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The Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration (OxMo) is an independent, academic journal engaging in a global intellectual dialogue about forced migration with students, researchers, academics, volunteers, activists, artists, as well as those displaced themselves. By monitoring policy, legal, political, and academic developments, OxMo draws attention to the realities of forced migration and identifies gaps in refugee protection.

Disclaimer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

This volume of the Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration brings together eight contributions from authors across the globe, spanning legal, academic, and creative approaches. Together, they present timely and diverse perspectives on forced migration, drawing out its real-world nuance and intricacies. Following the footsteps of previous volumes, this one seeks to provide a space for overlooked perspectives, voices, and forms of knowledge. As editors-in-chief, we were struck by the cross-cutting themes that emerged from this volume across different disciplinary approaches. We invite you to make sense of the richness of the pieces in your own way, and perhaps to dip into something you might not normally read.

Several pieces in this volume address the complexities and tensions of migration in terms of temporality, permanence, and notions of home. This is explored through the lens of protracted internal displacement in the piece on Syria, where Alhamodi, Kadan, and Rashwani consider how people understand home and grapple with "dwelling" after years of internal (often multiple) displacement. It is echoed in Açıkgöz's exploration of the aspirations of Ukrainian youth in Poland, whose ideas of the future oscillate between return, integration, and secondary migration. In the creative section, Nabila's review of the film *Chitra Nodir Pare* highlights the themes of loss of identity and homeland following Partition. These contributions skillfully highlight the tension between the draw of return home and the necessity of building a dignified life in exile. The everyday life of homemaking in the face of impermanence is illustrated in the volume's cover image, kindly shared with us by Alhamodi, Kadan, and Rashwani, of an adapted housing unit from al-Rayyan camp in Syria, where residents leave shoes by the doorway as plants climb across the ceiling.

This volume's contributions also highlight situations of cyclical migration, and the mixed and complex reasons people leave their homes, threatened by environmental disasters, climate change, or socio-political situations, but also sometimes pushed out due to economic deprivation or lack of work. Ferdous' academic review on Bangladesh explores these themes with a focus on the role of remittances in the country, both on the macro level of national development and the micro level of the household, providing a nuanced perspective on the outcomes of forced and mixed migration. In the legal section, two pieces present opposite responses to such questions of mixed and circular displacement. Hasan and Sara's critical analysis of the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty acknowledges the climate crisis and risk of environmental damage and disaster faced by Tuvalu, highlighting that the Treaty allows for circular migration and for Tuvaluans to work, live, and study in Australia - although it is not without criticism. Meanwhile, Möller's piece on reforms of the EU asylum system discusses how it risks eroding procedural safeguards, failing to acknowledge the complexity of individuals' forced displacement and threatening fundamental human rights principles.

Putting together this volume raised important editorial, ethical, and epistemological questions about memory and telling the stories of others: who produces knowledge about forced migration, and how. Many of the pieces centre voices and narratives, taking seriously the affective dimension of forced migration and asking how displacement is understood by those experiencing it. This was especially stark in the creative section, where Maurya's photo essay reflects on the author's visit to a museum honouring Korean 'comfort women', which links history and remembrance to current-day advocacy and resistance.

Another contribution comprises an interview transcript bookended with thought-provoking reflections from the author, Kayeye. In this moving piece, which employs an empowerment framework, the author's reflection on dual positionality and voice, as well as the interviewee's testimony, are eloquently presented, highlighting the human impact of Australia's punitive detention policies. The interview data of the two academic pieces also draw out the voices and perspectives of Syrian IDP camp residents and young Ukrainian refugees respectively; the former additionally includes a short but impactful reflective section, detailing one author's daily commute through - and family links to - al-Rayyan camp, and their collective reasoning for writing about shelter and home as scholars of reconstruction and building materials. Together, these works ask what counts as legitimate knowledge and whose histories are erased or marginalised. Epistemologies of displacement shape how forced migration is understood and governed.

Forced migration cannot be reduced to a humanitarian crisis: it is a deliberate result of a system built on unequal access to movement, resources and belonging. Its normalisation is starkly visible in the protracted displacement and ongoing genocidal ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, as well as Sudan's mass internal displacement. We hope that the pieces in this volume demonstrate that forced migration is not a peripheral or temporary aberration, but a structural feature of the global order - at once an outcome and an instrument of governance. As the volume's contributions remind us, displacement is not only a condition of movement but is also experienced as a condition of being: cyclical, enduring, marked by permanent impermanence across generations. Public denials of displaced peoples' narratives, through silencing, erasure, or censorship, reveal the epistemologies of displacement in action. Power shapes what is known, rendering lives disposable and undermining claims to home.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all involved in making volume 12 possible. To the contributors: your effort, care, patience, and scholarship - despite facing challenges this past year - are deeply appreciated. We also thank our editors for bringing their time, energy, attention and creativity into each of the pieces presented, collectively shaping this volume.

Hannah Geddes and Joanna Pienkowska
Co-Editors-in-Chief
Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration

LAW

Human rights erosion under CEAS: A critical analysis of the new EU asylum law in light of non-refoulement, freedom of movement and procedural rights

Lina Sophie Möller

Abstract

The European Union's recent reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), adopted on 14 May 2024, aims to standardise asylum procedures and alleviate pressures on southern EU member states. However, it has been the subject of considerable debate with regard to its potential to compromise the human rights of asylum seekers. This analysis examines sections of the reform that may be inconsistent with key human rights principles, such as non-refoulement, freedom of movement, and procedural guarantees.

The article identifies five areas of particular concern, namely: (1) The newly introduced Screening Procedure preceding the asylum procedure does not afford applicants the right to appeal or other legal safeguards. (2) The concept of 'safe third countries,' which serves as a formal rejection ground for an asylum application, has been significantly downgraded. The reliance on diplomatic assurances and the sufficiency to meet the standards only in parts of the territory increases the risk of refoulement. (3) The accelerated border procedure is susceptible to erroneous rejections due to a reduced depth of examination. (4) Prolonged detention at external borders during the procedure raises concerns about unlawful deprivation of liberty. (5) Time restrictions on the right to appeal an asylum decision, coupled with limitations on the suspensive effect of return decisions, weaken the right to an effective legal remedy and exacerbate the risk of unjust deportation.

Introduction

The European asylum system is facing an epochal change: on 14 May 2024, the European Council adopted a legislative package on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), paving the way for a reform that not only changes legal procedures but also puts humanitarian principles to the test. While efficiency and standardisation are being used as political arguments in favour of the reform, from a human rights perspective the reduction of protection standards threatens to erode fundamental rights. The ten secondary acts[1] are the product of a lengthy negotiation process.

Agreement existed as to the need for reform: the massive overload of the

1 (Eurodac Regulation, Reception Directive, Asylum and Migration Management Regulation, Asylum Procedure Regulation, Qualification Regulation, Screening Regulation, Crisis Regulation, Resettlement Regulation, Border Return Regulation, EU Asylum Agency Regulation)

member states, which were largely responsible for carrying out the procedures under the Dublin system, led them to deliberately disregard their obligations. Many states lacked the willingness to accept refugees in accordance with European standards. The lowering of human rights standards for protection seekers that accompanied the reform, therefore, worked in the states' favour. However, many lawyers doubt that this lowering will bring about the desired reduction in the number of arrivals.[2] More likely is that the conditions at the EU's external borders will worsen as a result of access restriction and externalisation. The following discussion focuses on particularly critical parts of the reform.

Screening

The Screening Regulation provides for a seven-day preliminary procedure at the EU's external borders, which consists of a check of identity, health, vulnerabilities, biometric data and security (Article 6(6), 9 ff. Screening Regulation). The screening determines which procedure is applied: regular asylum procedure, accelerated border procedure or immediate return procedure (Article 14 Screening Regulation). The procedures differ in terms of procedural guarantees, burden of proof and intensity of the substantive examination. Despite the potential consequences of the screening decision for those affected, there is no right to appeal against the screening decision. Additionally, counselling services are not provided. This seems critical in light of the procedural rights to an effective legal remedy and a fair trial guaranteed by Article 47(1), (2) CFR and Article 13 in conjunction with Article 3 ECHR.

Safe third country

The Asylum Procedure Regulation (APR) provides extended options for rejecting an asylum application on formal grounds without assessing eligibility for protection (Article 39(1) APR). One example for this is rejection based on the possibility of seeking protection in a safe third country under Article 38(1)(b) APR. The reform has substantially lowered the requirements for considering a third country safe. First, there is no longer full alignment with the 1951 Refugee Convention (cf. Article 59(1)(d), Article 57(2) APR) which seems critical in light of Article 78(1) TFEU, which requires full alignment of secondary asylum legislation with the relevant international treaties and particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention. Second, the guarantees demanded for only need to be provided to non-citizens (Article 59(1)(a)-(c) APR). It suffices if protection is only guaranteed in parts of the state or to the specific group to which the applicant belongs (Article 59(2) APR). However, the trustworthiness of a state that only guarantees human rights sectionally is questionable.

2 *Lehmann, K.* (2023) 'Deutschland sollte der GEAS Reform nicht zustimmen'. *Zeitschrift für Ausländerrecht* 2023(8): 275(275); Kluth, W.; Breidenbach, W.; Junghans, J.; Kolb, H. (2024) *Das neue Migrationsrecht*. Nomos. Para. 697; Pichl, M. (2024) 'Europas Werk und Deutschlands Beitrag'. Verfassungsblog 15 May 2023. Retrieved from https://verfassungsblog.de/europas-werk-und-deutschlands-beitrag (accessed January 2025).

According to Article 59(7) APR, there is a presumption of safety if the third country enters into an agreement and provides a diplomatic assurance of compliance with human rights. Such assurances are not legally binding (cf. Ben Khemais; Toumi). The ECtHR stipulated that they had to be sufficiently explicitly formulated and subject to an effective independent monitoring mechanism in order to rule out a violation of Art. 3 ECHR (Othman; Khayadarov). In Ilias and Ahmed, the Court found that relying solely on the categorisation as a safe third country without examining the merits of the case was unlawful. As a minimum, access to an effective asylum system in the third state had to be established. Thus, the reliance on diplomatic assurances poses a further risk of refoulement.

Added to this, the burden of proof for refuting certainty in individual cases lies with the applicant. This does not take into account that asylum seekers are often incapable of providing sufficient evidence and that their ability to present such evidence may be impaired by traumatic experiences.

The application of the safe third country concept presupposes that the individual applicant has a connection to the third country (Article 59(5)(b) APR). Concepts such as the Rwanda model, which provides for the general transfer of arriving asylum seekers to a cooperating third country where their claims are processed,[3] are therefore not feasible. On another positive note, original proposals which assumed that transit was sufficient to establish such a connection were rejected. According to Article 59(9) and Article 38(1)(b) APR the concerned third country must be willing to accept the applicant. Therefore, agreements modelled on the EU-Turkey[4] deal are likely to multiply and increase dependence on third countries in the future.

External border procedure

According to Article 45(1), an accelerated asylum procedure must be carried out at the EU's external borders if there is a suspicion of deliberate deception by the applicant (Article 42(1)(c) APR), if the applicant poses a threat to public safety or order (Article 42(1)(f) APR) or if the recognition rate of the country of origin is below 20% (Article 42(1)(j) APR). For this, only administrative decisions are taken into account which paints a distorted picture in view of the high rate of judicial corrections. Voluntarily, states can apply the border procedure to almost any protection seeker (Article 41 APR). The procedure takes 12, maximum 16, weeks (Article 51(2) APR). In the interest of accelerating the process, the depth of the examination is compromised. Geographical distance not only reduces the

3 *Angenendt, S.; Biehler, N.; Bossong, R.; Kipp, D. and Koch, A.* 'The Externalisation of European Refugee Protection'. SWP Comment No. 13 March 2024.

4 *The EU-Turkey Deal aimed to curb irregular migration to Europe by returning asylum seekers arriving in Greece to Turkey, in exchange for financial aid, visa liberalisation talks, and the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the EU, cf. EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/ (accessed January 2025).*

possibilities for support from civil society actors, but also facilitates a lowering of standards according to the motto 'out of sight, out of mind.'

Detention

For the duration of the screening (Article 4(1) Screening Regulation), the border procedure (Article 43(2) APR, Article 10(4)(d) Reception Directive) and the return border procedure following a negative decision (Article 4, 5 Border Return Regulation), those seeking protection may not enter the territory. It is up to the states to choose measures to ensure this (cf. Article 4(2) Screening Regulation). However, alternatives to deprivation of freedom of movement under detention-like conditions contrary to Article 6 CFR and Article 5 ECHR are difficult to imagine.

