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Editorial

Networks and Contested Identities in the Refugee Journey

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Abstract
This thematic issue traverses refugee research that recognises the importance of networks in determining the paths that refugees undertake in their journeys to seek safety and protection. In recent years, scholars have increasingly pointed to the multifaceted nature of networks in the refugee journey. These articles demonstrate the importance of elucidating the distinct influences and factors that shape refugee networks, including the unequal power relations between refugees and refugee aid workers in transit countries, transnational family and community connections, the proliferation of technologies in strengthening refugees' networks, the role of the state in privileging certain refugee groups over others, and the role of refugees themselves in mobilising both past and existing networks to activate supports.

Keywords
asylum seekers; contested identities; mobilization; network mobility; networks; refugee journey; refugees

Issue
This editorial is a part of the issue "Networks and Contested Identities in the Refugee Journey" edited by Niro Kandasamy (University of Sydney), Lauren Avery (University of York), and Karen Soldatic (Western Sydney University) as part of the (In)Justice International Collective.

1. Introduction

Although refugee studies have recognised the importance of networks in determining the paths refugees undertake in their journeys to seek safety and protection, in recent years scholars have increasingly pointed to the multifaceted nature of networks in the refugee journey. Unlike mainstream analysis of social networks, a growing body of refugee research outlines the distinct influences and factors that shape refugee networks, including the unequal power relations between refugees and refugee aid workers in transit countries, transnational family and community connections, the proliferation of technologies in strengthening refugees' networks, the role of the state in privileging certain refugee groups over others, and the role of refugees themselves in mobilising both past and existing networks to activate supports (D'Angelo, 2021; Hajj, 2021). As D'Angelo argues, we need to reject any form of "network determinism" which may limit the understanding of refugees' networks to assume the presence of "diffuse, ethnic based and transnational ties" (D'Angelo, 2021, p. 489). While it is important to identify these networks and explain their emergence, it is equally important to recognise the capabilities and agency of refugees in activating those ties in mobilising supports both within the location of place and across the boundaries of national borders (Anthias, 2007; D'Angelo, 2021). The multifaceted nature of refugees' networks, as the articles in this thematic issue suggest, points to a new reality facing refugees: Connecting with people and systems is a necessary part of surviving as they depart from the homeland and enter spaces that are unfamiliar and often hostile to them.

Scholars interested in networks in the refugee journey have, in particular, demonstrated (re)constructed identities of refugees in these connections, including

through state policy and media representations, thereby expanding how networks are negotiated and circulate (un)equal power relations between refugees and the specific connections that they make (D'Angelo, 2015; DaĞtaş, 2018; Nunn et al., 2016; Sharma, 2021). In addition to being treated differently due to the nature of their political circumstances of not being protected by the state, refugees are also subjected to legal and political regimes that differentiate them based on their race, ethnicity, and religion (Costello & Foster, 2022; Sow, 2022). This practice of racial differentiation and the treatment of refugees is historically rooted in the colonialism and ignorance embedded in the global refugee regime (Krause, 2021). As such, intersectional identities, that is identities that sit at the axis of, for example, race, gender, and class, delineate the further fracturing of refugees during their journey to safety and protection. Significantly, as illustrated in this set of articles, this has ramifications for the building of networks to both facilitate the journey of refugees and their successful resettlement in their new place of final settlement.

As documented in the set of articles in this thematic issue, scholars are required to move beyond viewing the refugee subject not just in terms of their involuntary migration, but as active subjects with intersectional identities within a complex field of interactions which includes, but is not confined to, class, gender, sexuality, race, disability, and age. Take, by way of example, the refugee protection crisis emerging from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This crisis has highlighted the significance of race in constructing the ongoing outpouring of global support for refugees from European backgrounds compared to the neglect, ignorance, and hostility towards refugees from non-European backgrounds, as articulated in the research with refugees (see also Zawadzka-Paluektau, 2022). Racialisation as a dominant feature of refugee intersections affect the networks that refugees require to secure employment and a sense of financial well-being. Such is the case of male refugees from Yemen who face heightened levels of stigma and discrimination in resettlement in South Korea due to their race and gender compared to the arrival of Afghan refugees (Sheikh et al., 2022).

Refugee journeys embody a range of specificities, including as a result of the relationship between the host state and the former refugee homeland, and simultaneously in different socio-political contexts within society. The question of networking is thereby inherently linked to the negotiated, politicised, and changing dynamics of the circulation, and indeed, contestation, of intersectional refugee identities at any given time and context. However, to date, there are gaps in the scholarship, specifically relating to the diverse contexts and methodologies that can help to understand the significance of networks and identities in refugee journeys.

It is the multifaceted nature of networks in the refugee journey that this thematic issue examines through a collection of methodologically and empirically rich case studies from across the globe. The thematic issue challenges the overly simplistic view of the refugee journey as linear mobility from the country of origin to a resettlement destination. While this linear movement certainly applies to some refugees, it does not take into account the complex spatial and temporal fluidities of the refugee journey, which is "constant, fluid and inherently transnational, and which has in the continuous deconstruction and reconstruction of social-ties as one of its key features" (D'Angelo, 2021, p. 490). As articulated throughout the articles in this thematic issue, we argue further that the networks refugees encounter in their journeys are marked by (contested) identities imposed on them by the states in which they seek to resettle and the local societies where they are able to finally resettle, and that the meanings of these identities are at times reinforced and, other times, resisted by refugees as they traverse structural barriers and social norms in different contexts and over time. The articles in this thematic issue provide case studies for understanding networks and contested identities in the refugee journey: Syrian and Afghan refugees in Europe (Belabbas et al., 2022), Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon (Chang, 2022), Yemeni and Afghan refugees in South Korea (Sheikh et al., 2022), Central American refugees in Tapachula and Mexico City (Willers, 2022), Tamil refugees in Australia (Mehta et al., 2022), and the construction of social identity of refugees and recently settled migrants in Portugal (Sales et al., 2022). The articles illustrate the importance of complex identities and refugee networks across four core areas, as outlined below.

2. Ambiguities and Uncertainties in Refugee Networks

Based on an extensive ethnographic study of Syrian and Afghan refugees crossing multiple borders to reach European destinations, Belabbas et al. (2022) examine the plurality of decision-making that contributes to the networking that refugees undertake—whether by themselves, collectively as a family or community, or imposed onto them by external forces outside of their control. The authors distil different types of networks and social capital that influence refugee journeys, what they term the "locus of control" that helps to understand the decision-making processes undertaken by refugees. For one Syrian refugee family, social, economic, and embodied cultural capital became crucial to their successful approval for resettlement in the UK. While refugees with established social networks experienced greater success in their resettlement, much of the journey was subjected to pure chance. For many of the refugee subjects in the study, the involuntary changes and unexpected turns in their refugee journeys had left their locus of control determined by external factors largely beyond their influence. Yet, refugee women, in particular, recognised the importance of social networks and invested time and energy into them.

For example, Afghan women who were denied schooling in their homeland and continued to be treated poorly in Iran were motivated to study and write letters about their plight to the UNHCR, the UN, and other refugee aid organisations to gain support to leave the transit country. It becomes apparent how important the gendered dimension became in influencing how and why refugee women made certain conscious decisions during their refugee journey. In the case of one Afghan family's journey, access to information through transnational ties with friends, family, and international organisations strengthened their chances of finding suitable accommodation and employment in resettlement. But these networks emerged only after a certain point in their journeys; the limited initial networks available to them made their journey subjected to more risk and complications, and further exposed them to chance. The interplay between capital, social networks, information, pure chance, and identities thereby facilitates the process and outcomes of refugee journeys, from the departure point to the first transit country, resettlement, and their "potential" final destinations.

3. Class and Economic Networks

Chang (2022) draws our attention to the crucial impacts that networks tied to economic capital and social status can have on the refugee journey. Drawing on rich interview materials Chang examines the role of class in Syrian business people's resettlement experiences in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. As business professionals, this particular class of Syrian refugees was more resilient compared to other refugees in their refugee journey, since their class and economic status equipped them with pre-existing networks, which acted as "pull" factors to certain destinations. In line with their business interests, this class of Syrian refugees applied for investment residential permits rather than other types of refugee residential permits, which re-stabilised their class status even after being displaced from the homeland during the protracted Syrian civil conflict. In fact, their decisions to resettle in certain countries were also driven by sustaining their own longstanding socio-economic class interests, such as requirements of tax payments that made Jordan more favourable as a destination country compared to Turkey or Egypt. The benefits of having pre-existing networks tied to their social class and economic status, however, did not prevent this class of Syrian refugees from being subjected to the politics of their displacement from their homeland, that is, the politics of being a refugee. Ultimately, as Chang notes, the success of this class of Syrian business people in the new land was tied to their status as refugees. In Turkey, Chang shows that Syrian business people faced additional discrimination because of their inability to speak the local language, which had consequences for the local success of their business. The hostile attitudes of locals had also resulted in them refusing to rent houses to Syrians, in turn making it extremely difficult to find accommodation while rebuilding their business as part of their resettlement process. It became apparent that this local community hostility was driven by political developments in the home country.

4. Gender, Race, and Discrimination in Refugee Networks

Underpinning the hostile attitudes of the host community is the issue of how host states have differently responded to the arrival of refugees fleeing different wars. Refugee studies have implicitly compared resettlement responses of different refugee groups that determine their social and cultural capital, and therefore belongingness in the new land through the processing of othering and exclusion or sameness and inclusion via engagement with racist discourse (Bourdieu, 1986; Cederberg, 2012, 2013). However, as Sheikh et al. (2022) argue, the diverse ways in which intersectional identities of gender and race are used by the host state and society to reject certain refugees and accept others have not been examined in enough depth in diverse contexts. Adopting an ethnographic approach and using a range of sources including policy and legal documents, political speeches, surveys, and observation analyses, the study advances theoretical approaches for understanding competing identities. These approaches shape social perceptions, legal instruments, and political agendas that can explain the different outcomes of refugees fleeing different wars and who need the same protection. By comparing the treatment of Yemeni refugees and Afghan refugees arriving in South Korea, Sheikh et al. (2022) assess the varied impacts that contested intersectional identities have on the success of support structures that are differently available to the refugee groups. At the core of the analysis is the intersectional analysis of Muslim masculinities: Gendered and Islamophobic stereotypes circulated by the media, far-right groups, and the government had constructed the majority-male Yemini refugee group who arrived in South Korea as "rapists," "anti-women," and "terrorists." Thus, permanent protection was rejected in favour of temporary visas that restricted them from securing employment in labour industries including fishing and farming, leaving them impoverished and unable to rebuild their lives in the new land. By contrast, the government's construction of Afghan refugees as "special contributors" following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 marked a significant turn in South Korean international relations—it was the government's first mass evacuation on humanitarian grounds when it airlifted almost four-hundred Afghan refugees. By constructing Afghan refugees as *teugbyeolgiyeoja* (people of merit to the country), the government had effectively underplayed the Muslim identities of Afghan refugees. Moreover, the political responses that favoured Afghan refugees emphasised the historical relationship with its US ally,

therefore, the Muslim part of their identities did not come into question.

The construction of Muslim masculinities by the host state and society through policy, stereotypes, and circulation through media compete with the success of networks that refugees must build in order to survive in the new land. The global "war on terror" has resulted in refugees from certain backgrounds subjected to further discrimination. Refugees labelled "terrorists" by the state and society have been denied protection, languished in detention centres, and separated from their families (Sajjad, 2018). Overall, as this article illustrates, networks are predicated on the intersection of *certain* identities which permit only *certain* refugees as worthy of protection and belonging in the new land.

5. Building Refugee Networks: Reinforcing and Challenging Social Norms

Gendered networks in the refugee journeys of women are not only performative on the basis of what social and political implications demand that they adhere to for their survival but also the extent to which they themselves are willing to challenge those norms. The articles in this thematic issue entangle the refugee identity with other identities in order to distil diverse refugee networks and the ways that refugee circumstances and decisions might reinforce or subvert social norms, individually or collectively. Distilling the diverse experiences of refugees offers new insights into the multifaceted journeys that refugees endure on their path to safety and permanent protection. Gendered performativity is a well-documented element of refugee women's survival in transit countries. In this thematic issue, Susanne Willers examines the complications that arise in the absence of networks that prevent refugee women from seeking shelter, albeit temporarily, outside of hostile refugee transit camps. The article focuses on Central American refugee women applying for refugee protection in Mexico to resettle in the US, where family and friends await to support them. Before they can use these networks awaiting them at the destination countries, however, the women must survive the reception contexts in transit, which re-victimise and exclude women. Examining the reception contexts in Tapachula and Mexico City, Willers (2022) finds that women participate in daily routines and social engagement activities in the shelter in order to be constructed as being in the shelter not because of laziness, but because of "bad luck." These perceptions impact the length of stay of the women in the shelters. Performing gendered roles in the shelter, then, contributes to the refugee women's survival as they come to terms with their new reality: that they must sooner or later "build new networks" outside of the shelter while they await outcomes of their refugee applications to resettle in the US where they have pre-existing networks. In turn, Willers's study of women in transit cities shows that women, who are mostly single parents with children, must contend with racial and gendered identities imposed on them by the host society that intensify their exclusion, identities that reinforce their state of need to prove that they deserve protection.

In contrast, Mehta et al. (2022) show that refugee women who have resettled in destination countries have challenged social norms by building community networks with other refugee women. Using focus group discussions with elderly Tamil refugee women in Australia, they examine women's abilities to establish social networks that increased their access to information, decreased feelings of loneliness, improved mental and physical health, alleviated stress, and contributed to a stronger sense of self. The women's interactions with each other also highlight their resistance to structural barriers, including difficulties accessing care facilities, social security provision, and navigating the health care system. These challenges are exacerbated by their gender and age, with the average age of the women in the study above seventy-five years. Building networks is vital for refugee women to survive in the new land, whether in transit or destination countries, as observed, for instance, by Willers in the case of central American refugee women in transit countries. By connecting with other elderly Tamil refugee women, the group harnessed a collective sense of agency that transcended their socially prescribed identities as mothers, grandmothers, and caregivers, while challenging ageist and gendered norms. By pursuing a politics of inclusion through social networks, these refugee women contribute to rebuilding new processes of belonging/becoming through networked forms of survival.

6. Practices of Mobility and Refugee Identity Reconfiguration

A final short note is offered from refugee scholars Catarina Sales, Ivan Novais, and Deriscleia Gomes. This piece is presented as a critical reflection on the Portuguese situation to expand existing theoretical discussions about the networked mobility practices of refugees within the European Union. Importantly, as a conceptual piece, the authors signify the interrelationship of personal networks, patterns of mobility, and structures of territorial boundaries in refugee journeys and how, combined, these factors shape the agency of refugees through the process of leaving their homelands and journeying to a new home—a place of resettlement. Sales et al. (2022) encourage our thinking around the interplay of these factors in shaping our engagement with the research literature to think through frames of justice within the refugee resettlement process.

7. Conclusion

By examining the multifaceted nature of networks and contested identities in the refugee journey, this thematic

issue has highlighted the diverse experiences of refugees together with the political implications of being displaced from the homeland. Centring the refugee subject in each of the studies has opened new avenues for conducting refugee research and, in particular, we argue that adopting a critical focus on the different stages of the refugee journey as well as a breadth of case studies from across the globe has demonstrated a more nuanced analysis of how refugee survival evolves over time and space. The political responses of states to the arrival of refugees, whether supportive or restrictive, are also crucial to the refugee journey. What each of the articles shows is that the refugee journey is inflected by contested identities. By drawing attention to these concerns, we hope that the thematic issue will contribute to further discussion of networks as a crucial aspect of refugee journeys.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

From Sex Offenders to National Heroes: Comparing Yemeni and Afghan Refugees in South Korea

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Abstract
This article examines discourses that shaped different outcomes for Yemeni refugees in 2018 and Afghan special contributors in 2021 in South Korea. Following the country's mission to evacuate its Afghan interlocutors in 2021, Afghans are fast-tracked for social integration through the creation of emergency enforcement ordinances, with South Korean society broadly welcoming them as national heroes and recognizing them as "special contributors" rather than refugees. In contrast, Yemeni refugees arriving in 2018 were subjected to Islamophobic and legal abuse, constructed as potential sex offenders and terrorists, and accused of being fake refugees. In both cases, refugee protections according to South Korea's 2013 Refugee Law were withheld as Yemenis and Afghans were processed through alternative systems. This article concludes that Muslim refugee issues in South Korea are masculinized and delves into the multi-faceted complex factors at play when analyzing the differences between the reception of Afghan evacuees and Yemeni refugees in the South Korean context.

Keywords
Afghanistan; Islamophobia; Jeju Island; masculinities; refugees; social discourse; South Korea; special contributor; Yemen

Issue
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1. Introduction

1.1. Assessing Ground Realities for Refugees in South Korea

South Korea has an incredibly restrictive refugee system. Despite joining the Geneva Convention in 1992 and enacting a stand-alone Refugee Act in 2013, it has the second lowest acceptance rate amongst the G20. Between 2010–2020, the South Korean refugee acceptance rate was a mere 1.3%, though the country processed 50,218 applications for refugee status, out of which 655 were successfully granted ("Hanguk, nanmin," 2021). Despite taking progressive steps towards establishing a humane protection system, in reality, South Korea lacks standardized guidelines, often performs biased screening interviews designed to reject asylum claims, does not offer applicants legal aid, and places heavy burdens on the asylum seeker to prove the risk of persecution levied at them in their home countries (NANCEN, 2021). Coupled with the fact that public and political perceptions towards refugees are largely negative, South Korea offers potential refugees a hostile environment. This research situates itself in this complex and understudied context and works across several intersections of study and observation. Specifically, we look at how social discourses—defined here as how public and political perceptions are shaped—and note the impact of gendered and Islamophobic stereotypes on refugee policy. We examine the very real-life consequences and outcomes for refugees in South Korea, especially when these are Muslim and male. An intersectional research project,

we deal with issues of gender, racism, Islamophobia, and social perception as vital factors that shaped how the Yemeni Crisis on Jeju Island in 2018 was handled in comparison to the arrival of Afghan "special contributors" evacuated to South Korea following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

The authors highlight from the outset that the nature of this research is preliminary and grounded in an understanding of the local context. Grounded theory approaches are essential for gaining insights into the competing factors that are shaping social perceptions, legal instruments, and political concerns that eventually led to two very different outcomes for two similarly vulnerable groups of people needing similar protections. To this end, the situation on the ground in terms of policy is still under debate and we base our propositions on analytical observations of pro and anti-refugee demonstrations that took place in 2018 against Yemenis, public meetings with ministers, the reception of Afghan special contributors, newspaper articles, and more. With this article, we aim to lay the groundwork that is desperately needed in English-speaking academic contexts, shedding light on public, legal, political, and social discourses that shape local perspectives on refugee issues, and in doing so, bring largely unheard Korean perspectives to the table.

In the Yemeni case, we emphasize how gendered discourses about Muslim male refugees constructed them as potential terrorists, sex criminals, and fake refugees whereas Afghans were constructed as victims of Islamic terrorism and, due to their status as "helpers" to the South Korean mission in Afghanistan, national heroes worthy of protection. The regional focus on South Korea adds value to the study of migration, especially from Muslim perspectives, which are severely lacking in the field. Lastly, this research expects to spark further conversations about refugee reception and attitudes towards Muslim men in non-western contexts, and extends works already conducted in familiar European settings at the time of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in 2015 (Hobbs, 2021; Ingvars & Gíslason, 2018; Scheibelhofer, 2017), offering researchers opportunities to explore crossovers and comparisons of refugee issues across regional contexts.

1.2. Afghan Special Contributors and Yemeni Refugees: What's the Difference?

In 2018, approximately 500 mostly male Yemeni asylum seekers arrived on Jeju Island seeking refuge from war. The road to South Korea was long and arduous, with a considerable amount of time spent in Malaysia, where it was impossible to establish stable lives because Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Coincidently, direct flights aimed at increasing tourism to South Korea opened up, giving Yemenis the opportunity to board flights visa-free to Jeju Island, where they could finally apply for formal refugee status as South Korea recognizes international refugee laws (Sheikh, 2020).

Unfortunately, Yemenis faced intense hostility in South Korea with rumors that they were rapists, anti-women, and potentially terrorist criminals due to their cultural and religious identities as Muslims spreading across online spaces, propagated by diverse groups of anti-multiculturalists, radical feminists, and far-right Christian groups. This, along with a reliance on fake and exaggerated news stories about the negative impact of accepting refugees in European societies eventually snowballed into a fully-fledged anti-refugee movement in South Korea (Sheikh, 2021). Widespread anti-refugee campaigns eventually forced the government to respond resulting in the implementation of discriminatory policies that continue to affect the lives of Yemeni refugees to date. Despite clear signs of war in Yemen, most Yemeni asylum applications were rejected; instead, the majority were issued with temporary, renewable humanitarian permits. These permits restricted most Yemenis to hard labor industries including fishing and farming, leaving them with little financial support or long-term prospects to put down roots in South Korea.

Memories of the mishandling of this crisis still fresh, the South Korean government chose to pursue an alternative course of action for its recent Afghan arrivals. Following the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the South Korean government joined global missions to evacuate local interlocutors comprised of a variety of professionals including interpreters, medical doctors, IT specialists, and vocational trainers (Jeong, 2021). This was South Korea's first-ever mass evacuation on humanitarian grounds, airlifting approximately 390 Afghan interlocutors and their families to the country. Taking great care to avoid repeating the same debates and mistakes made with the Yemenis in 2018, the government has kept Afghan special contributors mostly out of the public eye, drip-feeding updates to the media and providing assurances to South Korean citizens that their security is not being compromised. Upon arrival, Afghans were placed together in a closed facility that usually serves as a training center for government officials in the city of Jincheon. They were held in quarantine and then put through various crash courses in the Korean language and culture. This is not all: Stressing their contribution as "helpers" to the state, Afghan special contributors are being fast-tracked for social integration through various mechanisms designed to ease them into South Korean society far more efficiently than the Yemenis who suffered many systemic and social injustices before them.

Most importantly for our comparative discussion is that unlike the Yemenis pushed haphazardly through the asylum system, when responding to the Afghan issue, the government bypassed established systems altogether, instead enacting a special enforcement ordinance creating a brand-new legal category—the *Teugbyeolgiyeoja* (special contributor)—applicable only to this set of Afghan arrivals. As we will see later, this category was designed specifically and only for this small group of

Afghan evacuees, and is not to be confused with the existing category of *Teukbyeulgongnoja*, which has completely different criteria for recognizing people as special contributors of "special" merit (e.g., Nobel Peace Prize winners). These terms go beyond issues of semantics. The variation in labeling has left deep implications for Afghans and Yemenis who remain in precarious situations as they share the common challenge of being left unprotected by international and local refugee laws.

In our critical perspective, by categorizing Afghans as "special contributors" instead of categorizing them using existing asylum systems, the South Korean government has made its position on refugee issues clear: First, it reveals that the country is not prepared to handle the political risk and backlash associated with accepted Muslim refugees given the negative public sentiments expressed against Yemenis in 2018. Second, by going to exceptional lengths to avoid any re-emergence of refugee issues in public discourse, the government has created a new legal category for Afghans which not only supports faster integration but also opens pathways to long-term residency unlike many Yemenis who continue to be restricted by humanitarian permits that need to be renewed regularly.

As refugee discourse has evolved from one of fear of so-called Yemeni fake refugees, sex criminals, and terrorism to one of Afghan heroes, the question of who "deserves" protection has arisen in the field. Leaning on our observations and critical analysis of the discourse about refugees, we propose that Afghans were deemed worthy of South Korean protection as a return favor for serving the South Korean nation and for being familiar with its cultural norms. This approach has led to inequality amongst refugees, and concerningly, we can see the emergence of a new hierarchy within refugee communities depending on their proximity to South Korean causes. Interestingly, as new discourse emphasizes the need to save Afghans from the clutches of the Taliban emerges, we can see the construction of benevolent and hospitable public attitudes toward them based on a mutual fear of being crushed by "Islamic terrorism." Despite the increased hospitability extended towards Afghans over Yemenis, in both cases Islamophobic and gendered attitudes have shaped the discourse from one of "criminals and fake refugees" to "national heroes."

