem feels free from guilt towards Lina. She wanted to set an example that things could be different from her own experience. However, many of her statements indicate that this was not unproblematic for all parties involved (see also Al-Sherbiny, 2005).

For Reem, it is important to earn her own money as a woman. She also worked in Syria. Since Ali does not work, even though he has a UNHCR ID card, she sees herself in a dual role, "that of a woman and that of a man. I take care of the family and do the housework". Although both women live in separate trailers, Reem considers herself jointly responsible for all family members through her marriage. Her future plans, however, revolve around the desire to be reunited with her children. She wants to go to Germany together with Ali, and she tells of people who have managed to get there.

4   Remain, Return or Continue Towards an Uncertain Future?

Much has been written about family structures in the MENA region, particularly concerning interdependencies. However, there have been little publications so far about how the stress of displacement and flight affects family groups in everyday life. The Aymar family has somewhat come to terms with living in Za'atari and all family members residing in the camp try to reorganize a life after flight and loss. For many, Za'atari has become a second home. This is also true for Lina. After leaving the camp, pregnant and deeply hurt about her husband's second marriage, she still returned.

In contrast, Reem rejects life in Za'atari Camp, she even despises it. She wants to leave the camp and cannot imagine a future in this desert city. In Ali's narratives, the camp seems to resemble a train station where he has been forced to make makeshift arrangements in a train on a siding – uncertain whether he will be able to transfer to another train, in whatever direction, so that he can fulfill his obligations to his family in a "better world".

Za'atari has changed from a tent city to a permanent city in the desert, where residents from different regions in Syria come together to grow. Women who have arrived in the camp from cities in Syria seem more open in some cases and are more flexible in dealing with the forced changes in their daily lives. This is sometimes perceived with rejection and mistrust by women from rural areas, as they are not used to the overt presence of women in the public sphere, and consequently see it as a possible threat to their own familial peace. Lina finds that women in Za'atari have more freedom compared to the women in her family, who are more conservative and cannot move as freely.

Through marriage, girls and women move into a new family context and bear responsibility in the role assigned to them as mothers of the husband's children. Lina seems to have been completely absorbed in this role until the event of the second marriage disrupted her sense of stability. In her view, Reem had no choice but to think of a second marriage to avoid social discrimination and possibly sexual violence. She could not afford to be selective, as it is not easy for a middle-aged, divorced woman with children to remarry. If a marriage fails – and increasing numbers are documented for Jordan – many of the women return to their families of origin. This is often not possible for Syrian women. Divorced women who support themselves and raise their children alone still face devaluation and great difficulties, as this way of life is almost impossible to sustain economically, and to this day, it is not socially respected (Al-Khataybeh, 2022; El-Saadani, 2006). Ali sees his decision to live with two women as unproblematic for cohabitation. Offering remarriage to women when they are forced to try to manage their lives alone is a common practice and is viewed positively in his environment.

Nevertheless, he seems to understand the possible difficulties and psychological burdens that women in polygamous marriages face. This is reflected in his desires for the next generation: He wants to do everything he possibly can for his daughters to ensure that they stand on their own two feet and do not have to confront dependencies out of compulsion.

5 Conclusion

After 12 years of displacement and exile, the Syrian regime's hitherto rigid political exclusion in the Arab world has been called into question. The first transnational talks are beginning to take place to resolve the crisis. In addition, surrounding countries are reaching their limits in continuing to bear the economic burden of displacement, and international capacity and willingness to provide support is also declining. Concerns about being sent back are spreading among families. Lebanon's and Turkey's approaches point in such directions, and similarly, Jordan is addressing the issue of "voluntary return" to Syria. Families increasingly find themselves in a tangled web of information and rumors, causing some to panic and push forward with their migration efforts at all costs (Luck, 2022).

Ali himself has three options: He can return to Syria, where he would be reunited with his mother, son and sisters. However, his financial situation would be so inadequate that he would not be able to provide for his family. In addition, he does not know which other family members of his family of origin also need help. His two sons would have to serve in the military in Syria. He could also stay in the camp, which would be an attempt to come to terms with his forced displacement. A third option would be to try to emigrate to a third country and settle there. This would be risky with very uncertain prospects. In addition, Ali

has no intention of abandoning his two wives or children. There would only be the possibility of continuing formally with a wife and "a mistress", since polygamy contradicts the laws in Germany. For example, where as a rule only the first marriage is legally recognized, and further marriages are considered null and void. He sums up, "We are lost, we cannot settle in the camp, nor do we have the possibility to seek refuge in another country."

While Reem plans to leave Jordan and seek asylum in another country to be reunited with her children in Lebanon, Lina wants to use money from an inheritance to build a life and source of income in Jordan or Syria. She feels that the need for cultural adjustment and new roots in a foreign country would be a step backwards for her and her daughters, both financially and from a familial perspective.

The family is faced with difficult decisions and conflicts of interest. Due to the respective family backgrounds of the two wives, there are different wishes for the future. The second wife wants to reunite with her children, while the first wife wants to develop a sense of security and start a business in an environment to which she already has cultural ties.

We can see from this family that local and international aid organizations are facing new challenges today. In the early years of the Syrian crisis, aid was primarily focused on establishing services in Jordan in terms of shelter, food supply, education, and health care to provide the most necessities to those arriving.

Now, more counseling concepts are needed that capture the different life concepts and future visions of those living in Za'atari, so that possibilities for the future can be explored adequately. As can be seen from the example of the Aymar family, there is no unified idea as to which of the three permanent solutions – voluntary return, local integration or resettlement in a third country – is preferred by them collectively. Interventions, as the case of the Aymar family shows, therefore, cannot solely be geared to the individual person, but must take into account the various familial structures and dependencies and, if necessary, be prepared for a comprehensive mediation process. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to and sensitively communicate the opportunities that are currently arising and are possible for individual families due to the constantly changing geopolitical situation in the Middle East and the reactions of the immigration countries to these changes.

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The "Long, Difficult, Terrifying, and Very Dangerous Road": Refugee Women in Germany Share Stories of Resilience[1]

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Abstract

Refugees are forced to flee their homes due to well-founded fear of persecution, war or conflict, or other threats to their lives. As established in International Human Rights Law, refugees are not allowed to be deported under the principle of non-refoulement. To overcome such hardships, many refugees display resilience—the ability to overcome significant adversity—that may be fostered internally, but often may depend on other external factors. Little research has been conducted on the capacity for refugee women to be resilient and the factors that contribute to that resilience. In this qualitative study, 10 refugees from three different countries (Afghanistan, Syria, and the Ivory Coast) were interviewed in southern Germany to gain a deeper understanding of the factors the women believed to contribute to their resilience. Three overarching themes, all with multiple sub-themes, emerged: 1) a difficult departure and journey was worth the risk, 2) despite the challenges, help came, and 3) finding strength to endure. Women drew strength from their children, and from their desire for a better future. In the end, much of the strength they cultivated came from a deep resolve to hold onto hope. Further research could explore the ability of women refugees to be resilient in countries that are less welcoming.

Key Words:

1   Introduction

1.1   Resilience-Overcoming Challenges

Resilience refers to the "capabilities, processes, or outcomes denoted by desirable adaptation in the context of risk or adversities associated with dysfunction or adjustment problems" (Masten, 2018, p. 13). Sometimes the strength to overcome adversity comes from within, sometimes it comes from external protective factors, and sometimes it takes

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the combination of internal resolve together with a support system. Resilience takes place when someone successfully manages or adapts to the stress or trauma they are facing (Windle, 2011); the ability to be resilient in the face of traumatic events is indicative of a healthy adjustment over time (Gianesini, 2011).

1.2 Resilience in Refugees

Refugees, by nature of what makes them refugees (war, persecution, fleeing conflict, fear for their lives), have experienced significant stress and trauma before leaving their home countries. Some continue to experience traumatic events during their flight, and even once they arrive in a new country. Yet, despite all of this, refugees are often able to find the strength to start anew. In one study about Eritrean refugees living in Norway, refugees reported that they focus on the future, on fellowship with and support from other Eritrean refugees, and depend on their faith to bring them hope (Abraham et al., 2018). In another study, the researchers interviewed Palestinian refugee women living in camps in the West Bank (Darychuk & Jackson, 2015). They found that having a space that was safe for them to socialize helped the women support each other and build community strength (Darychuk & Jackson, 2015). Others had similar findings – that refugees' support systems, as well as their faith and religion may help in building their capacity for resilience (Ginesini, 2018; Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Ginesini (2018), in her study on refugee women who had been trafficked, found that women who relied on their faith were more likely to display coping flexibility and were more likely to have a positive view of their life events. Their faith, as well as other resources they depended on before migrating, such as having a positive outlook, and family and community support, can serve as protective factors for women who are facing multiple levels of trauma (forced migration, trafficking, exploitation, etc.) in helping them overcome these life experiences (Ginesini, 2018).

In this study, we sought to understand the lived experiences of refugee women. Specifically, we wanted to understand how women refugees describe the factors that contribute to their resilience. The sub-questions included:

  1 – How do participants describe how self-agency contributes to resilience?
  2 – How do participants describe how religion contributes to resilience?
  3 – How do participants describe how refugee communities contribute to resilience?
  4 – How do participants describe how host communities contribute to resilience?

This manuscript is part of a larger study focused on understanding resilience in refugee women. The research team consists of three women faculty at three different universities in different parts of the United States with expertise in social work, cultural studies, and psychology.

1.3 Resilience in Refugee Women

Lenette et al. (2013: 1) noted that women refugees "contend with a highly gendered array of vulnerabilities", and as such are often seen as disempowered, needy victims. In fact, during their journey to safety, forcibly displaced women are at a higher risk of human trafficking, rape, forced marriage, and other forms of violence (Hawkes et al., 2020). According to Lenette et al. (2013), focusing on the resilience of refugee women can challenge these dynamics of disempowerment, provided that the resilience is seen as both a process involving the outside world, and a trait that comes from within a person. Especially for refugee women from collectivistic cultures, the notion of collective resilience

further emphasizes that resilience is a process that involves both the refugee communities and host societies, which as a result "motivates and enables transformation" (Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011: 48). To overcome the Western, individualized notion of resilience, Atari-Khan et al. (2021) proposed an emic approach to understanding refugees' resilience from the context where it emerges.

In their qualitative systematic review of factors contributing to refugee women resilience, Hawkes et al. (2020) identified religion/spirituality as the most commonly endorsed factor, followed by protection of and connection to the culture of origin, raising children, social support, family, personal characteristics, and formalized support. In particular, in the face of violence and the complex traumatic experiences related to human trafficking of refugee women, researchers often find faith in God and religion as the salient factor of resilience, for participants endorsing both Christian and Muslim backgrounds (Pertek, 2022). Among Muslim refugee women from Syria, trust in God has also been defined as a facilitation of hope for the future (El-Khani et al., 2017).

1.4   Overview of Current Refugee Crisis

Since 2012, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has continued to climb (UNHCR, 2023b). Refugees are people that have been forcibly displaced from their country due to conflict or persecution; their lives were threatened at home, therefore, International Human Rights Law protects them under the principle of *non-refoulment*, meaning countries are not allowed to force them to return to their homeland or to deport them (*Convention relating to the Status of Refugees,* 1951; *Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1967; UNHCR, 2023a). Along with non-refoulement, non-discrimination and non-penalization are the core principles that undergird the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. Yet, discrimination and persecution can impact refugees at every stage of their displacement – at home before fleeing, in transit countries, and in the country where they ultimately seek asylum (United Nations, n.d.). At the time of writing, the UNHCR is reporting the number of displaced people across the globe to be 108.4 million (2023b). This is the highest level of forced displacement in modern history. Of these, about 40% are children. More than half of the world's refugees currently are from Syria (6.8 million), Ukraine (5.7 million), and Afghanistan (5.7 million) (UNHCR, 2023b). Over half of the world's refugees are women and girls (UNHCR, 2023b).

1.5   The Route to Germany

Typically, refugees flee to countries that neighbor the country that they left, in hopes that they might be able to return to their homes once the conditions that make life in their home country unsafe discontinue. In the last several years, however, more and more refugees from the Middle East are making their way to Europe to seek asylum, as the dangerous conditions in their home countries continue to drag on (Volk & Inhorn, 2021).

1.6   Political Reasons for Fleeing to Germany

In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel found herself making what many thought was an extreme decision – opening Germany's borders and welcoming refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The result was that Germany took in more than one million refugees (de la Baume, 2017). Other European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, responded in the opposite way, refusing to open their borders to these Middle Eastern refugees (de la Baume, 2017). In light of the country's welcoming stance, many refugees found

themselves en route to Germany. In addition, refugees reported that they chose to resettle in Germany because they perceived Germans to respect human rights (73%), they liked Germany's educational system (43%), and they felt welcome (42%) (Brücker et al., 2016). While Germany's social service system was not expecting such an influx of refugees, they quickly mobilized social workers across the country, who were, with great empathy and humility, able to effectively respond to a host of refugee needs, including needs for housing, education, German language, and community (Hagues et al., 2019). The UNHCR Global Trend report published in 2023 claimed Germany was still the European country receiving the most refugees, though this number may have changed with the current Ukrainian crisis (UNHCR, 2023b).

1.7   Geographical Considerations

The physical route to Germany is not easy. Refugees from the Middle East and Africa frequently travel first through Türkiye (often on foot or by car), then by sea (usually an inflatable raft) to Greece. Then, they continue by foot through the Balkan countries (Conner, 2016). If they are fortunate, they may be able to ride a train for part of that time. Many refugees that were evacuated from Afghanistan in August 2021 when the Taliban took over first fled to Pakistan on foot or by car (Khan et al., 2023) and then flew to Germany; some were privileged enough to evacuate Afghanistan by plane, and then were flown directly to Germany (BBC News, 2021).

Those that are forced to flee on foot are exposed to difficulties along their way. Often this is because asylum seekers are traveling through clandestine routes exposing them to greater risks of violence or unsafe transportation, such as shipwrecks or sinking rafts (Lorenz & Etzold, 2022). For example, Arsenijevic et al. (2017) found that of 992 migrants/refugees, 383 had experienced traumatic events, as they journeyed through the Balkan route to Europe. The most common traumatic event experienced was physical violence. While most of the violence was carried out by State authorities. Other common violent experiences included: being treated poorly by smugglers, incarceration or kidnapping, and physical violence by the local community. Refugees also suffered as they experienced discrimination, were witnesses to violence or killings, or even saw dead bodies along the way (Arsenijevic et al., 2017). Others found that refugees that had access to financial means, or social connections were more likely to face fraud, robbery, or blackmail but avoid violent attacks, while those with less access to financial resources were more likely to be imprisoned or face physical or sexual violence (Lorenz & Etzold, 2022). By the time migrants arrive in Germany, they have likely experienced multiple levels of trauma – from the trauma they experienced in their home country which they fled, to potentially traumatic forms of violence, or exploitation on their journey (Arsenijevic et al., 2017; Lorenz & Etzold, 2022), to facing discrimination upon resettling in Germany (Glorius & Nienaber, 2022). Of course, not all refugees undergo such traumatic experiences.

2   Methods

Since we wanted to understand refugee women's lived experiences as much as possible from their perspective, we designed a qualitative research study. Qualitative research is used when the researcher is trying to gain a deeper understanding of human experiences, processes, relationships, situations, or systems and uses thick descriptions to help in this discovery (Peshkin, 1993; Ponterotto, 2006). In design and analysis, we took the perception of Charmaz (2007), that "we begin inquiry with sensitizing concepts that alert

us to look at what occurs" (p. 80). In this case, we wanted to deepen our understanding of resilience in refugee women. Our goal was to understand how women refugees are, in the face of much adversity, able to overcome and persevere.

In-depth interviews were conducted by the lead author in July 2023 at refugee community centers, a refugee reception center, the home of an interpreter, and a local university. About half of the interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter, while the other interviews were conducted in English. Five of the participants spoke fluent English, and did not require any help from an interpreter. The shortest interview lasted only twenty-seven minutes, while the longest was one hour and twelve minutes. The longest interview was also conducted completely in English so none of the time was spent on translation.

2.1   Participants

Ten refugee women (N=10) were recruited by local refugee social workers who the lead author knew from collaborating with some of their professors at a local university. The women were told that the researcher was from the United States, and was interested in hearing their stories, particularly around why they left their home country, their journey to Germany, and how they have found strength to continue. As the research was introduced, the informed consent process was reviewed. The researcher made it clear to participants that they could stop the interview at any time. Participants consented at the beginning of each interview, both to be interviewed and to allow the interview to be audio recorded. One participant asked that the interview not be recorded, but was still willing to be interviewed, so the researcher simply took notes during that interview. All participants were adults with the youngest being 23, and the oldest 63 (mean age was 37.8). Eight were from Afghanistan, one from Syria, and one from the Ivory Coast. Participants arrival in Germany ranged from 2015 to April 2023.

2.2   Data Analysis

Data were transcribed verbatim by the lead author and several graduate students. Before transcription began, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to protect their confidentiality. Graduate students were not privy to the names of the participants, unless the participant stated their name during the recorded interview. If they did, the student was instructed to replace the name with the pseudonym.