The distinction between a permissible restriction and an unlawful deprivation of the freedom of movement depends on an overall assessment of the facts, in particular the type, duration, effects and intensity of the measure. Here, the poor living conditions and poor quality of procedure in camps in the vicinity of external borders (cf. J.A.; A.D.) must be taken into account. Noteworthy, Article 5(1)(f) ECHR considers detention to prevent unauthorised entry as a justifiable ground. However, this does not exempt the state from observing the principle of proportionality.

In Amuur, the ECtHR found that the asylum seeker's remaining option to leave the country for a third country at any time does not rule out a violation. While the state's interest in border protection is legitimate and a short waiting time therefore reasonable (Ilias and Ahmed; Saadi), detention for the entire duration of the border procedure, as expected under the new law, is hardly justifiable.

Legal remedies

The applicant can lodge an appeal against negative decisions (Article 67(1) APR). The shortening of time limits to five to ten days in certain cases (Article 67(7)(a) APR) hampers the chances of success. A negative asylum decision is directly linked to the issuing of a return decision (Article 37 APR). However, lodging an appeal against the asylum decision in the accelerated and border procedure does not automatically suspend the enforcement of the return decision (cf. Article 68 APR) in clear contradiction to the ECJ's case law in Gnandi. In A.C., the ECtHR stressed that such suspensive effect only upon application is prone to error and harbours the risk of a violation of Article 13 in conjunction with Article 3 ECHR.

Conclusion

The CEAS reform is characterised by efforts to impede access to asylum. This approach is due to the collision of state interests in reducing the number of arrivals with a high de facto entitlement to asylum once the procedure has been completed.

Avoiding substantive examination of protection needs, e.g. by expanding the criteria for inadmissibility, is devastating in view of the consequences of a negative asylum decision. Presumptions of safety and a reversal of the burden of proof further threaten the principle of non-refoulement. Against the background of procedural rights, the shortening of appeal periods and limitation of suspensive effects appear problematic. In addition, the predicted overburdening of external border states carries a risk of a persistent deterioration in standards. Violations of the freedom of movement in the context of detention at borders appear likely. Despite pro forma compatibility clauses, the regulatory content of the CEAS reform seems hard to reconcile with human rights.

It remains to be seen whether the ECJ will consider aspects of the reform to be incompatible with the CFR and demand procedural guarantees beyond the text. This dependence on courts to uphold fundamental rights is seen as a further weakness of the reform, which jeopardises the desired uniformity and transparency.

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Dignity in displacement: Analysing the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty

Adeeba Hasan & Sara

Abstract

The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty tackles the issue of climate-related migration by offering a dignified relocation pathway for Tuvaluans to Australia. This agreement allows Tuvaluan citizens to reside, study, and work in Australia while receiving access to essential services like education and healthcare. It is notable for recognising Tuvalu's sovereignty, even as climate change threatens its territory, thereby setting a new standard in international law for the recognition of statehood despite environmental challenges. Additionally, the Treaty promotes circular migration, enabling Tuvaluans to maintain connections with their homeland and contribute through remittances and skills gained abroad. However, the Treaty faces criticism, including concerns about Australia's influence over Tuvalu's security decisions and the need for sufficient support systems for migrants. Its effectiveness will depend on managing the outflow of skilled workers, providing adequate assistance to new arrivals, and preserving Tuvalu's cultural identity. The Treaty also holds broader geopolitical significance, potentially shaping future climate-adaptive agreements in the Pacific. By integrating climate adaptation, migration rights, and strategic interests, the Falepili Union aims to provide a humane and balanced approach for those facing displacement due to environmental changes.

Introduction

Tuvalu, home to just over 11,000 people, faces a dire climate crisis. Despite its stunning scenery, rising sea levels pose an existential threat. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports a 0.2-meter rise in global sea levels over the past century due to global warming and melting ice caps.[1] Tuvalu also suffers from increasingly severe cyclones and storm surges, endangering its ecosystems and livelihoods. Urgent action is needed, as Tuvalu's struggle foreshadows the global impact of climate change.[2]

This grim forecast reflects the broader challenges of climate-induced human mobility, a concept that remains largely undefined in international law. Climate-induced mobility, often driven by rising seas and extreme weather, blurs the line

1 *Giovanni Prete (2024) 'Tuvalu's Sinking Reality: How Climate Change Is Threatening the Small Island Nation' earth.org. January. Retrieved from https://earth.org/tuvalus-sinking-reality-how-climate-change-is-threatening-a-small-island-nation/ (accessed January 30, 2025)*

2 *Emily Wilkinson, and others (2016) 'Climate-Induced Migration and Displacement: Closing the Policy Gap' odi.org. October. Retrieved from https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1411/files/documents/2023-11/10996.pdf (accessed October 10, 2024)*

between displacement and migration. Although these individuals face life-threatening conditions, they do not fall under the legal definition of "refugees" outlined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention,[3] which applies only to those fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.[4] This gap leaves climate migrants, including Tuvaluans, without clear protections or rights under international law.

The term "refugee" is frequently linked to stigma and reliance on aid, an image that Pacific Islanders actively resist.[5] Instead, they want "migration with dignity," asserting their identity as skilled and valued contributors rather than victims in search of shelter. However, current frameworks fall short of addressing their long-term needs. Labour migration schemes, such as New Zealand's Seasonal Worker Program and Australia's Pacific Labour Mobility Program, offer only temporary opportunities without providing permanent residency or secure futures for those facing existential threats.[6]

In this context, the Australia–Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty offers a promising alternative, providing a pathway for human mobility that extends beyond short-term labour schemes. The treaty not only addresses climate-driven displacement due to rising sea levels but also includes security measures for emergencies such as natural disasters and military threats. By supporting permanent resettlement with dignity, this agreement enables Tuvaluans to preserve their cultural identity while reframing them as empowered participants rather than victims. As the impacts of climate change intensify, such initiatives may serve as models for addressing the complex intersection of climate mobility and refugee protections on a global scale.

Leading the way: The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty

The 2023 Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty[7] stands as a pioneering example of addressing climate-induced mobility within the Pacific region. This treaty creates a “human mobility” pathway, enabling Tuvaluan citizens to live, study, and work in Australia. Upon arrival, they gain access to education, healthcare,

3 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention).*

4 *Colin Yeo (2024) ‘What is the refugee definition in international and UK law?’ freemovement.org.uk June 17. Retrieved from https://freemovement.org.uk/what-is-the-legal-meaning-of-refugee/ (accessed January 30, 2025)*

5 *(2014) ‘Pacific Islanders reject 'climate refugee' status, want to 'migrate with dignity', SIDS conference hears’ abc.net.au 5 September. Retrieved from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-05/pacific-islanders-reject-calls-for-27climate-refugee27-status/5723078 (accessed January 08, 2024)*

6 *Helen Dempster and Ober Kayly (2020) ‘New Zealand's "Climate Refugee" Visas: Lessons for the Rest of the World’ cgdev.org 10 January. Retrieved from https://www.cgdev.org/blog/new-zealands-climate-refugee-visas-lessons-rest-world (accessed January 08, 2024)*

7 *Falepili Union Treaty (Australia-Tuvalu) (9 November 2023).*

and essential income and family support.[8] More than just a relocation agreement, the treaty aims to foster long-term economic and social integration while safeguarding the identity and dignity of Tuvaluans. By promoting climate cooperation, enhancing national security, and contributing to regional stability (cf. Article 1), the treaty reflects a holistic approach to shared challenges.

Notably, the Treaty is underpinned by the traditional concept of Falepili, which emphasises good neighbourly relations, mutual respect, and a collective sense of duty. These values are deeply embedded in Pacific Island cultures, promoting community-driven solutions to shared adversities. The concept of Falepili serves not only as a guiding principle for bilateral cooperation but also as a symbol of solidarity and shared responsibility in the face of climate-induced displacement. The use of the word Falepili in this treaty gains more significance if we consider past endeavours of the two nations, like Australia's support to Tuvalu during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as when Cyclone Pam displaced nearly 45% of the population in 2015. This historic agreement highlights the evolving role of regional partnerships in addressing global challenges through culturally grounded frameworks. However, the treaty raises concerns about Tuvalu's sovereignty, Australia's influence over its security decisions, and unresolved resource allocation. These issues cast doubt on the treaty's long-term effectiveness in addressing Tuvalu's needs amid climate change.

Article 2 of the Treaty highlights shared challenges from climate change to stability, security, and prosperity. It recognises Tuvalu's sovereignty despite rising sea levels (subsection 2(b)). This provision reinforces both nations' commitment to addressing climate issues and protecting Tuvaluans' livelihoods, ensuring their continued safety in their homeland.

Article 3 of the Treaty establishes a "special human mobility pathway" allowing Tuvaluans to live, study, and work in Australia with access to essential services. In return, Tuvalu must align its immigration controls with international standards, supported by Australia. Unlike employment-focused schemes like PALM, this pathway includes non-working migrants or older adults, ensuring legal and psychological security. It enables migration without requiring climate impact proof, fostering solidarity and climate justice. The Treaty supports circular migration, strengthening homeland ties while contributing through remittances and skills. It aligns with global frameworks like the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration,[9] the Agenda for Sustainable Development, and

8 Douglas Guilfoyle and Alex Green (2023) 'The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty: Security in the Face of Climate Change … and China?' EJIL: Talk!. 28 November. Retrieved from https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-australia-tuvalu-falepili-union-treaty-security-in-the-face-of-climate-change-and-china/ (accessed October 01, 2024).

9 United Nations General Assembly, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, UNGA Res 73/195 (19 December 2018) UN Doc A/RES/73/195.

the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility.[10] These frameworks endorse migration as a key adaptation and risk management strategy in the face of climate change, advocating for safe, rights-based migration pathways.[11]

Article 4 of the Treaty addresses security and stability, outlining mutual responsibilities for both nations. Australia pledges support to Tuvalu during major disasters, health crises, or military threats (Article 4(1)).[12] Tuvalu must consult with Australia before entering any security-related agreements, reinforcing Australia's role in regional security and diplomacy. It aligns with Australia's strategy of managing regional security dynamics, particularly amid China's growing influence.

Implications and future prospects for the Tuvaluans and the world

The effectiveness of this Treaty for Tuvaluans ultimately depends on factors such as support from the Tuvaluan diaspora in Australia, mitigating the risk of brain drain in Tuvalu, and ensuring equitable access to migration pathways for the most vulnerable populations.[13] Notably, the Tuvaluan government has shown interest in similar agreements with New Zealand, indicating a broader strategy for addressing climate-induced mobility within the Pacific region.[14]

Many Pacific peoples prefer to stay due to their deep cultural and ancestral connections to land and sea,[15] and the Treaty acknowledges these cultural ties. It pledges to support Tuvaluans in remaining in their homeland with safety and dignity, while also providing migration options for those who must relocate. The Treaty sets an important precedent for future climate-conscious and security-aware agreements with other Pacific nations. It highlights the geopolitical significance of such treaties amid regional strategic competition and the responsibilities of developed nations in supporting climate-impacted countries.

10 *Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (adopted 2021).*

11 *Dun, O. and Gemenne, F. (2008) 'Defining environmental migration'. Forced Migration Review 31 p.10-11, for a deeper exploration of this continuum. Felli, R., and Castree, N. (2012) 'Neoliberalising adaptation to environmental change: foresight or foreclosure?'. Environment and Planning A: international journal of urban and regional research, 44 (1), pp. 1-4.*

12 *Findlay, A.M. (2011) 'Migrant destinations in an era of environmental change'. Global Environmental Change, 21(1).*

13 *Black, R., Adger, W.M., Arnell, N.W., Dercon, S., Geddes, A., Thomas, D.S.G. (2011) 'The effect of environmental change on human migration'. Global Environmental Change, 21(1).*

14 *Cathrine Dyer and Andreas Neef (2023) 'The evolution of Aotearoa New Zealand's policy discourses on Pacific climate mobilities from 2006–2021' Frontiers in Climate 10 January. Retrieved from https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/climate/articles/10.3389/fclim.2022.1000632/full (accessed January 12, 2024)*

15 *Merewalesi Yee and others (2023) 'Why Pacific Islanders are staying put even as rising seas flood their homes and crops' The Conversation 10 January. Retrieved from https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/news/59274-why-pacific-islanders-are-staying-put-even-as-rising-seas-flood-their-homes-and-crops (accessed January 12, 2024)*

A band-aid solution?