1.3. Methodology

It is important to highlight that refugee issues in South Korea, especially in the English language, are severely under-studied and this is reflected by the existence of limited academic materials at our disposal. Recognizing this, rather than attempting to prove or disprove a particular concept or theory in an already sparse field, we employed inductive research methods, underpinned by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) working with primary and secondary data sources available at the time of writing through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective. As highlighted by Ralph et al. (2014), grounded theory approaches are also useful and necessary when gathering data that includes documents, moving the focus from more popular forms of data such as interview content. Keeping the focus on documentation, we lean on the CDA methodological framework proposed by van Dijk (2004, p. 352) who suggests that CDA research primarily studies "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts." Given our primary focus on the content of speeches, online commentary, documents, and so on, this approach is useful for unearthing presumptions, stereotypes, and attitudes hidden within the language (Machin & Mayr, 2012) used to talk about Afghan special contributors and Yemeni refugees, particularly teasing out gendered assumptions about Muslim men. Similar methodologies were used to explore gender stereotypes in political media discourse, focusing on documentary evidence by Sriwimon and Zilli (2017) with similar efforts exerted to overcome criticisms of this methodological framework, such as clearly marking out the materials used so that future researchers can follow and test our trajectory. The majority of our materials are comprised of documentary data—minutes of ministry meetings and speeches, newspaper articles, and commentary, combined with our own scholarly observations of online public discourse. In doing so, we assess how discourse about Muslim refugees is rapidly changing through the lenses of Afghan and Yemeni communities respectively.

1.4. Data

Data used for this study includes a range of policy and legal documents, political speeches, surveys, academic papers, and our own reflective observations of public discourse about Muslim refugees between 2018–2021. Specifically, we examined the minutes of the Korean National Assembly, considered official government documents. The particular focus of these minutes was the ministers' responses to inquiries regarding refugees made by lawmakers from the Legislation and Judiciary Committee and the Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee. These documents can assist in understanding the government's position on the refugee issue and its political implications. We also scrutinized annual statistics published by the Immigration Service of the Korean Ministry of Justice, as well as the enacted and amended legal articles and enforcement ordinances that practically define, categorize, decide, and control the status of refugees. In addition, we looked at various primary sources such as public petitions to the Cheong Wa Dae (until early 2022, the executive office and official residence of the South Korean president), official statements made by the Korean Association of Church Communication, press editorials and comments gleaned from both conservative and progressive media, such as the *Chosun Ilbo*, *Joongang Ilbo*, *Hankook*

Ilbo, *Yonhap News Agency*, and *Hankyoreh*, broadcast media materials, and various statistical data released by the government and private organizations including the Immigration Service of the Korean Ministry of Justice and the NANCEN Refugee Rights Center. Finally, Our lines of investigation are informed by the following research questions:

1. What comparisons can be drawn from the 2018 Yemeni refugee crisis and the evacuation of Afghan special contributors in 2021?
2. How can the different responses at the social, legal, and political levels be analyzed and what were the outcomes for Yemenis and Afghans respectively?
3. What role do gender and nation play a role in shaping the discourses about Yemeni refugees and Afghan special contributors?

1.5. Analysis

In line with the principles of CDA, we gathered the documents along with our observation notes and organized them thematically along our lines of inquiry. We performed several close readings and coded the data using qualitative NVivo software before noting the main themes that emerged from our data. We cross-checked our findings with other available refugee studies in South Korea before arranging our findings in categories of various discourses, explained in detail below.

2. Social Discourse, Islamophobia, and Gendered Perceptions of Muslim Men

The 2018 anti-refugee demonstrations declared that Yemeni men were fake refugees, sexual predators, and potential terrorist threats (Sheikh, 2021). Much of this opposition was captured in a controversial online petition to Cheong Wa Dae (National Petition no. 269548), with over 700,000 signatures demanding that South Korea withdraw from the Refugee Convention (the online petition platform has since been dismantled). The same petition also expressed fear that the security of the South Korean people was being compromised by the arrival of potential "criminals" under the guise of refugee law. A core part of the opposition discourse was the notion that Yemenis were a threat to the safety of Korean women. Many young women, especially radical feminists drove the narrative that they were at risk of sexual violence at the hands of Yemeni men because they followed Islam—erroneously perceived as a religion that condoned violence against women and was incompatible with South Korea's social norms (B. Kim, 2019; Sheikh, 2021).

Conversely, in 2021, there was a huge outpour of support for the resettlement of Afghan special contributors. 390 Afghan special contributors were deliberately separated from other refugee communities in South Korea, stating that special contributors already evidenced their contribution to society by supporting the Korean mission on the ground in Afghanistan. It helped that having worked with South Koreans and being somewhat familiar with the Korean language and culture, these Afghans were not perceived as invaders coming to the country for benefits but as people who needed to be saved from the tyranny of Islamist terror. These sentiments are broadly captured in a Realmeter survey conducted almost immediately after the evacuation mission. The results indicated that 68.7% of respondents were in favor of providing Afghan special contributors who had served the South Korean government with pathways to long-term visas and employment (Hong, 2021).

Notably, unlike Yemeni refugees, who had also fled a war and were met with hostility, South Korean people flocked to support Afghans through a "buycott." In a show of solidarity with the people of Jincheon, the city where Afghan special contributors were first placed by the government, South Koreans showed their support by purchasing specialist, local products through the city's official homepage, expressing their pride in Jincheon residents for providing Afghans with safety by leaving supportive online comments with purchases (Y. Oh, 2021). To note, although Afghans were initially placed in Jincheon, the location itself is rather insignificant as it was never intended to be a permanent place of residence. It was expected that the Afghans would relocate to areas with better employment prospects once they had undergone screenings, quarantine, and completed crash courses in the Korean language and culture. For example, currently, more than 40% of Afghans are settled in Ulsan, Korea's largest industrial city where there are plenty of factory jobs (Paik, 2022).

3. The Impact of Christian Communities on Refugee Discourse and Muslim Men

Despite this obvious change in public and political sentiment, we propose that Islamophobia and gendered framings of Muslim men are common themes that run through both episodes albeit with different outcomes. For example, Korea's large, influential, and very active Christian community often raises concerns about Korea becoming an "Islamized" country by stealth through the introduction of halal food, or the presence of refugee communities and their potential risk to Korean women (Sheikh, 2021). Nami Kim shows how fundamentalist Christian groups are the main propagators of Islamophobia in South Korea, re-creating the narrative of Korean women needing to be "saved" from the clutches of Muslim—particularly brown Muslim—men (N. Kim, 2016; Ryu, 2019). This narrative was very obviously activated in the case of Yemeni refugees, but in the Afghan situation, we suggest that Islamophobic narratives actually contributed to a more hospitable discourse towards Afghan refugees based on mutual fear of the Taliban.

Fear of the Taliban is also one of the early catalysts for the spread of Islamophobia in contemporary South

Korea. In July 2007, the Taliban abducted 23 Korean missionaries from the Bundang Saemmul Church of Gyeonggi Province. South Korean churches and wider society expressed their horror as the Taliban went on to murder two of the missionary hostages in one of Afghanistan's desert areas (H. Kim, 2021). Vivid memories of this episode instigated fear amongst Christian groups that the Taliban would once again persecute Afghan people, expressing their concerns through a Christian lens. For example, the pro-Christian newspaper *Kookmin Ilbo* stated that "the Taliban are an extremely anti-Christian group," and commented that attacks on Christians would increase throughout Afghanistan (Seo, 2021). Citing anonymous local sources, some South Korean media outlets reported that the Taliban were terrorizing Afghan Christians by executing them if they were found to have a Bible app on their smartphones ("Talleban, gagahoho," 2021). In this context, we saw an increase in calls for the church to accept and assist Afghan evacuees. One pertinent example is the Christian Ethical Movement Korea, which released the following statement on 23rd August 2021:

> As seen in the Yemeni refugee case in 2018, the general public's rejection of foreign refugees is also strong. However, in the face of a major international disaster, Korea now has to bear the responsibilities that befit its international status….Individual churches or church associations should be able to receive and help Afghan refugees by providing facilities and finances. (Na, 2021)

Additionally, even the usually conservative United Christian Churches of Korea stated that "the Afghan people are obviously at risk, so we appreciate allowing them to enter Korea from a humanitarian point of view" (B. Oh, 2021). These are unusual statements as conservative and radical Korean Christian communities were very open about their opposition to the acceptance of Muslim refugees (J. Yoo, 2018). For example, on 17 May 2018, the Korea Association of Church Communication (KACC), the main representative of conservative church communities, published a commentary entitled *Is Korea Becoming a Gathering Place for Refugees?* Here, KACC outlined its position against accepting Yemeni refugees based on "clumsy relativism" and "paternalism" (KACC, 2018). Furthermore, KACC's spokesperson, Lee Eok-ju, suggested that an influx of Yemeni refugees would have a negative impact on safety and security in South Korean society. He believed that Yemenis could not be viewed simply as refugees when Yemen has a GDP per capita of approximately $2,200 ("Nanmin suyong," 2018), indicating suspicions that they were economic migrants, therefore "fake" refugees. At the same time, the Christian community was divided, with progressive groups expressing a positive stance on accepting refugees from a humanitarian point of view, while conservatives as a whole took a negative view of the accepting of Yemeni refugees (W. Choi, 2018). On the other hand, when it comes to Afghan refugees, not only progressives but conservatives as well maintained a unified position regarding accepting refugees. Through this differentiated reaction of the South Korean church community, it is clear that Yemenis were viewed through lenses of Islamophobia and suspicion compared to positive reactions towards Afghan special contributors.

4. Observing the Discourse: Same Religious Identity, Different Reactions

We observed that Afghans, despite sharing the same religious identity as Yemenis, did not trigger the same concerns about the economy, fake refugees, the introduction of Islamic law, or the risk of sexual or terrorist violence. In part, this is because Afghans were perceived as people who had fled their homeland due to persecution by the same Islamists also feared by Korean society (B. Oh, 2021). On the other hand, with little exposure to the realities of the conflict and dangers of life in Yemen, Yemeni refugees on Jeju Island were subjected to similar racist stereotypes and violent Islamophobic narratives that shaped the reactions to Muslim male refugees in the 2015 European context (Sheikh, 2021), with attacks on their sense of masculinity, accusing "healthy, young men" of cowardice coming to South Korea for economic benefit rather than asylum. Furthermore, leaning on fake news from western sources, Yemeni refugees were consistently framed as potential criminals that needed to be securitized (Choi & Park, 2020). This is a heavily gendered discourse that focused on the perceived "risks" of accepting Muslim males into South Korean society whilst marginalizing the voices of refugee women arriving at the same time and in the same communities. This feeds into dangerous discourses that Muslim women are invisible with a lack of agency as they continue to be left without voice or support.

5. Social Discourse and Divergent Government Responses to Refugees

Given how social discourse shifted from fake refugees to special contributors, the South Korean government responded by crafting a different refugee policy. For Yemeni refugees, South Korea strived to find solutions that would strike a balance between anti-refugee public opinion and the fulfillment of its humanitarian responsibilities. For example, Minister of Justice Park Sang ki, who oversaw the refugee issue, expressed his will to pursue rational policies that could fulfill international responsibilities while taking care to avoid the negative consequences that occurred during the period of large-scale refugee acceptance in the West (J.-S. Lim, 2018). In reality, led by public opinion, the government created policies that were primarily focused on protecting South Korean people rather than Yemeni refugees. Minister Park, who attended the National Assembly on 19 July

2018, offered the following explanation to alleviate people's concerns:

> While acknowledging people's concerns about the refugee issue, Korea is a signatory to the [Geneva] Refugee Convention, and has also enacted the Refugee Act. Therefore, fulfilling our international responsibilities cannot be neglected, so we are struggling to come up with a way to harmonize the two….Above all else, the protection of our people is our top priority. (Korean National Assembly, 2018, pp. 12–13)

From this point of view, by accepting the pressure of social discourse surrounding "fake refugees," it is correct to argue that Korean policymakers sought a response to Yemeni refugees based on the conviction that the protection of citizens should be prioritized. Therefore, it could not be expected that the Korean government would promote a friendly policy towards Yemeni refugees in a situation where they needed to respond to the pressures of widespread anti-refugee social discourse.

Afghan refugees, on the other hand, benefited from the Korea–US alliance and the growing positive discourse surrounding special contributors in US-led military intervention in Afghanistan, which created the logic that refugee protection came first. That is to say, as an ally of the US, for the past 20 years, South Korea has been participating in the international community's efforts to establish lasting peace in Afghanistan by providing more than $1 billion in aid with the dispatch of the Korean troops (Korean National Assembly, 2021b, p. 2; Y. Yoo, 2006, p. 19). As a result, the South Korean government has found it difficult to ignore the humanitarian crisis generated by the sudden withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. This narrative was further strengthened given the fact that the US helped South Korea during the Korean War (1950–1953). The fact that the response to the issue of the Afghan refugees was considered within the context of the Korea-US alliance is reflected in the following remarks by the People Power Party Congressman Cho Tae-yong:

> Regarding Afghanistan [refugees], in fact, this is related to the Korea-US alliance….Those who have worked with the dispatched troops or reconstruction teams and their families, although it doesn't seem like a large number, I know that our government is making various efforts to bring them back to Korea. Regardless of the Taliban's statement that they issued a pardon for Afghans who cooperated with Western countries, including Korea, I believe that continuing efforts to promote the [rescue] plan are very necessary to make Korea trusted by the international community. (Korean National Assembly, 2021a, pp. 6–7)

Furthermore, labeling Afghan refugees "special contributors" created unintended consequences as voices critical of the progressive Moon Jae-in administration used the situation as ammunition to criticize its policy towards North Korea. While the discourse of "fake refugees" surrounding Yemeni asylum seekers did not provide ammunition for the right to criticize the Moon government, the Afghan issue had real potential to feed into concerns about Moon's policy towards North Korea. Considering this context, the government hastened its policy to silence refugee controversy in South Korea. Given the sensitive and ever-present nature of the North Korean issue, South Korea's right-wingers tried to politicize the Afghan refugee crisis in order to win points in the court of public discourse. In response, the South Korean government strived to pursue a more friendly policy toward the Afghan refugees to avoid the escalation of domestic political controversy.

The political turmoil that ensued after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan led to right-wing voices exclaiming that the peace treaty signed between the Trump administration and the Taliban on 29 February 2020, in Doha, was rendered useless. They criticized the Moon administration's appeasement policy toward North Korea, arguing that the limitations of the Afghan peace agreement should serve as a warning and that attempts to convert the armistice agreement with North Korea into a peace treaty should be stopped. For example, conservative People Power Party Congressperson Jeong Jin-seok asked Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Chung Eui-yong at the National Assembly:

> Watching the devastation at Kabul Airport and the Taliban's bloodless entry into the Afghan presidential palace, our people's hearts are very confused….The Moon administration has a goal to convert the armistice agreement into a peace agreement following the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration. As the Afghan crisis demonstrates, I think that an unripe peace treaty without substantial denuclearization can be a double-edged sword that threatens peace. (Korean National Assembly, 2021a, p. 12)

Moreover, some South Korean right-wingers are concerned that the government's obsession with the policy of appeasement toward North Korea could stimulate the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea, abandoning its commitment to security on the Korean Peninsula, just like Afghanistan. As for the issue of whether it is the US's turn to withdraw from South Korea after Afghanistan started to arise, Cha (2021) emphasized that withdrawal from Afghanistan would never lead to withdrawal from South Korea. As a result, the Moon administration was forced to pay attention to the direction of public discourse in the wake of rising political controversy in Korean society after the Afghanistan crisis. As in the case of Afghanistan, it was argued that the Moon administration's hasty efforts to declare an end to the Korean War and a peace treaty with North Korea have a risk of making South Korea a second Afghanistan (M. Ha,

2021). In this sense, it can be said that the Moon government tried to calm the controversy by promptly emphasizing the need to protect "special contributors" amid growing criticism of its policy toward North Korea from right-wingers right after the Afghan crisis.

6. The Impact of Discourse on Policy and Legislation Outcomes for Afghans and Yemenis

6.1. Jeju Island vs. Incheon Airport: Why Did It Matter for Yemenis?

The discourses presented in this article led to very different policy and legislative outcomes for Afghans and Yemenis. The Yemeni crisis swiftly resulted in stricter Jeju border regulations. Originally, Yemenis were able to use a B-2 (tourist/transit) visa according to a 30-day visa-free entry policy to South Korea through Jeju Island (National Geography Information Institute, 2014, p. 497). This quickly became a source of outrage amongst citizens believing that Jeju's open visa policies left the country open to abuse by false and mass claims for asylum.

The Ministry of Justice quickly responded by enacting a series of orders: On 30 April 2018, Yemen was added to the list of countries banned from entering Jeju Island visa-free. From June 1st, Yemeni asylum seekers were forbidden from leaving Jeju Island, so they were unable to travel to the mainland. Lastly, on September 2nd, another 24 "risky" countries were added to the Jeju visa-free ban. Through these measures, the government tried to placate public fears of any further attempts from refugees to seek asylum in South Korea through Jeju Island. However, in practice, this policy did not work well, instead resulting in serious side effects. First of all, not all Yemenis had actually utilized the B-2 visa system; among 1149 Yemenis, 382 applied for a C-2 short-term business visa. Also, a key fact left out of the discourse about Yemeni refugees is that before 500 or so Yemenis landed on Jeju Island, 587 other Yemeni asylum seekers actually sought protection upon arrival at the border at Incheon Airport (Immigration Division of Ministry of Justice, 2019). Despite the intense reactions towards Yemeni refugees on Jeju Island, in reality, 48.8% of all Yemeni refugee applicants came through Incheon airport without any public backlash or negative reactions. This speaks volumes about Islamophobic attitudes in South Korean society that branded Muslim men coming through its borders via Jeju Island as system abusers as well as potential women abusers (Sheikh, 2021).

Furthermore, directly tackling anti-refugee discourse stating South Korean citizens did not want to support "healthy young men," the authorities granted Yemenis permission to work in restricted industries on temporary Humanitarian permits. Yemeni refugees also experienced several violations of due process during their asylum applications. Despite fast-tracking the asylum evaluation system for Yemenis, the Ministry of Justice later admitted that the Seoul Immigration Office often fabricated reports of immigration interviews conducted in Arabic. Furthermore, the courts judged that these screening interviews were too short, improperly recorded, and poorly translated with staff manipulating or mistranslating applicant responses. Eventually, all Yemeni applicants who had undergone screening in Arabic were offered an opportunity to reapply (NANCEN, 2018). In 2019, only four Yemenis received official refugee status and 647 were granted temporary humanitarian status. Among 1,071 applicants, only 864 were examined, 99 were re-evaluated, and 98 were still queued (NANCEN, 2020). Only 0.4% of Yemeni asylum applications were officially granted full refugee status (S.-H. Yim, 2021a). As a result, 425 Yemenis consisted of 83% of the year's humanitarian status gainers (Immigration Division of Ministry of Justice, 2019).

6.2. Conceptualizing Afghans as Teugbyeolgiyeoja

The Afghan case is extraordinary. Attempting to avoid a rehash of the debates about Muslim male refugees in 2018, the government labeled Afghans *Teugbyeolgiyeoja* (people of merit to the country). This strategy separated Afghans from other Muslim refugees in the public mind, as they accepted that Afghans contributed to South Korean missions abroad and were worthy of support.

We note that attempts were made to grant Afghans immigration status as *Teukbyeulgongnoja* (which also translates as "special contributor") from within the existing "persons of merit" system. However, the latter, granted by Presidential Decree, provides the holder with an automatic right to naturalization and is used in very rare, uncontroversial cases (S.-H. Yim, 2021b). Since the enforcement of the Korean Nationality Act of 1948, only nine foreign nationals hold this status. Avoiding the sensitive issue of giving Afghans the automatic right to naturalize over other foreign nationals who have also assisted South Korean missions, snap legislation was passed to create a "lesser special contributor" category—the *Teugbyeolgiyeoja*, defined as people of merit applied only to Afghans rescued in South Korea's evacuation mission in 2021 (J. Ha, 2021). Unlike the Yemeni's humanitarian permits, this status guarantees long-term residence, right to employment, and life security. Minister Park made a clear distinction between Afghan special contributors and other refugees:

> Refugees have to go through a complicated process of application and examination. But since these refugees are helpers who contributed to the Korean national interest in Afghanistan, they will be given more consideration in terms of living costs, settlement support, and education than [other] refugees. (J. Ha, 2021)

By constructing Afghans as "national heroes," the government was able to bring them into South Korea with little public opposition. Having learned from the Yemeni

refugee crisis that Korean society holds deep-seated Islamophobic attitudes which hindered the process of granting vulnerable Yemenis asylum, this strategy completely bypassed that negative discourse by emphasizing Afghan contributions to the state. Furthermore, it was emphasized that Afghans escaped from the same violent enemy that South Korea was battling with its US ally, therefore, the Muslim part of their identities did not come into question. Plus, creating a special category for Afghans helped the authorities to avoid repeating issues of screening interviews, flawed processes, corrupt staff, and humanitarian permits versus refugee status—all of which caused South Korea great embarrassment on the international stage. Creating distinctively beneficial circumstances for Afghans, 372 Afghanis were granted an F-1 (visiting or joining family) visa this year. This visa provides many advantages including stable residence, job-seeking support, and access to social services. Contrastingly, only ten Yemenis among 1,081 residents in South Korea hold the same status.

The gender composition of both groups is also likely to have affected visa status. The entire Yemeni community in question was comprised of 863 males and 218 females compared to 547 Afghan males and 290 females. Discrimination and differences established by visa type amongst both groups are notable. If we consider an additional 225 Afghans who arrived in Korea just before the evacuation mission in 2021, only 84 out of a total of 837 Afghans were granted a G1 (miscellaneous) visa on humanitarian grounds compared to 746 out of a total of 1,081 Yemenis. The majority of Yemenis are either G1–5 holders (refugee applicant/asylum seeker status) or G1–6 grantees (humanitarian status), restricted in their residency, opportunities to build a permeant life in South Korea, and barred from accessing many services (Immigration Division of Ministry of Justice, 2022). In the context of anti-refugee discourse, most importantly, the issue of public security was addressed clearly in the Afghan case. From this perspective, the authorities cherry-picked a handful of heroes from a place riddled with "dangerous" Muslims, selecting them for protection and training for a new life in South Korea. However, keeping them out of the refugee system also allows for policy changes and arbitrary deportation. In this way, Afghans and Yemenis share the same precarity as they are left outside the protections of the international refugee system, constantly subjected to the whims of political change and public discourse.

7. Discussion

In the line of Cresswell (2012), who emphasizes the need to link discourse with experience in the study of migration and refugees, and MacDonald's (2017) argument that media attention influences the social exclusion of young refugees, we have outlined a variety of discourses rooted in social, political, and legal concerns that are instrumental for understanding the different responses to Yemeni and Afghan arrivals in South Korea with long-lasting effects on their future lives.

Müller-Funk's (2018) proposition that the entire construction of Muslim refugees as a culturally inferior other is important when we consider how the South Korean government took great strides to soothe the fears of its people through oppressive and restrictive policies on Yemeni and Afghan refugees, emphasizing how the protection of Korean citizens was a top priority. Similarly, we can see how South Korea is constructed as a place with a unique and exclusive culture that needs measures to protect itself from outsiders, especially when those outsiders are perceived as risky Muslim men. Despite the broadly benevolent attitudes towards Afghans, they were still placed in closed facilities, kept away from society, and assigned tasks designed to reassure the South Korean public that the government are in control of potential security risks whilst simultaneously training the new arrivals on how to live "proper" South Korean lives. Little has been mentioned about the specific needs or traumas suffered by Afghans kept in closed quarters after evacuation or indeed about the Yemenis forced to sleep hungry in the streets of Jeju Island in the face of nationwide anti-refugee demonstrations in 2018.

In short, the Muslim identity of Afghan special contributors is downplayed in the discourse to ensure that the focus remains on their training as model minorities in South Korean society compared to Yemeni refugees who were wrongly accused of violence towards women on Jeju Island (J.-H. Lim, 2018) constructed as drug-taking, lawless foreigners with a religion that encourages backward behavior abhorrent to Korean cultural norms and values (Sheikh, 2020, 2021). As proposed by Ghorashi (2021), gender plays an important role here, outlining how refugee men are viewed as a "risk." Similarly, Hobbs (2021) highlights how male refugees are demonized based on masculinities, and perhaps most significantly, Olivius (2016) explains how refugee men are represented as potential troublemakers and perpetrators of violence and discrimination. Sheikh (2021) demonstrates how public condemnation of Yemeni refugees constructed them as cowards for "abandoning" their country, branded as parasites attempting to benefit from Korea's economic success by utilizing the visa-free system on Jeju Island. In doing so, we can see how Olivius's proposition that refugee men's masculinities are pathologized plays out in real life.