Data were then analyzed thematically utilizing Atlas.Ti software, both from a deductive and inductive approach using a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014). The inductive analysis began during the interview and transcription process, as emerging themes began to be identified and memos were written (Patton, 2002); an analysis process known as a "course-grained phase" (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Through the process of transcribing new data, initial codes continually evolved and were collapsed into new, more cemented themes. These themes were crosschecked across all transcripts, and the over-arching themes became clear during this more deductive analysis phase. To ensure credible and trustworthy findings, triangulation was used as the co-researchers read through the data and confirmed the overarching themes (Olson et al., 2016). The three overarching themes, all which had multiple sub-themes, were: 1) a difficult departure and journey was worth the risk, 2) despite the challenges, help came, and 3) finding strength to endure.

3   Findings

3.1   A Difficult Departure and Journey was Worth the Risk

Each of the women who participated in this study described a long, complicated, and difficult journey, proceeded by a heart-wrenching (and in some cases, terrifying) departure that they had to make to save their lives and their family. Despite the deep love they described for their country and the family members they left behind, women made the choice to leave because their lives and/or the lives of their husbands or children were at risk.

3.2   Our Lives Were Being Threatened

Taara, a 23-year-old Afghan woman explained that she had to leave her family in 2022 because she worked with different international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). "...All my siblings are in Afghanistan, just I left. Because I was working with different NGOs, and I show my face, and my father is afraid that the Taliban will come." *Farzaneh* had a similar story. In 2015, when she was still a teenager, her family had to flee Afghanistan as well, because her father was an engineer and did different projects with foreign companies. "You know if you work with foreigners, foreign governments in Afghanistan, there is a higher chance of you getting killed by the Taliban because they don't like it," Farzaneh explained. "So, my dad was getting these threats and stuff, so he was scared. He said, 'we are going to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible.'" One woman, *Paksima,* aged 49, shared that her son was kidnapped by the Taliban when he was 18. This was in 2015 and he is still missing. Other women from Afghanistan shared similar stories – fear of the Taliban, personally knowing others that had died because of their work with NGOs, or on behalf of women's rights, and legitimate death threats.

Salimata, who is 40 and from the Ivory Coast had a different experience. She left the Ivory Coast due to religious persecution. She had been Muslim and left her Muslim faith to go to the Catholic church, to the disapproval of her parents. She eventually married a Christian man, who her parents never accepted. "My parents rejected me...I met my husband and told him to present himself to my family. They didn't accept him because he is not Muslim." She elaborated, "when you are a Muslim and become a Christian, your own father, his property, you don't have a right for it...you cannot get anything from your parents."

3.3   Getting Here was Complicated

Many of the women experienced some form of discrimination, exploitation, or harassment after leaving their home country, whether through their journey on the way to Germany, or in a different country before making it to Germany. For example, *Salimata* first tried to resettle her family in Ghana after leaving the Ivory Coast. *Salimata* explained,

> "I got a small job, and I started to come as a vendor to sell things...I was using that money to feed my family...and my husband started selling things too like me. And when we got some money we opened a shop and started selling bags, shoes...[but] this December my worker, the woman working with me...started stealing, taking money from me. And I [went to] the police in Ghana...but no, because I'm a foreigner, 'You have to do this. You have to bring this...' What is the proof? I showed them all the proof."

This situation was enough to compel *Salimata* to take her family to Germany.

Hajira, aged 59, shared that she and her husband hired a smuggler to get them from Greece to Hungary, then another smuggler from Hungary to Germany. Once they arrived in Europe, the smuggler demanded twenty-thousand U.S. dollars for three people (*Hajira,* her husband, and her son). *Jamila* had a similar experience. She explained,

> "some people told me that this group of people would bring documents, European documents for 10 thousand and 12 thousand euros. I know this is illegal, but I was forced, I mean, the condition forced me to do that...that's why my father paid...and they bring me European documents, passport, yeah."

Other women also explained their journey by boat, sometimes by train, and in a few cases by plane, but mostly by foot. Several of the women traveled by foot across multiple countries with small children, and some were even pregnant. The route they took was complex and they often did not even know where they were. The desperate measures these women and their families took – spending their life savings, paying smugglers, using false identification, taking unsafe boats, and walking thousands of miles by foot – demonstrates the risks they took to get themselves and for some, their families, to a place of security.

3.4   Fled More than One Country

Many of the women who participated in this study fled their home country more than once, and some fled multiple other countries. For example, *Kaamisha,* a 35-year-old mother, explained through an interpreter,

> "They left [Afghanistan] when she was 7, then they went to Iran. In Iran, she married and had children (she was 15 when she got married and had her first child the next year). In 2013 she went back to Afghanistan with her family and lived there for a year, then she saw that the security was very bad in Afghanistan. Everyday there was an explosion, so they decided to go back to Iran. So, in 2015 her husband got caught twice in Iran because his visa was not extended, so it was impossible for them to stay in Iran. The children were unable to go to school. Then they left Iran and went to Turkey. So, in 2015 they wanted to come to Europe, but...they didn't have enough money, so they stayed in Turkey. They stayed in Turkey for 1.5 years to work, then they slowly made their way to Germany."

> "They departed at night from Turkey on a small boat to Greece and landed on the island of Mitilini [Lesvos]. From there they went to Athens where they hired smugglers. Then traveled to Serbia, the Balkans, Croatia, and finally to Germany...all by foot."

Noor, who is 63, reported that she left Afghanistan in 2001 after her parents were killed in the war. They then went to Iran and stayed there until 2015, when they were forced to leave because her children were not allowed to work. They had many financial struggles, she was sick, and could not get treatment, and her husband was kidnapped. Through translation, *Noor* explained that her husband disappeared for 2 years, and then was found in Sweden during the Coronavirus outbreak. He has since been reunited with their family.

The amount of violence, trauma, and fear many of these women experienced before getting safely to Germany is unfathomable. Yet, along the way, help came, and they were able to find the courage to continue.

3.5   Despite the Challenges, Help Came

Despite the many challenges the women faced in getting to Germany, they did find help along the way and once they arrived. Sometimes this help came from other refugees,

sometimes it came from citizens of the countries they passed through, and some of them found help upon their arrival in Germany. Some women reported that the majority of their help came from God alone.

3.6 Refugees Helping Refugees

Farzaneh, who's family came at the beginning of a wave of refugees arriving from Afghanistan in 2015, explained how other refugees tried to help her family upon their arrival in Germany. Due to them coming at different times, their experience of resettling had been different. She said,

> "I would say most of the time other refugees from my own country came years before us. I know one family who came and told us how it went for them so we would have an overview of how it was going to go for us and how it was going to work out for us...but it was like completely different. What they told us, it was completely different from our story. They had to wait like years to find a house, for us it was months. So yeah, there were people who liked to help you, but...because it's too different as they are different situations, so they handle it differently for each person or family."

Through an interpreter, *Alma,* explained that on her journey to Germany from Syria, two young men traveling with them practically carried her over a mountain in Greece. She was not sure where the men were from but thought perhaps Iran; these men were also fleeing to Germany. *Alma* was pregnant and struggled to climb. They also helped her nephew. *Alma* explained that she and her brother-in-law also helped other refugees in the camp by translating for them.

Refugees who were stranded in the same camps or attending outreach programs at the same NGOs found themselves helping others, receiving others' help, and maintaining long-term relationships. *Paksima* shared,

> "When I first came in 2015 the group of refugees I came with is still together – Afghans, Syrians, and Iraqis. We meet in the intercultural center. We are not neighbors, but we are friends."

There may not be many other things they have in common, but these refugee women all know what it is like to have their lives be at risk, to flee to a country that is very different than their own, and to start their lives again. This common bond gave them the ability to receive help and to give support to others as well.

3.7 Found Help in Germany

3.7.1 Help from Religious Communities/NGOs

Farzaneh explained that local Germans were very helpful, especially some older women.

> "I would say yeah, they really helped us. There were also other older women who came, say 70s and 80s. They came to that refugee place and they picked families with children usually and they were helping them find housing so they could settle as quick as possible...they were local Germans and probably they worked for a church or for Caritas. Or maybe the German Red Cross. So probably they were from there or they were also volunteering because they were like [in their] 70s and 80s."

Alma also shared that the Red Cross was particularly helpful, along with other volunteers and other NGOs like Caritas. They provided them with counseling and helped them with basic needs. She also shared that a local woman who was working for the church helped her learn German, and the church graciously helped provide everything for their apartment

when they moved. Similarly, *Paksima* explained that they received help from churches, the *Diakonie*, and a German family:

> "[T]hose families are still helping us. For example, they helped register our children at school. The Diakonie helped. I gave the asylum interview, and we were accepted 20 days later. We are still living in the same place. A woman from the Diakonie, Stephanie, helps all the refugees with letters and documents, also with Germany [German] courses, etc."

The local Intercultural Center also helped them tremendously. *Hajira* explained that the German government helped her and her husband, but that it was a local church that helped her adult son. She said the church was supporting her son until his case got cleared by providing food, clothes, and other needs that he had.

3.7.2   Hospitality of Others

Several women talked about the hospitality they experienced either on the way to Germany or once they arrived. Some felt they were warmly welcomed, while others felt like the hospitality they experienced was minimal at best. For example, *Noor* explained that she did not have much help. But once she and her family were more settled in Germany, a Turkish woman reached out to help her. She showed her how to make a doctor's appointment and get to the doctor, helped her figure out how to get to the *Jobcenter* (office responsible for labor market integration and social subsistence) and even helped her figure out how to manage her finances.

Alma shared that when she arrived with her family to Greece, there was an old man that helped them. She said he found a hotel for them during tourist season when most of the hotels were booked. He also gave them his phone number in case they needed help on their way to Germany. *Alma* said he was "just kind" and wanted to help them because she was pregnant. *Kaamisha* also had a good experience with Greek citizens. She explained through an interpreter that they were giving them food and put bread and other things in the packages along the route where refugees were crossing. The interpreter explained, "So the people of Greece helped them. The island of Mitilini [Lesvos]. The people of…Mitilini. They really had a good experience from Greece. They even want to go back!"

Taara shared that her interpreter helped her feel calm after she was interrogated by police. She said,

> "There was a translator. I didn't know her name. She was from Iran. And she helped me. Believe me, I was in a situation that I felt that I needed something to help me to clear my tears, to feel me. And that woman…when she [saw] my face, she [felt] me. That's how she was looking like. And directly she hugged me. And I was just crying and crying. And she was like 'Don't worry. Everything will be okay. We're with you. Government is with you. If you are right, they will not bring you back to Afghanistan.' And I told her that 'I had very very, so [many] bad days. How can I go back to Afghanistan…She hugged me, kissed me. And she really gave me so [much] energy. And I didn't know her name, but she was very kind."

After a difficult experience with police, *Taara* indicated that the comfort and encouragement she received from this interpreter made all the difference. Others, however, felt like human help either did not exist or was inadequate.

3.8   Only God Will Help Me

Several of the women shared that more than anything, it was God that helped them endure. *Nahal* said,

"In every way my faith helped me. Like when I am alone, I rely on Allah. I pray. I pray too much. Because of my family. Even though I was not happy to come was not happy to leave my family the situation in Afghanistan was not good I decided to come here."

Alma also shared that God helped her survive. "On the way, I thought many times that we were going to die, and that my nerves were over. But with supplication to God, and prayers, we were able to overcome that." When asked if she could provide examples of how other refugees were helpful for her on her journey, *Noor* shared, "No. Just God." She further explained,

"[it is] because of my faith that I'm here. And it was my strong faith and belief and a lot that I came to, that I came with it here in this country. Yeah. It was that I have a God that I crossed the ocean unless I would have been sunk in the ocean."

She explained that she had to ride in a plastic boat. "If there wasn't God for me, I would have been dead." *Hajira* had a similar experience with a boat. She said, "it was God who saved us from the sinking." For some of these refugee women, survival of such traumatic events could only be because of the provision of God. They had no other way to explain how they were able to endure.

3.9   Finding Strength to Endure

When they felt like all was lost, women found strength from various sources. Sometimes they drew from personal relationships with family and friends and sometimes they were able to find strength within themselves. Those that had children drew much of their strength from the desire to save their children and keep them safe. Others found that they were able to cultivate hope that helped them keep going.

3.10   Strong Relationships with Family and Friends

When asked what was helpful for them throughout their refugee journey and experience, both *Alma* and *Nahal* said, "my husband." *Salimata* shared that after her family rejected her due to her converting to Christianity, she was able to maintain a good relationship with her aunt. She said,

"she took care of me. She's like my good friend…she's always there for me. She gives me hope…she helped me by always telling me, 'Well, be strong. Always try…You suffered, but now you are strong.'"

Jamila shared that if it was not for her parents, specifically her father, she may still be in Afghanistan.

"Fortunately, I was born in a very open-minded family. My father was an engineer. My mother was a teacher in Afghanistan. And I myself, I graduated in economic faculty in business department and financial department. And after I graduated from university, my university offered me to teach in our university because I graduated in first degree…I was also a teacher, a women activist. So that's why my father always told me that 'Jamila, I see in you lots of abilities. Lots of talents. If you have opportunities, you will be someone in the future. Please go and do something to yourself.' And my father [sold] everything because of me. And I had some jewelry. I [sold] my jewelry. My father [sold] all of their worth that he [had] and [brought] about 10,000, maybe 11,000 euros, and this much cost made me come here."

Such relationships motivated these women and helped them to remain strong and gave them reasons to persevere.

3.11 Power Within

Other women found strength within themselves. For example, *Nahal* reported "I have a personality to never give up." *Paksima* said, "I am happy here. I have had a good experience. It strengthened me and I feel more powerful here than in my own country. I have rights." These women were able to dig deep within themselves to find the perseverance to keep going, despite the challenges they faced.

3.12 My Strength is My Children

Women who were mothers talked in depth about how they were able to muster up strength because of their children. For example, *Salimata* explained,

> "I can say my strength is my children. And there's God. God first, secondly my children. ...When you have children, as a mom, you're supposed to be, I think, strong for them. If I allow myself to become weak, if I'm weak, who will take care of them? That's the way I think. Mommy and Daddy are different. Different. Daddy maybe can provide, but mommy, if you don't sleep, she cannot sleep. If you're sick, she's the one there. Daddy will be sleeping...My life is centered around my children...Everything I do, everything I did in this life, because of my children. I don't want them to suffer the way I suffered. "

Noor explained through an interpreter that it was her sons that helped her find strength to continue her journey. "Her sons only have their mother," the interpreter explained. *Noor* went on to say, "First, I have nobody in my life. I don't have any brother and mom, father. And also, because the only thing I have was my children. So yeah, I have to be brave." Similarly, *Kaamisha* reported that she did not want her children's future to be like hers. She wanted her husband to be in her children's life, which is why she left Afghanistan for the second time. The interpreter explained, "

> "So she did not believe in herself that she can come from Turkey to Europe. But when she saw her children, that they were happy, they were walking, that made her spirit able to walk also with them. It gave her strength. Her children's happiness and hope gave her strength."

These women, through the love of their children, were able to find the strength to persevere the many trials they faced.

3.13 She Held on to Hope

Some of the women talked in-depth about the hope that they had. Hope for their children, hope for their future, hope for change in the world. For example, *Hajira* was asked about personal strengths that helped sustain her, the interpreter shared, "She has hope. Like she was very strongly hopeful that she was going to come to Germany. That was her strength...It was her faith which made her hope strong." That hope for the future shone through *Jamila,* as she intentionally worked to focus on the positive and give herself to others. She shared,

> "Besides those negative things, I want to tell you some positive things. Yeah. I just want to tell you that I want to serve the community and the girls, especially the young women, young girls, who have abilities and talents, maybe like me or more than like me. And I ask the government here Germany that please help me to earn my ambition. And one day I promise, I promise to you and to all the people who will help me that one day, maybe not soon, but one day, they will see me in here...As much as we can, we serve others. So, this is only the thing that every day, every day, every time that I face to the mirror. I look myself as a super stronger woman."

Similarly, *Taara* talked about how she was able to find hope within herself. She shared,

"In Afghanistan I was a strong girl but beside my family, my family supported me [so that I could] do everything, and they [went] everywhere with me. Just I study and do a job. Now I know alone. If a person lives alone, they can be their best version. They can know how to drive their life. I want to study different books and go everywhere I want. This is like a hope, new challenges, new language, new culture. Everything is new and when a person learns new thing, this is like a hope. Like a light."

Once away from her family, *Taara* found that much of the strength she had was due to her family's support. Now that she was alone, she had to look within herself to find strength to be the person she wanted to be. Rather than despairing about what she had left behind, *Taara* chose to focus on who she was becoming.

Noor put it simply. When asked if there was anything else that has been helpful for her through her refugee journey, she stated, "Yeah. I have hope."