While the treaty reflects a progressive model, it lacks direct confrontation of the root causes of the displacement. Australia, a nation with a relatively modest population and economy wields a staggering global carbon footprint. This sunburnt country is responsible for a jaw-dropping 4.5% of the world's fossil carbon dioxide emissions. Even more shocking is that 80% of these emissions come from its colossal fossil fuel exports, effectively turning Australia into one of the planet's leading dealers of climate destruction.[16]

Recent reporting unveils an alarming statistic: from 1961 to 2023, Australia's fossil fuel exports spewed out a jaw-dropping 30 billion tonnes of CO2.[17] Further, under current government policies, Australia is on track to ramp up its exports by a staggering 50% by 2035, adding fuel to the global climate fire. Combined with its domestic emissions, this would devour 9% of the remaining global carbon budget required to limit warming to 1.5°C. Despite this, Australian politicians, industry moguls, and media mouthpieces routinely downplay the country's climate sins, claiming its contribution to global warming is negligible compared to the world's heavyweights. This argument is not just flawed: it is dangerous.

Although the Treaty is a positive step towards addressing climate-related migration, it falls short of tackling the root issue, climate change itself. As a major emitter, Australia's approach focuses on adaptation rather than mitigation. Instead of prioritising long-term measures such as reducing fossil fuel dependency and enforcing stricter environmental policies, the Treaty offers an alternative whose long-term success remains uncertain. While migration pathways provide relief, they cannot replace decisive climate action. Without a stronger commitment to reducing emissions, adaptation efforts may prove inadequate, leaving affected populations with few sustainable options for the future.

The road ahead

The Treaty seeks to address both nations' needs but faces criticism, particularly over Australia's influence on Tuvalu's security. While some see this as a strategic move by Tuvalu to leverage Australia's concerns about China, it raises sovereignty issues. Australia's approval is required for Tuvalu's defence partnerships, potentially resembling neo-colonial control. If the treaty focuses on climate migration, it should not extend into security matters, as this could undermine Tuvalu's autonomy and erode trust in international agreements.[18]

16 Renée Cho, (2019) 'You Asked: If CO2 Is Only 0.04% of the Atmosphere, How Does it Drive Global Warming?' Columbia Climate School 30 July. Retrieved from https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2019/07/30/co2-drives-global-warming/ (accessed January 17, 2024)

17 Climate Analytics (2023). Australia's global carbon footprint.

18 Castles, S. (2008) Afterword: 'What Now? Climate-Induced Displacement after Copenhagen'. McAdam J. (ed.), *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Hart Publishing, 2008.

Another significant concern is the unclear support system for Tuvaluan migrants relocating to Australia. Reports from inquiries, including those by the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, raise concerns that the existing small Tuvaluan community in Australia may struggle to support new arrivals without additional resources.[19] Experts, including Professor Stephen Howes, stress the importance of government aid for these migrants, alongside the need to monitor their social and economic progress. Although the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has indicated plans to help Tuvaluans integrate into the workforce and maintain cultural ties, the specifics of this assistance remain under development, leaving gaps in clarity.

The treaty establishes a pathway for Tuvaluans to reside in Australia, expanding migration opportunities beyond traditional labour agreements. However, significant uncertainties remain regarding the long-term sustainability of this pathway, particularly concerning access to education, healthcare, dual citizenship, and political rights. Moreover, the treaty lacks strong enforcement mechanisms to ensure its effective implementation, meaning its provisions risk being perceived as symbolic rather than substantive. For the treaty to be a meaningful and reliable framework, it must be backed by robust legal commitments that guarantee its promises are upheld.

Increased migration threatens Tuvalu's long-term independence, raising concerns about self-determination. A declining population could weaken its sovereignty and governance. This highlights the need for global recognition of climate refugees and legally binding protections for vulnerable nations. While addressing climate migration is essential, any treaty must respect national sovereignty and security. Efforts to impose external control under the pretext of climate aid could set a dangerous precedent. A balanced approach should safeguard migration rights, ensure legal accountability, and uphold Tuvalu's autonomy.

Finally, while the Treaty's "human mobility with dignity" provisions aim to address the needs of Tuvaluans, they fall short of tackling the broader challenges posed by climate change, despite Tuvalu's acute vulnerability.

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19 Brickle, L. and Thomas, A. (2014) 'Rising waters, displaced lives'. Forced Migration Review 45, February 2014.

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ACADEMIC

From shelters to home: IDP perspectives from northern Syria

Yousef Alhamodi, Bakry Kadan & Abdulkader Rashwani

Abstract

With the Syrian crisis ongoing for more than thirteen years, much scholarly focus has been trained on the lack of prospects for durable solutions for those displaced outside of the territorial borders of Syria. Less attention has been given to the plight of those displaced inside Syria – internally displaced people. This paper seeks to address the paucity of literature on IDPs in Northern Syria with a specific focus on their housing needs. Questionnaires and focus group discussions were carried out with a sample of IDPs selected from across four camps in the north of Syria to discuss their perspectives on more permanent dwellings; the implications of building new homes; and their understandings of possibilities of return. Findings indicate a tension between a need for more permanent dwellings in displacement and a desire to return to the original homeland if the current crisis ends. The study calls for greater engagement with IDPs by the humanitarian and development sector in addressing their need for dignified dwellings in displacement.

Introduction

The ongoing Syrian conflict since 2011 ranks amongst the most destructive wars since the Second World War with mass displacement both within and beyond Syria's territorial borders. According to UNHCR (2021), the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Syria has reached 6.7 million, the majority of whom live in tents and temporary housing. In Idlib province alone there are an estimated 1.9 million IDPs (UNHCR, UNOCHA 2022).[1] Other analysts suggest that the number is more than double the estimates provided by United Nations (UN) agencies (Netjes, 2022). Displacement is not a one-time event. Multiple displacement is very common for the majority of IDPs in camps. Whilst 12% have been displaced once or twice, 65% of IDP households have been displaced between three and seven times. Nearly a quarter have been displaced eight or more times (Action for Humanity 2023). The relationship between multiple displacements and the availability and access to dignified housing solutions in situations of protracted mass displacement remains under-researched. We know very little of what types of shelter are appropriate under such circumstances and whether alternatives such as subsidising rent in urban centres or facilitating mobility across borders are better options for meeting their needs. This paper provides a modest contribution to such debates.

1 *While IDPs are entitled to the enjoyment, without discrimination, of the same rights and freedoms, under international and national law, that other citizens enjoy in their country (Fagen 2011), for IDPs in Northwest Syria such legal entitlements seldom translate into actual access and enjoyment of rights and freedoms.*

Recognising the magnitude and complexity of the Syria crisis and the need for alternative ways to deliver humanitarian assistance inside non-regime held areas of Syria, the UN passed Security Resolutions 2139 and 2165 to establish the Syrian Cross Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) in 2014. Northwest Syria thus presents a distinct arena for humanitarian activity given the contested character of the territory. The IDP camps are not governed by the UN agencies one might expect such as IOM or UNHCR. Rather 87% of the camps are designated as informal settlements (UNOCHA 2022). The needs of the IDP camps are theoretically met through the SCHF which enables humanitarian partners including Syrian NGOs to expand and support the delivery of humanitarian assistance across border and conflict lines. In practice, a more disjointed picture emerges. The camp coordination and camp management cluster of UNHCR describes the informal settlements in the Northwest of Syria as being "disorganised, self-settled, […] lack[ing] site planning, services and camp management" and "critically overcrowded." This is unsurprising given the diminishing resources available through the SCHF. Within five years of the passing of UN Security resolutions 2139 and 2165, Western donors resigned themselves to the al-Assad regime recapturing Northwest Syria and funding through the SCHF ground to a halt (Netjes, 2022). Four years later, this prediction has yet to transpire. It is in this context of protracted displacement, characterized by resource constraint and limited oversight of the informal settlements in which IDPs have sought refuge, that this article addresses the challenge of determining dignified dwellings for displaced people.

Data for this study was gathered from 210 respondents (camp residents) through questionnaires across four camps in and around Azaz city in the North of Syria – al-Rayyan (69 respondents); Tell Jabin (66 respondents); Sajo (61 respondents); and Yazı Bagh (14 respondents) in April 2021. For further discussion, three focus group discussions were arranged with key informants in four displacement camps in the north of Syria, split along gendered lines given the conservative traditions observed by camp residents.[2]

The research team employed purposive sampling in recruiting participants for the focus group to ensure a gender-sensitive perspective on the camps and to include voices of those residents in the camps who engage with the wider population of the camp in their day-to-day lives. The first group (FGM1) comprised seven men living in al-Rayyan camp. The profile of the participants included a lawyer working in Azaz, a nurse working in the camp clinic, a schoolteacher newly graduated from Sham University, an imam of a mosque in the camp, a muezzin from the camp, two neighbourhood administrators, and a person with a high school certificate. The second group (FGM2) was made up of

2 *The questionnaire survey gathered data from residents across all four camps. However, the focus group discussions excluded participants from the Yazi Bagh and Tal Jabin camps, as these are informal settlements lacking an organized administrative structure conducive to facilitating such group dialogue sessions.*

six men living in Sago camp. This group included the deputy director of the camp, two teachers working in the camp's school, the imam of the camp mosque, and two neighbourhood administrators. The third group (FGW3) comprised seven women from across the four camps. All the women were both university students studying at Sham University in Azaz and had responsibilities as housewives for household management. The focus group discussions precluded the participation of individuals residing in the Yazi Bagh and Tal Jabin camps, as these informal settlements lack an organised administrative framework that would facilitate the coordination and execution of such collective dialogue sessions.

The commute and catalyst: Witnessing refugee camp expansion sparks reflections on sustainable housing solutions for IDPs

On the daily two-hour commute from Gaziantep to his place of work as a researcher at al-Sham University in Azaz, one of the authors passes by the adjoining al-Rayyan camp. The camp has taken on personal significance as members of his extended family have sought refuge there from the violence of the war in Syria. Over the years he has seen the camp expand at an exponential rate. Much of our academic work until this point has been in the field of reconstruction, specifically the possibilities afforded through ideas around circular economies including the recycling of essential construction material recovered from the debris of war (Rashwani et al., 2023). This has pushed us to think more clearly about the need to develop a sustainable economic model for dignified housing for IDPs and the challenges prompted by such an undertaking including the possible roles played by the IDPs themselves.

As an academic researcher and faculty member at the University of Sham, his daily commute to the campus provides a glimpse into the stark reality of the refugee crisis unfolding in the vicinity. The university is encircled by numerous refugee camps, which have become a temporary home to many individuals, including our colleagues, students, and acquaintances. This proximity has bestowed upon the authors of this paper a profound sense of responsibility to contribute to addressing the engineering challenges faced by these camps.
Recognising the value of a participatory approach, we conceived the idea of conducting a comprehensive study to elicit the perspectives and lived experiences of the camp residents themselves. Through this research endeavour, we aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of their housing and social needs, thus enabling us to develop engineering solutions that are tailored to their specific contexts and requirements.

This undertaking necessitates a collaborative effort, involving a multidisciplinary team comprising civil engineers and social science specialists. By synergising our collective expertise, we aspire to formulate innovative and sustainable solutions to the housing predicaments prevalent in these camps. The overarching goal is to

enhance the living conditions and foster a sense of dignity for the displaced individuals residing within these temporary settlements.

Between shelter and home

What does it mean to dwell in displacement? What does it mean to make a home in the liminal space of an IDP camp when the probability of returning to ancestral homes is virtually non-existent? This is the question we returned to time and again during this study. The accommodation made available to displaced people through the humanitarian and development sector is commonly referred to as shelter. Shelter should be considered as a rapid *process* of containing a large wave of displacement in small periods of time, and not simply as a product to contain the displaced for long periods (Matthes & Herczeg 2008). Moreover, shelters must be habitable, and provide physical safety and adequate space, as well as protection against the elements (Sphere 2018). They are also places where people seek well-being and safety.

Enrico Quarantelli (1982, 1995), writing in the context of natural disasters in North America, provides a conceptual lens for thinking through dwelling practices following a disaster. Typically, sheltering transitions from an emergency to a temporary phase wherein emergency shelter modalities are determined by displaced people themselves in the wake of a disaster. The temporary shelter phase denotes a short-term relocation under other living arrangements often under the aegis of a formal humanitarian actor. For Quarantelli, shelter transforms into temporary housing once household routines in alternative accommodation are re-established. Housing is only considered permanent once practices of homemaking and dwelling are normalised. From this perspective, shelter, in essence, offers protection. Ideally, this protection is to be found embedded in the concrete localised contexts displaced people find themselves. As the Sphere handbook (2018) notes:

> "Shelter and settlement assistance should support and draw on the existing strengths of affected households, communities, civil society and government. This increases the chance of developing localised strategies that encourage self-sufficiency and self-management by the affected people. A sense of safety, community and social cohesion are essential to begin the process of recovery." (ibid.)