On the other hand, Afghans were spared much of this hatred, framed as people of merit, who had assisted the Korean mission in Afghanistan, contributing to their status as "heroes" rather than villains. Unlike the Yemeni situation, public discourse highlighted the presence of women and children amongst Afghan special contributors, further softening public reactions toward their arrival.

We believe that at the core of this discourse remains the problematic notion that masculinity, especially Muslim masculinities, equals threat. It is also

important to highlight that refugee women (Afghan and Yemeni) have been completely ignored in existing discourse. There is almost zero field access to the women who sought asylum in 2018 or 2021 to gauge their concerns or needs. In the line of Scheibelhofer (2017), the focus on masculinized Muslim refugee issues has allowed politics and negative stereotypes to create gendered images of difference, particularly, as Olivius (2016) argues, that problematic constructions of refugee masculinities represent men as violent wrongdoers. We propose that this positioning is clearly visible in the powerful mainstream discourse that framed Yemeni refugees as "fake" and "criminal" and Afghan special contributors as "heroes," shaping Muslim refugee issues in South Korea as primarily masculine.

8. Conclusion

This article examines the impact of social discourse on the different approaches to and outcomes for Yemeni and Afghan refugee issues. Yemeni refugees, subjected to gendered Islamophobic discourse were constructed as terrorists, sex criminals, and fake refugees, while Afghan refugees were constructed as national heroes. We propose the reasons for these disparities can be attributed to the following: First, long-standing Islamophobia propagated by right-wingers and fundamental Christian groups has contributed to a more hospitable social discourse towards Afghan refugees based on a mutual (exaggerated) fear of a Taliban-style takeover of South Korea. This allowed for a shift in policy where refugee protection was prioritized for Afghans, whereas in the Yemeni case, citizen insecurities took precedence. Second, from the political viewpoint of the South Korea-US alliance, Afghans were spared much of the problematic constructions of refugee masculinities, downplaying their Muslimness and framing them instead as people who had assisted South Korean national interests. Significantly, in attempting to avoid the social and legal controversies that arose with the Yemenis in 2018, the authorities took the unprecedented step of creating a completely new immigration category for Afghans. The handling of both cases emphasizes that Muslim refugee issues in South Korea are still a masculinized discourse, as backlash towards (Yemeni) refugees and support for (Afghan) refugees are both centered around the contributions, needs, and voices of men. Refugee women continue to be excluded from any meaningful discourse. It also indicates a continued discourse of distrust as Muslim, mostly male refugees continue to be assessed under alternate mechanisms rather than existing, functional refugee systems in South Korea.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

From Conflict Zones to Europe: Syrian and Afghan Refugees' Journeys, Stories, and Strategies

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Abstract
This article explores the journeys of Syrian and Afghan refugees to Europe, looking at two of the largest and politically most salient flows of asylum seekers during the 2010s. Following political disturbances in their home countries, millions of Syrians and Afghans have been forcibly displaced or had to seek safety elsewhere. In search of protection for themselves and their families, some of them had to cross multiple borders to reach European destinations or hope to be resettled there. This article looks at the factors that shape the journeys of asylum seekers and the uncertain features of the process of moving from one unexpected location to another, with an emphasis on the overlapping role of information, social networks, resources, and pure chance. Our aim is to locate the refugee journeys in the context of significant social institutions that may determine their decisions, migratory trajectories, and consequently their entire journeys. The present research involves in-depth qualitative interviews. Drawing on an ethnographic approach and a multi-sited methodology, we bring together diverse refugee voices and narratives and focus on the role of information in their mobility. The results help us verify assumptions about different aspects of migrant journeys, mechanisms involved in the decision-making of the actors involved, the role of networks (or networking) and information exchange, and other relevant aspects expounded throughout the article. Our findings suggest that social networks, family status, age, disability, human, social, and cultural capital, their intersections, and, in the end, chance, play an important role in the shaping of the asylum seekers' migration trajectories.

Keywords
Afghanistan; capital; chance; decision-making; migration journeys; refugee voices; social networks; Syria

Issue
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1. Introduction

This study explores journeys of Syrian and Afghan refugees to Europe, looking at two of the largest and politically most salient flows of asylum seekers during the 2010s. We observe the factors that shape the journeys of asylum seekers and the uncertain features of the process of moving from one unexpected location to another, with an emphasis on the overlapping role of information, social networks, resources, and pure chance. Our aim is to locate the refugee journeys in the context of significant social institutions that may determine their decisions, migratory trajectories, and consequently their entire journeys.

Following political disturbances in their home countries, millions of Syrians and Afghans have been forcibly displaced or had to seek safety elsewhere. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022), by mid-2021, about 6.8 million Syrians and 2.6 million Afghans left their countries. In search

of safety and protection for themselves and their families, some of them had to cross multiple borders to reach their European destinations or hope to be resettled there. The focus of this study is on two groups of asylum seekers: those who relied on international organisations such as the UNHCR to take care of them, and those who chose to draw their own pathways by travelling legally or illegally via long, often unknown and uncertain routes.

Millions of migrants reached Europe through different entry points, such as Turkey, Greece, and Italy (Gillespie et al., 2016; Korkut, 2016; Squire et al., 2021). According to Squire et al. (2021, pp. 3–4):

> Between 2014 and 2016, arrivals [from Iraq, Iran, and more recently Syria and Afghanistan] in Italy were primarily via the central route across the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa, and in 2015 arrivals in Greece came through the eastern route (usually via the Aegean Sea).

Many others, meanwhile, opted for the Balkan route to Germany. The painful images of displaced and desperate individuals, including children, compelled European governments, asylum services, international and non-governmental organisations, and activists as well as volunteers to offer help (Iliadou, 2019).

In their study on migration decisions, Czaika et al. (2021, p. 16) argued that they are "often made in the context of idiosyncratic personal needs, stress, urgency and, above all, uncertainty and limited information about livelihood opportunities." In this article, we argue that in addition to the elements identified in prior work, different forms of capital, social networks, information, and chance also exert a role in shaping the individual's migration decisions and experience. To that end, this article aims to address the following research questions:

- What factors informed the asylum seekers' migration decisions to leave their countries?
- To what extent do capital, social networks, and information influence the journeys of asylum seekers to Europe at different stages?
- How does chance interact with the asylum seekers' plans, decisions, and journeys?

This article contributes to refugee and asylum studies. While most work in this field focuses on the refugees' experiences in refugee camps or the host country, this article focuses on the factors that shaped the journeys—the *process* of moving from one place to another. Existing work in this area has looked so far into routes, drivers, and trajectories (e.g., Crawley et al., 2016; Squire et al., 2021), the role of networks, especially mediated through modern technology (e.g., Gillespie et al., 2016), management of risk (Press, 2017), and information available during the journey from a range of sources (e.g., Gilbert & Koser, 2006; UNHCR, 2016).

In addition, this study brings together both capital dynamics as well as network dynamics to explain the refugees' migration processes. Our work aims to add to this literature by contextualising the journeys and choices available to migrants in light of various notions of capital and social networks, as well as how they intersect with the availability of information en route, migrant agency, and susceptibility to chance events (e.g., Gladkova & Mazzucato, 2017; Havinga & Böcker, 1999). Furthermore, it also reveals the challenges as well as the opportunities refugees have faced during their mobility, notably those engendered by their social networks and socio-economic status.

2. When Capital, Networks, Information, and Chance Intersect

This study focuses on the refugees' agency in migration decision-making based on the information they receive, capital, social networks, and chance. We look closely into the role of networks, and in particular of social media, in sustaining the refugees' bonds and influencing their decision-making. We argue that four key elements—capital, networks, information, and chance—are at the crossroads of refugee journeys, and also facilitate the decisions and integration patterns in the host society. The theoretical background is predominantly based on the literature available in English, including writings by prominent French authors, such as Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu (1986) borrowed the term "capital" from economics to a "wider anthropology of cultural exchanges." He employed it in the sense of "a wider system of exchanges where assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields" (Moore, 2014, p. 99). He distinguished three forms of capital: economic (monetary wealth), cultural (in its three forms: institutional, objectified, and embodied), and social, with special reference to social networks. Institutionalised cultural capital refers to educational qualifications; objectified capital to cultural artefacts, such as books, or works of art "that require specialised cultural abilities to use" (Swartz, 1997, p. 76); and embodied capital is acquired from the broader cultural environment and becomes a part of the self.

From the diverse approaches to migration studies, it has been agreed that "personal networks enhance and facilitate migration by decreasing costs and risks and [providing] information as well as social, emotional and financial assistance" (Ryan & Dahinden, 2021, p. 460). Many scholars have used the term "network" to explain migration in the age of information (Castells, 2010; Ryan & Dahinden, 2021; Schapendonk, 2015) and the complex transnational links built between migrants (Armbruster, 2002; Basch et al., 1994; Portes, 1998), allowing the exchange of resources, information, and knowledge (Belabbas, 2020). As shown in this article, maintaining ties with family and friends who have already escaped

the war significantly informs the asylum seekers' migration decision-making process.

Expanding on pioneering and existing literature on social networks, Larsen and Urry (2008) coined the term "networking" to refer to the "spatio-temporal performances that help to sustain networks" (Schapendonk, 2015, p. 812). This definition suggests that social networks are situated and dynamically evolve in specific contexts, spaces, and times, involving active interactions, efforts, and engagement (Pathirage & Collyer, 2011) from the participants to build new links or maintain existing ties with migrants as well as non-migrants, which implies the changeable feature of networks (Bourdieu, 1986; D'Angelo, 2020; Schapendonk, 2015). In this article, different forms of capital are considered, with special reference to social capital that is best acquired through transnational networking (Larsen & Urry, 2008). We look at the interplay between the three forms of capital but focus on the dynamics of networks to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the factors that shape the refugees' and asylum seekers' migration decisions and their trajectories.

Networks are said to be "conduits of information" (Ryan & Dahinden, 2021, p. 460). In fact, Putnam (1993) expanded the concept of social capital by including relationships within families and communities, and by focusing to a greater extent on trust and reciprocity norms. Putnam (1993, p. 35) suggested that social capital refers to "features of social organisations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit." Indeed, trust and reliable information, and sometimes even rumours, are important in sustaining asylum seekers' social capital, offering multiple migration options and allowing for a relatively less complicated journey. Therefore, this study understands social capital as an asset or resource that is generated and accumulated from a reliable and trustful network (Behtoui, 2022), allowing for circulation of information and therefore informing the actors' migration decisions and journeys.

The important role of chance in the migration process, highlighted already by Havinga and Böcker (1999), received a fuller theoretical treatment in Gladkova and Mazzucato (2017). Their analysis refers to "the role of chance encounters, structured by the interplay between environmental and personal factors, [whereby] how people deal with chance [as] an influential factor in the ways people migrate…and manage their lives in transit" (Gladkova & Mazzucato, 2017, p. 1). Other studies have focused on how social and cultural capital should be considered by the host societies to ensure migrant integration and "weaken situational problems" (Pacífico, 2009, p. 37), which motivates our focus on the intersection of social capital and chance.

The pivotal role of risk and uncertainty in shaping migrant decisions and individual trajectories is well established (Czaika et al., 2021; Williams & Baláž, 2014), as is the importance of access to resources (including money), social networks, and other forms of capital in mitigating risk, reducing uncertainty, and helping migrants establish greater control over chance events. Another relevant factor is the locus of control—whether the decisions are made autonomously by the migrants themselves, collectively by the groups to which they belong (families), or whether they are beyond their control and are essentially due to chance. This is another important dimension of migrant decisions (Czaika et al., 2021). In this article, we look at the intersection between these themes through an ethnographic lens, attempting to identify the relevant themes—and strategies—in the participants' accounts of their journeys.

3. Methodology

This article draws on an ethnographic approach (Wall, 2018), which relies on following the participants' narratives and experiences closely and thoroughly. This approach offers a fine-grained understanding of their decision-making processes. A core aim in using a multi-sited methodology is to provide a richer analysis of the individuals seeking asylum by selecting multiple profiles and looking into their diverse backgrounds, circumstances, experiences, narratives, and contacts, all of which inform their migration trajectory decisions.

According to Dörnyei (2007, p. 126), the main aim of sampling in qualitative research is "to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn." Accordingly, we selected a total of eleven participants for this study. This research has applied the University of Southampton's ethical guidelines and received institutional approval (Ethics and Research Governance Online/ERGO number 67139). Considering the privacy of the participants, all names provided are pseudonyms, and referential information has been either fully anonymised or deleted. The participants were Syrian individuals or families, as well as one Afghan family, who arrived in the UK and two EU countries (Germany and Spain) over the last five years through either the UNHCR programme or by charting their own course.

It was important to hold first meetings with participants in the UK face-to-face in order to build a relationship based on trust. However, for EU-based participants, the interviews were conducted over the phone. The participants recruited in this study represented different ages, migration trajectories, educational, social, and economic backgrounds, which offered a wider perspective and enabled more flexibility in analysis and interpretation. To this end, the study relies on ethnographic research methods for the collection of data, notably participant observation (Shah, 2001), fieldnotes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), and interviews (Patiño-Santos & Márquez Reiter, 2019).

The lead researcher (first author) was invited to some of the refugee families' homes. It was important to behave as a guest but also as someone who shares

certain commonalities such as language (Arabic) and culture (especially food culture) to build a relationship based on trust and comfort, while maintaining a high degree of reflexivity. At the same time, taking detailed notes on the whole environment, including the participants' openness during the interviews, their hospitality, and the cooking activities during visits, helped in remembering details or observations that were crucial to the research objectives. However, to avoid distracting the respondents and their guests, it was necessary to write a description of what was observed after leaving the fieldwork setting, relying on memory.

Another way of gathering data was conducting follow-up interviews through telephone calls with the participants over a period of five months. During this phase, participants responded to follow-up questions and engaged in informal conversations with the lead researcher. The aim was to create a balance between the scientific aims of the study and the social aspect of the interactions. By doing so, a comfortable atmosphere was created for the participants that allowed them to freely share their lived experiences without feeling embarrassed or under pressure. This approach enabled a richer exploration of the participants' told, but also untold, stories.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, several strategies were considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, a prolonged engagement with the participants was necessary to maintain reflexivity (Berger, 2013). Second, data triangulation through applying different methods (interviews, participant observation, fieldnotes) was key to provide a holistic picture of the participants' accounts. Finally, the findings were discussed with the participants to make sure they echoed their reflections (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. From Country of Origin to an "Ideal" Destination: An Ethnographic Account of the Participants' Journeys

In this section, the findings from the ethnographic fieldwork are organised into three major themes that arose from the respondents' narratives of their journeys from Syria or Afghanistan to their current place of settlement. We focus on capital and networks (Section 4.1), conscious decisions (Section 4.2), and the lack of choice (Section 4.3). In addition, Section 4.4 briefly discusses the participants' plans following their settlement. The three research questions underpinning this study are interwoven common threads in each part. The themes represent recurrent as well as unique shared stories and lived experiences among the informants. As the stories of the participants' journeys and their profiles are different, they can offer a richer account of their movement and provide a clearer picture of their decision-making based on the quality of information they had, rumours, social networks, capital, and other factors.

To begin with, we briefly introduce the participants' profiles and their narratives regarding their journeys. Delving into the participants' journeys that were punctuated with difficulties, hesitations, and fear can allow the reader to gain a holistic picture of their experiences and decisions along their entire trajectories, which typically involved several different countries and aspects, as depicted in Figure 1.

The study's ethnographic fieldwork started with Syrian families living in Hampshire, UK. The families were very welcoming and open to discussing different topics, including their sometimes harrowing journeys (usually due to their border crossing experiences), their lives in the UK, and occasionally their lives in Syria before the war. All Syrian participants came to the UK through humanitarian aid offered by their initial host countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt, fostered by the UNHCR's resettlement programme, ultimately leading to their successful arrivals in the UK. Afterwards, we extended the fieldwork scope to include Afghan refugees as well as Syrian refugees in two EU countries, namely Spain and Germany. The aim was to offer a richer account of the refugees' migration experiences and related decision-making. Table 1 outlines the profiles of the participants included in the study, showing their age, marital status, and itinerary. For privacy protection reasons, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and age is reported exact to the decade.

In the subsequent sections, we explore three analytical and explanatory themes that reflect participants'

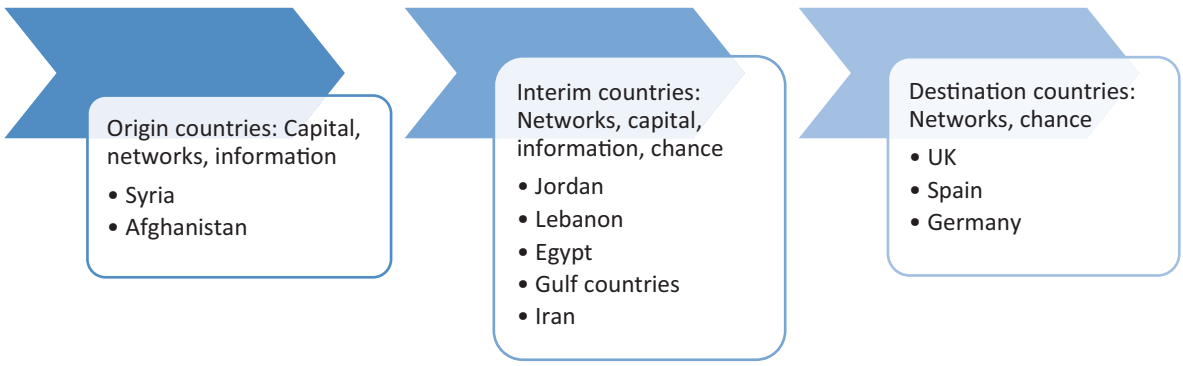

Figure 1. Key aspects of participants' migration trajectories from point of departure to "final" destination.

Table 1. An outline of the participants' social status and migration itinerary.

Participants	Age	Family status	Itinerary
Samia & family	50s	Married with five children (two sons in the UK, one in Jordan, one in Saudi Arabia, and one daughter in Turkey)	Syria—Jordan—Saudi Arabia—back to Jordan—UK
Amina & family	30s	Married with four children (all in the UK)	Syria—walked to Jordan—UK
Amal & family	30s	Married with three children (all in the UK)	Syria—walked to Jordan—UK
Neïla	30s	Married with four children (three in the UK and one in Jordan)	Syria—Saudi Arabia—Egypt—UK
Iman	30s	Married with four children (all in the UK)	Syria—Lebanon—drove to Jordan—UK
Ayzan	30s	Married with two sons (all in the UK)	Afghanistan—Iran—UK
Malik	40s	Married to Ayzan	Afghanistan—walked to Iran—Turkey—Greece—Bulgaria—Italy—France—UK
Camilla	40s	Married with three children	Syria—drove illegally to Lebanon—UK
Fadi	30s	Single	Syria—flew to Spain—plans to move to Germany
Sarah	20s	Single	Syria—Algeria—Spain—Germany
Ayman	40s	Married	Syria—Jordan—UK

journeys. These themes shed light on the interplay between capital, social networks, information, and pure chance that allowed the participants to cross the border(s) either voluntarily or by being de facto forced to do so. Through these themes, we hope to answer our three interrelated and complementary research questions and offer insight into the participants' experiences, from the departure point to the first safe transit country, and finally to their "potential" final destinations as portrayed in Figure 1.

4.1. Capital and Networks: Where, How, and Who Is Going To Help?

Over the course of the fieldwork, both Syrian and Afghan participants shared a common worry amid the war: What to do, where to go, and who is going to help? This confirms observations by Czaika et al. (2021, p. 13):

> The actual migration event is preceded not only by the decision, but also by a period of careful planning and preparations for the actual move. At the same time, migration decisions are anticipatory: they take into account what can be gained by moving in the future, as compared with the counterfactual scenario of staying.

The ambiguities and uncertainties throughout this process of negotiating their decisions to resettle were, in fact, reinforced by the migrants' lived incidents and experiences, the seriousness of the situation, and/or a feared loss of hope. They had to manoeuvre through their social positions and the options they had to move out of Syria or Afghanistan in the first place. Perhaps surprisingly in a refugee context, the cases presented in this article demonstrate careful and planned movement at the start of the migrants' journeys, particularly after reviewing their different forms of capital (resources), social networks, and quality of information. However, the journeys became unplanned once in the transit countries, which was usually shaped by both individual and country-specific circumstances. Involuntary changes in the refugees' itineraries are best explained by pure chance, leaving the locus of control of migration decisions largely beyond the influence of migrants themselves.

Capital, social networks, information, and chance are at the crossroads of refugees' migration capability and decision-making process. Already established social networks in other countries or creating face-to-face or digital ties dynamically on the move (i.e., networking) were key to the success of the refugees' resettlement. Indeed, social networks enabled by digital connectivity and smartphones play a crucial role in the "planning, navigation, and documentation of journeys, enabling regular contact with family, friends, smugglers, and those who help them" (Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 1). Moreover, from the participants' stories, the importance of a specific form of social capital became apparent—knowing someone overseas or someone who has recently crossed a border. This detail has strongly influenced the participants' choices of destinations.

Samia's migration started as a well-thought-out and planned journey. However, later it became shaped by

many other factors, which resulted in her relocation to the UK, along with her husband and son. In the end, a successful relocation required Samia and her husband to reach out to their extended social network through Samia's cousin's friend. This is what Pathirage and Collyer (2011) referred to as "network work," indicating the degree of active engagement and effort of the family to create the link allowing them to cross the border(s), relying and expanding on their already existent social capital:

> Once we felt the danger in Syria, we decided that I join my parents in Saudi Arabia with one of my sons, and my husband [would stay] with my other two sons in Jordan, leaving our daughter behind. She later joined her husband in Turkey. My husband is an accountant and he worked before in Jordan, so he thought of seeking job opportunities there, after he had received some suggestions from friends in Jordan. When I was in Saudi Arabia, my little son became ill, so my husband wanted me to join him. After I did, we visited the hospital in Jordan and did the necessary procedures for my son. It turned out that he had cancer and he needed urgent treatment. My cousin is a doctor in Jordan, and she works with the UNHCR. She forwarded my son's case to her friend and helped us with the application for resettlement…she even chose the UK for us because we were told that we were going to the USA. That woman thought the UK would be better in terms of social experience.

It is apparent from Samia's account that economic and embodied cultural capital acted as key motivations for leaving the country. Samia's resettlement application to the UK was approved thanks to the reliable network her family was engaged in. She could only go with her husband and her ill son, since he was the main reason for their application being processed, leaving behind another son in Jordan—the illness itself being an example of a chance occurrence shaping the journey. Therefore, adjusting or expanding their social network in the host society was important to increase their other son's chances of joining them. Indeed, upon their arrival to the UK, like many Syrian families, they received support from volunteers who helped them adapt to their new environment and assisted them with administrative tasks, daily activities, or English courses.

Samia's family was, as Samia and her husband pointed out:

> Fortunate to meet this lovely British woman who assisted us from day one. She assisted our sick son with his medical treatment as well as schooling. She wrote many letters to the Home Office until she managed to get our [other] son from Jordan to the UK….This is why we invite her with a neighbour every Thursday for a meal to keep the links alive, thank them, and acknowledge their efforts.

From the family's own accounts, they were willing to further invest in developing social capital, creating and expanding their network in their country of resettlement to better understand the functioning of the host society, reach the desired aim, and navigate their social positions, echoing again Pathirage and Collyer's (2011) work on networks. Moreover, such networks are clearly changing over time and space (Ryan & Dahinden, 2021), while other social factors, such as individual ambitions, age, and family status, also determine the nature of networks needed in specific contexts.