4   Discussion

All the women that participated in this research have spent a significant portion of their lives either fleeing conflict, living in fear because of war or conflict occurring around them, or experiencing persecution because of their faith (as did the participant from the Ivory Coast). Despite the many traumatic and ongoing distressing events they faced before fleeing and throughout their journey, they were able to be resilient. Either due to their faith in God, their love for their children, or their desire for a better life. In many cases, it was the combination of these things that kept them going. Sim et al. (2023) found similar things when researching refugee parents' resettlement – that "parents' conceptualization of God and fate appeared instrumental to their ability to understand, accept, and persevere despite overwhelming and unrelenting hardships" (p. 9) and that their family was an important source of resilience and strength.

All the participants who were mothers drew strength from their children and/or chose to flee so that their children could survive and have a better life. They were motivated to endure hardship and change for the future good of their children.

The three young single women (age 23, 23, and 25) were focused on their own education and their concern for women's rights. But they also indicated that they were only able to flee Afghanistan because of supportive, more privileged parents. Each of them reported that their parents were educated, were proud of them as women, and all three of them escaped because their parents could afford to pay their way; the 25-year old's family all escaped together, while both 23-year-olds had to leave their parents and siblings behind.

Some of the participants recounted participating in "illegal" methods in an effort to flee their country of origin (paying smugglers, purchasing false identification in order to leave their country or pass through other countries, or using clandestine means to cross boarders). At the time of the interview, each of these women had successfully entered Germany's asylum process and had either already been granted asylum or were already in the process of applying through the legal process. Their participation in clandestine or "illegal" activities in order to reach Germany's borders may seem by some as something worth reporting to police or border patrol. However, as a social work researcher from the United States, the Code of Ethics acts as a guide for how to handle ethical dilemmas. Usually, confidentiality would only be broken if the client (or in this case, research participant) was planning to harm themselves or harm others (National Association of

Social Workers, 2021, Section 1.07). In each situation recounted during interviews, the women instead were seeking to save their lives or the lives of others, not to harm them.

Many of the women talked about the help they found along their journey and once arriving in Germany and through the resettlement process. Recent research has found that acceptance in the new community along with lower perceived discrimination predicted resilience among resettled refugees (O'Donnell et al., 2023). Thus, in countries where refugees feel like they are not welcome, or are isolated from the rest of society, they may be less likely to be resilient. At the time of writing, while the number of refugees has only grown in Germany (1,063,835 registered refugees in 2018 compared to 2,509,506 in 2023) (UNHCR, 2023c), public opinion has become more divided on whether Germany should remain as open (Marsh & Alkousaa, 2023). If refugee women begin to experience more discrimination, their resilience may begin to dwindle.

Additionally, refugees found community with other refugees and in many cases, received advice, encouragement, and support from them. This includes receipt of help from those in the same process of flight and resettlement, but also from those who were ahead of them in the resettlement process. One implication of this finding is that refugee resettlement agencies could recruit refugees that have already successfully resettled to mentor newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. This may be one important way to help new arrivals feel welcome and less isolated.

Finally, although it emerged as a sub-theme, the idea of holding on to "hope" was consistently discussed as a way the participants found the strength to endure. Using a basic, accessible definition, hope is defined as something that "implies little certainty but suggests confidence or assurance in the possibility that what one desires or longs for will happen" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). That understanding of hope – confidence in the possibility of something better, despite uncertainty – was evident across the women that participated in this study. There was something greater and deeper – hope – sustaining them.

5   Limitations

This study looked only at women who had resettled to Germany, a country that was known for its welcoming stance towards refugees (de la Baume, 2017). Along with their welcoming stance, Germany was quickly able to prepare to receive many refugees efficiently and effectively help them resettle and integrate into society (Hagues et al., 2019). Furthermore, eight out of the ten participants had fled Afghanistan, which also could skew some of the attitudes and experiences of the women. Therefore, findings should not be generalized to women who may have resettled in other countries, in particular countries such as Lebanon, or the Republic of Türkiye where the reception of refugees is much less organized at the national level and women may be experiencing continued instability.

In addition, this research may have yielded richer data if the interview questions had been developed through the lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Such an approach could have further uncovered whether some of the participants' experiences could be more deeply understood through the intersectional interaction of their gender, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, country of origin, education level, or manner of flight to Germany.

6   Conclusion

One thing that was not explored in-depth is whether some people are more inclined to be resilient than others, meaning – is resilience something that is more intrinsic to some people over others? Is resilience an inherent trait or is it something that is cultivated? To explore such a concept with refugees, a longitudinal study that follows refugees overtime would be able to reach greater understanding of factors that impact resilience long-term.

Future research could also examine the resilience of refugee women in countries that are less welcoming. In particular, it would be helpful to investigate resilience of refugee women who seek refuge in countries that violate International Human Rights laws by threatening to deport them (which violates the principle of non-refoulement), discriminates against particular groups of refugees, or penalized refugees for "illegal" entry in their quest to seek asylum. It would be helpful to understand if in such contexts, perhaps some people are more motivated to cultivate resilience than others. If so, what factors contribute to their resilience? Perhaps it is more likely for these refugees to work to overcome their situations by creating deeper community with other refugees, rather than trying to integrate into the host society.

As previously mentioned, this research was part of a larger study that sought to understand resilience in refugee women. While this research took place in Germany and primarily included refugees from Afghanistan, data for the larger project was also collected in Poland and the Czech Republic with all participants in these other countries from Ukraine (Dryjanska et al., 2024). In a future paper, the authors plan to compare the experiences of these Afghan and Ukrainian women who have fled very different countries and conflicts.

Finally, much of the strength cultivated by the women who participated in this study came from a deep resolve to hold onto hope.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

1. Name:
    - Age
    - Country of origin:
    - Country of residence:
    - When did you leave your country of origin?
    - When did you arrive in your country of residence?
2. Tell me the story of why you left your country of origin.
3. Tell me about your journey to where you now live.
    a. Who was with you?
    b. Where was the rest of your family or community?
    c. Did you travel with others?
4. Tell me about a story of when someone helped you along the way.
    a. Who were they?
    b. How did they help you?
5. Tell me a story of someone who helped you when you arrived here?
    a. Who were they?
    b. How did they help you?
6. Tell me how other refugees have been helpful for you.
7. Tell me how community groups have been helpful for you. For example, any religious institutions, schools, community groups.
8. Tell me about any religious practices that have been helpful for you in your refugee experience.
9. Tell me about the personal strengths you have that have helped you in this journey.
10. What else has been helpful for you in your refugee experience?

QRP

Hues of Humanitarianism:
Exploring the Inequities of Humanitarian Parole in the U.S.[1]

Alexander Kuehl[2], Lauren Carruth[3] and Ernesto Castañeda[4]

Abstract

In principle, the U.S. humanitarian parole system is well-positioned to expeditiously provide equal protection and assistance to vulnerable Afghans, Ukrainians, and others fleeing humanitarian emergencies. For example, in 2021 the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in the wake of the U.S. military withdrawal from the country and just six months later, in 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Both events led to the type of massive displacement crises that humanitarian parole was theoretically created to address, with thousands of Afghans and Ukrainians seeking urgent refuge in the U.S. However, as evidenced by the robust Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program and the relatively fragile Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) initiative for Afghans, there are clear inequities in the accessibility and provision of U.S. humanitarian parole benefits. How do recently arrived migrants differentially experience the humanitarian parole program in the U.S., and what may explain some of the variations in their experiences with humanitarian parole? To answer these questions, this article draws on an analysis of humanitarian parole policies as well as data from structured interviews with 160 migrants who recently arrived in the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area from a humanitarian crisis-affected country. From this sample, the authors focus on the experiences of 10 migrants in order to better understand the U.S. humanitarian parole program. Based on an analysis of all these data, we argue that one of the primary functions of the U.S. humanitarian parole system is to serve as an internal migration control that meets U.S. national security interests. This article adopts a critical security studies lens to uniquely highlight the disparate impacts this selective humanitarianism has on the experiences of different migrant groups living in the U.S., before concluding that the realization of true, uniformly applied,

humanitarianism may be even further away as the second Trump administration takes aim at existing humanitarian parole programs.

Key Words:

humanitarian parole, humanitarianism, Afghanistan, Ukraine, U.S. national security

1. Introduction

Mahad and Muhammad[5] are two of the 124,000 individuals – mostly Afghan nationals – evacuated from Afghanistan in the wake of the August 2021 U.S. military withdraw and subsequent Taliban takeover of Kabul (Dawi, 2023). Both men came with their families to the U.S. through the federal "humanitarian parole" program.[6] Prior to these tumultuous events and their arrival in the U.S., Mahad and Muhammad supported their families through meaningful careers in Kabul. Mahad worked with the U.S. embassy, while Muhammad consulted with the United Nations Development Program in collaboration with the U.S. and Afghan governments. They both arrived in the D.C., Maryland, Virginia (DMV) region as humanitarian parolees in 2022. However, once in the U.S., the experiences of Mahad and Muhammad diverged significantly.

Mahad, unemployed and dependent on the generosity of friends and family, starkly summarized his predicament in an interview with a graduate student from American University's Immigration Lab: "Right now, I have zero. […] It is a very, very bad situation." In contrast, Muhammad found a job as a consultant in Washington, D.C., within the first 50 days of living in the U.S. and is thus able to support his family. What explains these disparate experiences despite the evacuees sharing similar backgrounds and humanitarian parole status? In short, the answer centers on the possession of a Green Card (or Permanent Resident Card), which allows holders to seek legal employment in the U.S. (McNamara, 2023). Mahad was not authorized to work upon arrival, yet Muhammad received his Green Card on day one. This type of differential treatment is even more apparent when comparing the robust Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program to the relatively fragile Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) initiative for Afghans. Overall, these discrepancies are representative of larger inequities in the U.S. humanitarian parole system that hinge on the government's decisions to permit particular provisions to select parolees.

Since its inception as part of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) in 1952 (U.S. Congress, 1952) humanitarian parole has given the U.S. government significant latitude to decide which individuals are "deserving" of temporary protection from deportation as their applications for asylum claims, work visas, or other immigration statuses are processed. To be sure, humanitarian parole was created with noble aims in mind. Prior to the INA, those who entered the U.S. due to humanitarian crises were legally indistinguishable from economic migrants or immigrants who entered the country for non-

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[5] These are pseudonyms. To preserve the anonymity of the study's interlocutors, all proper names in this article have been changed.
[6] The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) allows the secretary of homeland security to use their discretion to parole any noncitizen applying for admission into the United States temporarily for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. (See INA section 212(d)(5) (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, n.d.c).

emergency reasons (Chaudhry, 2023; Lustman, 2019; The Immigration Forum, 2021). The INA gave the Attorney General the power to

> "[…] parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe for emergent reasons or for reasons deemed strictly in the public interest any alien applying for admission to the United States […]" (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, n.d.c).

As of 2023, the Secretary of Homeland Security holds the authority to decide which parolees may receive temporary residency and protection under humanitarian circumstances, or in consideration of the public interest (American Immigration Council, 2024).

While the existing academic scholarship helps establish the fact that humanitarian parole is part of a larger ecosystem of migration controls enacted by host-states including the U.S., there are still questions pertaining to the U.S. government's use of humanitarian parole as an internal form of migration control. And importantly, how this impacts parolees themselves – their lives, their families, and their desires to find housing, work, and social services. This article aims to fill that gap. Through a critical security studies lens and analysis of qualitative data with recent arrivals to the DMV, the authors argue that while U.S. humanitarian parole offers a needed form of protection and assistance for vulnerable individuals, it principally functions as a migration control to meet U.S. national security interests, even after parolees are admitted to the U.S. This leaves refugees with vastly different experiences as it pertains to their quality of life, employment, and overall outlook on the U.S. resettlement process. We argue it is critical to understand the nature and shortcomings of humanitarian parole from the perspective of migrants in order to improve the system as a whole.

1.1   Background

At face value, humanitarian parole provides a mechanism for entry and temporary stay in the U.S. for individuals who are experiencing a humanitarian crisis in their countries of origin, whether or not they intend to apply for asylum or refugee status. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Resolution 429(V), 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 14/12/1950, 1951 Convention), the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2198 (XXI), and the Protocol of 1967 (adopted 16/12/1967, 1967 Protocol) outlines the following criteria for a refugee:

> "[…] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

There are many deserving groups that fall outside this definition, including individuals fleeing humanitarian crises that emerge amid wars, and those displaced from climate-related disasters. Therefore, in effect, humanitarian parole acts as a "stopgap" to respond to people's immediate need for safety and to prevent people from falling through the cracks of asylum systems. The asylum application process is also notoriously lethargic – with most applications taking up to five years to process – so humanitarian parole offers an expedited way for people to get a modicum of protection (Dawi, 2023). Each parole application receives a response within 90 days, which affords the U.S. government a more efficient way to respond to humanitarian emergencies (McNamara, 2023).

Humanitarian parolees add to an already robust immigrant population living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. According to George Mason University's Institute for Immigration Research (2022), there were 1,466,403 immigrants living in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, District of Columbia (DC)-Virginia (VA)-Maryland (MD)-West Virginia (WV) metropolitan area (also known as the "DMV") in 2022. This amounts to 23 percent of the region's total population, which is a higher share than the foreign-born population nationally (as a percentage of the total U.S. population), at 14 percent. The number of immigrants living in the DMV increased by 19 percent between 2012 and 2022. Ultimately, immigrants to the DMV represent "slightly more recent arrivals" when compared to immigration trends in the rest of the U.S. (Institute for Immigration Research, 2022). These demographics – in particular the top countries of birth among immigrants living in the DMV – are likely to shift in the coming years as intractable conflicts around the world persist. The impacts of the ongoing humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine are of particular interest in this article.

Historically, parole has served more than just individuals affected by humanitarian crises in their countries of origin – individuals who serve a "public interest" have also qualified (Chaudhry, 2023). However, there has been remarkable variability and ambiguity regarding what constitutes an adequate or legitimate "public interest". While these interests have shifted with changing U.S. presidential administrations and foreign policy over the last 75 years, they are still often predicated on a security logic. For example, the first widespread application of humanitarian parole came in 1956, as part of President Eisenhower's attempt to counter the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War (Markowitz, 1973). He responded to the Soviet Union's suppression of the Hungary Revolution – which saw an estimated 3,000 civilians killed and 250,000 Hungarians displaced abroad – by paroling over 15,000 Hungarian refugees (Markowitz, 1973). President Eisenhower's actions created a precedent for his successors, as humanitarian parole continued to serve U.S. interests during the Cold War. In the latter half of the 20th century, the U.S. accepted refugees fleeing communist regimes in Cambodia, Cuba, Hong Kong, and Vietnam under the protection of the INA and humanitarian parole (Andorra, 2020). In effect, these actions helped bolster the U.S. global sphere of influence during a period of heightened security concerns (Bath, 2022).

Based on an analysis of data outlined in this article, and a review of relevant humanitarian parole policies in the U.S., we first argue that there was significant variation in the quality of life of humanitarian parolees in the DMV, and this reality hinges, at least in part, on the differential mechanics of the U.S. humanitarian parole system. Parolees, including parolees fleeing the same humanitarian crises in the same places, can have vastly different experiences of immigration and integration into life and work in the U.S. On the one hand, humanitarian parole offers a needed form of protection and assistance for displaced and crisis-affected people. Yet on the other hand, this same program can leave some of these newly-arrived individuals in the U.S. with new uncertainties, and gaps in services. Perhaps Torpey (1998) was right in his assessment of "the ambiguous nature of modern states, which are at once sheltering and dominating" (p. 241). As will soon be clear, this apparent contradiction stems from the fact that humanitarian parole is yet another migration control that serves U.S. national security interests.

Second, our data and policy analyses suggest there is differential, even preferential, treatment of Ukrainian refugees who received humanitarian parole in the form of the U4U

program. This is compared to Afghan parolees, who at times struggle to settle in the U.S. amid limited support from the government. Finally, we argue that a security logic continues to pervade U.S. humanitarian parole policy, albeit with different manifestations. Most significantly, the September 11 terrorist attacks shifted security concerns to Muslim populations, so parole decisions often reflect anti-Muslim biases (Copeland, 2022). Additional future research with a larger and more representative sample of parolees from different countries is needed to confirm these findings.

2   Literature Review

Despite the political and media attention on physical migration controls – whether it be a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border or coast-guard interceptions of migrant boats in the Mediterranean Sea – the institution of state borders may more-closely resemble a façade instead of a fortress. This is not to suggest that physical barriers are ineffective at keeping people "in" or "out" of a country. Instead, conceptualizing the border as a façade captures the fact that borders, whether tangible or not, are transitory and "acquire their meanings always contingently, through the activities and practices undertaken around and through them" (Soguk, 2007: 284). This view of borders is especially important in refugee and migration studies. As it allows scholars to consider the myriad ways states try to control the movement of people, and retain the fundamental decision of who can "stay" within the state and who must "go". Walia (2021) brilliantly describes this phenomenon as "territorial diffusion," in which "the border is elastic, and the magical line can exist anywhere" (p. 6). State migration controls then can either be located "externally" or "internally".