However, such framings favoured by the humanitarian sector often assume discretely bounded and linear patterns wherein displaced communities seamlessly transition between relief, recovery and reconstruction (Smith & Wenger 2007). The lived experiences of displacement-affected populations suggest otherwise. In what follows, we set out how IDPs in Northwest Syria traverse the permeable boundaries of these different phases of recovery during a protracted conflict and crisis of displacement.

While shelter is one of the key domains of humanitarian activity, the issue of resettling IDPs in decent, long-lasting housing remains low on the list of priorities for the humanitarian sector. There are three fundamental reasons the humanitarian sector struggles with seeing through the transition from emergency shelter to permanent dwellings for displaced people. First, this can be attributed to the short-term funding cycles of the humanitarian sector (Krause 2014) that prioritise the immediate biological and physical needs of displaced people over their psycho-social needs. Moreover, the recovery cycle of displacement-affected people seldom maps onto the funding cycles of donors that determine what can and cannot be planned for and achieved (Opdyke et al. 2021). Second, to address ideas around permanence means to engage with grounded political realities and processes. To do so means to step outside of the humanitarian norms that actors within the formal humanitarian system operate under. Finally, the scale of what is required often overwhelms the capacity of the humanitarian sector to respond (Davis & Parrack 2018). A longitudinal examination of recovery for conflict-affected communities in Northern Uganda found that poorly designed overcrowded camps with poor access to services and limited opportunities to generate income engendered a fragmentation of family structures and erosion of traditional collective support systems and coping strategies (Khasalamwa-Mwandha 2019). A clearer understanding of protracted displacement reveals that the average duration of exile for those whose situation has become protracted is around 21 years (Devictor & Do 2016). This study points towards the tension between humanitarian efforts to provide relief based on minimum sphere standards and the homemaking practices and aspirations of camp residents. The study seeks to instigate debate on the implications of longer-term approaches to shelter provision with reference to anxieties around demographic change.

Already, we find a contradiction in "shelter" being the discursive term of choice for humanitarian actors. For humanitarian actors, shelter denotes protection, yet the notion of protection remains ambiguous when displacement becomes protracted. In such situations, resources from the humanitarian aid sector are unevenly distributed (Whitaker 2002). This in turn delimits possibilities for self-sufficiency. Where resources are made available, they are predicated on the short-term funding cycles of the humanitarian aid sector that demand and attract funding based on demonstrating the impermanence and precarity of displacement – temporariness is baked into the humanitarian aid sector's response to mass displacement. As Cathrine Brun (2015: 47) observes: 'IDPs are often assigned to shelters that make people survive, but that cannot be transformed into homes—they are shelters representing the interstices in displaced people's lives; no one is expected to stay there long, but rather to return home or move on.'

How, then, do we move from shelter to home? The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights has made clear in its general comment No. 4 that

policies to provide adequate housing must allow for the appropriate expression of cultural identity and diversity in housing. In the case of IDPs in Azaz, the war and the speed of displacement did not allow the implementation of these instructions due to the preoccupation with quickly sheltering the displaced. A strengthened dialogue between academic research, governing bodies, and humanitarian agencies can serve as a foundation for informed decision-making and the formulation of pragmatic solutions tailored to the specific contexts and needs of refugee camp residents (Sabie et al. 2017).

A home is more than simply the materiality afforded through shelter. It also has a distinct spatiality, temporality, and relationality (Taylor 2015). It is made up of memories and punctuated by daily rhythms of everyday practices (Hammond 2004). Making homes has become a means of establishing and maintaining continuity, agency, and a sense of self. Our study finds that residents of IDP camps have begun this process albeit within the parameters of severe resource constraint. When designing shelter, the humanitarian sector ought to factor in the significance of the home-making practices of displaced people in contexts of protracted conflict-induced displacement. In doing so, this could potentially address some of the asymmetries in the relationship between the aid-giver and aid-receiver. It could serve as an avenue for bringing displaced people more centrally into the dialogue of what the response to displacement ought to be.

Drawing on literature from the field of forced migration studies and data from the field, the following sections show how residents of IDP camps in the Northwest of Syria exist on a continuum between shelter and home. In the final section of the paper, we consider the potential implications of resettling IDPs in good housing.

Genesis and Evolution of a Camp

The camps were chosen based on the differing modalities of dwelling we can find across the IDP camps in and around Azaz city. To provide a concrete example, the discussion will focus on al-Rayyan camp, a formally established settlement with documented developmental mechanisms, as a representative case study. In contrast, the other camps included in the study are informal or spontaneously self-settled camps, lacking sufficient data on their growth and evolution processes. This disparity between formal and informal camps underscores the importance of documentation and institutional support in understanding and addressing refugee settlement challenges.

Al-Rayyan camp was established in October 2015 by IHH İnsanı Hak ve Hürriyetleri Yardım Vakfı (The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief), a Turkish based INGO, to house the growing numbers of IDPs on the Syrian Turkish border. Initially the camp measuring 88 donums (or 88,000 metres squared) was planned with registered families provided with iso box containers colloquially referred to as caravans. Each caravan measured 12

metres squared. Since its establishment, the camp has evolved from one wholly comprising caravans to becoming largely made up of informal tented structures (see figure 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 below). While those residing in caravans have access to clean water and working sanitation systems, the same cannot be said for the overwhelming majority of IDPs housed in tents in al-Rayyan camp.

Inequalities are further exacerbated through the support available to residents of camps. In al-Rayyan camp, the camp manager reported that households residing in caravans received $60 equivalent in food vouchers each month while those in tented settlements received a food basket worth $25 per household each month. Observational studies revealed that residents living in caravans employed more organised and technically advanced housing development approaches compared to those residing in tents. The latter group's shelter enhancement efforts were characterised by a greater degree of spontaneity and rudimentary methods, attributable to a lack of resources and external assistance. This dichotomy underscores the impact of resource disparities on the housing strategies and living conditions of displaced populations within the same camp.

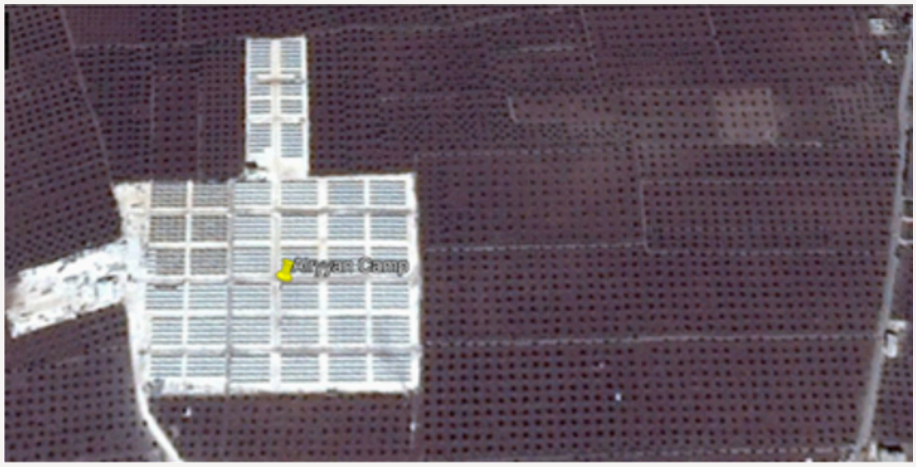

Figure 1.1: *al-Rayyan camp October 2015*
Source: Google Earth

Figure 1.2: *al-Rayyan camp April 2016*
Source: Google Earth

Figure 1.3: *al-Rayyan camp August 2020*
Source: Google Earth

With the passing of time those residing in the caravan section of the camp have been expanding the limits of their caravan structure. Using cement masonry blocks and tarpaulin sheets, extensions have been appended to the caravans to create additional rooms both for privacy and receiving guests (see figure 2). Such extensions are understood as practical improvements to current living conditions, rather than an acceptance of permanence. The Syrians displaced to Northwest Syria have a deep attachment to their homeland, rooted in their cultural identity, which suggests that a majority will choose to return once the crisis subsides. This strong inclination to repatriate is driven by emotional and historical ties to their ancestral lands.

Figure 2: *caravan with self-build extension*
Source: Author

Not all camp residents have the means to secure better shelters or upgrade their accommodations due to resource constraints. Spatial limitations, systemic obstacles within the camps, and the perception that their stay is temporary further impede shelter development efforts. These intertwined challenges

necessitate a holistic approach that considers not just physical infrastructure but also the socioeconomic, psychological, and logistical factors affecting displaced populations' housing needs (see figure 3 below).

Figure 3: *tent structures on the outskirts of al-Rayyan camp*
Source: Author

It is clear then that the modalities of dwelling available for IDPs in Azaz fall somewhere between the twin poles of shelter and home. In the organised Al-Rayyan camp, most residents have actively modified their caravan shelters, adding external walls, extra rooms, cement flooring, and even converting spaces into small businesses - transforming shelters into homes. This contrasts with informal camps, where for various reasons explained above, some residents have left their tent accommodations unaltered for over a decade, maintaining the atmosphere of a mere temporary shelter. The divergence between Al-Rayyan's enhanced, domesticated dwellings and the static shelters elsewhere exemplifies how systemic factors and resource availability impact displaced populations' ability to create a sense of permanence and belonging.

One of the participants in the focus group deliberations articulated the deleterious ramifications of constrained financial resources on the developmental progress within the camp, remarking:

> "The harsh reality is that many of us subsist on meagre incomes or rely solely on humanitarian aid, leaving little to no surplus for investing in the improvement of our living spaces. Consequently, we find ourselves trapped in a cycle of makeshift accommodations, unable to afford the construction of durable structures or the procurement of necessary materials and resources."

Results

To better understand camp residents' attitudes and preferences around housing solutions in situations of mass displacement, a questionnaire and focus groups were used to ask IDPs about the characteristics of their dwellings, the appropriateness of dwellings, the associated risks that these dwellings expose residents to, and what the move to more permanent dwelling structures could entail in terms of their contribution and residents' understandings of belonging.

Shelter, home, and return

Our findings indicate ambivalent, and at times even contradictory, positions taken up by displaced people in relation to their place of exile. 97% of respondents stated they would prefer to live in a more permanent structure made of cement blocks rather than tents or caravans. However, the overwhelming majority 94% also expressed a conditional willingness to return to their hometowns. Focus group discussions with men and women from the camps conveyed this mixed sentiment:

> "I didn't have a good job in my hometown [maskan al-umm], and here I have a better job than the work I used to have back there. Despite this and having a house of my own in the camp, I am now ready to give up everything and go back to my hometown on the condition that when I do so, my dignity and rights are preserved." (FG Sajo camp, male, 28 years old)

> "For me, I prefer to return to my hometown [maskan al-umm] after the end of the war. I am ready to give up my new job and my dwelling in the camp. No material temptations can keep me away from the place where I grew up and where my original roots lie. Personally, if someone offered me a million dollars a month I would still want to return to my hometown if the situation and surrounding circumstances allowed me to do so." (FG al-Rayyan camp, female, 20 years old)

> "There are pros and cons to this matter [having more permanent dwellings], and I like to think more positively. I prefer to move to a new more permanent structure and get rid of the misery and trouble of where I currently live [a tent] in order to ensure my comfort and the well-being of my family. But when the war ends and a political solution is found on the ground, we all must think about returning to our hometowns." (FG al-Rayyan camp, female, 22 years old)

Focus group participants acknowledged the need for having secure and durable modalities of dwellings in the camps by changing canvas tents to caravans with sustainable structures or concrete block housing, but held out the possibility of returning to their hometowns. However, this remains contingent on a political resolution of the conflict that ultimately upholds the original demands of the

2011 revolution – dignity and rights.

Participants also recognized that the consequences of the war had irrevocably altered people's attachments to their understandings of where home was located:

> "For me, my house has been destroyed. I have a cousin also whose house has been destroyed. How will we go back? If I get more permanent housing in the camp and a good job opportunity, I can stay in the place where I work. I don't have a house in my initial residence." (al-Rayyan camp, male, 43 years old)
>
> "I think that whoever has property and business in his home country will return after the end of the war, on the contrary, whoever does not have property and work where he came from and the requirements of life have been secured through having a more permanent dwelling, I do not think that he will return home." (Sajo camp male, 40 years old).