Similarly, Neïla's case involves an interrelation of various forms of capital (Moore, 2014) and dynamic social networks (Schapendonk, 2015), with her journey additionally shaped by information—often in the form of rumours—as well as chance. Neïla's interview narrative was mainly about the pathway from Syria to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and finally, the UK, foregrounding the different factors that shaped their decisions. Initially, when her family realised that their movement was inexorable, they started reviewing their options. At this moment, her husband joined our conversation and commented on the main reason that pushed them to leave:

> I took my 10-year-old daughter with me to the shop to buy some groceries and on our way back, a couple of armed men with long swords pointed down at us and shouted: "We will kill you all, we will eliminate you all." We were lucky to escape death that day. It was at that moment that I decided to leave Syria and find a safer place for my children. How could they say such horrific things to her? [Pointing to his daughter who was sitting on the sofa]

Neïla's family relied heavily on the information they had and the rumours they heard about potential countries for resettlement after their first movement to Saudi Arabia, which was a familiar destination as the husband had worked there. Afterwards, they decided to move to Egypt. In Neïla's own words, Egypt was "a sound choice to be honest. My husbands' friends were right and realistic about life in Egypt and how Syrians are treated there." Again, Neïla's claim demonstrates the importance of networks, the information they carry, as well as capital in the individuals' migration choices. When the family received a phone call from the UNHCR about the possibility to be resettled to the UK, they accepted. Interestingly, upon arrival, the family's "already established network was not supportive, which entailed the necessity to look for alternative [ties] and build new links with the locals in order to find a job," Neïla's husband explained.

Following the war, Camilla's family decided to leave Syria, with no choice but drive illegally to Lebanon—the closest country to their place of residence. Camilla mentioned their unpleasant experience in Lebanon after moving there, due to Syrians being viewed as a threat to the Lebanese's jobs. Following the economic crisis in Lebanon, Camilla and her family registered with the

UNHCR. She said: "We were really lucky to be relocated and brought [to the UK]." Although Camilla did not have relatives or friends in the UK, she relied on her brother's recommendations, showing an interplay of social capital and the role of information: Camilla's brother, who moved to Germany during the war, recommended the UK by reassuring her how peaceful life is there.

4.2. Conscious Decisions: When There Is Choice, There Is Hope

From the participants' stories, it becomes apparent how social networks and other forms of capital interact with the quality of information, allowing them to better choose their destinations. Having a choice of where to go and whom to contact, as opposed to being largely driven by chance, makes a considerable difference in refugees' decisions to leave their war-stricken country, first for an interim country and then for the final destination. Their choice is usually influenced by economic, cultural, or social capital that is acquired via their social network before and after leaving their departure country, as well as other external factors, notably family status, age, and disability as in the case of Samia discussed above.

Compared to the Syrian families who were mentioning options they had before they left Syria, Azyan's painful journey from Afghanistan illustrates a case of deprived individuals, for whom chance played a much larger role, and yet who lived on a glimmer of hope. It also demonstrates how harsh lived experiences in transit can trigger a vivid ambition to continue the journey against the odds, and thus demarcate a major factor shaping the refugees' migration decision-making.

Azyan described her difficult life as an Afghan asylum seeker in Iran, being denied schooling due to her undocumented status. Back in Afghanistan, her father was wealthy, with economic capital allowing him to escape the war and settle in Iran. He married a second wife to have a son (heir), and eventually lost his goods and properties when he left the country. Believing that education could help his daughters have a better life—acknowledging the role of investment in human capital—he falsified their documents to gain access to school:

> Upon his [her father's] death, I was in the UK, they didn't tell me about it. I only knew that he was sick, and my sister wrote letters non-stop to the UNHCR, the UN, and any organisation concerned with refugees and humanitarian aid. An American organisation came to finally read one of her letters and responded positively to it. I was so happy when my sister managed to leave [Iran] along with my mum, step-mum, and my stepbrothers. (Azyan, interview 1)

Azyan was the first family member to leave Iran by joining her husband, Malik, after he received his British residency. Azyan's experience in Iran was negative on all sides: socially, economically, and educationally. Understanding her experience in Iran as a marginalised asylum seeker explains her determination to study diligently in order to leave the country. Her story justifies her sister's struggle and persistent attempts to reach humanitarian organisations, as she finally managed to find refuge in the USA. Although the family did not appear to have many options for leaving Iran at first, Azyan and her sister worked hard to create options for themselves by improving their (embodied and institutionalised) cultural capital and expanding their social network.

In short, in addition to strategic, conscious capital investment (Schapendonk, 2015) and perpetuated attempts of the family to build and sustain social networks, and to some extent thanks to chance, the Afghan family managed to increase their multiple destination options. As is apparent from Azyan's case, access to social capital and networks—transnational ties with friends, family, and international organisations—enhanced the individuals' chances of finding a suitable place to live and a job in a new unfamiliar place. At the same time, compared to Syrian families, the limited initial capital of the Afghan family made their journey riskier, more complicated, and further exposed to chance.

4.3. No Choice: Leaving at All Costs

Treacherous journeys could also be the result of risky decisions. Ayzan's husband Malik had to escape not only the war in his country but also injustice in some interim host countries along the way. Azyan explained that "Malik imagined the UK as a final destination no matter what this would cost him, it took him a long hazardous way to reach his desirable land." Malik did not have a solid link or a direct network in the UK, but he had an imagined picture fed by imperfect information: rumours—and British TV shows—on how life could be there. Although he passed through several European countries, such as France and Italy, he did not stop there and continued taking risks to reach the UK. Although Malik's journey looks unplanned and had to be decided on the go, it was driven by his initial aim to reach the UK, intermingled with undesirable chance incidents and circumstances along the way.

Similarly, Sarah also decided to be smuggled from Syria to Spain, which she found to be a "culturally and linguistically different environment." Sarah did not share her experience in detail, but she described the dangerous ordeal that involved crossing the Mediterranean to reach the Spanish shore, despite the information they had about the journey from previous asylum seekers attempting to cross the border. Settling in Spain was not as easy as Sarah and her friend expected. On the border, Sarah explained:

> We were offered to either stay in Spain and be paid about 150 euros for a job they offered us or leave to a different desirable destination….My decision

> honestly depended on my friend, who preferred to stay. We found a job [which] was very tough, so my friend decided to go to France. For my part, I preferred to stay in Spain as my aim was to go to Germany.

Opting for clandestine migration routes suggests how desperate Malik and Sarah were to leave their countries. Taking such a risk was in this case considered to be a safer option than staying (see Mironova et al., 2019). This type of risk-taking has been described as a desperate response to an unbearable situation in which there are no other desirable alternatives and is therefore highly contextual and dependent on external factors (Zinn, 2019). With the caveat that respondents were free to withhold potentially incriminating information, choosing to be smuggled was not reported by Syrian families interviewed, except for Camilla's family who drove illegally to Lebanon, which is less dangerous compared to the hazardous route Sarah and Fadi followed. Sarah further explained:

> I had so many problems. Problems never ended in my family on top of the war, which pushed me to leave without, actually, thinking of the consequences. Samir [a good friend met in Algeria] was a trustful guy, he helped a lot in Algeria. Although he let me down in Spain….I kind of understand him….I had to leave Algeria because I needed a new place. I wanted to go to Germany. You have more freedom there. I was lucky to meet my present husband on Facebook. He is also a refugee, but he arrived there a long time before with his family.

In addition to the hostility of the war, Sarah also indicated problems she encountered, which pushed her to leave and adumbrate her own route. Again, relying on strong social networks (friendship ties) and chance, Sarah managed to reach her desired destination—Germany. Finding stability did not seem to be a straightforward process. The war destroyed the present and the future of many families whose members are scattered, hoping for a reunification one day.

4.4. Plans for the Future: After Resettlement

All participants shared a common feeling of loss, confusion, and psychological stress upon their arrival in Europe. Despite that, they were aware that it was a safer destination compared to the countries they left and gradually accepted their new reality and environments. At the same time, they explained how it took them time and additional information to understand the functioning of their new host societies. Language represented the main obstacle because most of them were monolingual (in Arabic) and struggled to master the language of the host country. For families, after a couple of years, when their children had access to school and acquired the language quickly, they expressed a significant level of relief (Ayman, Iman, Ayzan, and Amina with her two younger daughters). Conversely, others, such as Neïla and Amina, were more concerned with their teenage children finding it difficult to adapt to the UK school system, especially the lower high school exams (GCSEs), and discussed their struggle with the school programme. The parents' continuing worries suggest that their children's safety and education—human capital—occupied a large part of their decisions and thinking.

Many participants shared their plan to leave their current country of residence (UK) after they receive residency rights, and relocate to, for example, one of the Gulf countries. This could be driven by their familiarity with the area, language, culture, and religion in these countries or existing family bonds—social networks. It could also be due to their lack of proficiency in English, as the majority of middle-aged participants found it difficult to adapt to the British social environment, which often negatively impacted their wellbeing. This perspective on onward migration can be further explored in future research.

Nevertheless, it was different for families whose young children managed to quickly acquire language skills and did well at school. For example, Amina proudly told us about how her daughter's short story was selected at school to be published in a book in London. At the same time, despite better integration of children into the host society, a desire to either stay in the UK for longer was not as strongly expressed as a possible relocation to Gulf countries; it was not considered possible to return to Syria, either to visit family or to settle there permanently.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Refugees and asylum seekers are at the centre of the contemporary world's social and political thought. However, most of the qualitative literature has focused on the refugees' lived experiences in their host countries. Considering the participants' narrative accounts, this article has addressed the different sources of uncertainty and factors that shaped their decisions to leave Syria or Afghanistan. It depicted their journeys that were full of emotions, stress, and hesitation, but also determination. The results strongly suggest that different forms of capital, most notably social networks, information, and pure chance, as well as their mutual interactions, are critical for understanding the complex dynamics of refugee journeys and the decisions made in their context. The intersection of capital, social networks, information, and chance was clearly outlined across the cases, providing important clues for answering the study's research questions. Regarding chance, unexpected circumstances, such as disability or health issues, were identified as a particularly important factor alongside the more established migration drivers, such as marital status and age.

The experiences of the respondents in their interim destinations—which for them turned out to be transit

("entrepot") countries (DeVoretz & Ma, 2002)—were largely positive, but did not meet their expectations or aspirations. The feeling of being unwanted or having to deal with a source of threat put pressure on the respondents and pushed several of them to look for another place of resettlement. For example, although most Syrians who passed through Jordan shared positive feelings and quick and fluid integration, both socially and economically, they all preferred to go to Europe as it was seen as a better destination for health, education, or socio-economic purposes. At this stage, the role of networks and network*ing* (Larsen & Urry, 2008), manifesting itself through actively attending gatherings and joining online platforms and groups, was also found to be important for building and sustaining social relations and transnational links, which facilitated the refugees' decisions and migration process at different stages of their journeys.

We also noted the role of social networks (Schapendonk, 2015) and their role in influencing the circulation of information and capital dynamics (Bourdieu, 1986) to ensure relatively less complicated journeys. Overall, maintaining ties with different groups of people, not limited to compatriots, allowed the respondents to generate different forms of capital, notably social, cultural, and economic. This proved useful in shaping the migration and resettlement trajectories, helping manage the associated risks in the receiving societies, and, in the end, mitigating the role of chance on their migration outcomes. This confirms the intuition that in many cases, the locus of control of asylum-related decisions lies—at least to some extent—beyond the migrants themselves or their most immediate networks (Czaika et al., 2021).

One of the main arguments advanced in this article is that networks are dynamic and space—and time-based. Social networks tend to either expand or shrink (Wilson, 1998). Indeed, as commonly noted in all the participants' stories, their involvement with the Syrian community has reduced because, for example, "their domestic responsibilities increased and there is no time to accept somebody else's invitation" (Amina, interview 1), but also because already established links became less effective, which required the creation of new advantageous links. Arguably, once the individual refugee or family secures a degree of socio-economic satisfaction and integration, they can end up mixing less with their compatriots and look at building new networks with the local residents in order to integrate better, benefit from a wider range of services offered in the receiving society, and gain knowledge on how this society works in general.

One important remark that emerged from the analysis is that the openness of participants and how the narratives were presented during the interview depended on gender: men's narratives were more direct compared to women's. Women tended to attenuate the hostility of the journey and either intentionally or unintentionally avoided talking about sensitive details and conflicting situations. Given the limitations of the focus of this article, this idea could be explored further in future studies, possibly enhanced by adding the children's perspective.

Another possible area of future research is to study the importance of the context and possible legal routes (or lack thereof) enabling or hindering migrant journeys. The takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have led to different patterns of migration than those explored in this study. This was largely due to different legal opportunities for migrating. For this reason, future comparative studies could further elucidate the complexity and constraints of migration decisions and journeys.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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Article

A Different Way of Thinking About Refugees: Relocation and Settlement of Expatriate Syrian Business People

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Abstract
The 2011 Syrian uprising resulted in millions of Syrians fleeing to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, while others chose to relocate to Egypt. Among this unprecedented refugee wave, thousands were upper-middle or upper-class business people in pre-uprising Syria. This article examines how the Syrian refugee business people's social class affected their relocation and settlement in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. The data in this research are based on the analysis of ten months of fieldwork in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan with 213 in-depth interviews of Syrian business people conducted by the author. The findings suggest that, first, the political relations between the host–home countries and the economic structure of the host countries affect what type of political or economic business people are relocating. Second, Syrian business people are more resilient than other refugees in balancing the challenges they meet in host societies, mainly based on their economic capital and status as business professionals. This article argues that the relocation choice and settlement process of the Syrian business people are closely related to their class as business professionals since both their relocation and settlement are affected or facilitated by their professions. This case shows how refugees' relocation and settlement processes go through a class-based orientation, depending on the specific resources they have and the related considerations regarding their professions. Keeping in mind the various social compositions among the massive refugee waves or forced migration, which might affect the results of relocation and settlement, this further suggests that refugee policymaking should be more "customized," taking the refugees and forced migrants' social classes into consideration.

Keywords
class; refugee business people; relocation; settlement; Syrian refugee

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article examines how the expatriate Syrian business people's social class affected their relocation and settlement in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. Among the millions of Syrian refugees who fled Syria to neighboring countries, thousands belonged to the upper-middle class and were professional business people in pre-uprising Syria. This group had a much wealthier stance and were professionals with business investments. However, they experienced the same disaster as their fellow countrymen and clearly showed their resilience during their relocation and settlement. Their resilience can be found in their activities in the host countries, such as the establishment of more than 10,000 Syrian companies in Turkey, and further hundreds of factories and workshops in Egypt and Jordan ("15 thousand Syrian investors," 2012; "Number of Syrian companies," 2015; "Syrian food culture," 2015). However, very limited academic studies have addressed the existence and development of these economic elites of refugees during the war. The Syrians who left Syria after the 2011 uprising were, in general, considered and treated as refugees, while governmental think tanks or academic research neglected the

diversified nature of the socio-economic composition among refugees. Despite the literature on refugees' relocation and settlement recognizing the importance of refugee entrepreneurs, they either attribute their relocation and settlement to their social networks (Arango, 2000, p. 291; Boyd, 1989, p. 645; Ghosh, 2007, p. 225; Shah & Menon, 1999, p. 370; Smith et al., 1991, p. 254) or mostly show the problems for refugee entrepreneurs' settlement without further investigating how they deal with these issues (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Ayadurai, 2010; Heilbrunn, 2019; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). This article contributes to filling the gap of the understudied yet economically important group of refugees in terms of how their relocation and settlement have been made.

After reviewing the literature on relocation choice and settlement challenges of refugees/migrants, the methods for data collection used in this research are explained. Then, the relocation rationales of expatriate Syrian business people are discussed. It moves to analyze their settlement process by demonstrating the strategies they applied to settle in the host countries. The findings suggest that, first, the political relations between the host–home countries and the economic structure of the host countries affected what type of political or economic business people were relocating. Second, Syrian business people were more resilient than other refugees in balancing the challenges they met in the host societies. This article argues that the relocation choice and settlement processes of the Syrian business people were closely related to their class as business professionals since both their relocation and settlement were affected or facilitated by their professions. This case shows how refugees' relocation and settlement processes go through a class-based orientation, depending on the specific resources they have and the related considerations regarding their professions. Keeping in mind the various social compositions among the massive refugee waves of forced migration, which might affect the results of relocation and settlement, this further suggests that refugee policymaking in terms of resettlement should be more "customized," taking refugees' and forced migrants' social classes into consideration.

2. Relocation Choosing and Settlement Challenges

In terms of refugees' and migrants's relocation choice, previous literature suggests that (a) the social networks of refugees/migrants, (b) the relations of migrants with their host or home countries, (c) the host countries' entrance regulations towards refugees/migrants, and (d) economic factors are the factors that most affect refugees/migrants' relocation choice. Previous studies on migration widely recognize that social networks such as kinships and friendships facilitate the further emigration of people to host countries (Arango, 2000, p. 291; Boyd, 1989, p. 645; Ghosh, 2007, p. 225; Shah & Menon, 1999, p. 370; Smith et al., 1991, p. 254). Since the social ties of refugees in certain locations have been considered to positively support refugees' later settlement in host countries, this has increased the chance for refugees to seek refuge in those countries where they have acquittances or families. Additionally, other studies have shown how the relations between the home/host countries and the refugees/migrants play an important role in the settlement process of the latter (Akesson & Coupland, 2018; Castles & Miller, 1998, p. 22; Fabbe et al., 2017; Horst, 2006). Refugees forced to flee their homes due to conflict in their home country are attracted by the various features of the host countries that may increase their motivation to relocate, such as cultural similarities or geographic proximity. Furthermore, the entrance regulations of potential host countries have been shown to directly decide whether refugees or migrants can enter (Adwani et al., 2021; Al-Miqdad, 2007). Finally, for migrant/refugee entrepreneurs, location is an important part of having a successful business (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). To achieve a better business future, they have greater motivation to relocate to areas where there is a higher population of migrants (Kloosterman & van der Leun, 1999).

Although these four aspects of discussion have interpreted the relocation rationales of refugees/migrants in different manners respectively, there is a lack of comprehensive comparison regarding how these four factors affect refugees/migrants' decision-making for relocation, and how these four factors can be interrelated with one another regarding the relocation choice. Furthermore, although relations of migrants with their host countries or home countries have been studied in terms of how they affect the migrants' relocation choice, how the host–home relations influence this is missing. In addition, the literature on the relocation rationales of refugees rarely pays attention to the various classes of refugees, except the literature on refugee and migrant entrepreneurs.

Different from the literature on the relocation rationales that have less focus on the various classes of refugees, literature on the settlement challenges of refugees has received more attention in the field of refugee entrepreneurs. Mainly, the settlement challenges that refugee entrepreneurs have encountered during their settlement include legal constraints, social difficulties, and lack of economic capital. Concerning legal constraints, the literature mainly focuses on how the institutional constraints further impede refugee entrepreneurs from achieving their goals (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Ayadurai, 2010; Heilbrunn, 2019; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). The language barrier and social hostility are two other difficulties that refugee entrepreneurs are required to deal with while operating their businesses in the host country from a social perspective (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Ayadurai, 2010; Lyon et al., 2007). Finally, since refugee entrepreneurs mostly emerge from a context of conflict, the scarcity of capital for them to establish a business or inaccessibility to

local banks' loans are common phenomena that impede their businesses (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Ayadurai, 2010; Lyon et al., 2007; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). However, the lack of capital has already been suggested as not being the main difficulty in opening a business for Istanbul-based Syrian business people (Chang, 2022).

The studies regarding refugee entrepreneurs' settlement process in host countries have demonstrated the difficulties encountered in the host country, and some indicate that refugee entrepreneurs have countered these problems with their social networks (Bizri 2017; Sandberg et al., 2019; Zehra & Usmani, 2021). Nevertheless, most literature notes the problems for refugee entrepreneurs' settlement without further investigating the possibilities of how refugee entrepreneurs might deal with these issues and how these issues affect their operations.

3. Methods

The data for this research were collected through three rounds of field research in Turkey (Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Mersin), Egypt (Al-Obour, sixth of October, Cairo, and al-Badr), and Jordan (Amman). The author personally conducted the first two field studies between mid-2014 and the end of 2015 and between mid-January and mid-February 2020. However, due to the pandemic situation, the third field study was conducted through WhatsApp by interviewing 11 Gaziantep-based Syrian business people. In total, 213 Syrian business people were interviewed, 75 Istanbul-based, 56 Gaziantep-based, 20 Mersin-based, five Al-Obour-based, 18 sixth of October-based, 15 Cairo-based, one al-Badr-based, and 23 in Amman. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, conducted mostly in standard or Levantine Arabic by the author, and each interview lasted at least between one and two hours with some interviewees being interviewed more than once. Ethics approval was gained from the University of Edinburgh and the National Chengchi University's ethics committee, while the names of interviewees were anonymized at their request. After data collection, a thematic analysis approach for data analysis was applied. Thematic analysis is used to identify various patterns among data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author wrote down what the interviewees stated during the interviews. Once the interviews were finished, the author transcribed the written notes onto a computer. After the author had collected and typed all the data onto the computer, the author read through the notes various times to differentiate the main themes that routinely showed up from the interviews. In doing so, the author could delineate and analyze the various factors that affected expatriate Syrian business people's relocation and settlement. In terms of relocation, four themes repeatedly appeared from the data, that is, the roles of pre-existing networks, entrance regulations, politics, and profits. In addition, Syrian business people showed similarities concerning the challenges they encountered in legal, political, and social perspectives during their settlement. Nevertheless, the main limitation of the research method in this study was that only three out of the 213 interviewees were females. This was mainly due to the difficult accessibility of a male researcher for conducting interviews with female members in Arab society. This may lead to negligence of the role of businesswomen regarding their relocation and settlement.

4. Relocation Choosing: Pre-Existing Networks, Entrance Regulations, Politics, and Profits

Regarding the relocation choice of Syrian business people, there were four main reasons for choosing a specific place for relocation: pre-existing networks of business people in host countries; entrance regulations; political relations between the host and home governments; and the economic structures in the host countries.

4.1. Pre-Existing Networks

Before expatriation, Syrian business people had business activities, business partners, and relatives in other countries in the Middle East. These networks were one of the pull factors in attracting Syrian business people to emigrate and can be considered as bridges taking Syrian business people out of Syria. Pre-existing networks in host countries increased the motivations for other potential migrants to move (Arango, 2000; Boyd, 1989). This was true, to a certain extent, for Syrian business people, who decided to move to another host country where they had friends, relatives, or acquaintances when choosing a relocation destination. For example, Turkey was Syria's seventh-largest exporter and third-largest importer in 2011 (Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This suggests that before 2011, strong bilateral trade between Syria and Turkey was active and that some Syrian business people who had business in Turkey may have had Turkish business partners or Turkish business acquaintances. One Damascene box industrialist moved to Turkey because his family business had a Turkish business partner. He said: "I first went to Hatay, but the market there was not good enough for my business. Then I contacted our family's former Turkish business partner, he suggested I move to Istanbul." He eventually sought help from his father's old business partner and later built up a business partnership with him. Another similar case happened to another Damascene clothes businessman in Istanbul, who stated: "I opened my company here in Istanbul because my friend came here before me and told me that my field has a chance here."

The pre-existing ties of potential migrants in host countries can be considered a pull factor for motivating relocation to the countries where their networks existed; nevertheless, the fact of the existence of long-term exiled Syrian diasporas indicates a different perspective. The Syrian business community experienced different degrees of emigration due to the government's

nationalization policy in the 1960s, and many business people went to Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia at that time (Mouawad, 2001; Perthes, 1991; Picard, 2006). At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the Syrian regime suppressed a domestic branch of the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency and later forced thousands of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and members to leave Syria for Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey (Lefèvre, 2013, 2014). This indicates that Syrian diasporas had begun to spread to other countries long before the 2011 uprising. Nevertheless, once Syrian business people decided to leave Syria, most did not head to Saudi Arabia where there were already a great number of Syrians prior to their departures. This suggests that pre-existing ties of potential migrants in host countries alone are not enough to explain the rationales of relocation choice for migrants, even if it, to a certain extent, affected Syrian business people's decision-making processes.