The instituting of external migration controls – or "externalization" – "encompasses all extraterritorial state technologies and actions intended to prevent migrants and refugees from reaching the legal jurisdiction of the state" (Walia, 2021: 6). Specific "control tools" of externalization include interdiction, refoulement/pushbacks, offshore asylum processing centers and detention facilities, and safe third country agreements (Bowell, 2003; Walia, 2021). A central component of many of these tactics is that externalizing states often partner with (or outsource to) third countries to bolster border control infrastructure and policing (Boswell, 2003). President Trump's announcement of the "Remain in Mexico" policy (officially the Migrant Protection Protocols, Section 235(b)(2)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act) in December 2018 – which his newly appointed 'border czar' Tom Homan is anxious to reinstate in the second administration – is a case-in-point (Miroff, 2024). Though the Mexican government has voiced opposition to any restart of the Remain in Mexico policy, Trump is still keen on finding ways for asylum seekers to wait outside U.S. territory as their claims are processed in the U.S. (Madry, 2023). Externalization may also include "prevention" initiatives "designed to change the factors which influence people's decisions to move, or their chosen destinations" (Boswell, 2003: 619-620). These types of policies and practices are different than the aforementioned control tools because they attempt to address underlying drivers of migration and displacement through development assistance, investment, and foreign policy in (or close to) countries of origin (Boswell, 2003). Vice President Harris's first foreign trip as part of the Biden Administration illustrates this approach well. Speaking at a news conference in Guatemala alongside Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, she warned against irregular migration to the U.S.: "Do not come. Do not come. The United

States will continue to enforce our laws and secure our borders. If you come to our border, you will be turned back" (BBC News, 2021, para. 6-7).

The waging of internal migration controls – or "internalization" – refers to control measures exercised within a sovereign state's borders (Walia, 2021). Often, there is an inward Foucauldian "gaze" to (re)exert power over migrants and refugees who entered a country's borders irregularly (Foucault, 1995). The most visible internal migration controls are detention and deportation. Internalization is quite literally practiced by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which has an "expansive interior jurisdiction", that includes the legal authority to stop and search vehicles 100 miles inward from both the U.S. northern and southern borders (Walia, 2021). Despite the entity's namesake, CBP has jurisdiction beyond – albeit geographically within – the national borders to better facilitate detentions and deportations. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) also practices "interior enforcement" as part of their migrant "removal operations" (Office of Homeland Security Statistics, 2023). It is important to note that there are internal migration control practices that *precede* detention and deportation. Consistent with the conceptualization of the border as a 'magical line,' authors El-Kayed and Hamann (2018) argue that the border is not just the "physical demarcation of a geographic entity, such as a nation-state" (p. 136), but an internal governance strategy that includes regulation on the "right to housing and the right of free movement and settlement" (p. 138). This is egregiously practiced in the busing of migrants from U.S. southern states (namely Texas) to northern cities such as New York City and Washington, D.C. (Martinez et al., 2022). These actions and policies ultimately make migrants and refugees vulnerable to deportation – whether that be forced or coerced (as is often the case with "voluntary" repatriation).

The leveraging of external and internal migration controls emerges from the state's commitment to security. If states are considered the main units in the international system (Waltz, 1979) then "the merging of the state with a clearly bounded territory is the geographical essence of the field of international relations" (Agnew, 1994: 56). The security of this territory is seen as a critical determinant to a state's power, since borders separate the anarchic international environment from a nation's resources that allow it to survive in the competitive international system (Agnew, 1994). In the government's view, a fundamental part of territorial integrity is dictating who can enter and stay within a state's borders. External and internal migration controls are seen as a means to this end because migrants challenge the "old trinity of state/nation/territory" (Soguk, 2007: 305). It is no surprise then that there is a confluence between migration and security in both policy and academic circles. As noted earlier, granting humanitarian parole to migrants served a security function for the U.S. government during the Cold War. Following the Cold War and the heightened outward migration of Eastern Europeans to the West, security studies were expanded to include migration studies (Boswell, 2003; Boswell, 2007; Paris, 2001). The September 11 terrorist attacks, followed by the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings, further conflated migration with national security in the eyes of both politicians and scholars (Adamson, 2006; Boswell, 2003; Rudolph, 2003; Rudolph, 2006).

Ultimately, humanitarian parole can be considered both an external and internal migration control. Other scholars have already highlighted the ways humanitarian parole functions as an external migration control. In her article, "Humanitarian Parole: A Tale of Two Crises",

Ciullo (2023) focuses on contrasting the application processes for potential humanitarian parolees from Afghanistan and Ukraine. She concludes that, "[d]espite both groups applying for the same immigration status under the same statute, they experienced incredibly unequal application processes and prospects of approval" (Ciullo, 2023: 505). She states plainly, "[i]t is virtually impossible for most Afghans remaining in the country to obtain parole" (Ciullo, 2023: 504). While U.S. government decisions to initially admit Afghans or Ukrainians as humanitarian parolees is a form of external migration control, the noted variation in the treatment of humanitarian parolees once inside the U.S. amounts to a form of internal migration control. This article uniquely focuses on why and how humanitarian parole is utilized as a form of internal migration control. The proceeding data analysis section and application of a critical security studies lens further illuminates this dynamic – and the ways migrants and refugees are negatively impacted.

3   Data Analysis

This article draws data from an analysis of structured interviews conducted by faculty and graduate students taking part in American University's Immigration Lab. From 2022 to 2024, interviewers spoke to 160 persons who had recently arrived in the DMV from the crisis-affected countries of Afghanistan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Venezuela, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. These interviews were designed to better understand the basic histories, experiences, and struggles of crisis-affected recent arrivals residing in the DMV. Some of the over 50 questions in the survey required quantitative, or closed-ended, answers, but we also asked open-ended questions that allowed respondents to speak at length about their lived experiences. Occasionally, question probes were used to dive further into relevant topics. Several questions tried to gauge the experience of interviewees settling into the U.S., searching for and finding work, and accessing additional services (e.g. healthcare, educational, and employment assistance). The interviewers also posed open-ended questions relating to education and employment experience, family history, migration journeys, current immigration status, and uses of and knowledge about various local services for refugees and immigrants.

For this article, we selected 10 interviews to analyze that provided the best insight on the nuances of the U.S. humanitarian parole program. These interviews were all with adults who had immigrated to the DMV within the last five years, and most of these individuals came to the U.S. from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Ukraine through the humanitarian parole program. It is worth noting that not all interviewees from the in-depth qualitative analysis are listed by name in this article. This is in the interest of brevity and a desire to highlight respondents' quotes that most effectively illustrate the consequences of humanitarian parole being leveraged as a migration control. In light of the relatively small selected sample, we cannot make generalizations about the "migrant experience" in the DMV more broadly, or even the diversity of experiences with the U.S. humanitarian parole program. However, the in-depth and conversational nature of the interviews allowed the authors to uniquely focus on the relationship between humanitarian parole and the individual circumstances of respondents living in the DMV.

The authors realized early on in data collection that interviewees with comparable immigration statuses, and interviewees from the same countries and similar migration journeys to the U.S., had vastly different experiences living and working in the DMV. This reality prompted the authors to explore the nuances of humanitarian parole in greater depth, specifically gauging from the wide-ranging interviews which aspects of the

interlocutors' lives were most impacted by variation in the accessibility and provision of U.S. humanitarian parole benefits. Moreover, the authors were able to put the respondents' reflections on parole into greater context with this article.

3.1   Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolees

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Biden administration created the U4U parole program to support Ukrainian refugees fleeing violence and a worsening humanitarian crisis. Though U4U is the most fledgling humanitarian parole program in the U.S., it offers more resources to refugees relative to any other available parole program in 2023. Notably, it guarantees two-year residence permits for Ukrainian refugees, and their immediate families. Additional benefits are apparent from the onset of the U4U program – even before parole is formally granted (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, n.d.a). First, all fees are waived for applicants, which relieves a potential financial burden and further helps 'streamline' the process (Homeland Security, 2022). Second, all accepted parolees are automatically granted work permits, meaning Ukrainians can legally work in the U.S. for the duration of their humanitarian parole. Third, Ukrainian parolees enjoy access to certain 'mainstream' refugee benefits such as cash assistance, supplemental security income, health insurance, and food stamps. Moreover, refugee resettlement assistance – which includes job placement and English language training – is also available through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (HIAS, n.d.).

The experience of one Ukrainian respondent named Darina is a testament to the protection and assistance available to humanitarian parolees in the Uniting for Ukraine program. Darina and her family were forced to flee Odessa and leave their relatively comfortable lives behind after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Darina, her husband, and their two children uprooted their lives in the middle of the night to shelter at Darina's father's home in a nearby village. It was here that Darina first learned of the Uniting for Ukraine program. She described the process of securing the required sponsor:

> "[I found] this information in one group in Telegram…we could leave in the group a description of our family and our request (do we need financial help, place to live etc.). I wrote there asking for help in English and Ukrainian—we did not need any financial aid, just a sponsor to help us to fill in the forms. There was a Lithuanian girl in this group and, as I understand, she posted our request in Facebook. And Diana, the Lithuanian girl, contacted us. She asked what we needed from her. We started corresponding with her. She offered for us live with her for some time, as she lives alone."

Immediately upon arriving in the U.S. as humanitarian parolees, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) offered to help Darina and her husband secure public health insurance (Medicaid) and find employment. With work permits in hand, Darina was able to leverage her professional experience to work as a freelance photographer in the DMV, while her husband was also able to secure gainful employment. Darina underlined the fact that this employment gives her and her husband the opportunity to enjoy everyday activities with their children, and potentially reunite with their parents in the U.S. should the war continue.

3.2   Afghan Humanitarian Parolees

Despite also experiencing a protracted crisis, Afghans do not have their own country-specific humanitarian parole program. This reality does not stop Afghans from rightfully appealing for humanitarian parole, but it does complicate the application process and

negatively impact the experience for those admitted to the U.S. as parolees. The U.S. government's seemingly haphazard effort to evacuate Afghans was precipitated by the chaotic U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Both President Biden and his predecessor and successor, President Trump, were cautiously optimistic that the over 300,000 Afghan National Security Forces the U.S. trained over the last two decades would be able to thwart a Taliban takeover following the U.S. military withdrawal (Aikins, 2021). Both administrations were gravely mistaken: One week after the last U.S. evacuation plane left Kabul airport, the Taliban were in complete military and political control of Afghanistan (Aikins, 2021). That same month, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to evoke its authority over the U.S. immigration system and facilitate the safe passage of Afghans fleeing the Taliban. The subsequent coordinated effort between DHS, other U.S. government branches, international organizations, and humanitarian aid groups formed the basis of OAW (the sister program of Operation Allies Refuge), which evacuated tens of thousands of U.S. embassy employees, interpreters, and other Afghans who qualified for Special Immigrant Visas (Jamali & O'Connor, 2021).

Of course, protection – in the form of admittance to the U.S. – is only half of what refugees need in the host-country. Assistance is also paramount so that these individuals can really integrate into the U.S. This is especially important considering that the average length of displacement for refugees today is 20 years, which is over two-times that of the early 1990s (Katz & Brandt, 2017). Afghans and Ukrainians alike do not just need a temporary safe haven – they need longer-term and sustainable support in their country of refuge. While humanitarian parole has the potential to meet this criterion – as is evident with the Uniting for Ukraine program – it falls well short for many Afghans. To start, the application process for prospective Afghan parolees is laborious because they enter the general U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) backlog without any priority treatment. To complicate matters further, the U.S. refuses to process requests for parole from Afghans still inside Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover of the country (USCIS, n.d.b). One Afghan respondent needed to embark on a month-long journey to Uzbekistan just to apply for humanitarian parole. Out of 46,000 Afghans who applied for parole in 2021, only 11 percent saw their applications processed and a mere 297 Afghans were approved as of June 2022 (McNamara, 2023). This contrasts sharply with the over 70 percent of Ukrainian applications that have been processed with the applicant safely inside the U.S. as of June 2022 (Rush, 2022).

3.3   The Different Shades of Humanitarian Parole

Once inside the U.S., the experiences of Afghan refugees varied significantly compared to their Ukrainian counterparts in our sample. This is potentially due, in part, to the fact that relatively few Afghans receive humanitarian parole. But it also stems from the inconsistencies of humanitarian parole benefits for Afghan parolees since there is no country-specific program. The various shades of humanitarian parole have the potential to cast a particularly long shadow for Afghan parolees trying to settle into the U.S.

The story of Mahad, who was introduced at the outset of this article, is a case-in-point. Mahad recounted the daily struggles he and his family continue to endure in the U.S., despite the fact he remains here through the humanitarian parole program. Although Mahad arrived in the U.S. with humanitarian parole, unlike other parolees or asylum-seekers we spoke to in this research, he did not receive work authorization upon entry,

and thus needed to live with family and friends for his first six months in the U.S. While he was eventually able to secure housing for his immediate family through assistance from an agency, he noted that this support stopped "after only four months". Still unemployed, Mahad explained his family's circumstances: "We are now four people in one apartment with nothing. No curtains, no furniture, nothing. No one is helping us, and we have a lot of problems". Mahad and his wife finally have Green Cards, but the search for employment continues. Sultan, another Afghan refugee, echoed some of the same frustrations, even suggesting that seeking asylum in the U.S. may have been the wrong decision:

> "You know from the last one year, I'm just having no paper, having no regular status at all. And still, we are waiting and whenever the decision is coming, we don't know […] what will happen. Even though we have solid reasons for why we came here and why we left Afghanistan. But still this uncertainty, it means that it makes us disappoint[ed] and we cannot focus on our goals at all. Sometimes you know that I'm…I did a wrong decision [to come] here, because you know that our time is going to spend without any, any, any activity…I'm dependent on my friends."

Sultan has not yet been able to receive a work permit or any official immigration status that could eventually help facilitate legal employment. This predicament leaves Sultan in a vicious circle. Without a job, Sultan and his family are especially in need of outside assistance. However, as Sultan explained, multiple NGOs have informed Sultan that he must have an official immigration status or Green Card to receive any assistance for housing and employment.

The indisputable benefits of a work authorization are apparent in an interview with another Afghan respondent. Sayyid received humanitarian parole after fleeing the Taliban with 500 of his colleagues in the middle of August 2021. Though his migration journey was difficult and his formal asylum application in the U.S. is still pending, Sayyid was able to receive his work authorization permit and social security card within 15 days of arriving in the DMV. This allowed him to immediately search for legal employment and secure work in the food service industry. Though these jobs – lacking any employee benefits or health insurance – were less than ideal, Sayyid was eventually able to find a satisfying position at a nearby airport. Sayyid reflected on his experience, which he acknowledged was made easier with his documentation. Unfortunately, many refugees, even fellow humanitarian parolees, do not enjoy this same security:

> "Work is different with other people, you know for immigrant people. Actually, yeah…we feel that. And sometimes we feel that and like when we apply for a little bit good job and good benefit, we can do that. We can. We have [the] ability…they're looking for a long process and for our documents and a lot of requirements they have, especially a government job… they say the requirement is US citizenship. We [do] not have it that. A green card, we [do] not have that. And some companies, they're looking for a clearance. And many of them [are] like that […]."

Even in the event that an "undocumented" refugee is able to secure a job, without legal authorization to work they are left in a profoundly precarious position. Desta is one respondent who fits this profile. She arrived in the DMV in 2022 from Ethiopia, after fleeing the Tigray War and endemic corruption at the hands of the government and military. Desta described herself as an asylum seeker, though she has not yet applied for asylum. Since arriving in the U.S., Desta has been working at a restaurant for cash under the table. Her uncle was able to find this job after he contacted a broker who specializes in helping immigrants find discrete work. In her interview, Desta described her frustration over her lack of rights without a green card and work permit:

"I'm OK with working anything. It's not out of disrespect, but as I said…one day [I was] aiming to be a doctor. [I] never worked at all. The second day, there's some forces knocking at your door telling you to get out. On the third day, you just move out of the country, and when you're here out of the blue, you decided and I'm not going back to my country. I will be an asylum seeker. And now you're in work. You don't even know anything about it… I have no rights, but I just…I just go hopefully cause tomorrow is a new day. That's it."

Desta reported that she often fears for her safety at work and during her three-hour round-trip commutes between Washington, D.C. and Maryland using the city's public bus system. She feels exploited at work because she is expected to do everything while receiving significantly less compensation than she is owed. It is evident that people in Desta's position are especially vulnerable to mistreatment, underpay, and overextension in the workplace. Fortunately, negative experiences like this may be remedied if migrants are provided with legal authorization to work, such as through a consistently applied humanitarian parole program.

4. Discussion

Access to humanitarian parole – including temporary protection from deportation and a range of benefits – is certainly not experienced equally by recent parolees in the U.S. These contrasts are perhaps sharpest when comparing displaced Ukrainians with Afghans, but significant variation still exists even within the Afghan refugee community in the U.S. While access to work and benefit assistance were critical for parolees and others, it is certainly not a panacea – as is evident from the vulnerabilities the Ethiopian respondent faces in her job. Humanitarian parole functions as an internal migration control in a multitude of ways. The utility and mechanics of these internal "control tools" become even clearer when examining the security logic that underpins why some humanitarian parolees receive better treatment than other humanitarian parolees. In short, the reason Afghans, as opposed to Ukrainians, are largely on the losing-end of this equation is due to U.S. security concerns.