For these displaced individuals, the physical destruction of their previous homes has forced a re-evaluation of what constitutes a true sense of home, shifting from a fixed location to wherever they can establish permanence, security, and access to economic opportunities. Their perspectives suggest that 'home' has transcended the narrow definition of a specific dwelling or hometown, instead becoming an adaptable concept centred around having a durable shelter, sustainable livelihood, and fulfilment of basic needs. While the possibility of return remains, the notion of 'home' now encompasses not just the nostalgic ties to their initial residences but also the pragmatic realities of creating a stable, self-sufficient life wherever circumstances permit, even if it means redefining their sense of belonging and roots.

The possibility of return seems to be gendered in the focus groups. Male participants seem less attached to where they came from due to the destruction of their property, making them open to staying if it provided better housing and employment opportunities. Male participants also indicate a desire to return to their hometown on condition of their dignity and rights being preserved. In contrast, female participants express a stronger desire to go back to their roots, with one prioritising the immediate comfort of her family before considering returning. Other female participants believe those with assets and livelihoods in their initial homes will return, while those without such ties and who have secured permanent dwellings are less likely to go back.

Social and cultural mixing

The camps in and around Azaz have become sites of refuge for people across Syria particularly its central, Northern and Eastern provinces. Prior to the popular call for revolution against the al-Assad regime and the ensuing conflict, the

opportunity for different cultures to mix was severely constrained. In Syria, the question, "where are you from?" took on sectarian undertones – answering Sweida meant you were Druze; answering Selemiyeh equated you with belonging to the Ismaili sect. It is in this context that the opportunity for different groups to encounter and live alongside one another in the IDP camps in the Northwest of Syria becomes possible. We tested the validity of claims around the mixing of people in camps by asking survey respondents whether they lived in a neighbourhood that included kinship members. 61% of respondents answered affirmatively, indicating that despite the opportunity to do so people continued to live in proximity to those who are culturally familiar. The focus group discussions across genders echoed a reticence to mix freely with those outside of their kinship groups:

> "There are some families who have special customs and traditions, and they cause inconvenience to their neighbours. If these families are clustered as groups, I think this is a positive thing because they are from the same fabric and have the same habits and their behaviour may be annoying to others, but it is normal behaviour between each other." (Sajo camp, male 32 years old)

> "When the matter calls for mixing, we do not have any problem. At the beginning of the crisis, we housed people from different parts of Syria because the circumstances did not allow us to check their customs and traditions, and we coexisted with them and provided them with assistance. But when talking about permanent housing, it is better to gather relatives and people of the same village in the same sector because the difference in customs among the residents of the neighbourhood can cause problems." (al-Rayyan camp, female, 24 years old)

> "Before the crisis of displacement from different parts of Syria to the northern countryside, we here as residents did not have this interest in learning and education, but after the displacement of Aleppo, Idlib and Homs, we saw people having different perspectives based on their learning, so we were encouraged to take more interest in learning ourselves. This matter made us reconsider how integration helps in the development process. Why can't I accept coexistence with my countrymen in one neighbourhood? We are one people." (al-Rayyan camp, female 20 years old)

Architecture and resources

Amidst the dire conditions of the refugee camps, a subset of internally displaced persons possessing modest financial reserves have undertaken adaptive measures to enhance their living quarters. Their initial dwellings, limited to rudimentary tents or caravans, fell short of providing adequate standards of dignified living. In an effort to ameliorate their circumstances, these IDPs have embarked on self-initiated shelter development initiatives. One such endeavour

involves erecting additional walls around their existing tents or caravans, utilising either cloth or cement blocks as construction materials. Furthermore, they have constructed supplementary rooms, also fashioned from cement blocks or cloth-covered roofs, serving diverse purposes.

This expansion not only accommodates the growing needs of families, which often increase in size over time, but also facilitates a degree of spatial segregation, catering to the cultural norms and privacy requirements of conservative Syrian households. Moreover, some IDPs have undertaken measures to improve the flooring of their dwellings and construct peripheral corridors encircling the expanded shelter units. These interventions are driven by a desire to preserve the privacy and cultural sensibilities inherent to Syrian family structures. Such grassroots initiatives, borne out of necessity and resourcefulness, exemplify the resilience and adaptability of displaced communities in their pursuit of creating a semblance of normalcy and dignity amidst adverse circumstances.

The irregular distribution of social protection provision or humanitarian cash transfer to residents of the camp raised the salience of access to earning a livelihood. The results of the survey also revealed that 68% of residents across all four camps work for less than 400TL per month, which is equivalent to $1.60 per day. Moreover, only 16% of respondents had any additional income aside from a single main source. On the other hand, when we asked about the sources of monthly income, 60% of the residents reported earning a daily wage, 7% of respondents reported receiving assistance from relatives or friends. A further 11% reported not having any work at all. All this is due to the cumulative effects of the war for ten years, and the lack of recognition by countries of the liberated area, and thus the lack of investments Internal and external, residents' dependence on food aid, and lack of income make the residents of the area unable to build the camps' architectural growth and waiting for humanitarian organisations to help restructure the existing shelters.

Conclusion

70% of residents in the four IDP camps located in and around Azaz on the Syrian-Turkish border lived below the poverty line. Despite camps being managed by the Turkish State's Disaster Response Agency - Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (AFADi), the scale of displacement outstrips the resources made available for housing by the Turkish state and aid sector. Most residents live in tents and lack the resources to be able to adapt their shelters for themselves. The search for more permanent housing for the displaced is an urgent necessity.

Most IDPs reported that the currently available shelter was inadequate and insufficient to guarantee a dignified life. With no prospect of a political solution on the horizon in Syria, return – although desired – remains a distant prospect.

Most study participants, however, believed that returning home was inevitable if a political solution could guarantee their safety. Further research should be undertaken by UNHCR and other relevantly mandated organisations to focus specifically on the question of housing for internally displaced people in northern Syria. Investing in housing for displaced people could potentially act as an anchor for the local economies they are situated in.

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Deciding between moving or staying in uncertainty: Future aspirations of young Ukrainian refugees in Poland

Oğuzhan Açıkgöz

Abstract

Since the onset of the Ukraine-Russia war in February 2022, Poland has become a major host country for nearly 950,000 Ukrainian refugees, many of whom are grappling with uncertainty about their futures. Among these refugees, young Ukrainians face unique challenges as they navigate the complexities of displacement, integration, and future aspirations in a foreign land. This study examines the aspirations of young Ukrainian refugees in Poland, exploring how life satisfaction and experiences of discrimination influence their plans to stay in Poland, return to Ukraine, or move to a third country. Using qualitative and quantitative data from interviews with 20 refugees, this research reveals that while most refugees wish to stay in Poland due to factors like education opportunities and perceived ease of integration, a significant minority express a desire to return home or move elsewhere, citing homesickness, dissatisfaction with government policies, and experiences of discrimination as key reasons. Findings highlight the importance of life satisfaction and societal acceptance in shaping migration aspirations, suggesting that both play critical roles in the refugees' integration and future trajectories. As the war continues, this research underscores the need for more sustainable, long-term policies to address the evolving aspirations of displaced individuals across Europe.

Introduction

Since the outbreak of war in February 2022, more than 6 million Ukrainians have fled their homeland, seeking refuge in various countries across Europe (UNRIC 2024). Among these, Poland has become the primary destination for nearly 950,000 Ukrainian refugees (IOM 2023). As of June 2024, Poland continues to host a significant number of these displaced individuals, many of whom face deep uncertainty about their futures (Operational Data Portal 2024). The European Union and Polish government have implemented various short-term policies to accommodate this influx, yet the unpredictable nature of the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war, combined with rising anti-immigration sentiments across Europe, poses critical challenges for refugees (İneli-Ciğer 2023; International Rescue Committee 2024; Aumayr-Pintar and Guerrero 2022; IOM 2022).

Within this broader context, young Ukrainian refugees in particular represent a vulnerable group, disproportionately affected by the trauma, displacement, and challenges of starting anew in a foreign land (OHCHR 2017; COE 2019). The experiences of young refugees, who are in the formative stages of their personal and professional lives, are essential to understanding how forced migration

impacts future aspirations. Early adulthood is critical for developing long-term goals, envisioning personal growth, and establishing social and economic stability (Wood et al. 2017). For young refugees, however, these aspirations are often clouded by their precarious legal status, uncertainty about returning home, and the realities of life in a host country that may not be fully welcoming (The Economist 2024).

Existing research on forced migration has shown that life satisfaction and experiences of discrimination play key roles in shaping the aspirations of refugees, particularly regarding onward mobility or integration into host societies (Üstünbici and Elçi 2022; Müller-Funk and Fransen 2023). This research combines quantitative modelling and qualitative analysis to explore the future aspirations of young Ukrainian refugees, and understand the underlying reasons of their decision and its correlation with life satisfaction and facing discrimination. By focusing on this specific population, the research sheds light on how young Ukrainians navigate the complex realities of forced migration, and what this may mean for their future trajectories in a rapidly changing Europe.

Methodology and participant profile

The data in this research study was gathered in June and July 2024, from 20 participants who came to Poland from Ukraine due to the war and were living in Warszawa, Toruń, Łódź, and Poznań provinces. These 20 participants were reached through connections with local NGOs and migration research centres in Poland. All 20 interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. Interviews were conducted mainly in Ukrainian by native speakers in our research team and translated to English but also conducted in English when preferred by the participant.

With the monitoring of Toruń Humanities and Social Sciences Summer Program officials, ethical standards were observed throughout the data collection process through the administration of informed consent forms and openness about the study's objectives and the use of the data generated from the interviews.

The age range of the participants is 18-30, and the average age is 26. The gender distribution of the participants is 3 males and 17 females. The number of male participants is lower because the sex-selective military recruitment law prohibits men between 18 and 60 from leaving Ukraine unless they are disabled, the father of at least three children, or a single father (Carpenter 2022; Sauer 2024; The Danish Immigration Service 2024). When the participants' marital status is examined, 10 are unmarried, 9 are married and 1 is divorced. 14 of the participants are university graduates, 3 are college graduates, 2 are 11th grade graduates, and 1 is a 9th grade graduate. All 20 participants have an international Ukrainian passport and are registered under temporary protection status in Poland. The average length of stay in Poland for the 20 participants is 23

months, while the longest stay in Poland is 30 months and the shortest is 5 months.

The dependent variable in the survey is measured by the question, 'In the foreseeable future, do you plan to stay in Poland or go to Ukraine, or go to another country besides Ukraine and Poland, if the situation does not change?' The answer choices are 'stay in Poland', 'return to Ukraine', and 'go to another country besides Ukraine and Poland'. The question aims to understand current plans rather than future aspirations in an ideal situation, such as the termination of the war in Ukraine or if they were to receive travel documents (see Üstünbici and Elçi 2022; Carling and Schewel 2017, on measuring aspirations). Participants were asked questions to learn the primary reason and secondary reason(s) for their choice, and the top three common reasons of the participants were schematized. The primary and secondary reasons were derived from the interview context with follow-up questions.

As an independent variable, to examine the aspiration with the affiliation of life satisfaction and facing discrimination, we divided participants into two groups. Group 1 consists of the participants who want to leave Poland (who gave the answers 'return to Ukraine, and 'go to another country besides Ukraine and Poland), and Group 2 consists of the participants who want to stay in Poland. In order to test the level of life satisfaction, we asked respondents, 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?' with answers ranging between 1 (not at all satisfied) and 5 (very satisfied). To test facing discrimination as a push factor for aspiration, we asked "Do you think that Ukrainians living in Poland are treated well by the native population?" with answers ranging between 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). With the descriptive analysis we derived from the independent variable, we tested the hypothesis "migrants who aspire to leave Poland due to lower life satisfaction and higher perceptions of discrimination are more likely to experience negative social integration, suggesting that perceived discrimination acts as a significant push factor influencing their migration aspirations."

Findings

Who aspires to move on?

Descriptive analysis of our dependent variable shows that 55% of respondents want to stay in Poland, 30% of participants want to return to Ukraine in the foreseeable future, and 15% want to go to a third country (see **Figure 1**.). Overall, only a minority of young Ukrainians aspire to go to a third country, and the majority are planning for a future in Poland.