4.2. Entrance Regulations of the Host Countries

As mentioned earlier, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia both held a great number of Syrian diasporas prior to 2011. Nevertheless, the number of Syrian business people who chose to move to these countries was not as great as Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. The various regulations regarding the entrance of Syrians into their countries may be an explanation for this phenomenon. The host countries' regulations affected migrants' decisions about whether or not to settle in that country. For instance, Gulf countries put in place prohibitions or restrictions to prevent Syrians from entering their countries as a consequence of the conflict. As an Aleppan food industrialist in Gaziantep stated:

> Saudi Arabia prohibits Syrians from traveling in and out unless you have a residence permit. Egypt is ousting our people out of their lands. Jordan [is] afraid our arrival may have an impact on their local economy. You can see how the other Arab countries hate the Syrians through this war. It is the Turks who are helping us now. Such a shame for the Arabs.

After the eruption of the 2011 uprising, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan held an open-door policy regarding the entry of Syrians into their lands. Turkey had applied an "open-door" policy regarding the entry of Syrians into the country since the beginning of 2011 (Ahmadoun, 2014). During that period, Syrians could easily enter Turkey without restrictions, and even without bringing any personal official documents if they entered through the Turkish-Syrian border. The situation in Egypt was similar to that of Turkey at the beginning of 2011, as Syrians could enter Egypt easily with their passports (Kortam, 2013). Egyptian policy welcomed Syrians, especially under the rule of Mohammad Morsi between mid-2012 and mid-2013. Jordan received great praise for their open-border policy towards Syrians at the beginning of 2011, whereby Syrians could simply enter Jordan with their passports (Achilli, 2015). Nevertheless, following 2011, these three countries have either slightly or dramatically tightened their borders against the entry of Syrians into their countries.

In Turkey, regulations did not change massively until 6 January 2016 when the government issued new visa regulations for Syrians, whereby Syrians who wanted to travel to Turkey were required to have a visa, except those traveling through the Turkish-Syrian border in southern Turkey ("Turkey does a U-turn," 2015). The Egyptian and Jordanian governments either tightened their border control or even closed off their borders against Syrians after the 2011 uprising. After the coup in Egypt in mid-2013, when Mohammad Morsi was replaced by the pro-Assad Sisi regime, Egyptian policy on Syrians experienced a 180-degree turnaround. On 9 July 2013, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Syrians who attempted to enter Egypt would be required to have a visa (Kortam, 2013). The Jordanian government officially announced the closure of the borders with Syria in June 2016, due to the escalation of conflict in Syria and the fear that the conflict would extend into Jordan. Since the entry requirements for Syrian business people became more difficult in Egypt and Jordan as of mid-2013, some Syrian business people who had already relocated to Egypt and Jordan after the 2011 uprising had to re-emigrate to Turkey. This shows that entrance regulations directly determined whether Syrian business people could enter host countries, and how easy it was to cross the borders.

4.3. The Political Relations Between the Host and Home Governments

The Turkish, Egyptian, and Jordanian governments held different political views toward the Assad regime after the 2011 uprising. It has been argued that once the local public opinions against the migrants were negative, the livelihood of the migrants could be more difficult, and vice versa (Fussell, 2014). However, how the political relations between host–home governments affected the settlement or relocation of migrants has been less discussed.

Political relations between home–host governments were a double-edged sword in influencing the decision-making of Syrian business people regarding relocation. On the one hand, the emigration of Syrian business people suggests that when the political orientation of the host government was contrary to that of the home government, the motivations for the business people to immigrate were higher. On the other hand, Syrian business people chose to move to a host country whose government's political ideology was closer to their own political leanings. For instance, the Turkish government did not cut off official ties with the Syrian regime at the beginning of the uprising, but rather they were attempting to be a mediator through official talks between the regime and the rebels. Nevertheless, the Turkish government

changed its position and publicly condemned the Assad regime in mid-2011 (Phillips, 2012). This change of political position led to a more welcoming stance towards the arrival of Syrians into the country and large numbers of Syrian business people were received. In Egypt, between mid-2012 and mid-2013, Muhammad Morsi's government publicly condemned the Assad regime, maintained an outspoken and strong anti-Assad regime position and policies regarding the entrance of Syrians to the country were not difficult to comply with. Nevertheless, after Abdel Fatah al-Sisi came into power in mid-2013, the Egyptian policies towards the entrance of Syrians became stricter and many Egypt-based Syrian business people fled to Turkey (Abdul-Aziz, 2015). Jordan's policy on the Syrian uprising was seen as ambiguous since they were more centered on their own internal stability at the time. The Jordanian government was mostly cautious about the Syrian event, neither supporting the Syrian regime nor standing with the opposition (Satik & Mahmoud, 2013).

The Turkey-based Syrian business people were mostly anti-regime, which meant that their political ideas were closer to the Turkish government. In Gaziantep, the Syrian Interim Government, the Syrian National Coalition, and the Al-Waad Party—which is a Muslim Brotherhood political party—also had business people participating in anti-regime activities (Chang, 2018). In Egypt, during the Morsi period, the country witnessed a high number of Syrian business people moving into the country. Once the pro-Assad Sisi regime came into power in mid-2013, this led the Egypt-based Syrian business people to flee again to Turkey ("Turkey Syrians paradise," 2013). At least eight out of the 151 Turkey-based Syrian business people in this research said they fled from Egypt to Turkey due to the coup, and another 12 claimed that they knew other business people who fled to Turkey because of the coup. Most Egypt-based Syrian business people who did not flee the country either had closer political orientations to the Syrian regime or were self-declared as politically neutral. For example, the president of the Syrian Business People's Assembly in Egypt, Khaldūn al-Muwaqqʿ, took an official business delegation to visit the Syrian Minister of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection, Samīr Qāḍī Amīn ("Commerce Minister meets," 2014). This kind of visit from the Egypt-based Syrian business people to the Assad regime was never reported under the reign of Morsi. Thus, the political relations between the host–home governments indicate that the nature of political relations affects the political type of business people relocating. That is to say, business people choose to relocate to a host country where the government's political position is closer to their own political orientation.

4.4. Economic Structure: A Reality Related to Potential Profits

The meaning of economic structure here includes the cost of labor and the markets. The cost of labor in the host countries is important to consider if business people are planning to open a business after resettling, be it commercial or industrial. Calculations of the local economic structure further influence the type of business people (industrial or commercial) who were going to settle in which country. The minimum wages per month in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon in 2012 were $115, $226, $443, and $450 respectively (see the minimum wage datasets at http://minimum-wage.org and http://www.tradingeconomics.com; see also Social Security, 2017). A low minimum wage indicates that Egypt provided cheaper labor forces compared to Jordan and Turkey. As a result, most Syrian industrialists chose to settle in Egypt since they required a higher labor number.

Another economic consideration was the markets that Syrian business people could access, especially for those who attempted to maintain former foreign customers after settlement. Before the conflict, Syrian business people had customers in various countries, in addition to these three main host countries, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Iraq and Saudi Arabia were two of the top five export partners of Syria between 2006 and 2010. Iraq was ranked fourth in 2006 and 2007, and first from 2008 to 2010. Saudi Arabia was ranked third in 2006 and 2007, and fifth from 2008 to 2010. Most trading between these two countries was in the field of consumer goods, raw materials, textiles, and clothing (World Bank, 2022). Nevertheless, due to the difficulties that Syrian business people encountered in moving to these countries, as mentioned above, they chose other host countries from where they could continue transporting their goods. For instance, an Aleppan plastic industrialist who relocated to Istanbul and Gaziantep after the conflict and used to export his products from Syria to Iraq but now continues selling his products from Turkey to Iraq said:

> It is important for industrialists to preserve their customers. If you do not continue to sell your products to them, they may buy from others. It is easy to preserve my old customers here [in Gaziantep] since I can easily send my products by trucks through the borders.

Those business people who had customers in Gulf countries preferred to move to Jordan or Egypt to maintain the routes of product transportation through the ports of Aqaba or Alexandria. Different from a consideration of social ties, even within a business family, brothers might not flee to the same destination unless they were working in the same business field. As stated by an Aleppan food restaurateur in Gaziantep: "We have five business brothers in the family, two went to the US, one went to Ghana, and two came to Turkey. Because we need to go to the places where we can continue to work in our fields." Business people who were working in the same field had a higher chance of fleeing to the same destination if they were able to trust each other enough or if they had had stable business with each other in the pre-uprising period. Thus, evaluating the economic

structure of host countries was another factor for Syrian business people when choosing a relocation destination. Additionally, the economic structure affected the type of business people who went where, since this was an issue closely related to their business operation and profits in the host countries.

Studies suggest that personal networks of potential migrants in host countries before emigration enhanced the possibilities of attracting them to relocate to specific countries where they already had acquaintances (Arango, 2000; Boyd, 1989; Ghosh, 2007; Shah & Menon, 1999; Smith et al., 1991). Nevertheless, the examination of the relocation choices of Syrian business people suggests that entrance regulations are decisive for refugees regarding entering the host countries or not in the first place. More importantly, the investigation of the political relations between host–home countries and the economic structure of the host countries shows other dimensions regarding refugees' choice of location. Namely, the political relations between the host-home countries and the economic structure of the host countries affect what political or economic type of business people are going where. First, Syrian business people might choose to settle in a host country where the government possesses a more similar political position as them. This also means that on the one hand, positive relations between the home–host governments could limit the appeal of a host country; on the other hand, negative relations could attract more business people to relocate to the host country. Second, Syrian business people take the host countries' economic structure into serious consideration prior to their relocation, since they need to plan how they will continue their business operations after their relocation to the host country. This leads to the relocation choice being conducted under economic considerations.

5. The Settlement Challenges: Residence and Business Regulations, Language, and Discrimination

After the Syrian business people made their decision about which country they would go to, they encountered various legal and social challenges from the host countries. Legally, Syrian business people needed to deal with local regulations issued by local authorities before and after their entry into the country. Socially, they needed to engage in the host countries by interacting with the local communities.

5.1. Legal Perspective: Residence and Business Regulations

Most Syrians, after relocating to the host countries, applied for residential permits as refugees, students, or tourists. However, the business people did not apply for the same types of residential permits as their fellow countrymen; Rather, they applied mostly for investment residential permits. This was mainly because, if they wanted to establish companies and register those companies in the host countries, having an investment residential permit was a condition to do so. Additionally, the Syrian business people who relocated to Turkey could not purchase real estate as Syrian citizens, but rather through their companies that were registered in Turkey.

The main differences in business regulations among the three host countries were the amount of capital required for establishing a company and regulations regarding the establishment of a commercial company. There was no minimum capital requirement in Egypt to start a limited liability company, while in Turkey it costs at least 10,000 Turkish lire (around $3000) and 50,000 Jordanian dinars (around $70,430) in Jordan (ADMD Law Office, n.d.; LexMundi, 2018; PKF, 2011). This suggests that if Syrian business people wanted to establish new companies in one of these three countries, Egypt provided the lowest threshold for opening a new investment project, followed by Turkey and Jordan. Moreover, the corporate income tax for foreign companies in Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt was 10%, 20%, and 22.5%, respectively in 2016 (PWC, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). This shows that Jordan had the lowest requirements of tax payment for Syrian companies such that the tax to be paid in Jordan was only half of that in Turkey or Egypt. Since refugee entrepreneurs usually do not have the chance to access local bank credit (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008), the business regulations for the payment of business establishment indicates that those Syrian business people can manage the amount of money for starting up their businesses in the host country.

In addition, the regulations for foreign investors to establish a commercial company in Turkey were different from those in Egypt and Jordan. The regulation in Egypt allowed foreign investors to have 100% ownership of the companies; nevertheless, neither the limited liability company nor joint stock company allowed their foreign investors to conduct importation from outside of Egypt (PWC, 2022c). For Jordan, foreign investors could hold 100% of the share of their companies, but "foreign entities may not…have ownership [over] 50% of construction and certain other commercial ventures," according to Jordanian investment law (PKF, 2011). Only the regulations in Turkey did not have any of the above-mentioned limitations (Investment Office, 2022). This suggests that the more welcoming regulations for establishing a commercial company in Turkey attracted more Syrian commercialists to relocate there since this lowered the cost for them to embark on their commercial enterprises. A Damascene real estate investor in Istanbul explained how this difference in regulations affected Syrian business people's investment types:

> I do not think many Syrian business people would like to open a commercial company in Jordan or Egypt since they cannot control the whole company by themselves because of local regulations. Unless they

> know somebody there, they will not open a commercial company.

Investigating the residential permits and business regulations demonstrates the different degrees of difficulty that Syrian business people had, and the amount of money Syrian business people were required to pay for settling in. Although Syrian business people emigrated under the context of war, the successful registration of their companies in these three countries suggested that they could encounter legal challenges through the economic abilities they possessed. In addition, the business regulations of the host countries could influence what economic type of business people were settling in.

5.2. Social Perspective: Language Barriers and Attitudes of Local Communities Towards Syrian Business People

Since Syrian business people do not know Turkish prior to their relocation into the country, and the locals' official language in Turkey is Turkish, communicating with the locals is one of the challenges they are required to deal with during their stay in the country. This not only became a problem for the business people while managing their businesses, but it also made their daily life harder. Both the Syrians and the Turkish community could not communicate with each other easily: "I tried to learn Turkish and speak with the local people. Once, when I was using Turkish to communicate with a Turkish guy, I mistakenly used a word which has a negative meaning, and he was furious and just left the office," stated an Aleppan businessman who owned a design company. Nevertheless, there were some business people who could speak intermediate to advanced Turkish because of their former business experiences in the country. For them, the language was less of an issue. The majority of Syrian business people, however, did not understand Turkish, but they clearly understood the importance of having the language skills necessary for doing business with the local business people. As such, they would recruit translators, either Turkmen Syrians who also left Syria for Turkey, or other Syrians who could speak Turkish.

In addition to the language barrier, the attitudes of locals in host countries towards refugees are another influential factor that affects the settlement of the latter (Ayadurai, 2010; Lyon et al., 2007). As such, local public opinions about the arrival of Syrians did indeed affect their settlement. On the one hand, host governments may have their own political stances towards the Syrian uprising which affected the settlement process of Syrian business people; on the other hand, public opinions may or may not be in accordance with the policies of their governments. Thus, the expatriate Syrian business people needed to deal with contradictory attitudes between the host governments and the locals in the host countries.

The public opinions of the Turkish population towards the Syrians were, in some cases, not as friendly as those of the Turkish government. There were many protests against having Syrians in the country (Jamāl, 2014). In turn, many Syrians were aggravated and insulted by the local Turks ("A group of Turks," 2016; "Hundreds of Turks demonstrate," 2014). This anti-Syrian atmosphere was not restricted to Syrians from lower social strata, as Syrian business people who had established companies were not immune from local aggression. Furthermore, Syrian business people experienced additional discrimination, complaining that Turkish people were not willing to rent houses to them, even those who had the money. "We would pay two or three times the normal rent. However, many Turkish landlords just refused to rent their houses to us once they knew that we are from Syria," stated an Aleppan packaging industrialist in Istanbul. As stated by various Syrian business people, one of the main strategies for them to counter this unfriendly manner was to show the locals that they were richer than them. "You need to let them know that you have money with you, like the decent dressing, the expensive watches or cars you own," stated an Aleppan instruction company owner in Istanbul. As claimed by the Syrian business people, this could at least receive some respect from the locals.

Following the ousting of Morsi and the rise of Sisi in Egypt, the political atmosphere changed from anti-Assad to pro-Assad. Moreover, Syrians became considered to be supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Obviously, the life of Syrians in Egypt became extremely difficult during this period. As stated by an Aleppan plastic industrialist who was based in the city of sixth of October:

> Many of my Syrian business friends' cars were stolen after Sisi came into power, and many of them have even been robbed on the streets or in shopping malls. Once, a business friend was driving in the city sixth of October. Three guys got off their tuktuk with a gun and robbed him of all his money and car.

Syrian business people were generally considered by the local Egyptians to be "rich people," even though many of them were not as wealthy as the local Egyptians had believed. During fieldwork in the Gisr El-Suez area of Cairo, where many textile workshops and stores are located, the author was walking on the street looking for Syrian-owned shops. The author went into an Egyptian clothes shop and asked the owner where the Syrian shops were. He responded: "Why do you want to do research on the Syrians? They are wealthy. They are richer than us." This suggests that the local Egyptians might consider that the Syrians in their country are "normal" people who are in a good economic situation. Egyptians' general impressions of Syrians negatively impacted the lives of the Syrian business people since they could be remnants of the Muslim Brotherhood, but at the same time, they are wealthy people who came to their country and established businesses.

Syrian business people based in Jordan had less tense relationships with the local communities than those in Turkey or Egypt. Jordanians, in general, did

not discriminate or have as many prejudices as some Turks or Egyptians did. Since some famous Syrian dessert shops' names were well known in Jordan before 2011, some Jordanian business people even used Syrian commercial brands to raise their own visibility in the market. For example, an ice cream shop and a *kunafa* store called Bakdāsh and Nafīsa respectively were located on Makka Street in Amman. The signs outside the shop were very "Syrian," using pictures of the al-Umawi mosque or the Aleppo castle. The names of the shop and the images on the signs made customers believe that they were branches of the famous Bakdāsh and Nafīsa shops in Damascus, both being well-known in Jordan. A Damascene bookshop owner and printing industrialist explained why he thought the relationship between the Jordanians and the Syrians was comparatively better:

> Jordanians used to consider Syria as heaven. Jordan imports almost everything from abroad, including from Syria. Before the war, Jordanians even depended on smuggled meat from Syria. So, the Jordanians are not unfamiliar with our products. Furthermore, the Jordanians used to come to Damascus for weekends to go shopping. They have very good impressions of Syrians.

The language barrier and unfriendly atmosphere against Syrian refugees also negatively affected Syrian business people's daily lives in the host countries. Syrian refugee business people were not exclusively immune from those social impediments in the host societies. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, some could balance these challenges with the money they possessed by recruiting translators, showing their strong economic abilities to the locals, or receiving respect from the locals as wealthy people. Others could counter these unpleasant treatments from the locals through their status as professional business people. Finally, it shows that how the locals treat the refugees may not follow their governments' position.

Syrian business people also encountered various challenges from the legal and social perspectives of other non-business Syrians in the host countries. However, how they leverage these challenges indicates a different story from other Syrians. Since they are business people and have established and operated their businesses in the host countries, this provides them with more economic capital and social status as business professionals. Applying the economic resources they have and exploiting their image as business professionals has helped them manage the general difficulties that refugees may meet in host societies.

6. Conclusion

Previous studies on refugees or forced migrants were usually conducted under the framework of "refugees" or "forced migrants" as a whole, without differentiating among the social class background of the people. Although refugees and forced migrants were considered as being in a weaker social position, the analysis of the relocation and settlement of expatriate Syrian business people demonstrates a different picture in terms of refugees' relocation and settlement. First, the political relations between the host–home countries and the economic structure of the host countries affect what political or economic type of business people are relocating to where. This not only moves beyond the discussion on the impact of refugees' pre-existing ties on their relocation but also adds to the understudied influence of host–home countries toward refugees' relocation. Second, Syrian business people have shown their resilience in balancing the challenges through the money or status they possessed. The ways in which they leveraged the difficulties were attributed to the money or status they possessed for their relocation choice, they could not only afford to travel again but also stand the loss of what they had established in the first host country and re-establish again in a second host country. The economic resources and status further assisted them in countering the other social challenges they faced in the host societies. The two findings demonstrate that in terms of Syrian business peoples' relocation and settlement, the economic factor affects both processes. Not only can the economic consideration affect what type of business people are going where, but also the Syrian business people could alleviate or withstand the difficulties they encountered from the hosts with the economic abilities they possessed. Thus, the article argues that the relocation choice and settlement processes of Syrian business people are closely related to their class as business professionals since both their relocation and settlement are affected by their professions. This case shows how refugees' relocation and settlement processes go through a class-based orientation, depending on the specific resources they have and the related considerations regarding their professions. This suggests that refugee policy in terms of resettlement should be more "customized," taking the refugees and forced migrants' social classes into consideration since their relocation and settlement are related to their socio-economic compositions. Taking the socioeconomic compositions of refugees and forced migrants into consideration can facilitate the delineation of resettlement policies for refugees and forced migrants, since the backgrounds of refugees and forced migrants impact where and how they choose to relocate and settle. This research has demonstrated how Syrian business people's relocation choices and settlement process are closely related to their class. Future research could further analyze how the different ways or resources mutually affect the relocation and settlement of refugees and forced migrants.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

Negotiating Survival: Central American Refugee Women in Mexico and the Politics of Deservingness

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Abstract
This article aims to analyse the difficulties Central American refugee women face when applying for refugee protection in Mexico and how they negotiate survival during this process. Claiming refugee protection is an important legal mechanism to ensure survival, but managing this process successfully is difficult, not only because of the bureaucratic complexities but also because of structural and political constraints. Research has addressed the difficulties migrant women face while in transit and in the United States, but there is less analysis on the limitations in accessing refugee protection in transit countries such as Mexico. Therefore, this article examines the main barriers women face by considering the social and spatial specifics of two different reception sites, the southern Mexican city of Tapachula and Mexico City, in the centre of the country. Drawing on ethnographic field research and interviews with refugees and practitioners, this research seeks to understand women's agency in dealing with adversity in reception contexts. Analysis showed that women need to engage in micro-level negotiations with gatekeepers in host communities to gain access to humanitarian assistance and social rights. In addition, it has showed that access to scarce resources depends on personal performance in terms of vulnerability and "deservingness." This demonstrates the complexities refugee women encounter in the local context, but also the role of institutional constraints to humanitarian attention in contrast to an integral understanding of rights. Furthermore, the obstacles faced by refugees and the generation of uncertainty and waiting must be analysed as a political strategy to prevent effective access to asylum in Mexico.

Keywords
deservingness; gender; Mexico; refugee protection; social navigation; social rights; waiting

Issue
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1. Introduction

The last decade has seen an increasing number of refugees fleeing widespread social violence in Central American countries and seeking asylum, mainly in the United States. As a result of US immigration and border control measures, Mexico has become another important asylum destination for people from all over the world, but especially for Central Americans fleeing violence in their countries. Yet, women and their families seeking refugee protection face many obstacles. These challenges are related to existing limitations in access to basic social rights such as housing, healthcare, and work, as well as to weak institutional frameworks. Socially constructed differences such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, but also age and (dis)ability, play an important role. While a general discriminatory context against Central Americans prevails, women are particularly affected by gender-based and sexualised violence, but also symbolic violence that constructs them as racialised and sexualised others (e.g., Fernández-Casanueva, 2017; Frank-Vitale & Nuñez-Chaim, 2020).

While research has been conducted on asylum seekers at the United States border and in transit through Mexico, less attention has been paid to the complex process of reception within Mexico. This article attempts to understand the problems refugee women face when applying for refugee protection in Mexico and to analyse how they negotiate their rights and survival in these circumstances. The application process places refugees in a period of liminality without full rights, which can last more than a year. Therefore, the application for refugee protection in Mexico must be analysed as a twofold process by (a) making a legal claim to protection status before the Comisión Mexicana de Atención a Refugiados (COMAR) and (b) claiming humanitarian aid before international and domestic NGOs and institutions to be able to succeed with the legal claim. Humanitarian help is provided temporarily and at the discretion of national and international NGOs in cooperation with the UNHCR, yet it does not cover basic needs during the entire process. Field research was conducted in 2018 and 2019 in the southern Mexican town of Tapachula and the Mexico City area. As the analysis of the micro-level dynamics of claim-making showed, refugees need to negotiate their deservingness in complex interactions with gatekeepers at NGOs or other institutions. Additionally, opportunities for women to demand rights varied in the regional contexts of reception which makes it important to further analyse them. The analysis is grouped around three central aspects of the claim-making process: First, it examines women's access to information concerning the legal application process and the uncertainty about its outcomes; second, it analyses the negotiation of humanitarian aid at NGOs and shelters; third, it looks at the process of finding housing and work in host contexts. The research is based on a grounded theory approach as it examines the process of access to refugee rights and women's agency in coping with violence and exclusion over time. It considers the underlying institutional context as well as practices, interactions, and consequences from the perspective of the refugee women interviewed. The analysis shows that obtaining refugee protection can be viewed as a highly competitive process that pushes refugee women into impossible places, yet women negotiate their access to rights through their own agency. Furthermore, the production of uncertainty in the refugee application process is part of the actual border regime as it restricts effective access to asylum.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The analysis of refugee women's experiences in reception contexts is based on an interdisciplinary framework that draws on various bodies of literature, such as forced migration and refugee research, feminist geography and critical migration research. Concerning gender and migration regimes, time and space are important variables that frame the reception context of refugee women (Hyndman & Giles, 2011; Mountz, 2011). Feminist geography in forced migration and displacement has pointed to the importance of social space in analysing refugee contexts and embodied experiences. Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar have proposed an analysis of the "gendered geographies of power" (Mahler & Pessar, 2001). Their approach considers three dimensions of analysis to understand gendered agency. The first dimension refers to geographic scales, the second to social locations, and the third to geometries of power, a concept that draws on Massey's (1994/2001) notion to understand how gender operates simultaneously at multiple spatial and social levels (see Mahler & Pessar, 2001, pp. 445–446). While analysing mobility contexts, this also entails considering the social production of "otherness" from an intersectional perspective along the lines of inequalities such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class (Vigoya Viveros, 2016) and at different spatial levels (global, national, regional, and local, as well as interpersonal), which traverse women's embodied experiences (Lutz, 2015; Mahler & Pessar, 2001). Therefore, the analysis of the micropolitics of how women gain access to refugee protection through the negotiation of deservingness seeks to reflect on the particular social space where these negotiations take place.