Most of the larger sample of recent arrivals we spoke to for this research had permission to reside in the U.S. – including the humanitarian parolees introduced here. Yet, it is evident that only a select few have the support they need for longer-term integration in the U.S. Others felt they had been left in precarious and destabilizing positions that shroud their futures in the country with uncertainty. This is exactly how internal migration controls are designed to function, especially when instituted alongside relatively "insufficient" external migration controls. The Biden administration originally told nonprofit organizations serving refugees and other crisis-affected persons in August 2021 that humanitarian parole would be used as a stopgap to receive and resettle over 50,000 Afghans in the U.S. Accordingly, this initiative was used to rapidly evacuate as many Afghans as possible prior to the Taliban's complete conquest of Kabul (Cai, 2021). However, it is no coincidence that the Biden administration's level of support for parolees once in the U.S. would be less ambitious. If Afghan refugees are unable to work or receive support in the U.S., then they are ostensibly forced to move elsewhere. If Afghan parolees are unable to achieve self-sufficiency through employment and the state withholds benefits they depend on, then the government maintains a degree of control over these individuals, and retains the right to end their protection and return them home to Afghanistan.

Migration is not a unidirectional phenomenon: while an exponential increase of Afghan migration to the U.S. immediately following the Taliban takeover of Kabul may have run counter to the government's preferred pace of accepting immigrants and asylum seekers, the U.S. government can also influence the outmigration, return, repatriation, and even potentially the deportation of Afghan parolees. The current debate in Congress over the Afghan Adjustment Act, "which would create legal pathways for Afghans who entered the United States in 2021 under humanitarian parole and are seeking permanent residence and naturalization" (Dawi, 2023: para. 8) underlines this point. In the two years following the Afghanistan withdrawal, the number of Afghans seeking asylum in the U.S. increased to 19,000, fueled by parolees who were evacuated to the U.S. after August 2021 (Dawi, 2023). Considering that the current form of humanitarian parole that many Afghans receive is designed to make it difficult to secure suitable employment, it's no wonder that Congress is hesitant to pass naturalization laws that would make it easier for this population to work (and stay) in the U.S. This is yet another example of the government trying to impact the ability of Afghans to live in the U.S. long-term, despite initially opening their borders to this population.

This "dialectical" relationship between internal and external migration controls is visible in many refugee hosting states. For example, after German Chancellor Angela Merkel famously suspended the European Union's Dublin Procedure for Syrians in August 2015, her government began the process of imposing internal border controls, or what El-Kayed and Hamann (2018) refer to as "internal border regimes". On September 4, 2015, as part of the Dublin Procedure suspension, Merkel and her Austrian counterpart opened their borders for the thousands of refugees stranded in Hungary after Prime Minister Viktor Orban closed his country's borders (Dockery, 2017; Vick, 2015). It is estimated that 20,000 refugees arrived in Germany the following weekend (Horn, 2015). Long lines of refugees leaving Hungary on foot or being welcomed in Munich's main train station by crowds of Germans are images now synonymous with Merkel's decision. In *Times'* "Person of the Year" feature of Merkel, the magazine described the latter scene as "transcendent, almost too good to be true" (Vick, 2015: para. 78). As a matter of fact, for the newly arrived refugees in Germany, this may have been 'too good to be true' as Merkel attempted to regulate this population's "legitimate means of movement" (Torpey, 1998: 239) within the country by dictating where refugees could live during the asylum application procedure. This is a clear illustration of "residential bans and obligations" that author Margit Fauser identifies as a form of "urban migration control" (Fauser, 2017: 9) which has been the focus of many refugee-led protests. When faced with their respective refugee "crises", the imposition of border controls by the U.S. and Germany are very similar. Each country compensated for the "loosening" of their external border controls by "tightening" their internal border controls. This strategy is a way of reasserting control over a central tenet of what it means to be a modern state: deciding who can reside within state borders.

Humanitarian parole, when conceptualized as a form of internal migration control, relies on creating uncertainty among parolees and depriving them of security and agency. Sultan's second-guessing of whether he made the right decision of seeking asylum in the U.S. is incredibly significant. These trepidations were shared by other respondents, including other parolees, and can be a harbinger to a decision to ultimately leave the U.S. Accordingly, the concept of "voluntary" return migration should be scrutinized. Ellermann (2006: 305) describes the "*voluntary* return of deportable migrants" as being achieved "through a combination of carrots and sticks", to suggest that outmigration is often

coerced. While the aforementioned Afghan Adjustment Act can restore a degree of certainty among Afghan humanitarian parolees, its fate is in the balance as members of congress continue to voice "concerns about poor security vetting of the individuals who were airlifted from Kabul amid a chaotic withdrawal operation" (Dawi, 2023: para. 10). Though this reservation may be presented in pragmatic terms, some are quick to point out the fallacy. Ciullo (2023) notes that Afghan immigrants in the U.S. historically do not have any higher rates of terrorism or crime than other migrant groups, or even native-born U.S. citizens. She goes further to rightfully point out that "many Afghan parole applicants were former employees of the U.S. military [so] if they truly presented a national security threat to the United States, the military would not have employed them" (Ciullo, 2023: 210). Ciullo (2023) concludes that "only racial prejudice and Islamophobia perpetuated by the U.S. government" (p. 495) can fully explain why Afghans do not receive equal access to humanitarian parole as Ukrainians. Just as migration and security have become conflated over time at the external border, there is also a merging of these policy areas at internal state borders which tend to exclude certain migrant groups. In the context of this article, Afghans are seen as a greater security threat than Ukrainians and are accordingly on the losing end of the accessibility and provision of U.S. humanitarian parole benefits – even if they are recognized parolees.

5 Conclusion

While humanitarian parole should ideally operate on humanitarian principles – namely the equal protection and assistance of all vulnerable populations facing emergency situations – there are clearly inequities and gaps in the implementation of the program based on people's country of origin. We find that humanitarian parole is part of a much larger ecosystem of migration controls fundamentally motivated by security – not humanitarian – calculations and domestic foreign policy objectives. This reality is apparent today in the differential treatment of humanitarian parolees from Ukraine and Afghanistan. These calculations have real and potentially negative consequences for parolees in the U.S. Reform of humanitarian parole is desperately needed. In order to better meet the needs of displaced populations and place "humanitarianism" at the center of the humanitarian parole initiative, the program must commit to serving a wider range of refugees equally – not just those who fulfill national security interests. For example, we find that the proactive measure of automatically granting work permits and/or Green Cards to all humanitarian parolees upon entry into the U.S. would exponentially improve people's condition and integration. While this translates to a tangible policy recommendation, the implementation of such policies may be significantly curtailed by President Trump's reelection to the White House. In keeping with his campaign pledges of strict border controls, and mass deportations, the President-elect is also expected to end Biden's humanitarian parole programs all-together (Hesson, 2024). According to Andrew Selee, President of the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute, "the first thing we know he will almost certainly do [as part of his mass deportation plan] is cancel humanitarian parole for people that received it" (Inskeep, 2024: para. 4). Trump's consistent labeling of prospective deportees as "criminals" only perpetuates the security logic also present in Biden's immigration agenda. In order to break this cycle, any reimplementation of humanitarian parole programs after Trump's 'Day One' executive orders needs to draw on true humanitarianism. Until the inconsistencies of humanitarian parole are addressed, past, present, and future parolees in the U.S. may question the program's namesake.

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Voices from the Field:
Enhancing Refugee Social Work Education through Practitioner Insights[1]

David P. Cecil[2] & Rachel Joy Hagues[3]

Abstract

The following presents three methodologically identical original studies on the social work response to the global refugee crisis in Germany, Lebanon, and Greece between 2016 and 2023. It reveals key patterns and important insights into refugees' greatest needs, the essential skills and knowledge social workers developed to support refugees, imperatives for self-care and coping strategies for social workers, and recommendations for optimal continuing education and training. Methodologically, this article synthesizes findings from three original research projects through a narrative literature review, that incorporates additional evidence-based literature. Key findings can be summarized as such: Participants show a strong preference for practical learning. It is noted that they often become overwhelmed by the scale of needs, and by real-time challenges related to health, mental health, systems, laws, and cultural differences, for which they feel unprepared. Although they recognize the importance of continuing education and training, finding the time and resources to improve in these areas is extremely challenging. Due to the work's intensity, personal coping capacities are often stretched beyond their limits, leaving them with inadequate coping strategies and resources. Nonetheless, many participants describe effective personal coping methods that could benefit others in similar roles. As for conclusions and implications, these findings underscore the need for social work educators to address the urgent demands faced by social workers in the global refugee crisis, where many lives are at stake. Educators must equip future social workers with critical skills, knowledge for refugee practice, and guide the development of relevant content areas for ongoing education and training.

Key Words:

social work education; refugee crisis; coping; Germany; Lebanon; Greece

1   Introduction

To inform and strengthen social work education and practice with refugees, this article synthesizes findings from three methodologically identical original research studies conducted in Germany, Lebanon, and Greece – three countries with significant and diverse refugee populations (Cecil et al., 2021; Hagues & Cecil, 2020; Hagues & Stoltzfus, 2019). Germany became a leading resettlement destination due to its welcoming stance

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in 2015, spearheaded by Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement, "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do it"), and its robust economic and human services systems (Brücker et al., 2016). Since then, Germany, with a population of about 85 million, has received approximately 2.85 million asylum applications (Statista, 2024a), approving around 1.2 million (Statista, 2024b). While Germany has offered safety, security, and hope to many, its health and human services have been strained, and community and political support have fluctuated over the past decade (Kuhn & Maxwell, 2024). Additional challenges include integration, language barriers, employment, housing shortages, and impacts on the education system.

Lebanon faces significant challenges in supporting its large refugee population amid economic strains and political instability. Lebanon, with a population of 5.35 million, hosts approximately 2 million refugees, primarily Palestinians and Syrians. Palestinian refugees have been present since the 1940s (Siklawi, 2019), while Syrian refugees arrived after the 2015 crisis. By 2020, there were 470,000 registered Palestinians and 1.5 million registered Syrians in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2020). Lebanon's limited resources and high debt-to-GDP ratio strain its capacity to support refugees, compounded by ongoing military tensions between Hezbollah and Israel (Congressional Research Service, 2024). Social work has a growing presence through institutions like the Lebanese American University, but governmental disorganization hinders a coordinated social work response. Despite these challenges, Lebanese social workers, citizens, refugees, and NGOs have created a patchwork of refugee support, maximizing limited resources to address pressing needs.

Greece's proximity to the Middle East and Africa, along with its European Union (EU) membership, made it a primary destination for refugees fleeing their countries. However, many were unaware that Greece itself was in a severe economic crisis, worsened by the 2008-2009 global recession and the U.S. housing market collapse (Cavounidis, 2018). This economic strain left Greece ill-prepared to manage the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees on its shores (Carastathis & Tsilimpounidi, 2018). While social work agencies and programs have worked tirelessly to support refugees, Greece's economic hardships, political fluctuations, and complex relationship with the EU – which is concerned with irregular migration throughout Europe – keep many refugees in a state of limbo, lacking formal recognition in Greece, but unable to return home.

Despite diverse circumstances between Germany, Lebanon, and Greece, participants reported notably similar responses regarding refugees' greatest needs, key skills, and knowledge (including preferred pedagogies), and strategies for coping with work-related stress. The literature review examines the context of international social work education, evolving social work curriculum recommendations, and the importance of practical application in refugee focused social work education. The results section presents selected participants' direct quotes highlighting refugees' greatest needs, key skills and knowledge, and ways of coping. The discussion section is a call to action for social work educators and recommends specific topic areas to emphasize in the refugee social work practice curriculum.

2   Literature Review

The global refugee crisis has escalated to unprecedented levels over the past decades, challenging nations, governments, humanitarian organizations, and professionals, including social workers, to respond effectively (Androff & Mathis, 2021). Major resettlement locations, such as Germany, Lebanon, and Greece, had limited time to

assess and build capacity. Instead, they were forced to adapt swiftly, simultaneously providing aid while preparing and resourcing front-line workers the best they could. For social work education, the crisis necessitated a reevaluation of educational strategies and practices in the context of refugee care (Kenan, 2021; Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2023). Synthesized findings emphasize the advantages of internationally collaborative approaches to research, teaching, and practice in addressing major humanitarian challenges like the global refugee crisis (Davis et al., 2018). Social workers' education and training are vital in responding to refugee needs. This brings up two important questions: How can internationally focused social work education continuously enhance the refugee social work curriculum? And what are the best methods for teaching and training in this context?

3   International Social Work Education and the Evolving Refugee Social Work Curriculum

International collaboration and research in social work education reveal commonalities in addressing refugee needs across cultures. Davis et al. (2018) stress that participants from different countries often articulate similar responses regarding refugees' needs and circumstances. They state,

> "Increased global communication elucidates the similarities of social challenges faced by nations throughout the world and improves access, literacy, empathy, and responsibility internationally" (Davis et al., 2018: 327).

The concept of global citizenship emerged as a critical theme, emphasizing the consistency of human needs and the potential for systematizing practice approaches such as assessment and intervention. From this perspective, differences are seen primarily in systems of access, rather than in individual needs.

Refugee social work practice requires specialized knowledge and skills customized to the unique challenges faced by refugee populations. Core knowledge areas for refugee social work practice have been established and continue to evolve (Borrmann, 2023; Hagues & Cecil, 2020; International Federation of Social Workers, 2019; Kenan, 2021; Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2023; Potocky & Naseh, 2019; Social Work Portal, 2024). Well established content areas in the literature include the refugee experience and context, legal and policy frameworks, cultural competence, and trauma-informed practice. Practice skills include assessment, intervention, case management, and language and communication strategies. Potocky and Naseh (2019) set a high premium on evidence-based service approaches that address cultural, linguistic, political, and socioeconomic barriers. They also recommend that social workers assess health and mental health issues, family dynamics, language related challenges, educational needs, economic well-being, and within-group relations.

Refugee social work curricula through an ecological perspective equips social workers to address complex and dynamic needs of refugee populations. Based in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, Hagues and Cecil (2020) developed a course outline proposal that accounts for refugee needs across macro-, mezzo-, micro-, exo-, and chrono-system levels. While the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels are familiar concepts, the exo-system encompasses external environmental factors that indirectly influence development, and the chrono-system focuses on changes over time. Using this framework, social work education integrates diverse content areas, including diversity, human rights, policy

practice, ethics, assessment, evaluation, community assessment, community engagement, research, and interventions with individuals, families, and groups.

3.1 Experiential Learning for Refugee Practice

Practicing social workers commonly state that they learn best what they put into practical application, which is substantiated by a significant body of literature on experiential learning (Acharya et al., 2019; Council on Social Work Education, 2022; Deslauriers, et al., 2019). CSWE, the council that accredits all social work education programs in the United States, designates field education as the *signature pedagogy*, referring to it as a primary and crucial approach to social worker development. Experientially oriented classroom methods, such as role playing, and case study application, are also shown to manifest improved learning and retention outcomes when compared to passive learning (Abraham, 2024; Mayer, 2004).

4 Methodology

This article is a narrative literature review, which is a non-standardized approach that allows researchers to compare, evaluate, and synthesize evidence more flexibly from selected studies (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The three primary studies that are the focus of this article received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through Samford University's Institutional Review Board (Cecil et al., 2021; Hagues et al., 2019; Hagues & Cecil, 2020). The results section of this article includes quotations from data collected for those studies. Each study utilized a mixed methods approach with 109 (N=109) participants (Germany, N=34; Lebanon, N=47; Greece, N=28). Qualitative data were collected through structured, in-person interviews (Patton, 2014) and quantitative data were collected using ordinal measurements that looked at the extent to which social workers felt their work was effective, that they were adequately supported, and to their level of coping. Interview transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative method through the Atlas.Ti software (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Charmaz, 2014). Qualitative analysis yielded themes, which were prioritized according to frequency with which they came up. Ordinal data yielded means and standard deviations that revealed overall effectiveness and coping scores, and variability between participants. This narrative review pulls from top themes identified in this research.

5 Results

This section reviews and substantiates key thematic areas that arose in these research projects with respect to *refugees' greatest needs*, *key skills and knowledge*, and *coping*. The question of *refugees' greatest needs* was designed to find out from social workers what they felt were their most important service areas to provide. For *key skills and knowledge*, participants responded about areas they retained from their studies as well as those they either forgot, missed, or felt should have been included in their studies. In terms of *coping*, it was posited that this work is fraught with uncertainty and resource constraints, so participants shared both how they were doing and, more specifically, what coping approaches work best for them.