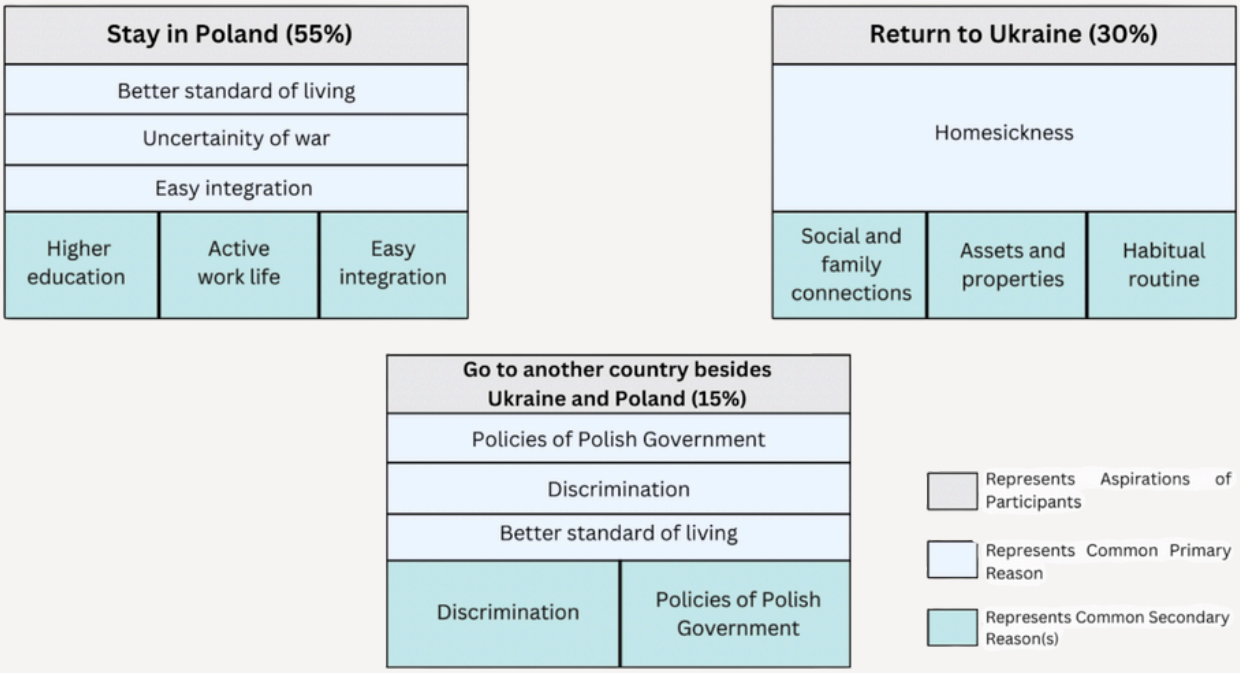

Figure 1. *Aspirations of Ukrainian Refugees to Move or Stay and the Common Underlying Reason(s) (n=20)*

Ukrainians who wanted to stay in Poland stated that the primary reasons for their choice were better living conditions, the uncertainty of the war, and easy integration into Poland. Secondary reasons for staying were their desire to receive higher education, having an active work life in Poland, and easy integration. The fact that easy integration is chosen as the primary reason by some immigrants and as a secondary reason by others shows that young Ukrainians easily integrate into Poland and therefore tend to plan their future in Poland.

For instance, a 19-year old Ukrainian refugee who is from the Sumy region stated in an interview that:

> "It was a very difficult step for me to leave my family in Ukraine and come to Poland. My family is currently living under Russian occupation. I have very limited communication with them. Sometimes I read on social media or local news sites that there are violent explosions near our home and I go crazy. I try to reach my family but I can't. I worry about my family who are miles away from me. I feel safe in Poland but the fact that they are in danger affects my daily life. I want to stay here and continue my higher education. I want to gain financial independence as soon as possible and bring my family back to me. The main reason I want to stay in Poland is the uncertainty of the war and the irreversibility of its consequences. I can say that I have integrated into Poland now, I can speak the language fluently and I have many local friends. I think our cultures are similar. Living here is not much different from Ukraine." (Interview dated 24th June 2024)

All refugees who want to return to Ukraine identify the primary reason for their choice as homesickness. Having social and family connections in Ukraine, having assets and properties (like a home, a car or agricultural land), and habitual routine are the secondary common reasons for wanting to return to Ukraine. For instance, a 30-year-old Ukrainian refugee who is from the Kiev region stated in an interview that:

> "I love Ukraine, that place is our home. The war will end one day and we will have to make our unique Ukraine beautiful again. I believe that it is necessary to return to develop and build it. Because who, if not us? I have many relatives in Ukraine. They are still in Ukraine. They are not in danger like eastern regions but there is always danger until the termination of the war. Sometimes I miss my house in Ukraine, going to the market, sitting in our park with my friends, and chatting… They look simple things but when you leave your home you can realize how valuable they were. I really want to go back to where I belong, where the streets, avenues, and squares are familiar to me." (Interview dated 10th of July 2024)

The refugees who want to go to another country besides Ukraine and Poland assert their primary reason to move as the policies of the Polish government, facing discrimination, and the possibility of finding better life conditions. Secondary reasons for choosing to move are also discrimination and the policies of the Polish government. What some immigrants consider as a primary reason may be secondary to others, but the results of this research indicate that the two key reasons why refugees want to move to a third country, are the policies of the Polish state and facing discrimination in Poland.

For instance, a 23-year-old Ukrainian refugee who is from the Odesa region stated in an interview that:

> "The war in Ukraine is still going on, not only soldiers but also civilians are part of this war. It is uncertain how long the war will continue. Building a future in Poland will be impossible due to the absurdity of government policies. My passport will expire very soon and I don't know what will happen. To tell you the truth, I think that many people here do not want us, especially the elderly. Unfortunately, I have been subjected to racism many times. I think that there will be less racism in countries where there are many international people. Therefore, I want to go to a country that embraces the international community." (Interview dated 2nd of July 2024)

Life dissatisfaction and facing discrimination as a push factor to move

In line with recent studies on the question of aspirations among refugees in Turkey (Düvell et al. 2021; Müller-Funk 2019; Üstübici, Kirişçioğlu, and Elçi 2021), Üstünbici and Elçi (2022) found that life satisfaction fosters aspirations to stay in Turkey, using the standard interview question 'How satisfied are you currently with your life in these days?'. Colic-Peisker (2009) assesses how aspects such as a

sense of discrimination and visibility in the community relate to refugees' life satisfaction in Australia. He claims that their life satisfaction is linked to the idea of 'life going back to normal' (Pollenne 2023). Similarly, Kuschminder (2018) states that poor conditions in transit countries, such as experiences of abuse and discrimination, can be an impetus for onward movement. We therefore followed Üstünbici and Elçi's (2022) life satisfaction definition. We also examine the effect of facing discrimination on their aspirations for movement (see Figure 2.).

To test the correlation, we divided the participants into two groups based on whether they wanted to stay or leave: Group 1 consists of young Ukrainian refugees who want to leave Poland and Group 2 consists of young Ukrainian refugees who want to stay in Poland.

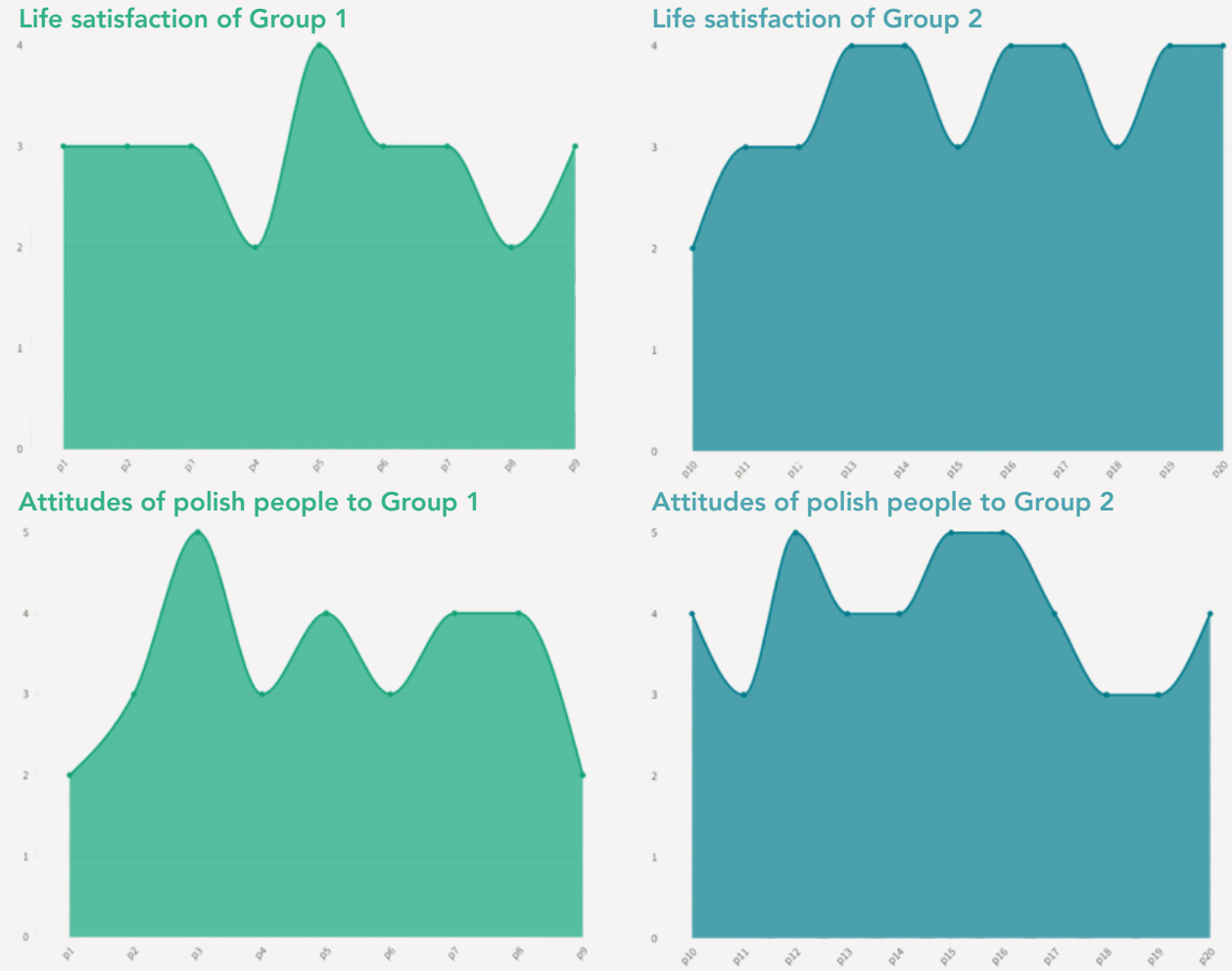

Figure 2. *Correlation of life satisfaction and facing discrimination to future aspirations (Group 1, n=9; Group 2, n=11)*

As the quantitative results show in **Figure 2**, satisfaction with life in Poland indicates a tendency to want to stay in the country. This is further supported by our qualitative data. For instance, participants who expressed their desire to stay in Poland often have a better standard of living, easy integration and active work life. We also elaborate on the reverse situation, that frustrations and feelings of being discriminated against may feed aspirations to move on. For instance, those

who want to leave Poland frequently mention frustrations related to discrimination or a lack of opportunities, which also supports the quantitative data. The average life satisfaction of those who want to leave Poland is 2.88, while the average of those who want to stay in Poland is 3.45 (where 5 is 'very satisfied'). However, when asked how well the Polish people treat them, the average answer of those who want to leave Poland is 3.33, while the average answer of those who want to stay in Poland is 4 (where 5 is 'strongly agree' that Ukrainians are treated well).

The aspirations of young Ukrainian refugees in Poland reflect a complex interplay of personal, social, and political factors shaped by their life experiences and the ongoing war in Ukraine. While a majority of the participants in this study express a desire to stay in Poland, this decision is largely influenced by factors such as the uncertainty of the war, opportunities for education and work, and perceived ease of integration into Polish society. On the other hand, a significant portion of refugees yearn to return to Ukraine, driven by homesickness and a deep connection to their homeland, while a smaller group seeks to move to a third country, citing dissatisfaction with Polish policies and experiences of discrimination. Significantly, facing discrimination is a key concept relevant to understanding the aspirations of this small group, as the concept is cited as a common primary or secondary reason for their decision.

For instance, a 21-year-old Ukrainian refugee who is from the Dnipropetrovsk region and wants to go to a third country stated in an interview that:

> "The war in Ukraine is still going on, not only soldiers but also civilians are part of this war. It is uncertain how long the war will continue. Building a future in Poland will be impossible due to the absurdity of government policies. My passport will expire very soon and I don't know what will happen. To tell you the truth, I think that many people here do not want us, especially the elderly. Unfortunately, I have been subjected to racism many times. I think that there will be less racism in countries where there are many international people. Therefore, I want to go to a country that embraces the international community." (Interview dated 2nd of July 2024)

Conclusion

In this study, the findings highlight the complex relationship between life satisfaction, experiences of discrimination, and the aspirations of refugees. Those who expressed a desire to stay in Poland tended to report higher levels of life satisfaction and fewer instances of discrimination, while those who aspired to move on were more likely to feel dissatisfied with their current circumstances and to have faced discriminatory treatment. Ultimately, the aspirations of these young refugees are shaped by a delicate balance of hope for a stable future and the ever-present challenges that come with forced migration.