From a legal point of view, the recognition of refugees is based on institutionalised procedures by which signatory states of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention determine who should receive protection and gain access to rights. According to the definition of the Convention, a refugee is already a refugee before this determination procedure and their official assignment to this legal category; therefore, they should have access to humanitarian help. This must be considered in the analysis since it examines the situation of people who have not yet received official recognition and therefore go through a stage of liminality which jeopardises their access to rights and survival. To analyse these processes of liminality—in Turner's sense, a state in between two social categories—I draw on concepts such as "deservingness" (van Oorschot, 2000; Willen, 2012), "legal non-existence,'' and "uncertainty" (Coutin, 2000), linked to the discretional aspects of accessing rights.

As I describe the social process of accessing rights by people in mobility, I use the terms "refugee" and "migrant" interchangeably in this article. Also, studies on forced migration processes have been critical of the distinctive use of the terms "migrant" or "refugee," as those categories refer to different (not contradictory) aspects; persons fleeing violence can be migrants and refugees at the same time (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Hyndman & Giles, 2011). More than an existing difference, these categories often describe the social phenomena of inclusion and exclusion of outsiders in receiving societies (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018). Furthermore, the creation of distinctions and new categories has been discussed as a tool to limit access to social rights in receiving societies (Zetter, 2007).

In recent years, there has been a larger body of literature devoted to aspects of deservingness in everyday interactions between asylum claimants and staff at institutions providing access to rights—the so-called "street-level bureaucrats"—primarily in the context of welfare states (Ataç, 2019; Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014; Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021; Willen, 2012). I argue that these analyses should be extended to consider the situation of refugees in countries of transit in the Global South, which receive increasingly high numbers of refugees due to the externalisation of borders from the Global North to the Global South and where, as in the case of Mexico, access to benefits and rights is discretional and contested, mediated mostly by NGOs and international organisations. Staff at these institutions facilitates access to basic rights and humanitarian help in interpersonal relations and can be seen as gatekeepers, like those "street-level bureaucrats" described by Lipsky (2010), who evaluate their needs and their "deservingness." Negotiations at the interpersonal level are influenced by existing preconceptions of social differences such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, imbricated in power relations (Fassin, 2011; Foucault, 1994) and the social construction of a categorical distinction between "deserving" refugees and "undeserving" migrants. Furthermore, a helpful concept to understand the agency of people experiencing conditions of liminality and uncertainty is that of "social navigation" (Vigh, 2010), which aims to describe how people interact with highly dynamic or "moving environments." Aside from posing a metaphor, this concept intends to connect the experience of mobility in circumstances of uncertainty and insecurity with the coping strategies of forced migrants. It also bears considering the complex social interactions that take place as migrants and refugees engage in "social negotiations" with others and massage their relations with stakeholders in the field to access help (Schapendonk, 2018, p. 666). Drawing on these research bodies, this study aims to look at the underlying logic of the social exclusion of refugees in Mexico, but also at the agency of refugee women when confronting these processes.

3. Context: Recent Changes to the Migration Regime and Receiving Contexts

The present analysis is framed by a context of ongoing securitisation of migration along the Southern US border and in Mexico. This process is characterised by the externalisation of borders and migration management strategies to Mexico and Central America, which deters migrants and refugees from reaching safe countries of asylum. While Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala are among the top ten nations with the most asylum applications worldwide (UNHCR, 2018), most refugees from these countries seek asylum in the United States. The reasons behind their flight are manifold. Overall crime and social violence cause most asylum requests, while women with children additionally escape forms of gender-based violence in their countries of origin (Carcedo, 2010; Medrano, 2016). Yet, migration securitisation itself contributes to escalating gender-based and sexual violence against women and children in transit countries such as Mexico (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2013; REDODEM, 2018).

Mexico is a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, of the Cartagena Protocol (1984) as well as Plan Mexico (2004) and Plan Brazil (2010), and has incorporated the latest standards on refugee protection in its legislation, such as the 2014 Refugee Act and Regulations (*Ley Sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político* and the *Reglamento*; see Barichello, 2016; Kneebone, 2016). Yet, as has been reported by NGOs and human rights groups, refugees are often not granted rights by government institutions and law enforcement is very arbitrary (Amnesty International, 2018; Brewer et al., 2022; Sin Fronteras, 2016). Furthermore, Mexico, a middle-income country marked by high levels of social inequality, does not have a social policy directed toward asylum seekers. Instead, the Mexican government has cooperated with the UNHCR and with different national and international NGOs to attend to the rising inflow of refugees over the last several years. However, as analyses of local arrangements proved, there are obstacles to inter-institutional coordination for humanitarian aid.

Until 2020, Tapachula and Mexico City were two of four places where refugees could file asylum applications before the COMAR—the governmental institution that processes refugee applications. Tapachula is a southern town of 350,000 inhabitants about 60 km from the Guatemalan border, while Mexico City has about 25 million inhabitants in its metropolitan area. Both are shaped by the presence of numerous stakeholders associated with migration and refugee administration: government institutions like the COMAR and the Mexican Institute for Migration (INM), as well as local, international, and transnational NGOs. Tapachula is the first urban space most refugees and migrants traverse on their routes. Its labour market draws heavily on migrant labour, yet it is strongly segmented and segregated by gender and ethnicity. Most Central American women only find highly stigmatised jobs, such as sex work under exploitative conditions (Fernández-Casanueva, 2009, 2017). Many refugees fleeing violence do not feel safe in Tapachula due to the proximity to Central America and the presence of transnationally operating criminal groups. Compared to Tapachula, Mexico City boasts a bigger infrastructure and a much larger labour market, but transportation and housing are expensive. Affordable housing is only available in the extremely dangerous outskirts of the urban area. Often, people who file asylum claims in Mexico City have already faced clandestine transit along dangerous routes through the Southern Mexican territory. Many of them take the risk, hoping that waiting time and living conditions will be better than in Tapachula, where most

asylum applications are filed resulting in an even bigger backlog. Still, each space poses its own challenges for refugee women, who endure long administrative procedures in very hostile environments.

4. Methods

The study draws on an ethnographic approach and 21 in-depth interviews with refugee women at migrant/refugee shelters in Tapachula and Mexico City. Of these interviewees, ten came from Honduras, nine from El Salvador, and two from Nicaragua. I was also able to conduct follow-up interviews and conversations with refugees, which helped me to grasp the development of the process over time. Refugees were approached at shelters and NGOs, where they received accommodation, food, and advice. Interviewees were provided with information about the study and asked for their informed consent to participate. Additionally, the study draws on six interviews with experts from non-governmental and international organisations who became a second source of information. Other sources were reports by NGOs and other materials on the current context of migration routes and asylum. The study focussed on refugees who presented their applications voluntarily and not after being detained by immigration authorities (the INM). The constant and quick changes migrants and refugees are subject to in Mexico influence their individual circumstances, but also make looking for refugee protection a very fragmented experience, with variations based on place, time, and specific situations. During fieldwork, great variability was observed in terms of the conditions people face. For example, some people interviewed in Tapachula in August 2018, who decided to abandon their asylum process in Mexico, crossed the border into the United States and still managed to apply for refugee protection; those who entered the country in early March 2019 may already have been affected by the Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy, a policy introduced by the US government in 2019 that requires asylum seekers to wait for their asylum process to be complete on Mexican territory (Gandini, 2020). Unpredictable and changing border enforcement practices contributed to uncertainty and the constant worsening of reception conditions. Therefore, this study cannot speak of the situation in general but highlights two realities at different sites in the period between 2018 and 2019.

5. Women's Experiences Accessing Refugee Protection in Mexico

Women on the run, most of whom are mothers with children, must negotiate survival in a complex series of interactions to find help and a new safe space to live. Seeking refugee protection and accessing rights through a formal application is a process that evolves over time and depends on the circumstances in the reception contexts. As Landolt and Goldring (2019, p. 853) argue, the decision to claim rights depends on the conditions migrants face, but also on social interactions and social learning. As the interviews with women showed, their decisions on claim-making depend on the stage of their flight and the knowledge of rules, laws, and local conditions they had gathered during their journey and from previous migration events. Taking into account the peculiarities of the Mexican context, claiming refugee protection can be analysed as a dual process: (a) as a legal entitlement before state institutions and (b) as social entitlement, that is, claiming social rights while still awaiting recognition as a refugee. The focus here is on the second aspect of how women learn about rights and negotiate help to be able to succeed with their legal claims, once they have applied for refugee protection in Mexico. The term "negotiation" is used to show how access to rights and humanitarian aid is not granted but must be achieved by convincing others of their deservingness in a context where humanitarian resources are scarce and subject to discretion.

5.1. Access to Information, Waiting, and Uncertainty

In the early 2000s, Mexico was primarily a transit country for refugees and migrants; a situation which has started to change only in the last decade. The preference to reach the United States was also evident during fieldwork, as most of the women interviewed had not planned to remain in Mexico. Their goal was to get to the United States, where they would use their transnational ties with acquaintances and family members to find jobs and housing. However, to reach the US border on clandestine routes, financial aid is necessary, but also scarce. Some respondents decided to apply for refugee protection after learning that their relatives could not send the resources they needed to traverse Mexico. But also, violence against undocumented migrants on migration routes is notorious (Amnesty International, 2018; Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2013). Most interviewees were not aware of their right to refugee protection in Mexico before fleeing. J., a Salvadoran mother of nine, explained:

> I wanted to get to the border and turn myself into immigration in the United States, so they would help me when they saw R.'s (her son) situation. I know they help disabled children a lot, but here…? I have also received support here. They [the human rights centre] told me it would be better to get my papers in order. They started to tell me about UNHCR, COMAR, and how UNHCR helped women. So, I thought: "Ok, I'll get my papers because, if I leave just like that, I would be risking my and my son's life." (J., Tapachula, 2018)

J. received advice from a human rights organisation where she looked for help to support herself and her

son. As her child had special needs, she was looking for a way to assure his survival by securing food and the necessary medical attention. When entering Mexican territory, most women bound for the United States are caught between the threat of deportation by authorities and the multiple dangers encountered on clandestine migration routes. Travelling with children increases their visibility and makes them ready targets for kidnappers or criminal groups. Therefore, most of them go through a social learning process about the dangers and alternatives of their transit, such as the right to seek refugee protection in Mexico. Some hear about it from other migrants at migrant shelters, some receive legal counselling from NGOs. Others have previously been deported by the INM and have learnt from the experience. Information and knowledge about rights and procedures are key factors in accessing refugee protection, but they are not readily available and no one can prepare women for the uncertainty that the process creates.

During the application process, women experience significant stress due to the unpredictable waiting time and outcome of their application. To keep up with their daily needs, they must develop strategies to negotiate with various actors and institutions that will help them cover their expenses in order to survive. In 2019, the waiting period for refugee status had increased to one year due to the high number of cases, although by law, the decision was supposed to be made in 45 business days. The number of asylum applications has increased steadily in recent years, but the budget and capacity of the authorities have not (Secretaría de Gobernación [SEGOB] & COMAR, 2019; Ureste, 2019). Due to the lack of humanitarian aid and the difficult conditions, women were worried about their future. As one interviewee put it:

> So, they explained to me that refuge, the resolution to the refuge application is granted after fourteen months, which I do not intend to endure, it is very hard. So, I thought: "I'm going to Mexico City; I will get my papers more quickly"—it was worse! But I don't know whether the COMAR authorities say that to test our limits, to see how much we will put up with….Their duty is also to tell us the truth, what the process is like, what is done, how much….Step by step because…you know full well a day is time you lose, which you never get back to do better things. But they don't understand this. They just tell you: "Wait there." How are we supposed to wait? Our situation is not regular. How are we going to work? Where are we going to live? The shelter only takes you in for one or two months, so what about the rest of the year? (A., Mexico City, 2019)

This excerpt summarises the troubling impact of this uncertainty and waiting on applicants. After all, asserting rights for people who have fled their home countries is a matter of survival, and basic needs such as shelter and food must be met to comply with administrative procedures. At the same time, refugees have limited access to work, as they are only granted a formal work permit when their application has been approved. However, they are advised by the UNHCR to look for work. Additionally, applying for refugee protection is a time-consuming process, as applicants had to show up at the COMAR office every week and sign their petition, a form of follow-up that not only limits refugees' physical mobility but also their time allocation. In this sense, queuing and waiting is a way of passing the cost of social (and legal) services onto clients and assuming they have nothing better to do with their time (Lipsky, 2010, p. 95).

5.2. Deservingness: Negotiating Access to Food, Shelter, and Healthcare

During the application process, most women rely on help from humanitarian institutions and financial aid from the UNHCR refugee program to support them while they wait. Help is provided step by step. Women receive first attention in shelters, where they obtain basic services, such as legal counselling, advice on finding work, psychological and medical attention, training, etc. Later, monetary help is available for families for one to three months and provided directly by the UNHCR (in the case of Tapachula) or by the local cooperating NGO in charge (in the case of Mexico City). While women stay in shelters, many services are provided optionally, and women are evaluated by the shelter staff in terms of their adherence to rules, participation in daily routines, and social engagement. Collaborating in everyday chores in the shelter contributes to showing that one is not in a state of need because of laziness, but because of "bad luck" (e.g., van Oorschot, 2000). These informal negotiations impact, for instance, the time refugee women can stay at the shelter. In some places, the length of the stay is limited to several days or weeks, while in others it may be extended to up to three months. Since most women lack the financial resources to pay rent, they try to negotiate extensions and adapt their strategies to navigate these circumstances and the social norms imposed by the context. As an interviewee in Tapachula explained:

> On the eleventh of this month, they told me that I had to leave the shelter because they cannot keep people for long. In my case, they are giving me preferential consideration because of the baby. Because R. [her son] is a special case and…they cannot just throw me out into the street.
>
> Interviewer: Can't you go back to the shelter afterwards? Is that not a possibility?
>
> Well, yes, but the director is always reminding me that I have so many days left and that I can't stay here long and there are other people who need it more than me, so….Yes, the truth is that it hurts sometimes. (J., Tapachula, 2018)

Another woman in Mexico City stated:

> My father always helps them [the shelter] in the gardens. They didn't pay him, but he went to help them every day. So, the engineer [a volunteer at the shelter] had maybe already talked to my father and asked me…whether I wanted to help him work…so we went and started helping him with that. (M., Mexico City, 2019)

Women rely on contributing to the shelter's chores and accepting imposed rules to obtain housing. But they are also aware they need to rely on others to get by and build new networks. This shows how they engage in "active waiting" (Brun & Fábos, 2015) as a process of social navigation to access other possibilities for help. Even though women who find shelter feel lucky since there is high demand and very little space available, some shelter rules put women under additional pressure. One example is a lack of privacy and a space to rest during the day. Yet, rules in this regard were tough, and the staff was trained to enforce them. As a shelter employee explained:

> In general, at ten-thirty in the morning, we close the rooms, all the bedrooms, to prevent people from staying there and to prevent things from getting lost, right? So, rooms are not open until after dinner, which is at eight-thirty or nine in the evening….Rooms are not open unless there is something very, very exceptional going on. (Attendant at a shelter, Mexico City 2019)

These rules affect women and their children who already suffer from the effects of the violence they experienced before and during their flight. Some women had been harassed by gang members, enduring excruciating physical and sexual violence and receiving threats on their and their children's lives. They all showed negative physical and psychological sequelae, which worsens in shelters due to the tense and restrictive environment imposed on residents. The space is controlled through closed-circuit cameras, doors are closed, and people had to sign in when entering and leaving (in Mexico City) or were registered by guards. While shelters provide a temporary place to rest and essential services, this space is still uncertain and contested. Complaints are seen critically, and women fear seeming disobedient or ungrateful. The staff members I spoke to argued that these rules were enforced to avoid problems with care receivers and to keep them busy to prevent them from getting depressed or affected by the difficulties they experience during application proceedings. As the same attendant explained:

> There are cases when they say: "They will give me the resettlement." Then they go to their appointment and come back all disheartened. "What happened?" "No, they say I'm missing this or that." So, then they do "this or that," a health check or something like that, supposedly the last thing they had to do, and say: "Yes, I did it." [But then it is:] "No, now you have to do other things." This means their experience with the application takes a very, very long time. There is high demand and little institutional capacity, so it is difficult to give a positive answer to all these cases, right? This is why the whole model is important, it is important to prevent these results from causing depression or a delicate condition, and instead, we have to look for alternatives.

This shows how staff at shelters and NGOs get involved in the worries of their "care receivers," yet they need to see progress for their effort and decide who gets some of the few resources available. My analysis found that "docility" (shown through respect for rules and collaboration), gratitude, and perceived neediness are three important criteria for these decisions (e.g., van Oorschot, 2000). This is also similar to Lipsky's finding that "compliant clients are treated more generously than demanding clients" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 36). While I cannot offer an exhausting analysis of these interactions here, it is important to show that these relationships are complex and influenced by awareness of the scarcity of resources and the absence of effective access to social rights for everybody. Also, it illustrates how the violence of selective inclusion and exclusion processes by NGOs and other institutions is normalised. How staff at shelters and NGOs deal with these structural limitations also depends on the institutional development and their preparation and motivation, which varies widely from place to place. Some of the shelters have begun working with state authorities to accommodate vulnerable groups while they wait to be sent back to their home country by state authorities as an alternative to detention. While the shelter in Mexico City had professionally trained personnel and more resources compared to others, the financial situation in most of these places is delicate, as many depend on donations. This also impacts their capacity to provide integral social services and their responses to people in need, as these micro-level negotiations in interactions are also marked by unequal power relations, symbolic violence and abuse. In Tapachula, for example, an interviewee who was travelling with her young child reported being sexually harassed by the shelter's caretaker. A situation that additionally endangered her and her son's lives as they escaped pursuit by organised crime groups (Willers, 2020).

But also outside of shelters, women had to negotiate access to rights such as healthcare and medical attention. Even though Mexican asylum law foresees access to social rights like education and emergency healthcare, these are mostly ineffective (see Vera Espinoza et al., 2021, p. 17). Refugees depend on non-governmental organisations as gatekeepers to gain access to public services, which then again implies queuing and waiting.

As an interviewee recounted:

> I am tired of telling them over and over, of filling out forms…and they not helping me. They say they will call, but they never do. (M. R., Mexico City, 2019)

M., who urgently needed surgery due to an infection in her leg, was advised by the hospital to first go to her embassy to get a passport, as an official form of identification was needed before she could receive care. Women interviewed also reported that a common argument made to them for example when looking for medical attention at hospitals was that not even Mexicans would get institutional attention when needed—a phrase I also heard repeatedly during my fieldwork by service providers and NGO members. This shows that refugees who look for access to public services are perceived to compete with the local population for scarce resources. Such a reflection further summarises caregivers' resignation to barriers to accessing rights and hierarchies to access. These rationales of exclusion, forcing and imposing rules on refugees, are manifestations of the micropolitics through which the actors on the ground take part in the *governmentality* of migration, as it is part of the internal bordering that affects people after entering the territory (Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021). The idea that refugees must reciprocate, return, or exchange aid for work as dependents in shelters is consistent with the ideology of humanitarianism described by Ticktin (2006), which aims to relieve the pain of the suffering and is not based on rights that allow making claims, but on mercy. A strategy based on moral imperatives, that "fills in for the failure of political rights discourses and practices" and can have brutal exclusionary effects (Ticktin, 2006, p. 2).

5.3. Access to Labour and Housing

When their time in the shelter is up, women are told to look for a job and a place to rent. They then receive financial assistance under UNHCR's cash transfer program, but only for one to three months. Yet, for refugee women, mostly single parents with children, the combination of achieving gainful employment, childcare and bureaucratic asylum procedures results in a problem that is almost impossible to solve. Furthermore, in reception contexts where they cannot rely on their social networks and their surroundings are not safe, women are very concerned about their prospects in Mexico:

> After three months, the help ends…and I think [about] what I'm going to do if I can't find work. Then, the first thing they ask for is documents, that is, the documents they request, and if I don't have them and look for an informal job, the first thing they do is discriminate against you and it's not the same payment. (E., Mexico City, 2019)

Another interviewee conveyed:

> So yes, and they [the UNHCR] gave me that money and since it's very dangerous here and with everything that happened, the children couldn't go to school. The truth is I'm scared to leave the girl in school because they kidnap so many children. I would have to keep an eye on her, I would have to be there to drop her off and pick her up but if you work you can't do that. (M., Mexico City, 2019)

Their situation in Mexico is complicated by the lack of reliable contacts and job opportunities that would help them settle and access housing and an income that would ensure their survival. All interviewees reported that they faced great difficulty in finding a job that would cover their expenses. Women reported being asked for papers even for the lowest-paying jobs, like cleaning. In Tapachula, a labour market strongly segregated by gender, ethnicity and nationality, the only work offered to Central American women was work in bars combined with sex services. Many employers refuse to give them jobs even after they have been granted refugee status, they do not recognise their documents, or argue that they will be fined if they employ people without work permits. Even though Central American women speak the same language and Mexico has a vast informal labour market, social prejudices, and the social dynamics of othering limit refugees' rights and place them in asymmetric relationships in the host society. The social construction of Central American women as racialised and sexualised others, or of men as violent and dangerous troublemakers, contributes to their exclusion in Mexico (e.g., Fernández-Casanueva, 2017; Frank-Vitale & Nuñez-Chaim, 2020). They experience a constant need to prove something, to show documents where others would not have to, and a requirement to fulfil impossible tasks. While building networks with the local community is a crucial survival strategy in Latin America (e.g., Lomnitz, 1975), it takes time and is not achieved within three months. The complexity of the refugee application and the hostile environment negatively affect women's sense of security and their hope for a new life in Mexico. These aspects become a strong reason for women to move on and try their luck in the United States, resulting in numerous dropped applications throughout 2018 and 2019 (SEGOB & COMAR, 2019).

6. Discussion: Deservingness, Uncertainty, Waiting

The analysis looked at the difficulties faced by women who claim asylum in Mexico to understand the structural and political limitations to effective claim-making at the micro-level of interactions, and to highlight women's agency in this process. However, it also aimed to understand these processes in the context of ongoing securitisation and border enforcement in the North American Migration Corridor, as the conditions faced by refugees

are part of internal bordering practices. The findings of this study suggest three aspects that negatively impact women seeking refugee protection in Mexico. First, the assertion of legal claims for refugee protection involves long waiting times and uncertainty about the outcome. Second, the basic needs of refugee women and their families during this period were not adequately addressed by institutional actors to endure the wait and uncertainty and ensure survival. Third, negotiations of deservingness are complex and intertwined with unequal power relations at the micro-level of interactions, which opens the door to further victimisation.

As a strategy to counteract impediments and pursue their legal claims, women engage in complex interactions to negotiate their deservingness with staff at NGOs, migrant shelters, and hospitals who serve as "street-level bureaucrats" and resource gatekeepers. This is problematic as the need to negotiate social rights rather than be able to count on reliable resources creates the potential for further victimisation of women and their families. Yet, in these contexts, women have few choices. On the one hand, they need to prove their deservingness through enacting a compliant, grateful, and passive victimhood, while on the other they need to be active and resist if they want to survive. This so-called "frame discrepancy" (see Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014; Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021) of reception contexts puts refugees in an impossible place, having to perform their victimhood versus enacting their survival strategies, such as being mobile and moving on to better places. Additionally, by being mobile, people risk becoming suspicious because of their excessive agency in the eye of nation-states (see Ticktin, 2006). As people are required to stay put, their mobility could be made a reason for barring them from asylum not only in Mexico but also in the United States (Chishti & Bolter, 2020).