5.1 Refugees' Greatest Needs

A thorough examination of *refugees' greatest needs* provides valuable insights that can better prepare educators to train social workers for refugee practice in more precise and

nuanced ways. Respondents consistently identified the following as *refugees' greatest needs*: assistance with navigating systems, community engagement, legal status, safe housing, food, legal protection, civil rights, and opportunities for productivity, particularly in education and employment. Several quotes that demonstrate these points include:

"I think at the moment the problem is they have to wait very long to make any decisions, and they don't know at this time what is happening . . . For a long time, they just have to sit here and wait until someone makes some decision. I think I would call it uncertainty." Germany, 2016

This participant describes how limited resources and misunderstandings of both refugees and social workers frustrate outcomes.

". . . they had this false expectation that [the government] would be like just, shelling out money left and right and it's a little bit frustrating. It's frustrating for them because of course it didn't meet their expectations, it's frustrating for us because of course we'd like to grant them but that's not our decision, we can only work with what we've got." Germany, 2016

In this quote, the participant articulates just how unrealistic it is to expect refugees to integrate if they do not have rights, such as employment and home ownership opportunities.

"Maybe they don't voice it clearly that they really need to be integrated but still they need rights. So, this is the Palestinians. The right to work; and there are at least 67 employment they cannot work with; they cannot, they do not have the right to own their houses outside of their camp; they cannot build house outside the camp." Lebanon, 2019

Key Skills and Knowledge

Social workers in the refugee field face two significant challenges. First, many report gaps in their learning when preparing for refugee practice or find that they have forgotten much of the content due to a lack of practical application, which would have helped them retain the material. Second, they encounter issues and problems that neither social work programs nor they themselves could have anticipated in their careers. These experiences sharpen their focus on three key areas: (1) things they studied and are glad to know, as these skills are now useful in their work; (2) things they studied only theoretically and struggled to retain or apply in practice; and (3) knowledge and skills they never realized would be so crucial and wish they had time and resources to pursue through continuing education. Some common themes include working with populations that have distinctly different cultural background, including different approaches to solving problems, and constantly changing refugee and asylee policy. Here are examples of what they reported:

"Yeah, first of all establish eh, human picture. Like respect the people . . .my first method is just to greet everybody. To look in their eyes and say hello so they feel recognized . . . know they are here alone, sometimes they don't know anybody, and if you don't say hello they feel like ghosts and are never recognized. So, I will make them feel visible." Germany, 2016

This quote reflects the importance of social workers' knowledge of cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and specifics of the circumstances refugees are fleeing.

"To try to be aware of the cultural background, and to be updated regarding the-ethnicities, or their nationalities, the situation in the countries. To try to be focused and concentrated on their plans, when it comes to asylum seekers, always have in mind that they-there are many factors that these won't work, be prepared. I mean that to keep in mind that the plans that you set, and that you put aside, for many reasons, we are talking for the-especially for the asylum seekers,

it's not so obvious that they stay here, and for this reason, to be focused as well for their future, in their future that they imagine." Greece, 2023

This participant makes a very strong argument that social workers must be informed about the legal rights of refugees, which would include a detailed understanding of the process refugees must walk through.

"First of all, [we] have to know the rights of immigrants, of refugees. How the whole system works. Even now … in the future we will get more knowledge about this. But right now I think we don't, we can't say to you … all the steps it takes along till you get accepted. We don't know about this. We know some of the steps because they are more complicated, and then therefore, we are here to help them through." Germany 2016

The gap between theoretical learning and practical demands of their work was articulated by one participant in this way:

"Even when we took theory at the university, it's really different to work in the field. And even we made lots of internships hours in the university, it's different when you take that case and you start working with it from the beginning. You got the assessment, you got their needs, it's your responsibility, so I think it's really different … Every day we're asking people something new. Even when we are working with the refugees, even when we say the cases are the same, same needs, the same thing, but very different every case … So nothing can teach you ..." Lebanon, 2019

Participants emphasized the importance of the following: learning theory without practical application is ineffective, practical learning should be emphasized both in the classroom and through internships, true empathy requires cultural exposure and purposeful equality, and cultural humility and curiosity are essential for competent practice.

Coping

While there is extensive literature on the importance of self-care for social workers (Ratcliff, 2024), it is especially vital in refugee practice, where the potential for burnout and secondary trauma are immense (Roberts & Rushworth, 2021). Many participants report high levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress indicators at some point in their careers. Some suggested refugee work is unsustainable as a long-term career and recommended engaging in it only for a limited period. Others talked about their trust in human rights and their desire to promote human dignity as core beliefs that keep them motivated. Several other coping methods articulated included physical activity, taking breaks as needed, collaborating with supportive colleagues, engaging in faith and faith communities, and maintaining a strong commitment to human rights. Recognizing and supporting these strategies is crucial for sustaining resilience in refugee social work practice. Here are some examples of their contributions:

"Definitely when you have faith in your capacity and the cause and human dignity … Of course, you actually have to work on this." Lebanon, 2019

This social worker emphasized peace and equality in terms of rights for refugees.

"I think that's eh, we have all believe in peace and be equal and have the same rights, eh … the human rights actually." Greece, 2023

And finally, this participant asserts that they are serving humans and that it is imperative for social workers to see the inherent dignity of all. Additionally, it is important to

remember that all people are potentially vulnerable and social workers may also find themselves in need.

> *"I am tired of treating people in general, and especially refugees, as other beings ... they are humans. They are like me and you. That, it can happen to us as well. Tomorrow. It can happen now. I want to make people understand that." Greece, 2023*

5 Discussion

Social work educators play a vital role in empowering front-line refugee social workers to meet their continuing education needs. Active engagement of educators with practitioners and integration of practical and real-world insights into their teaching bridges the gap between theory and practice. Educators must also work to respond to practitioner needs with flexibility, recognizing the inevitable time and resource limitations. This means developing innovative and creative approaches that optimize affordability and accessibility (e.g., grant funded continuing education programs).

Participants identified several key areas for continued education, including migration laws and policies, cultural origins (i.e., causes of refugee exodus by country), culturally informed family dynamics, trauma-informed care, and counseling and interviewing skills. Many participants noted that migration laws and policies are especially challenging to learn, given their complexity and tendency to shift in response to migration trends. Few reported receiving substantial education on these topics in their degree programs, despite understanding that these laws significantly impact their work. Participants also described the difficulty of achieving cultural competence in settings with refugees from diverse backgrounds and needs. They emphasized the challenges of navigating cultural norms that differ from those in the resettlement country, particularly regarding gender roles and family dynamics. Several social workers expressed concerns about tense, awkward, or conflictual interactions that arose when they lacked the preparation to address these cultural differences in a respectful manner.

While social work outside the United States may exclude counseling and psychotherapeutic practice, many participants reported deficits in their understanding and skillset related to trauma-informed care and counseling and interviewing skills. Trauma poses significant challenges for asylum seeking and refugee population, and secondary trauma risk is high for those serving these groups (O'Donnell et al., 2023). Trauma literature further suggests that coping with trauma varies over time; some individuals may manage trauma effectively in the short term, while others may experience delayed symptoms (Markovic & Živanović, 2022). Social work participants emphasized a need for improved counseling and interviewing skills that would enable them to listen more actively, connect more deeply, and learn from their clients how to best support them. Understanding the risk of secondary trauma underscores the importance of proactively incorporating self-care and preventive measures into practice models for all involved.

6 Limitations of the Study

A narrative literature review is a non-standardized methodology that leans on authors' interpretations of noteworthy themes. Additionally, though the qualitative aspects of the research studies synthesized in this article are strong (i.e., well-developed structured interview guide, robust analysis protocol using Atlast.ti with a triangulate analysis process [Patton, 2014], and large sample sizes for qualitative research), findings are nevertheless

non-generalizable. Additionally, ordinal level measurements using descriptive and frequency statistics, in addition to small sample size, also indicate non-generalizability. Moreover, the qualifications and roles of social workers vary from country to country. Finally, there is potential bias among the authors due to pro-refugee integration and resettlement views.

7   Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to guide and inform research and academic efforts to benefit as many people as possible in response to the global refugee crisis. To achieve this, we need to listen carefully to our practicing social work colleagues and move beyond traditional educational systems that limit access to frontline social workers. Future research should focus on creating integrated, accessible curricula that blend in-person and online formats, including certifications, workshops, and modules. This is essential to keep up with the evolving complexities of global displacement. Failing to make these educational resources affordable, accessible, and user-friendly would severely undermine this mission.

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Enhancing International Social Work Education to Prepare Social Workers for Crisis, Flight and Social Transformation: Mindful-Based Intercultural Communication & Resilience Training (MBICRT)[1]

Hannah Reich[2]

Abstract

In today's time of global crises, and the resulting increase in turmoil and migration movements, Social Work needs to expand its methodological repertoire and adapt its working and teaching practices accordingly. This fact has become very palpable in recent discussions with Social Workers from Lebanon and Jordan. This paper is based on the insights gained from conceptualizing and implementing a module called "Mindful-Based Intercultural Communication & Resilience Training" (MBICRT) within a Master program in International Social Work and with Lebanese partners. The module was developed in recognition of the ongoing crisis that Lebanese social workers are facing. This occurred before the ongoing war and has thus increased in relevance now. It was initially set up from a module for Lebanese students at the Modern University of Business and Science (MUBS) and for international students within the Technical University of Applied Science (THWS) in Germany and was later broadened to integrate students from the German Jordanian University (GJU). This paper lays bare the theoretical foundations used for the conceptualization of that module. The module's effects have been tested with scales afterwards, resulting in insights that will be published at a later stage.

Key Words:

intercultural education; exchange; mindfulness; stress-management; salutogenesis; self-sare; social work

1.   Introduction

> *"The peacebuilder must have one foot in what is and one foot beyond what exists."*
>
> *"Authenticity asks for transcendence and grounded realism, accessibility and broad vision, strategic capacity and immediate behavior. In turn, these require the disciplines of the moral imagination in the public sphere."*
>
> *John Paul Ledearach: The Moral Imagination*

In today's time of global crises, and the resulting increase in turmoil and migration movements, Social Work needs to expand its methodological repertoire and adapt its working and teaching practices accordingly. In doing so, it is primarily important to learn

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from the experiences of social workers in the global south, who have had to develop skills to respond appropriately to exceptional situations and crises and interact in conflicting socio- cultural paradigms since their birth (Kahi, Ghanem 2021). This "learning" might not be learning through books, as a lot of this knowledge is not (yet) extracted into the scientific body of research. It might demand instead that "learning sites" (Ropers, 2000: 42) or "learning space" (Ropers, 2008: 36-37) be created to access the practical knowledge and bring it into the awareness within the group learning setting. I believe that we can learn a lot from the field of peace-building, conflict transformation and peace education here, which have vast experience in this so called "elicitive" (Lederach, 1996) approach of "teaching" to expand the regime of knowledge. This whole process is a "work-in-progress" creation, with the panel and this article forming integral components of its development.

Considering the focus of Social Work is on those excluded and marginalized, the difficult situation of many people on this planet is clearly reflected in the field of work of International Social Work. Social Work professionals face significant challenges in dealing with conflicting imperatives and uncertain contexts shaped by increasing economic disparities, environmental, economic, and health crises, as well as various forms of group-focused enmity, misanthropy and violent extremism. The profession finds itself as an actor in poverty conditions, overburdened health systems, refugee camps, conflict areas, or as an agent in repressive systems with beneficiaries who have experienced massive human suffering. This brings us to the importance of self-awareness and self-care to strengthen their personal capacities to handle such difficult situations, termed in the medical discourse as "stress". The importance to insert these self-care modules into the teaching repertoire became very clear in our interaction with Lebanese Social Workers within the "International Social Work Acting in Crisis: Attitude Matters (AttiMa) Project"[3] and "International Social Work from Crisis to Sustainability (ThRIvE)"[4]

Furthermore, even if International Social Work must act locally, be well anchored and orientate itself on the locally valid interpretation schemes, it always acts in its professionalism in the light of universally valid claimed maxims of action (Cox/Pawar, 2013). This tension brings forth change and transformation, but also entails ethical dilemmas and challenges (Healy, 2008). Additionally, even in the local, concrete practice, it is desirable to be aware of our global interconnectedness and interdependencies, including unequal power relations and unequal access to resources with something, which I would like to call a "glocal" (Swyngedouw, 1997) awareness. They manifest sharply in the daily life of the urban, consumer culture. This brings us to the significance of culture itself and the impact of culture shaping our perception of reality, our interactions, behaviors and beliefs, and thus our socio-cultural creations and the mode how we interact with ourselves, with each other and with the planet. In the context of migration, "culture", "trans-cultural", "inter-cultural encounters" and "intercultural communication" have been at the centre of investigation and have brought to awareness an understanding of culture far beyond the nation-state or linguistic borders. Yet, for Social Work education, it is not enough to fathom the competence to deal with different systems of interpretation theoretically, but it has to be experienced concretely and practically (Tesoriero, 2006) to

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[3] For further information see: https://ifas.fhws.de/international-social-work-attitude-matters/

[4] For further information see: https://ifas.thws.de/en/international-social-work-thrive/

be embodied by future Social Workers (Reich & Di Rosa, 2021). This needs to broaden or even transform, as Social Work education is further boosted by the future scenarios ahead of us: On the one hand, crisis easily leads to politics and a social climate of fear, which legitimizes discrimination, scapegoating and de-humanizing of the "other". On the other hand, migration will amplify due to climate change and altering living conditions. Thus, the need for an integration of diverse cultural perspectives will increase even further to avoid the surge of discrimination, exclusion, and in many regions of the planet also violent conflicts.

In this article, I am presenting core theoretical foundations for a module called "Mindful-Based Intercultural Communication & Stress Management" (MBICRT) created within the AttiMa/ThRIvE Project. Theoretically, the concept of the module is based on salutogenesis according to Aaron Antonovsky, who ascribes an appropriate role to the aspect of meaning and interpretation for health, and focuses on the widely studied MBSR-Program of Jon Kabat-Zinn, broadened with teaching units from the practice of intercultural communication and peace and theater education. This linkage works very well as they all are based on an experiential, participatory pedagogy and place great importance on the group and the learning process as a group. The module encompasses four SWS (three hours per week) and builds on weekly meetings over the span of nine weeks, with three full days on the weekends in between. Homework is given from session to session, and a working book is provided.

The aim of the module was firstly to empower people to deal constructively with stress. Since the constructive handling of stress can have a sustainable impact on the quality of life, this can be constructed as a building block for resilience promotion. Secondly, the module intends to strengthen emotional intelligence, as this is very important for intercultural contexts, and to increase ambiguity tolerance. For this reason, I selected the following three scales to test effects:

- The Schuttle Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).
- Adult Resilience Measure-Revised (ARM-R) by Resilience Research Center, which is a self-assessment of social-ecological resilience.
- Tolerance of ambiguity scale developed by Budner (1962).

All three scales have also been tested in cross-cultural contexts, which is central to this course, and were composed of people from very different cultural backgrounds. Further, qualitative interviews have been done with some of the students to complete a mixed method approach. The results of these data will be published at a later stage. Here I would like to lay bare the theoretical foundation of the concept. The method used is literature based and not referring to the empirical data.

The theoretical foundations presented here serve as background information, aiming to foster the educational and pedagogical theoretical discussions teaching in a migrant society. Here we need to take into consideration that people come from crisis regions and thus, a culturally sensitive approach to health and health care is needed. In my view, the following theories can be very valuable to set up intercultural seminars for well-being.

I wish to discuss the assumption, that further professionalization of International Social Care needs to integrate a transcultural perspective, a 'glocal', reflective mindset, and

modules. Thus, incorporating self-competencies and embodiment in the curricula, based on experience-based learning and informed by post-colonial curricula developments. I do so by not aiming to focus on the problems future migration will bring, but rather by focusing on the possibilities it reveals in the advancement of the existing higher education culture, to support participatory, inclusive and experience-based learning and bring more space for different knowledge-regimes into the academic bodies. As I have been trained in constructive conflict transformation, I believe addressing structures is crucial for long-term change. Although I am very well aware that inserting such a module into higher educational structures does create paradoxes and dilemmas, I hereby hope to spread some suggestions into the discussion of curricula development and the integration of the phenomena of migration into International Social Work Education.

The collaboration with Lebanese Social Workers served as a basis to develop the MBICRT Module, as much of my work is with Social Workers from Za'atari Camp in Jordan. It is my experience of their love for life despite tremendous suffering, injustice, loss and pain, that inspires me deeply and ignites my inner quest to be capable to face such circumstances without turning to nihilism, criticism, cynicism, rage and depression. I believe, if we want to face the up-coming events as humans, it is time to evolve all our capacities and focus on our human potentials.

2 Fostering the Sense of Coherence (SoC): Mindful-Based Intercultural Communication & Resilience Training (MBICRT)

The module that aimed to foster personal and social competencies of students such as ambiguity tolerance, emotional intellect and resilience to prepare the students for crises, was to be enacted in a context where students from very different contexts took part. These contexts varied not only in geographical background (from Ghana, Nigeria, Mexico, Lithuania, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Taiwan, etc.), but also in their previous educational fields (some education related studies, some social studies, some anthropology, etc.). Furthermore, it was developed to be implemented in collaboration with the Modern University of Business and Science (MUBS) to allow for Lebanese students to participate. Thus, it was necessary for the underlying model of the course to be universal enough to meet people where they are and to be open for particularities as well as an integration of different cultural backgrounds into the training space. Therefore, it had to be conceptualized to be implemented primarily as an online module, while at the same time remaining participatory and experience-based.