The findings support our research hypothesis that life satisfaction plays a key role in shaping aspirations. Refugees who want to stay in Poland generally report higher life satisfaction, while those aspiring to leave tend to be less satisfied with their lives. The average life satisfaction score for those wanting to stay is 3.45, compared to 2.88 for those wanting to leave. The role of discrimination is also consistent with the research hypothesis. Refugees who want to leave Poland report higher levels of dissatisfaction related to discrimination, with their average score of perceived treatment being 3.33 (lower), compared to 4 for those wanting to stay.

To conclude, as the war in Ukraine continues, it remains uncertain how long refugees will remain in Poland and what their ultimate future aspirations will be. However, their future decisions will be shaped not only by the trajectory of the conflict but also by the opportunities and challenges they face in Poland, particularly in relation to integration, life satisfaction, and the societal reception they experience. As the war drags on, European policymakers may need to shift away from their initial short-term focus and consider more long-term integration and sustainable strategies, both for Ukrainian refugees and the local communities accommodating them.

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The link between global migration politics and development in Bangladesh

Jannatul Ferdous

Abstract

Since migration and development have significant socio-economic effects on the country of origin and destination, they have long been closely related in social studies. Migration is a decision that aims to minimise risk and maximise income. In the case of Bangladesh, a developing country that has benefited from remittances and development initiatives inspired by migrant experiences, international migration represents a viable and potentially lucrative revenue stream. Forced migration, driven by political instability, economic hardship, and environmental challenges, is a crucial aspect of Bangladesh's migration dynamics, influencing both internal and international mobility while shaping the country's socio-economic development through remittances and policy responses. An overview of the diaspora's mobility, remittances, and impact on Bangladesh's socio-economic development is given in this review article. The article demonstrates that Bangladesh's development has benefited from international migration on an individual, local, and national level. In Bangladesh, the welfare of migrant households is significantly impacted by remittances, even though COVID-19 harmed remittance flows worldwide. For many communities, the regularity and dependability of remittances have served as a safety net and a coping mechanism, which became more crucial throughout the pandemic. Ensuring the effective utilisation of migrant experiences for the micro and macro levels of Bangladesh's development is paramount as the country emerges as a significant actor in South Asia during the twenty-first century. This paper explores the mobility patterns of the Bangladeshi diaspora and analyses the socio-economic impact of remittances on the country's development trajectory. It also examines current policy frameworks and proposes strategic measures to optimise the benefits of migration, aiming to foster inclusive and sustainable growth.

Introduction

Migration has been an intrinsic part of human civilisation, consistently driving significant changes in nations, societies, and the lives of portions of the global population. Human migration is the term used to describe the movement of individuals for employment or residential purposes from their place of origin to another location, either temporarily or permanently (Masud & Hamzah, 2018). Various studies have characterised the links between migration and development as complex or uncertain. De Haas (2010), for example, contends that discursive shifts in the 'migration and development' debate should be predominantly regarded as a component of broader paradigm shifts in social and development theory. Castles (2009) questions the assumption that migration inherently leads

to development and discusses the uncertain relationship between migration and development. Siddiqui (2010) examines how migration in Bangladesh contributes to development but also introduces social and economic uncertainties. For years, analysts and policymakers lacked a complete understanding of these connections, but this perspective is evolving. Increasingly, migrant-sending countries are recognising the economic importance of remittances and the potential role of migrants as advocates abroad. Within migration studies, a growing recognition of transnational practices connecting migrants to both their host and origin countries has expanded the understanding of migration's potential benefits for development (Van Hear & Sorensen, 2003).

Bangladesh has been a well-known case study in conversations about migration. As of 2019, 7.5 million Bangladeshi migrants lived overseas, making Bangladesh the sixth-largest country of origin for international migrants worldwide (IOM, 2020). Academics concur that families dealing with resource constraints and economic instability should consider migration as a solution (Afsar, 2009; Sikder et al., 2017). This aligns with a substantial corpus of literature on household coping strategies in the Global South, particularly concerning population growth, social transformation in rural communities, and agricultural communities (Grigg, 1980; Wood, 1981). Bangladesh has seen tremendous socio-economic changes since the middle of the 1970s, including an increase in population and improved development. The high population density in rural Bangladesh has made it difficult for every household member to secure agricultural employment. Consequently, many have migrated to urban areas and joined the informal economy (Chaudhury & Curlin, 1975). Additionally, forced migration has become a pressing issue due to climate change, natural disasters, and socio-political factors (Seddiky et al., 2024). Rising sea levels, frequent floods, and riverbank erosion have displaced thousands, forcing them to seek livelihoods in already congested urban centres or abroad. Social conflicts, lack of employment opportunities, and economic deprivation have further exacerbated forced migration, making it a complex challenge intertwined with the broader migration narrative in Bangladesh (IOM, 2021).

Since the beginning of human civilisation, people have moved in search of safety and survival, making migration an old phenomenon. The need for more stable finances and improved employment prospects still motivates migration today. Europeans have been travelling between locations for trade since the 13th century. While some migrated temporarily, others relocated permanently (Tassinopoulos, 1998). North America and the Indian subcontinent were rich areas during this time. However, the abundance of natural resources and technological advancements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to a shift in migration patterns, with an increasing number of individuals moving to the United States from Europe and Asia (Carrodus et al., 2012).

Migration from Asia to North America, Europe, and Australia increased dramatically in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. During the British colonial era, some went to Britain and the United States of America (US) for trade or further study. Bangladeshi migration surged dramatically after the middle of the 20th century, with the US and the United Kingdom (UK) being the main destinations. After Bangladesh gained its independence in 1971, emigration increased quickly, partially in response to the need for unskilled labourers when oil was discovered in the Middle East in the middle of the 1970s. The early 1980s saw a spike in both short-term and long-term migration (Hasan, 2006).

Systemic inequalities are a significant contributing factor that has prevented many Bangladeshis from benefiting from the nation's steadily improving Human Development Index rating in recent years. It is still difficult for women, in particular, to obtain fulfilling work opportunities and access essential services like healthcare, education, and other necessities. Because of this, about a million Bangladeshis were forced to leave their homes in 2022 in search of better living conditions, better pay, and more promising futures for themselves and their families (Azad & Vallentine, 2024). Climate change has compelled many people to migrate overseas in pursuit of work, even as migration chances abroad have improved (Bernzen et al., 2019; Islam, 2018).

Experts studying migration from Bangladesh typically focus on economic factors (Siddiqi, 2010). Migration is often motivated by the desire for better opportunities abroad and the difficulty of securing a stable life at home. However, in addition to these economic forces, cultural, social, and political aspects also greatly impact migration patterns. Drawing on secondary sources, this article explores migration patterns from Bangladesh, highlighting the role of different factors and interventions within the home country. Migration in this region has been influenced by active government intervention long before Bangladesh achieved independence. This paper provides an overview of the types of migration from Bangladesh, the reasons behind them, and their outcomes, with a focus on the government's role in shaping these patterns. It examines the developmental impact of remittances in Bangladesh, focusing on their short, medium, and long-term socio-economic effects. This paper argues that migration from Bangladesh is driven by government policies, economic necessity, and global labour demands, with remittances playing a vital role in socio-economic development, despite key challenges.

Remittances

In this review article, remittance refers to the process by which migrant or diaspora communities send money globally via official channels from their current place of residence or work. Both temporary and permanent migrants' inward transfers are considered. Temporary migration is characterised as working under contractual labour agreements for a predetermined amount of time before

returning home. Hasan (2006) notes that most of Bangladesh's temporary migrants come from impoverished rural areas. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), migration is the movement of people, regardless of their circumstances, duration of stay, or demographics—including those who are displaced, refugees, or moving for financial reasons (Perruchoud, 2004).

Remittance spending by recipients is primarily divided into two groups: investment and consumption. Consumption includes spending on essential goods and services such as food, clothing, furniture, healthcare, loan repayments, home repairs or renovations, social events, gifts, donations, and other incidentals. While home construction and repair expenditures could be categorised as either consumption or investment, this study views them primarily as consumption due to the limited long-term financial benefit they offer and remittance-dependent households' reliance on these funds for basic sustenance. Any remaining remittances are typically directed towards savings or investments. These investments may include community development, savings and fixed deposits, business ventures, land purchases for homesteads or agriculture, educational expenses, and family relocation abroad. These expenditures, both immediate and long-term, benefit individuals and society alike.

International migration and remittances

Bangladesh boasts a remarkable workforce of over 14 million migrant workers who have collectively contributed $99 billion in remittances over the last five years (United Nations, 2023). These remittances have played a crucial role in improving socio-economic conditions and reducing poverty, particularly in rural areas (United Nations, 2023). With more than 7.5 million Bangladeshis living abroad, the country ranks sixth globally among migrant-sending nations after India, Mexico, China, Russia, and Syria (TBS, 2019).

The first significant wave of Bangladeshi emigration occurred in 1973, following the oil boom in the Middle East. Around 6,000 Bangladeshis emigrated in 1976, and since then, the number of both permanent and temporary migrants has increased significantly (Khan & Sultana, 2020). Between the mid-1970s and 2020, nearly 13 million Bangladeshis migrated to over 162 countries, most of whom were low- and middle-skilled temporary workers headed to the Middle East and North Africa (Hassan, 2021; Shoma, 2021). Approximately 73.7% of Bangladeshi migrants are classified as temporary labourers (Shoma, 2021).

The formal employment of female migrant workers began in 1991, and by December 2023, 1,182,030 women had migrated abroad (GoB, 2024). Although the proportion of women among migrants declined slightly after 2015, they still made up 7.52% of all migrant workers during that period (Shoma, 2021). The number of women migrating for domestic work increased significantly after 2004,

following the relaxation of restrictions on female migration (IOM, 2017).

A notable destination for Bangladeshi migrants is the United Kingdom, especially after World War II, when the UK recruited workers from Commonwealth countries to address labour shortages. Many migrants from the Sylhet region settled in London, forming strong transnational links (Van Schendel, 2020). However, today the majority of migrants go to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Migration to the Gulf States surged tenfold between 1980 and 2010, reaching over 250,000 annually (Khan & Sultana, 2020). By 2019, more than 7.8 million Bangladeshis were living abroad, and remittances accounted for an estimated 5.4% of the country's GDP (Khan & Sultana, 2020). Each year, approximately 2.2 million young people enter the labour force in Bangladesh, many of whom seek employment abroad due to limited local opportunities (IOM, 2017).

Saudi Arabia and India are the top destinations for Bangladeshi workers, with Saudi Arabia becoming the most popular in 2019 (Khan & Sultana, 2020). According to BMET data, only 2% of Bangladeshi migrants are professionals, while 48% are low-skilled, 15% semi-skilled, and 33% skilled (IOM, 2017). Many migrants are employed in high-risk and labour-intensive industries such as construction (Khan & Sultana, 2020).

To facilitate migration, both public and private recruitment agencies operate in Bangladesh, with intermediaries acting as liaisons between migrants and recruitment firms. These agencies also provide pre-departure skills training (Khan & Sultana, 2020). The government has made efforts to offer migration opportunities at lower costs compared to private agencies.

Bangladesh’s economic transformation is significantly supported by its migrant workforce. The country has made notable progress in poverty reduction and is on track to graduate from the UN's list of least-developed countries by 2024 (Finance Division, 2024). Despite this progress, challenges remain, especially due to vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. Bangladesh has also demonstrated humanitarian leadership by sheltering 1.1 million Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar (Khan & Sultana, 2020).

Development dynamics and international migration

In the past, migration was seen as a problem that hindered development of the sending country (Bhagwati & Hamada, 1974; OECD, 2005). Recently, however, there is growing acknowledgement that mobility and migration may play a significant role in a country's advancement and development. Through the transfer of funds, skills, knowledge, and social relationships, as well as their participation in entrepreneurial efforts, migrants are expected to progress in their host and home countries as well as support their families and communities (Koppenberg, 2011).

In recent research, migration has shown great potential for poverty reduction, empowering women, and generating income. International migration enhances migrants' social status, improves their personal safety, and provides access to better livelihoods. It also contributes to technological and ideological progress within origin communities. Moreover, remittances from migrants increase domestic spending on health, education, and sanitation, while strengthening the central bank’s foreign exchange reserves. Since the late 1980s, there has been widespread acknowledgement of the positive relationship between migration and development (Masud & Hamzah, 2018). Migration provided Bangladesh with a crucial opportunity as the country struggled to meet the increasing demand for jobs following independence due to rapid population growth. This varied migration, which includes both temporary and permanent movements, has directly contributed to the notable increase in remittances in Bangladesh's economy (Barai, 2012).