A look at local application conditions showed that neither Tapachula nor Mexico City provided adequate services and safe spaces for refugee women and families to meet their basic needs. Structural and political violence also became tangible through the consequences of waiting on women's health and hope. Still, as the analysis of women's coping with difficulties showed, it is important to consider the numerous aspects of multiple conditionalities in local contexts, as those may vary significantly (Landolt & Goldring, 2019). Migrant shelters, which offer the first place of recovery, have evolved from short-stay shelters for transit migrants to shelters for people forced to stay put and claim their rights in Mexico. This poses new challenges to these institutions and the services offered to their target population as they face limitations in funding and human resources. Even though conditions have been improving since 2013, when I first did research in the region, the supply of aid has not kept pace with the demand. In 2018 and 2019, families and single mothers were not able to find the help they needed. Instead, people in need had to compete for the little help available. While the nation-state is evading its responsibility to create policies that allow for the social inclusion of refugees in reception contexts, NGOs and shelters are left with the responsibility of providing humanitarian help. Yet, without disregarding the crucial role of NGOs and shelters in Mexico in the provision of basic aid to migrants and refugees, a closer look at the complex constellations of stakeholders in the current migration regime is necessary. This also means giving space to "register the many little lines of force that run in multiple directions, constituting the border regime as a complex and dynamic multiplicity" (Walters, 2015, p. 7). It implies addressing its actors critically, those who take part in the everyday interactions of the social field of immigration and refugee regimes, and disentangling the complex and often contradictory ways in which humanitarianism and migration control are linked in the experiences of migrants and refugees.

While mobility is a form of agency to confront violence (Willers, 2020), waiting has been discussed as a form of enforced immobility and governmentality of "hope" or "uncertainty" (Biehl, 2015, p. 69). In this sense, keeping people waiting in uncertainty has been examined as an important bordering practice, but the lack of access to social rights has received less attention and has been problematised mostly in the context of European welfare states (Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021). Yet not only the waiting, but also associated circumstances have negative effects on refugees, and severely restrict access to rights in Mexico. Reception contexts reinforce the dynamics of re-victimisation and social exclusion, putting women and their children at serious risk of enduring violence and exploitation and becoming a target of organised crime. The generation of unease as a form of "politics of discomfort" is a crucial tool for coercing and disciplining refugees (Darling, 2011). The obstacles faced by refugees are part of it and should receive more attention as a form of internal bordering in the context of externalisation of the US borders to countries of transit.

The highly dynamic field of migration policies and enforcement observed in Mexico over the last few years was also tangible during the empirical research work conducted for this article. While data was being analysed for this article, the Covid-19 crisis exacerbated underlying aspects. Pandemic control measures taken in 2020 led to the temporary closing of borders and the suspension of services, including the shutdown of asylum receptions at the US border under Title 42 of the US Code. In Mexico, migrant and refugee shelters were temporarily closed, refugee applications paused, and working opportunities disappeared (see Gandini, 2020; Vera Espinoza et al., 2021). While it is not possible to include the full array of implications into the analysis at this point, previous fieldwork showed the main lines of exclusion and problematic processes of re-victimisation encountered by refugee women and their families in the current migration regime.

7. Conclusion

The present analysis has shown that, under the current circumstances, refugees in Mexico cannot meet their basic needs while awaiting their refugee application. In the context of ongoing migration enforcement and externalisation of borders in the North American migration regime, structural violence, discrimination, and exclusion in receiving contexts constitute barriers which prevent refugees from effectively accessing protection. Refugee women encounter a multitude of symbolic, institutional, and political forms of violence which make it almost impossible to succeed with their asylum claims in Mexico. The findings show the social context was extremely impactful for people being able to claim rights. The formal right to protection alone is not sufficient to make rights substantive and raises questions about the reliability of these populations to social rights. Moreover, it shows that not only the Mexican south, with its extremely unequal labour markets and poor job opportunities but also Mexico City offer few sustainable possibilities for women. When women arrive with their families, they engage in a process of "active waiting" (Bruns & Fábos, 2015), to look to re-establish their "normal lives" despite the difficulties they encounter. They try to rebuild their social ties and engage in relations with others that can provide them with helpful information. Yet, it is the unpredictability of the outcome that makes seeking asylum in Mexico a risky and expensive endeavour, affordable only to those who have the means or have nothing to lose. Under the current circumstances, refugee protection in Mexico does not offer an "enduring solution" for most of the women interviewed. This raises questions about the role of the nation-state and the intentionality of putting in practice seemingly contradictory policies, such as setting up legal frameworks without providing effective protection systems for refugees or while producing uncertainty and waiting that hinder effective access to asylum (Biehl, 2015; Hyndman & Giles, 2011). It is, therefore, important to understand the findings in the overall context of ongoing changes in migration and refugee regimes which systematically try to prevent people from accessing effective asylum (e.g., Chisthi & Bolter, 2020).

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

"This Group Is My Country": Sri Lankan Tamil Women's Narratives of Isolation and Connectedness in Australia

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Abstract
Refugees lose their networks and support systems on their journey from their home country. In addition, they may experience torture, trauma, and socio-economic hardship. A critical question concerning refugee wellbeing is how refugee belonging, inclusivity, and community connectedness can be better understood, strengthened, and promoted. In this article, we discuss how members of the Tamil Seniors Group, supported by the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), develop social networks in Australia. Based on two focus group discussions, this article analyses their experiences through the intersection of age and gender to elucidate the challenges and affordances of networking and establishing social relations in Australia.

Keywords
agency; belongingness; isolation; refugees; Tamil

Issue
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1. Introduction

People migrate for a host of reasons. The underlying force that drives migration is the desire to live a better life. For forced migrants—refugees and those seeking asylum—this desire is fuelled by conflict, fear of persecution, and the threat of imminent danger. The trauma they face in their home countries is compounded by the journey of their escape and the process of gaining refugee status in a foreign country that can provide asylum. The plight of refugees is arduous, full of uncertainty, lacks security, and often involves separation from family members.

The obstacles that refugees face do not end at the borders of the settling environment. The socio-political factors that govern the public perception of refugees significantly influence settlement. For a long time, essentialist ontologies have been feeding into stereotypes by defining group identities based on the behaviour of individuals. This phenomenon has been a topic of interest in several circles of discourse, highlighting the relationship between elements of these constructed identities and prejudice. In the case of refugees, their identity is constructed by the community in the settling environment based on pre-existing social and political perceptions. Consequently, despite their trauma and the risk of isolation, refugees are most often viewed through a prejudicial lens (Hanson-Easey et al., 2014, p. 371).

For many reasons, public perception of refugees is motivated by xenophobia. The events of 9/11 in the United States were a turning point as they exacerbated Islamophobia (anti-Muslim sentiment), which has since extended to other groups. Refugees were readily assumed to be potential terrorists, with governments

securitizing their arrival and, in this manner, creating a dichotomy of "us versus them" (Poynting & Briskman, 2018, p. 213). The common ground across different groups of refugees is that they inevitably face challenges when settling in a new country. The existing trauma combined with the difficulties of resettlement can result in isolation and a decline in their self-esteem. As will be discussed in this article, the formation of social networks is a means of reducing harm and is a key factor contributing to their sense of belonging and connectedness.

Our research aims to understand how refugees form social networks, focusing on how formal and informal networks inform each other to promote refugee wellbeing. For this research, the formal groups associated with the New South Wales (NSW) Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), an organisation working with refugee groups from diverse communities in NSW, were our starting point. STARTTS has worked with refugees in NSW for more than 30 years and is the partner in this research. It is a specialist, not-for-profit organisation that provides culturally appropriate psychological treatment, support, and community interventions to help people and communities heal from refugee torture and trauma and rebuild their lives in Australia. STARTTS also fosters a positive recovery environment by providing training, services, advocacy, and policy work. When trusting community relationships are deliberately and systemically destroyed, cultivating new positive social relationships in a new environment must also be systemic. STARTTS groups are intentionally formed to provide safe spaces for refugees to connect through participation in trauma-informed group activities that are conducive to the formation of social capital, which profoundly increases resilience to the impact of trauma and increases the wellbeing of the individual, the family, and the community. Groups are facilitated by bi-cultural staff with lived refugee experience who fulfil the roles of setting purposeful group tasks and maintaining a safe environment.

We explored existing literature and conducted focus group discussions with members of formal refugee groups from different backgrounds supported by STARTTS. We heard about their experiences with establishing social relations and networking. In this article, we focus solely on the experiences of older Sri Lankan Tamil women through their own voices. In this way, we aim to position women's agency through their stories and contribute to overcoming negative media discourse and government statements. The government and sections of the media have applied damaging discourses to Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka, some of whom arrived directly in Australia to seek refugee status. Despite negative media discourses and government statements, little research is available about the lived experiences of Tamils in Australia.

Coincidentally, public awareness emerged preceding and during the time that focus groups were held in June 2021. This followed media reports of a Sri Lankan Tamil family of four asylum seekers who had been living in a Queensland rural community (Biloela) where the adults (Priya and Nades) and their young children (Kopika and Tharnicaa) had formed strong social networks. They were forcibly removed from the community in 2019 by immigration authorities and placed in detention in Melbourne to be deported (Sharples & Briskman, 2021). The deportation was halted by legal action, they were relocated to remote Christmas Island and later released on temporary visas in Western Australia, which eroded the connection with their Tamil peers and Australian supporters. At the time of writing, and following a change in the federal government, the family is returning to the welcoming Queensland community of Biloela.

2. Background

Following Sri Lankan independence from the UK in 1948, and after the introduction of the 1956 Sinhala Only Act (the Official Language Act No.33 of 1956), which mandated Sinhalese as the only official language (replacing English), significant numbers of Sri Lankans of Tamil ancestry migrated. Initially, in the 1970s, Sri Lankan Tamil migrants were mostly professionals and university students in search of improved economic and educational opportunities. Persecution of the rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka by Sinhalese-dominated governments gave rise to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which emerged in 1983 and fought the Sri Lankan state for an independent Tamil state and homeland ("Tamil Eelam") in the north-east of Sri Lanka (McRae, 2015; Parashar, 2009, p. 240).

From the 1980s, the migration flow from Sri Lanka altered as increasing violence in Sri Lanka led to Tamils seeking asylum due to fear of persecution during the Sri Lankan civil war (Hugo & Dissanayake, 2017). This conflict lasted from 1983 to 2009, ending with the state's military victory over the Tamil Tigers. The UN estimates that between 40,000 to 70,000 people were killed in the final phase of the war (Hyndman & Amarasingam, 2014), with the Sri Lankan government army being accused of drawing civilians into a no-fire zone before firing on them, killing over 40,000 people, as well as of war crimes, including rape and murder (McRae, 2015).

After the war, minority groups, particularly Tamils and Muslims, continued to struggle to find security in Sri Lanka (Thiranagama & Obeyesekere, 2011). While the war has officially concluded, Tamils continue to seek asylum due to fear of persecution and violence in their homeland (Kandasamy et al., 2020).

A 2020 estimate placed Sri Lanka's émigré Tamil population (the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora) at around 887,000. Most Sri Lankan Tamils are in Canada (over 200,000); however, significant populations are in Europe, in the UK (120,000), Germany (60,000), France (50,000), Switzerland (35,000), and under 10,000 each in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Australia is estimated at around 50,000, with populations concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne. Sri Lankan

Tamils have been coming to Australia as asylum seekers since the 1980s (Kandasamy et al., 2020), with arrivals accelerating during and after the civil war. The Sri Lankan Tamils who participated in this study arrived in Australia as refugees and migrants, and some were sponsored by their children. The number of years since their arrival in Australia ranged from 20 to 30.

3. Literature Review

Successful refugee resettlement is complex, as the capacity to develop effective networks is influenced not only by their experiences but also by socio-political factors and community perceptions (Pittaway et al., 2016). Community integration is significantly dependent on forming social networks that facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge, and resources, which empowers individuals to address their immediate and longer-term needs. Studies focusing on refugee resettlement reiterate the importance of social connectedness (Riggs et al., 2012; Sundvall et al., 2021). Strong social support networks, particularly those developed soon after resettlement, can improve access to healthcare services, reduce isolation, increase life satisfaction, mediate stress from discrimination, and ameliorate poor physical and mental health outcomes, extending emotional, informational, and instrumental support (Hawkins et al., 2021). Thus, collectively successful resettlement has a lasting impact on refugee communities, rebuilding personal and social networks that support increased social, economic, and personal integration (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003). Trust, reciprocity, and the size of one's social networks may not universally predict wellbeing and quality of life, but social participation often corresponds with positive impact (Adedeji, 2021, p. 89).

Some of the first connections refugees form are within their own community. Social support from ethnic in-group members and others has been linked to an increased sense of community, belonging, and access to practical assistance (Menjívar, 2000). Ethnic in-group support has been shown to be important when people from refugee backgrounds experience discrimination by providing a buffer against alienation and loneliness (McCoy & Major, 2003). Friends, participation in ethnic associations, religious institutions, refugee support organizations, and alike can foster networks of people with similar ethnocultural backgrounds. Such groups that interact regularly and are trusted "as you would [trust] family or people known over a long period" (Brettell, 2005, p. 859) act as a substitute for the extended family, where "rights and obligations associated with family ties are replicated" (George & Chaze, 2009, p. 267). These networks provide a safe space for those with experiences of prejudice and discrimination (George & Chaze, 2009, p. 276) and enable mutual experiential recognition in one's native language (Slade & Borovnik, 2018). Such associations offer friendships, rituals, and traditions that provide "communities of memory," nurturing familiarity and a sense of place, and reaffirm localised cultural identity (Brettell, 2005, p. 859). These bonds of similarity facilitate setting down roots in the new country. The question is whether they preserve original cultures in the new country or foster intercultural links (Brettell, 2005, pp. 858, 877). In a study by Doney et al. (2013), participants acknowledged the need to understand the Australian culture and considered that their own cultures and values must be respected within the wider community. Faced with upheaval entering a new country, refugees, to foster a sense of belonging, prioritise being adaptable and flexible while maintaining their culture, which creates safety and continuity (Marlowe, 2014).

To explore the formation and processes of older women refugees' social networks, intersectionality is useful to critically investigate the complexity of groups with multiple similarities and differences through lenses such as age, race, and gender as refugees grapple with the challenges of establishing themselves and their families. Older refugees may "face more losses than gains during resettlement compared to younger as they face rebuilding their lives over in years left before retirement or death" (Slade & Borovnik, 2018, p. 102). Their challenges intersect or can be circular, reinforcing each other. In their new country, language difficulties impede access to information, services, and public transport; constrain socializing, interaction, and freedom of movement—exacerbating loneliness and isolation and complicating language acquisition and integration (Hugman et al., 2004). Older refugees' culture and customs contextualize their resettlement and sense of belonging in their new country as they "seek to assign new meanings to place" in a culturally unfamiliar environment (Lewis, 2020, p. 104). The activities and orientation of networks and organizations regarding wider society help determine whether segregation or integration ensues.

Studies focussing on women specifically highlight a range of socio-cultural factors that support their adaptation as they juggle day-to-day challenges and opportunities (Lenette et al., 2013; Vromans et al., 2021). Hawkins et al. (2021) suggest that refugee women, particularly older women, face unique resettlement challenges in relation to their experiences of past trauma, including war, displacement, and recovery (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2004). In a health profile of newly arrived refugees, women acknowledged the importance of social support but noted barriers in maintaining their networks, such as their perceived low status, traditional gender roles, poor education and over-reliance on male family members (Sudhinaraset et al., 2019).

A review of the literature on Sri Lankan Tamil communities in Australia identified six studies. Three focused on their health-seeking behaviours (Samuel et al., 2018; Silove et al., 1998; Steel et al., 1999); one was on "generation 1.5," who had migrated to Australia as adolescents and thus had different ideas of homeland, and different experiences of identity and family displacement when compared to first generation migrants (Kandasamy,

2018). One study explored the reasons Sri Lankan Tamils choose to migrate and the strategies used to adapt to a new culture while maintaining Sri Lankan Tamil identity (Arasaratnam, 2008), while Kandasamy et al. (2020) brought together life stories and experiences of Sri Lankan Tamil women to investigate the concept of "home" and what the (re)creation of "home" means. There is limited literature focusing on older female Tamil refugees and social networking, and this article seeks to fill that gap in research.

4. Methodology

The article is based on focus group discussions with the Tamil Seniors Group (simply referred to as "the group") supported by STARTTS. Information about the project and its objectives were shared with the group two weeks before the focus group discussion. Seventeen members were present at their local community meeting place on the day of the focus groups, 15 women and two men. To facilitate effective discussion amongst the group members, participants were invited to divide into two groups and move into two separate rooms. Each group was accompanied by a bi-cultural facilitator from STARTTS who also provided language support. There were two researchers in each room to facilitate the focus group discussion. The age of the members ranged from 65–89 years. A large proportion of the women in the group were widows. Regarding their educational status, most had completed an equivalent of the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. The group's newest member joined as recently as seven months previously and the oldest member had been there for five years, since the start of the group. A few of them had been connected to each other and the facilitators through other STARTTS programs for about 15 years. The focus group discussions were transcribed and thematically analysed based on the common themes that emerged from the narratives. Notes taken by the researchers during the focus group also formed part of the analysis. The questions and discussion points for the focus group were based on existing literature on networking and social relations amongst refugees as well as discussions with STARTTS based on their experience of working with refugee groups. The questions ranged from understanding the duration, nature, and reasons for participation in the group and other community groups, to barriers and challenges to participation, as well as the value of different kinds of networks and connections. Given the number of participants, the analysis focuses only on their narratives, which aligned with the conceptualization of the research on themes of belonging and connectedness.

5. Findings and Discussion

In keeping with the research objective of understanding experiences of inclusivity, belongingness, and connection, focus group discussions concentrated on a range of experiences, which we have classified into three broad themes: (a) structural barriers, (b) continuum of isolation and connectedness, and (c) collective agency.

5.1. Structural Barriers

Networking and social relations are often represented in literature as a genderless aggregation of individuals in some geographical space or civic association and not necessarily as a form of collective agency that women may use to provide resources for themselves, their families, and the wider community (Bruegel, 2005). Limited attention has been paid to the relations of power at the macro and micro levels that systematically fail to consider the diversity of socio-political locations of people and their access to resources (Lin, 2001). The need to look at the micro and macro structures was affirmed when the group members spoke about several structural barriers to their participation in the broader Australian society. Several circumstances and experiences prompted the group members to join the STARTTS group. To begin with, the members often did not know where to start when they first arrived in the country. One of the members said:

> So when we come here [Australia], language is a big barrier. We don't know anybody. And we thought, okay, when we are coming together, we can get to know more things. That is the reason we are coming to the group.

Lack of access to information and awareness of systems and laws in Australia jeopardises their situation further and makes their integration in Australia more challenging. This issue is compounded when viewed not only through the intersection of language and culture but also age and gender. This is particularly relevant for this group, where the average age of the members was above 75 years, and most were women. The group acts as a reliable source of information for the members and helps them connect with existing institutions and structures in Australia. Members remarked that they did not know about the services available to them in Australia:

> We don't even know what happens in Australia. When you come to the group, you can get information from each other, from the facilitator—and get to know about the rules and regulations.

The members shared that sessions by professionals on aged care facilities, social security provision, and the public health system benefited them in understanding the eligibility criteria and process for accessing these services. The sessions on health issues such as diabetes, blood pressure, and heart ailments were particularly useful for them as it was personally relevant to a number of members of the group. Besides financial and health issues, some members discussed their difficulties finding employment when they arrived:

> When I came here, I went to TAFE and I studied aged care and hospitality, but I was not able to get employment because I didn't have a driver's licence….Then what I did after that was I started going to the aged care centres and volunteering in different places.

The challenges associated with not having an essential document such as a driver's licence are known to impact the employability of refugees and migrants in Australia. In addition, the inaccessibility of public transport due to linguistic differences or the expenses involved makes it difficult for the elderly in the group to access other groups or go out without waiting for someone to accompany them. This immobility caused due to transport being inaccessible also hinders their access to medical facilities. The members stated that, as older people, they often forget where they need to get off when travelling by bus or train. They would prefer to take a taxi, but it is very expensive and alternative community transport options were unavailable. Covid-19 further exacerbated the challenges experienced by the elderly members of the group:

> I have been running continuously here and there to participate in groups and other things. I used to be active those days and was able to catch the train and bus. Now, my age, as well as the environment, Covid, and other things stop me from catching trains and public transport, so I'm always waiting for someone to take me.

Members reported being part of another seniors group that stopped its activities due to the pandemic and limited funding availability. This leaves them with only this group to meet and "see our people." The pandemic led to reliance on telecommunication platforms such as WhatsApp, Skype, or Zoom, but most said they found it difficult to access such tools. Moreover, they felt that digital platforms "could not match up to face-to-face meetings.''

These challenges and structural barriers reflect what Yuval-Davis et al. (2018) refer to as technologies of everyday bordering into social institutions. They control diversity and discourses and impact the politics of belonging. Access to basic facilities such as education, health, employment, and transport directly affects the sense of belonging of an individual and community. In the context of Covid-19, access to technology has become an essential question to address to enable communities to remain connected and able to access essential public services.

The narratives from the focus groups reflect the diverse range of issues the Tamil elderly women face in Australia. The functionalist ways in which they bond with each other are indicative of deep-rooted systemic problems they are confronted with in their everyday lives. The narratives reflect their experiences with both macro and microstructures in Australia.

5.2. Continuum of Isolation and Connectedness

Narratives from the focus group suggest a complex continuum of isolation and connectedness that the members of the group navigated. This was reflected in the reasons they stated for how and why they joined the STARTTS group and how membership benefits them. Apart from the structural barriers discussed above, members also navigated the sense of isolation and loss of community. This was further exacerbated once their children and grandchildren started living an independent life, as one of the women narrated:

> I have only one son, and he's married, and he's in his own world. I feel really isolated and alone; I wanted to get rid of that isolation and loneliness. So, I wanted to go to a group, and I searched for this, and I joined this group. Here I find friends and friendly people. They have a structure, and there is a culture in this group.

Another member said:

> I have been in Australia for 20 years. Throughout my life, I have spent my time with my grandchildren and children and fulfilled all their duties. I didn't go out, and I thought that was my world. And like, all of a sudden…children went to work and…to classes and schools. Now, I think this is the first time I'm coming and joining a group, and I'm really enjoying being here.

Several women in the group carried out caring responsibilities for their children and grandchildren and did not necessarily feel isolated and lonely until they lost these roles and responsibilities. They felt a void once they were no longer required to devote their time and attention to their children or grandchildren. One of the women from the group put this succinctly: "We felt we had some time [on our] hands, and we didn't know what to do." The women's narratives in the group suggest that their role in social reproduction limited their opportunities to go beyond the confines of their home and family. The external networks offered them opportunities to recognise and value alternative ways of being.

The group presented them with new roles, prospects, and connections. The members echoed that they gained opportunities to engage in different activities and physical exercise, giving them a reason to laugh and talk to each other. Every Friday they also go for a walk, which was appreciated, since "it's not a part of our culture, going for a walk." As one of the members said:

> We forget what is happening at home, at least once or twice a week we come here, we forget everything when we are outside, we can be ourselves and be happy.

Joining the group provided the members with a community of people they could relate to culturally and linguistically. As one of the women said:

> I was happy, but not to the extent of being with [one's] own people. So I was really craving for a group to join. Then, at the CMRC [Community Migrant Resource Centre], I met a Tamil-speaking community worker. That is where we found [STARTTS group facilitator]. And after that, we came to join this group and, yeah, now I feel I am somewhere, [a] belong[ing] sort of feeling, because this is a Tamil community—Tamil people—and I brought my husband who is also really keen in coming every week, but today he didn't come.

For a few, the pathway to the group was through the STARTTS counsellor; others found out about the group through friends who were group members. The group creates a sense of community for the members and serves several emotional and functional purposes:

> Most of us are widows. We feel lonely. So when I come to the group, it makes me feel better [to meet everyone].