Given the vast amount of evidence, Mindful-Based Stress Reduction Trainings have an impact on well-being, I chose this as a basic component and will thus begin this paper by explaining some of the basic principles these trainings convey. However, given the variety of different backgrounds, I felt a need to advance this process, with more recognition of the importance of individual, collective meaning, and meaningfulness. Here, I found that the Salutogenetic Model can deliver some important understanding by combining a more physiological perspective on health with the importance of cultural signification. I will outline this approach in the following chapter. Yet, to understand, what is meaningful to us, it is important to look to the signifying systems and practices, which brings us to the concept of culture. Although culture was mentioned previously, it is decisive to make explicit an often very implicit understanding of concepts underlying the conceptualization of this experience-based module. The module also builds on the premises, that the

separation of body and mind can no longer hold scientific validity and thus strives towards an "embodied" practice.

2.1 Mindfulness as Invitation to "Sit with the Uncomfortable", Pausing in Silence to Act from this Inner Place of Freedom

In situations of crises, migrants and social workers alike, are exposed to an enormous amount of stress. This results from the unpredictability of future events, inconsistencies and uncertainties, various (existential) threats, enormous amounts of suffering impacting one's self or one's surroundings, as well as a lack of resources and an absence of control over their environments. This constant exposure can become very harming to their long-term well-being, particularly if the socio-cultural, economical and individual coping mechanisms do not deliver any sort of alleviation. Furthermore, if social workers or migrants remain in a kind of survival mode, they focus on what frightens them and "stresses" them and are not capable of moving into a creative mode of action. Yet, this creativity is needed to build a sustainable society arising from times of crises. Generally, one can say, that the practice of mindfulness involves consciously directing attention to the experience of the present moment. In doing so, the practitioner adopts a non-judgmental, accepting, and curious attitude toward his or her experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2010; Shapiro & Carlson, 2011).

One approach that has proven to bring sustainable relief in overcoming stress and to support stress management, is the Mindful-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) founded by Jon Kabat- Zinn. Initially, this training was carried out in a semi-inpatient setting at the Stress Reduction Clinic in Worchester, Massachusetts, which was founded for this purpose. It then developed into an eight-week course known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), now conducted worldwide on an inpatient, day-care, and outpatient basis (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2005).

The program delivers a thoroughly developed training in observing one's mode of thinking and feeling, while connecting to an awareness of the present moment. This firstly allows for awareness of the way one thinks and feels, and of the repetitive patterns of this construct. Secondly, as this awareness resumes, a dis-identification with one's own thoughts and feelings follows. This dis-identification is crucial for positioning oneself outside of this construct, and then thirdly, it enables the self to act differently, to respond to the stressors as an act of creative engagement, and to merely react in a habitual form from an autopilot modus. This present-moment awareness, or "presencing" (Scharmer, 2013), is the key for change. This positioning, however, has no real impact on one's day to day engagements with life, if it is not embodied. Embodiment needs a profound practice or regular training, in which the position of an "inner observer", of being present in the moment, with an awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations are practiced.

This awareness of one's way of thinking – and feeling – dismantles the notion that emotions shape our thinking. It shows how much this state-of-being, in-turn shapes the way we perceive reality and how selective our perception is.

Here we start to question our perception not in a merely theoretical way, backed-up by constructivist theories, but in a concrete manner allowing for an illumination of our inherent judgements about the statements and behaviors of others. Only then, if we manage to step back from our immediate judgements, we can build connections to others,

who might be in some ways different then us. To draw upon the famous words of Margaret Wheatly:

> "When we listen with less judgment, we always develop better relationship with each other. It's not differences that divide us. It's our judgments that do. Curiosity and good listening bring us back together" (Wheatly, 2001: 2).

Wheatly brings us to another dimension of MBSR Training, which the practice of staying in the present moment can lead to an awareness of the attitudes one is currently adopting. She speaks about curiosity as essential to building a relationship with the unknown (person or circumstances). This is also a central aspect in MBSR and described within the eight foundational attitudes as the "beginners mind". Yet, as this is a theoretical text, I do not want to mention all the eight attitudes of MBSR, as it is precisely not a moral prescription of these attitudes, which bring about a release of stress-reaction advanced through their enactment, but it is the awareness of one's own process of *relating*. Which then opens up a space to relay to the world and to others in a different way, and thus experience "stress" differently. Asking the question, 'How do I relate to what I perceive right now?'[5], gives rise to more awareness of one's own thinking, feeling patterns, and their deeply embodied attitudes. This awareness of the *mode of relating* to the experience brings forward a possibility to change the process of experiencing from within.

MBSR has given rise to many new developments as it carries the seed not only as a resilience tool, but in its holistic approach, also seems capable to support a valuable living with different diseases (such as chronic pain, insomnia, depression, cancer, etc.) (Lao et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2010). Furthermore, mindful leadership, mindful parenting and mindful partnership have emerged, which support the idea, that mindfulness practice does not simply lead to an individual change of attitude but contributes to an overall modification of "relating" to pleasant, unpleasant or neutral experiences. It does so, by allowing us to become aware of the attitudes we hold in the way we relate to experiences. Thus, it opens a space to alter our attitudes towards our experiences. Such a change is very subtle but has profound impacts in creating a completely new *culture of relating*.

As a program, MBSR can be applied very well in the predominant culture of curing disease.[6] This might be part of the reason for its success, as it brings a whole new culture into the present time structures, which are still created by ways of thinking from the past and built by a dominant paradigm of deficit orientation.

This deficit orientation has far-reaching consequences, as the focus on the deficit easily leads to a "war" against the disease and the unwanted, and thus leads to the establishment of further walls and separation from different parts of each other. Instead of thinking about the problem (the stress), Peter Clark motivates us to think about "possibilities".

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[5] Maybe asking: "Am I accepting what is and feel empowered to creatively dance creatively along with it or am I feeling victimized, am in judgement about or resistance of it?"

[6] Here, there is also a big question mark: Is mindfulness by itself powerful enough to bring about a cultural change to manifest a new way of living suitable to include a wide range of diversity and new way of relating to others and the environment? Is it a seed for social, political, ecological and economical transformation or is it merely manifesting the status quo?

This approach seems to be very valid for inter-cultural settings. It brings about a new perspective. Yet, the challenges lie in the fact, that mindfulness and meditation is not for everybody. Thus alternatives, such as other co-regulative practices, like humming, play or other embodied techniques have to be implemented. Particularly, if the people are very stressed, movements like shaking with music, or sessions from body-mind-cantering (BMC) to calm down the nervous system have to be set out before a seated practice. Still, we invite the participants to step out of their comfort zones, as this is where growth occurs. It is about challenging their autopilots and habitual pattern of behavior. Therefore, it is a fine line to what extent the challenge is healthy, and students are encouraged, and not overwhelmed. It is of utmost importance to foster self-responsibility, self-awareness and self-care throughout the entire sessions, as well as guiding students again-and-again to listen to themselves, and make their own choices, particularly in intercultural settings.

2.2   The Salutogenetic Model

On the topic of Salutogenesis, it is helpful to distinguish between a more general understanding of the term referring to an attitude focusing on the genesis of health, and the genesis of illness and disease, which is mostly practiced in medicine and health studies. The latter more specific application, which I adopt here, is linked to a particular model that has been developed by Aron Antonovsky in his book "Health, Stress and Coping" (1979) and was further exemplified in many other succeeding works. Antonovsky developed the model continuously, departing from the central question: 'How do we manage to stay healthy?' (Antonovsky, 1979). Antonovsky observed that women, who have experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, had significantly more issues in overcoming their menopause than others who did not. However, a third of them did not do worse at all. This caused Antonovsky to ask, "What was the miracle?" (Antonovsky, 1990: 76). Asking this question, stood in such sharp contrast to the general pathogenic query about what causes not ease, but dis-ease, and illness. Thus, he felt the need to coin a new term to this approach and attitude towards life to mark the different orientation of attention and mode of thinking behind this approach (Mittelmark et al., 2017).

Central to this understanding is that he transcends the socio-culturally shaped binary perception of reality of humans being either "ill" or "healthy". Instead, rather suggests to display these different states of being on a continuum, between ease and dis-ease:

> "I am persuaded that the salutogenic orientation, that thinking in terms of the mystery of movement toward the ease pole of the ease-dis/ease continuum, is a significant and radically different approach to the study of health and illness than the pathogenic orientation" (Antonovsky,1979: xiv–xv).

Health is thus, according to Antonovsky, much more than low risk factors, including salutary factors. He often speaks about the metaphor of not-wellbeing as a stream: a body of water in which people are supposed to fall into when they are ill, and when health-workers have to search for treatments to pull them out. To him, this swimming in a stream is a rather normal situation of life and thus it is not that life occurs on the shores, but in the stream itself, as life is full of challenges:

> "A more fruitful vision is to see life as turbulent and inherently full of conflicts and what he called chronic life strain, referring to long-lasting structural and cultural situations such as poverty, unemployment, marginality, etc. A sad fact of the lives of many persons." (Antonovsky, 1990: 73)

He thus broadens the view on illness from a narrow focus on one particular disease, with a more holistic approach of integrating the subjective experience of not feeling well, and the socio-cultural surroundings into his quest. By doing so he recognises the fact that something, what he terms a "breakdown", the subjective experience of being ill, might occur with or without having been diagnosed with a disease[7]. Healthy is, according to Antonovsky, much more than being low on risk factors. It is connected to the mental, emotional and physiological dimension of a human. It is less of a state then a process, a verb, taking the subjective experience of the people and his capabilities to adapt to certain circumstances or so called "stressors"[8] into account: "Salutogenesis, (. . .) leads us to focus on the overall problem of active adaptation to an inevitably stressor-rich environment" (Antonovsky, 1987: 9).

Disease and stress are integrated parts of life, both as natural conditions and as the resources available to respond, with the individual's active agency being central. Here we can recognise the coherence with the MBSR approach. The achievement of this adaptation is not something evaluated from outside the being, diagnosed by another person, but it is under the authority of the person itself. This displays a deep respect for the autonomy of the human being, and the decisions concerning his life in this model. The centrality of human dignity, self-responsibility and agency are also shown in the question Antonovsky has been asking to figure out social support. Normally, one would assume to inquire about social support, and to ask how much help one is *receiving*. Yet, Antonovsky turned the question around, inquiring how much "one feels one is needed by one's spouse, children..." (Antonovsky, 1990: 75). This is pointing to the importance of giving, of *contributing* to the social surrounding to feel meaningful and self-worthy as human. A system that places people into positions from which they can merely receive things, but are deprived to create, to act and to contribute meaningfully to their surrounding is undermining human well-being.

The quest about coping strategies and the stressors that life brings about, brought Antonovsky to look for subjective dimensions, which are very much connected to the socio-cultural and economic environment. The dimension, which he found to be central to a person's perception of well-being is the so called Sense of Coherence (SoC). "The origins of health are to be found in a sense of coherence" (Antonovsky, 1979: vii).

> "The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement." (Antonovsky,

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[7] A diagnosis, defining, who is ill or not from outside, as done in the pathogenetic approach, Antonovsky stated: "blinds us to the subjective interpretation of the state of affairs of the person who is ill" (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 36).

[8] A stressor is, "(a) stimulus which poses a demand to which one has no ready-made, immediately available and adequate response" (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 72). Or later: "A stressor, in sum, can be defined as a characteristic that introduces entropy into the system—that is, a life experience characterized by inconsistency, under—or overload, and exclusion from participation in decision-making." (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 28)

1987: 19)

The three elements that Antonovsky names above, are often referred to as: comprehensibility, manageability and sense of meaning (see figure 1). The more a person is able to comprehend and integrate (comprehensibility), to handle (manageability) and to make sense (meaningfulness) of an experience or disease, the greater the individual's potential is to successfully cope with the situation or the disease. What is central to manageability is the sense that adequate resources to cope with stressors are found, either in "one's own hands or in the hands of legitimate others" (Antonovsky, 1990a: 2). Thereby, Antonovsky understands meaningfulness in a way of looking at life worth living, providing motivation which leads one to seek to order the world, and to transform resources from potential to actuality" (Antonovsky, 1990b: 79).

Fig. 1.: Salutogenetic Model

Source: Antonovsky, A. (1987), visualized by author
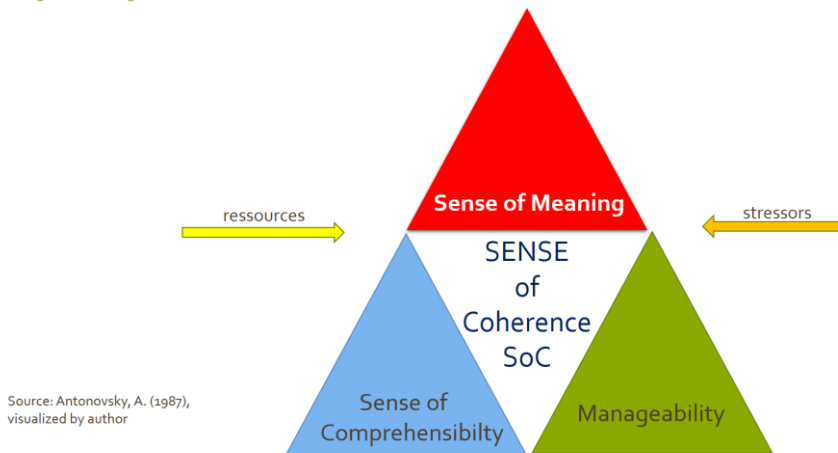
As a consequence, the movement of the dis-ease/ease scale is a lifelong learning process and is part of the experience we call life. This learning perspective is very different from an approach, which aims at turning people from "ill" to healthy at once:

> "The "magic bullet" approach, Dubos warns us, leads to "the mirage of health". It implies that all we need is a war against smallpox, another war against cancer, then a war against HIV and schizophrenia and, and, and...and soon, if we devote enough resources to these wars, we will all be permanently healthy. The salutogenic approach, seeing the struggle to move toward health as permanent and never fully successful, focuses our concentration on those salutary factors which will help people to cope as successfully as possible throughout their lives." (Antonovsky 1990: 2)

In contrast to focusing on a particular disease, disability or syndrome of a person, that must be fought a war against, salutogenesis takes many more aspects and interconnections into account as is done through a pathological lens. These aspects include the immediate surrounding of significant others, human relationships, and the community one is embedded in. It also includes the "map of meaning", referring to the culture the person is part of. In the Salutogenetic model, the cultural and historical context

can thus be understood as a vessel, which is generating psychosocial stressors on the one side, but on the other, also generates resources.

Recognizing the "sense of meaning" carves out potentials often ignored in a global view that denies the importance of the subjective meaning for a person's health. At the same time, Antonovsky does not want to open the definition of health, which would include everything and allows for "medical imperialism" (Antonovsky, 1979: 53). He does not promote "health" to be defined by this one body, as being some kind of objective reality. Rather, he positions health within the subjective experience of a state of being and into a collective, meaning and sense-making surrounding, belonging to many bodies.

He emphasized that:

> "[W]hen one searches for effective adaptation of the organism, one can move beyond Cartesian Dualism and take into account fantasy, love, playing, meaning, will and the social structures that promotes these." (Antonovsky, 1987: 9)

He thus advocates to observe collective behavior and creations such as myths, rituals, humor, language, ceremonies and so on (Antonovsky, 1987).[9] These are all central parts of culture. In turn, culture does play an important role in shaping the way we handle health and act within situations of stress, risk and crisis.

If we listen to the meaning given to people living through the crisis, and not just treat them as receivers of our humanitarian aid, we might discover valuable strategies to handle crises – also useful for Western countries. One example can be taken from the Kel Ewey Tuareg emphasized by Gerd Spittler in his research on "Agency in Famine" (2012). One noteworthy issue is that here people have been searching for the meaning of the crisis. Before they rush into mind-less action, they listen to themselves, acknowledge their fears, ask what they are afraid of the most, and then recognize that it was not merely the fear of death, but the fear to die without dignity. In response, the Kel Ewey Tuareg also used culture and spent resources on cultural activities (instead of on food) to safeguard their dignity collectively as humans. From a materialistic point of view, it could be seen as irrational not to spend everything on food. Yet, many of them chose to act otherwise (Spittler, 2012). This could be explained in a way that through their signifying practice, making things comprehensible, manageable, and giving meaning to their suffering had been all acts to strengthening the Sense of Coherence (SoC) as a collective.

2.3   Culture: The Map of Meaning of Collectives as Material for New Co-creations

In the context of migration and integration, intercultural encounters have become a major focus of research and practice. Taking into consideration that future crises, war and climate change will further increase the amount of people leaving their place of birth and wandering, or fleeing, to a place with better conditions for livelihood, it does make sense to integrate culture. Awareness of culture and competencies of intercultural communication may be included more predominantly into the curricula. Yet, this should not be done to give culture an ontological status, but it should be handled as a concept or

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[9] For Antonovsky and the roles of culture in salutogenesis and the development of the sense of coherence *see* (Benz, et al, 2014).

an idea to organize reality itself. Thus, it is important to lay bare the theoretical foundations we adhered to in the development of the module.

Since the cultural turn (Ley & Duncan 1993a; Gregory, 1993) in humanities, social science and the elaboration of "cultural studies"[10], culture has become a widely discussed concept, with an emphasis on the importance of art and culture for education, development, social criticism and change. It responded to the realization of global interconnectedness, hegemonies, the structuring of capitalism, and relationships among economic, cultural, and political institutions.

Culture thereby could be understood both as a way of life – encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power – and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, cannons, architecture, mass-produced commodities, and so forth (Mitchel, 1994: 102). Yet, on a more concrete understanding, Peter Jackson proposed a "working definition" for culture, "the level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life", called cultures, which themselves "are maps of meaning through which the world is made intelligible" (1989: 2).

Such an understanding of "culture" draws its traction from constructivist reasoning (Derrida, 1981, Foucault, 1972, Butler, 1993) and is – although conceived as an ordering principle – not seen as fixed or permanent, but rather as a pattern constantly in change, in becoming and in permanent re-creation (Morley & Chen, 1996).

Inspired by Stuart Hall, and the so called new-cultural geographers (Duncan & Duncan, 2004; Jackson, 1989; Mitchell, 1995), it makes sense to distinguish "culture" used on the one hand as an umbrella term for artistic expression, the arts (literature, music, theater, film, dance, etc.) or on the other hand for other understandings. Here the term culture refers more to an ordering frame, a "map of meaning" (Jacksons, 1989: 186), through which the world is made intelligible, which constituted by system of meaning and values carried around in the head (concept) and a set of signifying patterns of actions (modes of doings). This "map", although in a constant form of becoming, serves as orientation, guidelines and creative material for communication for individual and collective (self-)expression. These maps constitute modes of thinking, doings and being, driven by and giving birth to a system of power relations.

This understanding of culture as intrinsically related to power is in my understanding crucial. As the element of distinction is central to the idea of culture: "from these earliest extensions, 'culture' was an idea used to differentiate and to classify" (Mitchell, 1995: 104). This distinction is only possible by providing the possibility of the constant re-enactment of power relations. Distinction – and thus power – is also central to the process of creation.

Unfortunately, one can still encounter an essential understanding of culture, particularly in the natural sciences, in the media, or the public. As Rathje elaborates:

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[10] Cultural studies began at the University of Birmingham, England, in 1963, where Richard Hoggart established the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. but became an independent department under the leadership of Stuart Hall, who largely shaped the theoretical background of cultural studies and was the director of the Centre from 1969-1976.

> "As shown at the beginning, the traditional assumption that each of us primarily belongs to a culture, usually a country or an ethnicity (primary collectivity), and that there is a certain similarity among the members of a culture (trait congruence) still dominates our everyday thinking and acting with regard to culture." (Rathje, 2009: 93)

Therefore, since the 1990s, the term "intercultural" has been criticized repeatedly as one assumes that "inter" suggests that there are two clearly distinguishable cultures – that through this perspective an essentialized understanding would be fostered, where the differences between cultures would be highlighted (see Welsch, 1994). In its place, the term „trans-cultural" has been widely adopted, which then sets off from the constructivist understanding of culture of which crossings of constructed socio-cultural boundaries are likely and ongoing (Vanderheiden & Mayer (2014: 31). Such an understanding of culture as something fluid and hybrid, in the constant making and becoming, was the basis of the outlined course. Yet, it also takes into consideration the knowledge generated within the ongoing development of intercultural competencies training, and not becoming too fuzzy about the term "inter-cultural" (Grain, 2018).

Culture is indeed a useful survival strategy to overcome situations of profound stress, such as crisis, ethno-political conflicts, destruction and war. As we know also in working with culture in conflict zones (Reich, 2012; Thompson, 1988), it is not the case yet that any cultural expression naturally promotes a peaceful interaction between humans. Cultural expressions, such as theatre, film, poetry, art, etc. can foster peace as much they can also foster war. In this, it seems to be the case with the SoC as well: it is not guaranteed that a strong sense of coherence immediately leads to a civilian rule, which values the autonomy of a human being and constrains forms of coercion (Antonovsky, 1990). Cultural expressions are not *per se* constructive or harmless. Rather they depend on the values of the collective which creates meaning through representation of cultures fueled by the values they hold. Furthermore, conflicts, flight and migration, or other crises (health crisis, financial crisis, environmental crises) could point to the fact that the cultures in which these crises occur, and our global culture, in which most of them are somehow embedded in, are not appropriate to safeguard life on the planet and its multiple expressions sufficiently. These crises call out for new cultures to be created, emerging from the future (Scharmer, 2013). In this transformation, the different perspectives, prioritizations of values and worldviews will come up. To handle these differences, methods, and tools are demanded, which can support connections despite the differences that are addressed in intercultural/transcultural communication, conflict management and peacebuilding.

To stay in contact with each other, despite differences, demands a divorce from group thinking (us versus them), and a strengthening of the group feeling within the collective. This can occur by doing something together.

Acknowledging the collective, I would like to refer again to Stefanie Rathje, who points less towards the performative and representative aspect of culture, and more to the familiarity with certain collective habits as something that is creating culture (Rathje, 2009)[11]. This also emphasizes the collective dimension of culture. It is a very important direction referring to the multiple belongings one person has and acknowledging the connection to a variety of collectives and, thus, cultures. This is not only the case when two people from two different "cultures" meet with each other. Rather,

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[11] Translation by the author.

"(w)henever individuals interact with each other, countless worlds are involved and never only two. Against this background, interculturality as a special state of affairs can no longer be objectified, but must be defined as a construction of the participants. However, since individuals in everyday practice obviously make distinctions between "normal" and "intercultural" situations that seem plausible to those involved, the question of the criterion of distinction arises. With the help of the notion of multicollectivity, the hypothesis can be put forward here that interculturality is constructed by the communication partners precisely when the participants do not activate a common collective belonging in the given situation, or experience the lack of common collective belonging as virulent (missing link paradigm)" (Rathje, 2014: 15).

Rathje proposes an understanding here, which departs sharply from the still very much present idea of one dominant culture coherent with one language and one nation state. She makes the actual fact palpable, by recognizing that very different collectives create diverse cultures, organizational cultures, family cultures, sport cultures, music cultures, youth culture, etc. – all created and established by different collectives with individuals of multiple belongings (see Nohl, 2014).

Such a collective is also created by participating in a joint module or more profoundly in a joint study program. Tim Middendorf has convincingly shown how the socialization into the study group actually constitutes an essential part of the personal training to become a professional social worker (Middendorf, 2021). Each study group creates a collective, and thus its own culture. This culture can be constructed very consciously and deliberately.

A culture of separation, competition, and comparison is very much present in higher education. These are often sustained by emotions of fear and nourished by mechanisms of rating and control. Transforming this into a different culture, one that is built on mutual recognition, authenticity and interdependency, and based on mechanisms of trust and emotions of respect, will create a collective of professionals that belongs to an educational culture that fosters these aspects in their professional practices. A collective experience of a deep respect for differences may enable students to enact principles of true acceptance of different "truth". Meanwhile, still connecting with people, and holding such "truth" on a human level is much easier outside of the university setting. Hereby, it is essential, that the students learn how to handle the "unknown" and become more curious about the "missing-link" (Rathje, 2014: 15) paradigm in intercultural settings.

Often, the full extent of the deeply entrenched meanings and associations of concepts and symbols, and the implications of actions cannot be accessed by outsiders from another cultural setting (Cohen, 2001; Jabri, 1996; Moore & Woodrow, 2010; Salem, 1997; Woodrow & Moore, 2002). However, the task is, to open a space for new learnings to occur and to broaden the horizon in some way. This allows for personal growth, but also for opening new scopes for action. To be open for new insights to occur in the moment, one has to be prepared to step into the unknown within the encounter and to liberate from past assumption. To do so, as social workers, we need methods

- to become aware of our own modes of thinking and thus 'decolonize' our thinking practice;
- to become aware of our state of being, our emotions, train the capacity to step in and out of our emotions (des-identify with them) and train our emotional intelligence;

- enabling us to connect with ourselves in depth, create our own sense of feeling safe, so that we can bear others to have a different worldview, without feeling threatened by their views;
- enabling us to hold space for each other; allowing to sit calm with discomforting situations, connecting to the "nothingness" from where the new can emerge.

These methods are needed to give space for transformation, realization & growth and to step into self-empowerment. Yet, one needs to be aware that if or physiology is in a state of fear or anxiety, we first need to self or co-regulate ourselves, well explained by Stephe Porges with the Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2003). This requires disciplined practice, to be able to handle deep emotions, and not to be governed by them.

This is something mindfulness practice can very well offer and offers through this "pause" the ability to respond and not to react. The capacity to respond consciously – and not to react- can be seen as central to intercultural communication to avoid decisions done on the bases of stereotypes or fears. This "pause" then allows to step into new realms, a new territory, discovering a new reality or to say: regarding the same reality with a new gaze and enriching one's own horizon. That creates a new space, which might be called with Norbert Ropers a true and deep "learning site" (Ropers, 2000: 42) or "learning space" (Ropers, 2008: 36-37). Here, the learning is connected to the individual perceptions and raising of its awareness emerging from the interactive process, pauses and reconceptualization's.

2.4 Experience-Based Learning as Prerequisite and the Dilemmas Occurring to Train within the Body of Higher Education

Such "learning sites" demand spaces for listening, beyond what is deemed right and wrong, as well as teaching approaches that differ from traditional forms. Participatory and experience-based teaching methods, which are also sometimes called "elicitive approach" (Lederach, 1995: 55) in peace education, or "emergent" (Bodhin, 2020; McCrown et al., 2010) in the mindfulness training scene, seem to be suitable. These are also acknowledged in the post-colonial teaching formats discussions. These are formats suitable for a life-long learning that fosters reflection and awareness. The reflection on modes of thinking and doing, and the intrinsic values and norms are also referred to as second-order learning (van Mierlo et al., 2010), experiential learning (Kolb, 1983) or transformative learning (Mezirow, 1996). If people can review certain situations in a different light and learn to define the situations differently, they might activate a greater room for maneuver and identify different resources for action. This in turn can strengthen their SoC, but also transforms the culture of the collective, as they start to see and act differently. However, this approach demands voluntarily participation, which is not really given in the context of higher education – even if it is announced that the participation is voluntary, and even if the grading does not depend on the participation. Within the MBICRT, it was possible to set up a proof of achievement, such as a term paper, which could be evaluated independently from the participation in the course. Still, the university as an educational center, where marks are given and hierarchies between professors and students exist, can't be seen as a neutral place, but rather its structural violence has to be taken into the account and well reflected upon. These encounters only bring deep results if deep trust is established within the seminar room. This is not so simple in the judgmental context of higher education. It indeed is very supportive, if the sessions are not implemented in the rooms of the university but in other more beautiful places, inviting

social interaction and deep sharing. This also fosters a process of relationship building amongst the participants, which is very important in these sessions; the establishment of ground rules and developing a safe space. Seeing the relationships between the participants/students as an important outcome, and honoring the truth shared from each one of their perspectives is not the usual practice in higher education. We need to start to acknowledge different forms of truth, equally valid for an in-depth learning process. On the one hand it is the delivery of information, the "representational knowledge", and on the other hand it is relationship building, or "relational knowledge" (Park, 2004). In intercultural contexts, where values, experiences and perspectives are so different, the "relational knowledge" is of high significance and spaces, which create relationships across the intercultural dived are essential for personal growth and learning. These spaces foster the broadening of the horizon and of self-reflection, and raise consciousness, thus strengthening personal development. This is needed when encountering crises, where what is known falls apart. Social Work can take on a pioneering role establishing these spaces for intercultural reflections on experience-based learnings to foster personal development, as it is something that higher education would generally need to prepare all students for: to act wisely in crisis. If higher education sees itself not simply as an institution delivering information and evaluating the knowledge thereof, but also values its capacity to support personal growth through socialization, which entails living together in a certain way, then it could help develop habits on how to listen to others, hold space for emotions for each other, and give feedback to each other in an appreciative way – even in cases of having an entirely diverging perception, and without falling into blaming or de-evaluating the other's perception, and thus fostering polarization. Here we find much potential for future development.

The higher education culture is also only a "map of meaning" established worldwide due to the colonial systems entrenched by military thinking. Yet, "cultural maps", as Jackson has stated, "are capable of multiple readings" (1989: 186). This creates the prerequisite for its constant re-enactment to become structured and its need to be repeated to exist (Butler, 1997). This need to be re-enacted, for its structuring yields directly to the "possibility of its un-doing" (Butler, 1990: 14). With regards to the structure of higher education, it is for sure worth doing so. The present-time education system is re-creating a way of thinking, which has created competition, comparison and separation between groups, humans and systems. Creating spaces for relationship-building and personal empowerment, might enrich the university landscape to strengthen the capacity of social workers to encounter crises, wars & separation and to act from an inner space of peace.

3   Conclusion

This paper presented the theoretical framework on which a module called "Mindful-Based Intercultural Communication & Resilience Training" was built, within the International Social Work study program. This program was developed in recognition of the ongoing crisis that Lebanese social workers are currently facing and the need for self-care in such circumstances. Furthermore, it addressed some of the challenges and needs directed towards implementing such courses within the framework of higher education. It is directed to reach out to others working in the same field and creating spaces for intercultural exchange and experience-based and participatory teaching methods to transform higher education. Therefore, it is to integrate the reality of crises, flight,

migration and social-political transformation, by preparing our students for these challenges ahead.

I firstly spoke about the self-care tool of mindfulness and certain key elements available in such trainings. Then, I continued to elaborate on Salutogenesis, as this model could serve as a missing theoretical link which explains why culture and the sense of meaning is so important for individual and collective well-being. Furthermore, epistemologically, salutogenesis can be regarded as a constant learning process fostering the movement toward health and well-being (Mittelmark et al., 2017). This is important to recognize as I believe this collective learning process is central to this module. Then I spoke about culture and briefly discussed the understanding of this notion, as culture constitutes such an important resource. Yet, is also highly ambiguous as it can pertain values of coercion and dehumanization of the other as much as it can be serving as means to overcome crisis and deprivation in a human way.

An important question will be: How far are different truths, different stories accepted? How are minority views treated and what kind of cultural practices allow for a variety of stories to be given voice?

Methods allowing these different perceptions to co-exist in the same space are often highly emotionally charged. They are best built up on a training which first implements a certain awareness that our thoughts are not our reality and that they are strongly shaped by the state of being, our emotions we a currently in. Thoughts are never neutral. All what we seem to perceive as reality is strongly filtered by our emotions and believes as we select from all the stimuli, those which support our mindsets, believes and perspectives. Methods, which bring awareness into this process have to be practices with discipline and they have to be experienced. They cannot be learned theoretically alone. This is why experience-based, participatory learning methods are necessary.

At the end, I would like to highlight two central elements, which I propose to take into consideration in curricula developments, integrating the phenomena of migration, flight and crises.

Firstly, it might be meaningful to integrate mindfulness practice into such trainings, as they – beside many other aspects – train *to sit with what is unpleasant* and consciously *respond* from the state of inner connection and stillness in contrast to immediate reaction. This trains to not directly "react" to an outside trigger, but to "respond" from a connection with one's values, and preferred state of being. This capacity is needed to navigate not only through stress and overwhelm, but also through the unknown terrain within intercultural encounters.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the resources available in cultural practices to overcome emergencies, crises and create new futures. This force of creative agency was something we could observe e.g. in Lebanon after the explosion on 4th of August 2020 and now during the recent war in 2024 when incredible fast lots of collective creative action emerged. Given that people migrating, as well as those working in the field of migration, are experiencing a high amount of stress, it is indeed important to strengthen the inner capacities to handle stress and protect the health and well-being, as mentioned above. Yet, such skills are not enough to remain human: It is important to open spaces for them to tell their stories through their own voice in their own language, and in addition, create opportunities for contributing to the collective meaningfully, and co-creating a meaningful

future. This readiness demands that spaces are offered to share these meanings, yet, also demand to empower people to be able to listen to them, which is not always easy. Thus, we need formats of training to listen to and accept different perspectives, handle emotions and practice embracing ambiguities.

To train future social workers in the power of stillness for conscious transformation and response *and* the power of culture to create a meaningful world, both can only be trained through experience, which might be a future step to take in the integration of migration within the International Social Work curricula. This might empower social workers and migrants alike. The ability to create a more culturally diverse, sustainable and peaceful future might transform the culture of higher education itself by integrating more creativity and participatory practice into joint learning processes.

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