While a number of members lived with their children, others lived alone. One of them said:

> If something happens to me, you won't know anything. If anything happens to me, nobody will know. It's very important for me to call and keep in touch with my friends [from the group].

The members came together to help each other financially and emotionally at times of death or illness of a family member. They also celebrated birthdays and other significant achievements in each other's lives. There was reciprocity, solidarity, and trust amongst the members. The disconnection from the broader Australian society was expressed through cultural differences and the loss of a way of life. As one of the members expressed:

> Because back home we were used to talking even to unknown persons. They talk to you when you meet each other. So, trust is there. But here, even your neighbours don't talk to you. Loneliness is there. When you come here [to the group], it feels like we are back home.

The group helps them make social connections in a place where they find it difficult, beyond their own community members, to connect. According to Anthias (2006, p. 21), "a sense of, or concern with, belonging becomes activated most strongly when there is a sense of exclusion." The sense of identity that this Group brings them and the sense of exclusion within Australia was further affirmed in one of the narratives:

> And the other thing is, when we come here [to the group] as Sri Lankans, we talk about our country, this country [Australia], our stories back home and stories here, so it's a full-on thing for us. So, it's so fun to be here.

The differentiation between "our country" and "this country" indicates the distance felt from the latter. Another member shared the same sentiments saying:

> We are all one nationality; a Tamil-speaking group. That's also a big thing for us. Because the language connects us all. So for us, it is easy to connect to each other, to talk, and you know we simply share the same wavelength, so it's easy for us.

The group draws them out of the sense of isolation and enables them to make meaning of their lives in Australia by drawing on the experiences of the collective. It provides them with a safe space to discuss their experiences and contributes to their mental wellbeing. One of the members said:

> Coming to this group is helping me to relax and be happy and reduce isolation. Meeting and seeing other people has so many other benefits for mental health. When I'm at home I always think I'm the worst; I have a lot of depressed feelings. When I come to the group, and when I see other people, I think their problem[s] [are] much bigger than mine.

Some members of the group attributed their mental wellbeing to the care that they receive from members of the group:

> It's sort of taking our attention away from the bad things and mak[ing] us feel active. The people are showing care, the kind of care you get from a mother; that kind of care. Yesterday I had the injection [vaccine for Covid-19]; people called me and asked me "how are you, how do you feel?" So they show some kind of care. There is genuine care in the group.

The group also helped its members process memories of war in Sri Lanka and the associated trauma:

> Back home, we were living in fear throughout the time—bomb blasts, more problems, shell attacks, and all those things. We hold our lives and come here and feel…sort of a relief and safe and happy environment. We are safe meeting in this place; this country provides us with a lot of opportunities, a lot of things. Because of this group, we forget what we had in our country—the bombing, the shooting.

One woman recollected how the house she used to live in was bombed while her daughter was inside. On her way back from her teaching job at school, she was

informed that her daughter had been taken to the hospital. She said:

> I was crying and sat down at that place, and someone carried me back home. My daughter got nine stitches on her nose, but by the grace of God, she is alive. I came from that kind of environment to here, and we are sort of okay here.

These statements reflect the resilience showcased by so many refugees who have experienced war as they move from their country of origin and endeavour to establish their lives in a new country. The trauma of these experiences combined with the experience of loneliness and isolation in Australia created this complex continuum of isolation and belongingness. While the group members referred to Sri Lanka as home, they constantly referred to feeling safe and secure in Australia. The feeling of home, connectedness, and belongingness was associated with Sri Lanka and the Tamil community. When asked what comes to their mind when they think of the word "home," one of the members replied: "The community, the Tamil language, and the culture that brings us together." Isolation marked their lives in Australia, which the group helps the members navigate. According to Humpage and Marston (2006, p. 125), "the politics of belonging is always unfinished business because the processes of inclusion and exclusion are social [struggles] where social identities and selves are being made and remade.''

The group increased its members' social connections and networks, alleviated their stress, contributed to a sense of self, improved their mental and physical health, increased their access to information, and contributed to a decrease in loneliness. While these are important functions of the group, it is also indicative of the limited opportunities for members to meet and engage with other communities within Australia despite having lived there for 20 or 30 years.

5.3. Collective Agency

The group provided support and valued the women's talents and what they produced—an acknowledgement of who they are and their value as individuals, and it fostered pride in their achievements. When asked what they did in the group, immediately there was a cluttering noise of bags being opened, and the women brought out and laid valuables on the table, including striking colourful embroidery, sewing, beautiful drawings, artwork, and coloured pictures.

The group also gave them the confidence to resist the perceived norms of social behaviour expected of them. A group member hesitantly spoke about the judgements from members of her community when she first actively started travelling around the city alone and participated in group activities. Initially, these judgements from community members impacted her, but gradually she learned to ignore them. The women in the group harnessed a collective sense of agency; they extended solidarity and cared for each other. They went beyond their roles as mothers, grandmothers, and caregivers. They resisted and challenged ageist and gendered norms of mobility and participated in group activities. The group contributed to their positive sense of self and provided a space to be creative and re-imagine their role in their community and broader society in Australia. According to Kannabiran (2006, p. 54), "the politics of belonging encapsulates within itself the politics of becoming." She refers to the politics of belonging/becoming as a transformative process that forges a larger community of belonging beyond borders and merges histories of oppression as well as those of resistance, creating new measures of solidarity and shared citizenship (Kannabiran, 2006, p. 57). The women in the group challenge the everyday processes of bordering and exclusion through their politics of belonging/becoming.

The bonding between the group members should not be misconstrued as inward-looking and conservative. While they may be experiencing isolation and exclusion in Australia, this does not limit the group from looking outward and connecting with other groups and communities. The group was eager to connect with and learn about diverse cultures and religions. Before the pandemic, they participated in a few multicultural events organised by STARTTS. One of the members stated:

> We chose to go because we wanted to know what other religions are talking about. What is their policy? What are their beliefs? We wanted to know, particularly in this age. We wanted to know—this is our belief; what do other people believe? We wanted to go and see things. That's why we went.

They now have plans in place for future activities:

> We are going to bring the other seniors from other cultures, with their foods and cultural things, and pair them with our people's food and their culture; we are going to do an inter/multicultural program.

The members showed an openness to other religious and cultural beliefs. Some indicated that they would be comfortable adopting other ideas and belief systems if they helped them live better lives. The support from members within their group gives them the confidence to reach out to other groups.

Besides connecting with other communities, the group also highlighted their role in supporting newly arrived migrants and people seeking asylum. They want to be more proactive and support people based on their own experiences of migration to Australia. The following was echoed by both men and women in the group:

> There's a huge gap between the Tamils who come as refugees and Tamils who have already settled here.

> If we seniors have an opportunity to go and meet those newly arriving asylum seekers, refugees, and newly arriving migrants, we would be able to share their experience, one thing. Second thing we can teach—most of them are having a problem with the language and the culture and the tradition of a new country. Sometimes we can help because we have been here for a while, we would like to do that. The third thing is [that] this is a multicultural country; most of the cultures are different, so better to mix up with other cultures.

While group members provided narratives of the challenges they experienced, they also highlighted their resistance to the structural barriers to social inclusion. They take the initiatives to connect with other groups and are eager to extend support to newly arrived migrants. In this way, they harness their collective agency to fill a systemic gap and make a public investment by reaching out to other communities, especially newly arrived refugees and those seeking asylum. They also dispel the notion that only women utilise neighbourhood and informal social networks by extending their networks beyond their families and their own community networks. The women's narratives in the group require broadening our understanding of political participation by showcasing their capacity for supporting new migrants in Australia. Their narratives foreground hope against a backdrop of social exclusion and isolation.

6. Conclusion

The notion of belonging needs to be understood from the differential positions from which it is viewed and narrated (race, gender, class, stage in the life cycle), even concerning the same community and the same boundaries and borders (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005, p. 521). This is evidenced by the fact that although not all group members had arrived in Australia as refugees or were from refugee-like backgrounds, their experiences were very similar even after having been in Australia for several years. Social inclusion is about emotional and affective ties, but it is also about feeling safe and accepted in a community and feeling that one has a stake in the community's future (Anthias, 2006). In this context, the idea of home for group members remains complex. The passage of time did not erode their connections to their homeland while aspiring to make a home in a new land. The term "home" is used in a multivalent sense by the women both in past and present terms and in terms of safety and risk (Perez Murcia, 2019). Memories of what they left behind in Sri Lanka and the need to connect with a country that has provided them with a sense of safety create a continuum of isolation and belongingness in the two lands. The group acts as a bridge for these experiences, where they can find a sense of their home in Sri Lanka while also sharing the experience of being in Australia. The group collectively navigates experiences of isolation and the constant search for belongingness. The tension between the "home" left behind and the "home" in Australia may never be resolved, but the group functions as a support system for those who have experienced displacement.

Our exploratory project provides a springboard to further research opportunities which continue to explore questions of belonging and how government and community responsiveness might be facilitated by groups experiencing dis-connection in their aspirations for inclusion. There is increasing exploration of ethical dilemmas of university research and the means to ensure accurate representation of refugee voices, accountability to participants, and reciprocity (Dantas & Gower, 2021). Rather than being an inhibitor of research, ethical considerations provide opportunities for research that emphasise collaboration, privileging voice and co-production as normative. Our research is contextualised to Tamils in Sydney but offers some leads for conducting research with other refugee groups. For the specific participants of our research, co-production can be built from the grassroots, including the Tamil community and an organisational support base, such as STARTTS. This would focus on ensuring that the research questions posed are relevant to aspirations and include the intersections, where appropriate, of race, gender, and age. Clearly, the women who participated in our research face significant challenges that can continue to be highlighted from their own perspectives over time and the geographies of settlement.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Short Note

Moving to Portugal: Conditions for Refugees' Identity (Re)Configuration Processes

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Abstract
This research seeks to explore how mobility interacts with identity (re)configuration processes. We take a comprehensive look at the impact of mobility on refugees' adaptation of their own social identity in diasporas. To build our analytical standpoint, we will discuss theories of mobilities and identity studies and explore points of intersection between relational approaches to collective identities, theories of co-constitution of social formations, and mobile subjectivities and narratives about diasporans' experiences, refugee hosting, and conditions for identity (re)configuration. Next, we apply our analytical perspective to a selection of existing empirical research on refugees in Portugal. We were able to identify some clues that indicate the relevance of our approach and suggest two lines for further empirical research in the Portuguese context.

Keywords
hosting country; identity (re)configuration; mobilities; refugees; transit

Issue
This short note is a part of the issue "Networks and Contested Identities in the Refugee Journey" edited by Niro Kandasamy (University of Sydney), Lauren Avery (University of York), and Karen Soldatic (Western Sydney University) as part of the (In)Justice International Collective.

1. Contributing to a Theoretical Update of Refugees Studies

This short note provides a theoretical update of refugee studies in the Portuguese context. It results from a literature review of research about conditions for identity (re)configuration processes of refugees currently hosted in Portugal. A refugee is a person that is "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, n.d., p. 3). An asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection and might become a refugee if they are granted that protection (UNHCR,n.d.). Since 2015, internal and external conflicts in a number of countries increased the mobility of people seeking refuge in Europe (Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2022). Europe has a long history of receiving refugees (UNHCR, 2022) but with very different realities at the national level. A longitudinal perspective of the mapping and flows of refugees is a complex intertwining of several factors where geopolitics and international relations play a central role. Nevertheless, other factors are important, especially the presence of historical ties and social networks (Fransen & de Haas, 2022) and, to a lesser degree, the asylum and refugee national policies (Spinks, 2013).

Refugees and asylum seekers are cases of forced mobility: "In the scientific literature, the term forced (or involuntary) mobility is used as an umbrella for characterizing human flows in which there is an element of coercion" (Tsapenko, 2021, p. 526). Forced migration and mobility are, therefore, situations where the degree of choice and agency is very low or absent. This is the case of refugees and asylum seekers because, as the Norwegian Refugee Council states, they move due to an "uncontrollable situation of being forced out of their homes and may not be able to ever return" (as cited

in Baranik et al., 2018, p. 117). Refugees and asylum seekers tend to have very limited opportunities to make choices. Their decisions regarding their trajectories and destinations are strongly conditioned by contextual constraints and chance (Spinks, 2013).

Shaped by these circumstances, their mobilities are typically dangerous, long, uncertain, and precarious. The central premise of this paper is that their mobility experiences frame their identity (re)configuration processes.

We conceptualize identity from a socio-anthropological perspective, convening the works of authors like Barth (1969) and Goffman (2008), who stress the relational interactive features of identity, with inputs by Rutherford (1990) and Bauman (2001), who have emphasised its unfinished and fluid character respectively. Identity can be described as a floating signifier for multiple meanings present in "different, even competing perspectives of individuals, collective bodies, ties and processes" (Conde, 2011, pp. 2–3). Identity configuration is, therefore, a central process in both individual biographies (Dubar, 2000) and public social life. Regarding the movement dimension in the identity process, Manderscheid (2015, based on Foucault) claims the influence of the socio-political realm in the construction of the mobile subjectivities, and Easthope (2009, p. 61) states that "both mobility and place are essential components of identity construction."

These last two theoretical perspectives drive us to the realm of the mobilities paradigm, which is central to our approach. The theoretical background of mobilities studies remains scarcely used in research focusing on the identity reconfiguration processes of refugees (for some exceptions see DaĞtaş, 2018; Declich, 2018; Nunn et al., 2016; Sharma, 2021). Considering mobility as a central human feature, mobilities studies address the conditions, meanings, and effects of the increasing movements of people in the second half of the 20th century particularly. Hannam et al. (2006, p. 2) argue that "mobilities and moorings are complementary and occur dialectically." The use of the plural form of the concept of mobility—mobilities—is precisely to highlight its diversity and reach. This current of thought pays special attention to the social inequalities associated with mobility.

The concept of "mobility justice" (Sheller, 2018) addresses the uneven situations and processes that mobility can involve, from the freedom to travel full time of the digital nomads to the forced mobilities of refugees. Nevertheless, until recently was not usual to see interpretations of refugees' situations from a mobility focus. As Scalettaris (2009, p. 52) states, "within refugee policies, mobility is considered incompatible with solutions to displacement. So refugees and asylum seekers are considered not to have the agency to actually be mobile." Their situation has been more embedded in perspectives highlighting dominance, structure, and discrimination. But "refugees today (i) travel longer distances, (ii) are less likely to seek protection in a neighboring country, (iii) are less geographically concentrated, and (iv) are more likely to reside in a high-income OECD country" (Devictor et al., 2020). Therefore, to represent refugees as victims, helpless people completely deprived of agency, is a common depiction that might not correspond entirely to reality (DaĞtaş, 2018; Mainwaring, 2016; Wimalasiri, 2021).

Agency is a central piece in identity (re)configuration. In this respect, Nóvoa (2018) claims that mobility can potentialize identification with a place (in his study, the development of a European identity) only when it empowers individuals. A great number of refugee and migration studies highlight how identity and agency can be affected by these conditions. In fact, a stigmatization process starts immediately when people are labeled as refugees (Goffman, 2008; Scalettaris, 2010) and all the loss of control over circumstances that happen in most trajectories. Later, while settled or resettled, there is the more subtle *looking effect* of local citizens (Anderson, 2019) that maintains the otherness boundary. Being a refugee is a condition that tends to devalue not only the social status of the individuals but also their self. Nevertheless, some authors point out cases where, surprisingly, the agency of refugees is "evidenced in their own accounts of their journeys" (Mainwaring, 2016). This perspective is particularly interesting from an intersectional perspective. Women refugees coming from patriarchal societies are usually represented as especially vulnerable. However, these women refugees can experience a plurality of situations during displacement that empowers them (DaĞtaş, 2018; de Almeida, 2021; Mainwaring, 2016) because they come into contact with different realities having left their familiar and/or religious background behind. In the same sense, the decision-making power of refugees—when they have the opportunity to make decisions—is influenced by their journeys. "Decisions are made on the run, and may change according to circumstances encountered during their journey, or information (real or rumoured) heard along the way" (Spinks, 2013, p. 9). This demonstrates how pre-established ideas about refugees' lack of agency can be reductive and how it can be relevant to look at their mobility experiences as a possible important element in the process of redefining their identity.

2. Testing Our Model: Portuguese Refugee Studies in the Light of a Mobile Subject

2.1. Methods and Context

After having identified the problem, we decided to essay an application of this analytical framework. We are involved in two academic research projects about refugees hosted in Portugal. We are, therefore, familiar with the current research on the Portuguese case. We essayed a comprehensive revision of this literature regarding the intercross of mobilities and identities. We retained data from ten documents. In Table 1, we present a list of the materials used. Three are institutional reports (ACM, 2018; de Oliveira, 2021; Sousa

Table 1. List of references analysed.

Reference	Type	Language	Keywords
ACM (2018)	Technical report	Portuguese	flows; hosting; integration
de Almeida (2021)	PhD thesis	Portuguese	trajectories; hosting; identification
Moleiro and Franco (2017)	Newspaper article	Portuguese	escape; hosting; desidentification
de Oliveira (2021)	Technical report	Portuguese	refugees hosting; flows
Ribeiro (2017)	Master's dissertation	Portuguese	hosting policies; flows
Rodrigues (in press)	Master's dissertation	Portuguese	families; hosting; autonomization; identification
Santinho (2011)	Phd thesis	Portuguese	hosting policies; trajectories; boundaries
Santinho (2013)	article	Portuguese	trajectories; hosting; identification
Sousa et al. (2021)	Research report	Portuguese	hosting policies; institutions practices; (des)identification
Teles (2018)	Master dissertation	Portuguese	hosting policies; institutions practices; (des)identification

et al., 2021), one is a newspaper article, and the rest is academic research. The dimensions vary from extensive studies involving official registers, in the case of the reports, to small samples of less than 20 cases, in the mainly qualitative approaches of the other researchers. In the first phase, we collected descriptions and narratives about the trajectories and displacements of the refugees (dimension mobilities). Then, using thematic analysis, we categorized the collection of excerpts accordingly to the presence of references to belonging, identity processes, or bounding (dimension identities).

To contextualize our object of study, we will briefly present the national context. Portugal has a long past of mobility. Despite its small size and scarce economic resources, Portugal has founded the oldest of the modern European colonizing empires spread over many locations that now belong to more than 50 nations (Haag, 2012). Through the 20th century and already in the 21st century, the country has experienced intense emigration flows mainly connected with the search for better economic conditions and escaping the Portuguese colonial war (Rocha-Trindade, 2000). After the democratic revolution of 1974, the country witnessed an intense flow of entrance into the country of inhabitants of the former colonies. This movement greatly affected Portuguese society (Rocha-Trindade, 2000). Soon after these movements and with the entrance into the EU (at the time EEC), Portugal started to receive immigrants from Europe, especially from Eastern countries. In recent years, immigration has continued to grow. Currently, Portugal can be described as "a country of migration" (Góis & Marques, 2018). However, this general label hides fundamental geographical differences: More than 70% of the foreign population is located on the coast (de Oliveira, 2021) and some neighbourhoods in the bigger cities can be described as cases of super-diversity (see Dias, 2019), but in other locations, mainly in the interior, the welcoming of immigrants is a recent phenomenon.

Portugal has a short history of hosting refugees and asylum seekers. The first experience was in the context of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) when flows of political refugees sought asylum (Santinho, 2011). Since then and until very recently, this social situation has remained marginal, contrary to what happens with migration. During the last decade, when the number of refugees entering Europe started to rise, Portugal was one of the least chosen countries as a destination. In 2020, Portugal had only 0.2% of the EU applications for international protection (de Oliveira, 2021). The country's location can be a reason since more faraway destinations demand resources that diasporans cannot afford (Müller-Funk, 2019). Interestingly, this situation doesn´t correspond to a lack of national interest in hosting refugees. Unlike several other EU members, the Portuguese government has offered to take many more refugees than it was asked to. Yet the refugees themselves seem unenthusiastic about coming and staying in Portugal (Goldberg, 2021; Nyman et al., 2017). Portugal presents an interesting case study due to these specificities and contradictions. How does the lack of will to move to the country affect the experiences of refugees currently hosted there?

2.2. Results

We will now present the more significant results of our narrative analysis.

2.2.1. Double Forced Mobilities

Refugee's mobilities to Portugal are doubly forced. A common theme of all the studies revised is that Portugal is not chosen as a destination country and is also often an unknown country (de Almeida, 2021; Santinho, 2011, 2013; Sousa et al., 2021). In several cases, Portugal had been just a transit country until refugees' circumstances made them stay and settle. Therefore, moving

to Portugal is, in fact, a non-reality. Most refugees in the country didn't move to Portugal; they ended up *stuck* there. This can increase the constraints and conflicts experienced. Some stay against their will; others choose to return to the road with all the risks and loss of rights associated with escape (Teles, 2018). Refugees' escape movements from Portugal are not a marginal phenomenon; 31% of the refugees received between 2015 and 2017 did so (ACM, 2018; Moleiro & Franco, 2017). This *escape mobility* has not been addressed yet by research, so this information was obtained from the media and in studies about the role of hosting institutions (see, e.g., de Oliveira, 2021) that do not present interpretations and details of this phenomenon.

2.2.2. Agency vs. Territorial Forced Mobility Policies

Agency is a central element in refugees' trajectories but is commonly absent. Hosting policies can worsen the lack of agency refugees typically experience. Despite it being more common to experience refuge as a disempowerment condition, de Almeida's (2021) results show a different process in the case of the women and girls she interviewed. As they were travelling alone, their role in the mobility decisions was central, allowing them to have an important agency (de Almeida, 2021). De Almeida concludes that when women have the power to decide and to lead their own trajectory, this affects both their travel experience and, later, their self-esteem, family relations, and settlement. In the case of women, refugees having agency has specific impacts since it challenges the dominant model of gender relations in their countries of origin. However, we found that the power to make decisions about mobility and settlement is central in other research and, when lacking, can bring great dissatisfaction. Ribeiro (2017) claims that Portuguese hosting policies seem to serve the national interest better than refugees. Hosting is ruled through a national plan (ACM, 2018) in which several principles are defined. One is an option for a decentralized policy based on the rationale that it is important to integrate this population involving the community directly and that small-scale solutions can work better (ACM, 2018). Consequently, refugees are currently placed in different localities of the country according to partnerships created between the government and local municipalities or social institutions. The process includes a matching between the profile of the refugees and the institutions/locations but other factors come into play, such as the availability of places and the connection with social innovation projects that aim to repopulate deprived areas (ACM, 2018). In the end, refugees are being pushed to move into the nation's interior when they do not wish to do so. Recent research followed 13 refugees' families and concludes that all of them wished to stay in Lisbon; however, they had to move to 11 other municipalities all over the country where they had no contacts (Rodrigues, in press). This territorial forced mobility can represent a de-identification practice, especially when refugee communities and networks of belonging are still absent in Portugal (Santinho, 2011). De Almeida's (2021) interviews in Fundão and Castelo Branco (two inner country councils in the centre of Portugal) illustrate how loneliness and isolation are present in the refugee's daily life. So at the same time that our findings highlight that agency in displacement is very important to effective settlement, we discover that the current status quo of Portuguese hosting policies deprives the individuals of agency and promotes the internal displacement of refugees.

3. Final Remarks

To conclude, the application of our perspective has provided evidence that mobility plays a central role in the complex puzzle of refugee hosting. In the narratives explored, we find relevant connections to what the literature states regarding the central role of agency in empowering diasporans, the complexity of trajectories, and the invisibility of the experiences of refugees on the move. We discover that the refugees moving to Portugal face additional barriers that make their mobilities even more complex: They come to an unwanted and unknown country, usually just expecting to cross it as a transit country. When they end up staying here and even being officially welcomed, they are subjected to relocation policies that internally displace them against their will. The considerable number of cases of escape mobilities from Portugal indicates this dissatisfaction. Among those who stay, this situation has the potential to unbalance the fragile social and institutional connections that they have established. Representing much more than just a physical move, mobility experiences reconfigure paths and social and family relations; they redefine refugees' plans and their futures. Therefore, we believe it is essential to hear from refugees to more deeply understand (a) the profound effects these mobility experiences have on identity processes and (b) their expectations and representations of Portugal. These results will be important not only to enlarge scientific knowledge but also to inform a possible redesign of the Portuguese refugee hosting policies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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