Recipients' spending habits influence remittances and economic development in Bangladesh. Academics are increasingly paying attention to the relationship between remittances and development, by analysing the various ways households use the money for things like saving, businesses, education, health care, buying assets, paying off debt, and other activities. In economically developing countries like Bangladesh, remittances represent a significant source of finance for projects and a means of stimulating growth (Giuliano & Ruiz-Arranz, 2009). Remittances are frequently distributed directly from person to person to satisfy the unique needs of recipients, as explained by Ratha and Mohapatra (2007). With this extra cash, households can improve living circumstances, boost consumption, expand access to healthcare and education, and make profitable investments (Thao, 2009). Remittances eventually increase a nation's total savings, freeing up more funds for investment (Carling, 2004; Solimano, 2003).

Even though money sent by people working in other countries helps families and the country a lot, using that money wisely is still a big problem. Research shows that many families who get remittances do not save or invest the money (World Bank, 2021; IFAD, 2017). Instead, they often spend it right away on things they need to survive. This happens for many reasons. First, most families have urgent needs like food, clothes, or medical care. Second, many people do not know how to save or invest money because they never learned about it. Third, some families do not have banks or other money services nearby to help them use their money better.

Also, families do not always access advice or tools that could help them use the money in smarter ways. This means they may struggle again if something bad happens, like a job loss or illness. Sadly, banks and financial companies often do not think of these families as important customers, so they do not offer them good services. There is also a gap between the companies that send the money and the people who manage it at home (IFAD, 2017; UN DESA, 2023).

This limited access to information about optimising remittance usage is the primary cause of their vulnerability to financial shocks. As a result, many of these households may fall back into poverty. The majority of these migrants are found in Asia, particularly in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Although there has been a trend of Bangladeshi migrants permanently relocating to wealthier Western nations, an increasing number of migrants are now choosing to move to developing economies (Barai, 2012).

Migrant labourers in Bangladesh: Utilisation and development dynamics of remittances

Because migration and development have significant socio-economic implications for both the countries of origin and destination, social scientists have studied this complex link for a long time. Decisions on migration are frequently driven by the twin objectives of maximising gains and limiting losses. International migration may be quite beneficial for a developing country like Bangladesh, especially when it comes to development initiatives that are funded by the remittances that migrants send home and their experiences (Masud & Hamzah, 2018). Second only to exports of goods and services as a source of foreign cash, remittances are essential for supporting developing economies.

Economic impacts of remittances

The evaluation of remittances encompasses their short- and long-term effects on a spectrum of macro and micro socio-economic variables, particularly within emerging nations that experience higher poverty rates and underdeveloped financial systems (Giuliano & Ruiz-Arranz, 2009). Many remitters who were previously unemployed in their home countries find employment abroad, which can lead to an increased demand for labour in the host country. Furthermore, the money they remit back home can spur job creation within their countries of origin. This phenomenon occurs through investment, wealth accumulation, and the encouragement of domestic savings, each influenced by remittance flows (Barua et al., 2007). The cumulative effects of remittances on developing nations are profound, yielding direct, trickle-down, and indirect benefits. Beyond merely analysing the volume and flow of remittances, Barai (2012) investigates how these funds contribute to broader economic and societal growth. Given Bangladesh's low economic growth and the persistent oversupply of labour willing to migrate, the country is likely to continue as a labour-exporting nation in the near future. Should the trend of out-migration persist, remittance flows are also likely to grow. The geographical scope of Bangladeshi migration is also expanding.

Conversely, the economic empowerment of migrant women and their families can be enhanced if more women migrate abroad for work. However, Bangladesh needs to improve its remittance distribution infrastructure to facilitate official channels for sending money back home. This enhancement could reduce the

volume of unreported remittance flows, which currently hampers the growth of the informal sector. In areas with high concentrations of foreign-born emigrants, improved remittance mechanisms may help mitigate inflationary pressures (Alam, 2025).

Migration plays a pivotal role in stabilising household consumption. Approximately 66% of remittances are directed toward meeting consumption needs (Zaman & Akber, 2013). In addition to consumption, remittance income is often used for land purchases, agricultural production, housing construction and repairs, healthcare expenses, education, and debt repayment. As a result, remittance-receiving households generally enjoy better access to healthcare and educational opportunities (Karim et al., 2020).

Effects on education

The relationship between remittances and education is complex. While remittances provide financial support, they do not always lead to improved educational outcomes. Kumar (2019) highlights that foreign remittances can negatively affect educational expenditures, reporting a significant reduction of Tk.1020.67 in per capita spending on education. This suggests that families may prioritise other expenses over long-term educational investment. Some experts say that if families and the government do not spend enough money on education, it can lead to serious problems. More children might start working instead of going to school, some may get married too early, and the quality of education might decrease. This would mean that in the future, the country may have fewer skilled workers who can do good jobs (Islam, 2024).

However, not all studies say the same thing. Some research gives a more hopeful picture. For example, Al Kabir and others (2018) found that when families get more remittances (money sent by relatives working abroad), their children are more likely to stay in school. Al Islam (2022) also found that the more remittance money a family receives, the more likely their children are to go to school. Other things also matter for children's education. If parents are educated, their children are more likely to do well in school. Families with two or three children usually send them to school more often than families with only one child or too many children. Surprisingly, in some cases, boys and children living in cities are less likely to be sent to school regularly.

Effects on health spending

According to a study by Kumar (2019), there is a strong connection between remittances and the amount of money families spend on health care. The study found that when an average family in Bangladesh receives money from a family member working in another country, their spending on healthcare increases by around Tk. 4817.39. This shows that remittances can have a large positive effect on how well families can take care of their health. With more money available,

they are able to buy medicines, visit doctors, and even get treatment for serious illnesses, which they might not have been able to afford before.

The study also suggests that the government and trusted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should start awareness campaigns. These campaigns would teach families about the importance of using some of the money they receive from abroad for healthcare purposes. Many families may not realise how helpful it can be to invest in their health, so these campaigns can guide them in making better choices. Some people think that when families get remittances, they stop focusing on important things like education (Kumar, 2019). But this study suggests something different. It says that families who receive remittances should try to use part of that money to pay for their children's education. Education is very important because it helps children grow up to be skilled and responsible citizens. If children go to school and study well, they will be able to get good jobs in the future and help their country develop even more.

Experts in health and education also say that the cost of healthcare has gone up a lot. One of the main reasons for this is that medical treatment, hospital care, and medicines are becoming more expensive. After the COVID-19 pandemic, more people need regular medical checkups and treatment, which has made healthcare even more costly. As a result, families now need to spend more money than before to stay healthy. This makes it even more important to use remittances wisely, especially for health and education.

Poverty alleviation and dependency

In Bangladesh, remittances from migrant workers in the 1990s contributed significantly to poverty alleviation. Between 2000 and 2005, remittances reduced the poverty rate by 1.7% (Raihan et al., 2009). The 55% increase in income for migrant households, fuelled by remittances, enhanced their living standards (Barai, 2012). Remittances, primarily sent by households with migrants, have had a demonstrable effect in reducing poverty in the country.

However, remittances can sometimes foster dependency in recipient families, leading to what some scholars describe as a "reliance syndrome." The migration of rural workers from agricultural employment to temporary overseas jobs can hinder long-term rural development by creating overdependence on remittance income (Clemens & Ogden, 2020). In some cases, remittances are viewed merely as short-term financial support rather than a pathway to sustainable development, posing risks to the long-term financial security of recipient households (Mannan & Kazlov, 2005).

Migration also brings about positive effects by creating employment opportunities both abroad and within the migrants' home countries. For instance, Karim et al. (2020) reported that migration accounted for approximately 9% of

Bangladesh's economically active population, underlining its significance in the national labour structure. Mamun and Nath (2010) examined various dimensions of labour migration in Bangladesh, highlighting its economic implications at both household and macroeconomic levels.

Remittances, in particular, play a vital role in promoting economic growth. In Bangladesh, a large share of remittances is transferred through formal banking channels, where they serve as a source of capital for loans and business investments. These financial inflows contribute significantly to the country's foreign exchange reserves, facilitate import financing, and help narrow the current account deficit ultimately easing pressure on the balance of payments (Mamun & Nath, 2010). As a reflection of their growing importance, remittances and foreign exchange reserves reached historic highs in December 2020. The foreign exchange reserve stood at $43.17 billion, a considerable increase from the previous peak of $33.41 billion in FY2017 (Shoma, 2021).

Remittances and labour productivity

Remittances and higher domestic labour productivity are strongly correlated, according to Akter's (2018) investigation into the long-term effects of remittances on Bangladesh's labour productivity. This is particularly noticeable in the acquisition of material and productive assets, as migrant households often use remittance income to invest in land, livestock, agricultural tools, home construction, or to start small businesses, thereby engaging more actively in local labour and product markets (Chiodi et al., 2012). In order to optimise the benefits of remittances for national productivity, it is essential not only to increase the volume of remittance inflows but also to channel these funds into sectors that enhance long-term productivity, such as agriculture, SMEs, and infrastructure. Additionally, to better regulate and sustain the flow of labour migration, the government should actively explore and negotiate access to alternative overseas labour markets, particularly in emerging economies and regions with high demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on remittances

The worldwide labour market has been severely affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, which has significantly affected migrant workers' return to their home nations. Many of the migrants from Bangladesh were unemployed during the pandemic, putting them at risk of deportation (Bhuyan, 2020). 2020 saw the homecoming of 666,000 migrant labourers to Bangladesh between January and mid-March. In contrast, only 181,000 workers departed the country between January and August 2020, while 441,000 did so during the same time in 2019 (Noman, 2020). A number of enduring issues hamper Bangladesh's economic recovery following the pandemic. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth decreased from 7.1% in FY22 to 5.8% in FY23. Foreign currency inflows decreased as a result of the September 2022 adoption of a multiple exchange

rate system, which created a financial account deficit. In response, restrictions on foreign exchange were put in place, which led to shortages of gas, energy, important intermediate products, and capital resources (World Bank, 2024). These difficulties were made worse by the COVID-19 outbreak.

The rapid global spread of the pandemic posed significant challenges for the Bangladeshi government in effectively addressing its impact. The economic fallout from the difficulties experienced by Bangladeshi workers overseas exacerbated the nation's public health crisis. Problems such as increasing deportations from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, rising unemployment rates and salary reductions worsened the situation. Families and communities have been deeply affected by the abrupt loss of income faced by migrant workers, leading to unexpected financial instability. Remittances, which typically account for roughly one-third of Bangladesh's national budget, declined significantly (Khan & Sultana, 2020).

Compared to the average annual GDP growth rate of 6.6% recorded in the decade before the pandemic, real GDP growth is projected to be moderate at 5.6% in FY24. The anticipated persistent inflation is likely to hinder private consumption growth. Additionally, the limited availability of energy and imported resources, rising interest rates, and vulnerabilities within the banking sector are expected to weaken investor confidence. However, as monetary and exchange rate adjustments and financial sector policies take effect, growth is expected to improve gradually (World Bank, 2024).

The government’s 2% stimulus package, streamlining of remittance processes through official channels, and implementation of remittance-friendly laws have since boosted remittance inflows. These initiatives encouraged migrant workers to send money through legal channels. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the process of deporting foreign workers continued and even intensified. Many migrant workers sent remittances to support their families, worried about losing their jobs. In December 2020, remittances amounted to US$2,051 million, marking a 21.22% increase from the US$1,692 million sent in December 2019. Amid the harsh realities of COVID-19, the impressive ability of migrant workers to send home substantial sums of money was a source of hope and optimism (Shoma, 2021).

Conclusion and recommendations

Bangladesh needs to concentrate on a few important areas to reach its target of becoming an upper-middle-income nation by 2031. These include producing a trained labour force and a competitive business climate to generate employment opportunities, building enough infrastructure, and enacting laws that support private investment. Bangladesh exports both temporary and permanent labour. A large segment of Bangladeshi migrant workers is classified as low-skilled or

engaged in menial labour. These workers are usually employed on short-term contracts in sectors such as construction, mining, agriculture, and hospitality. Upon the conclusion of their contracts, they have the option to return home or attempt to extend their contracts. However, due to stringent immigration laws, these unskilled workers are not eligible for citizenship.

Furthermore, a large number of migrant workers from Bangladesh labour in these nations' unofficial industries without the required paperwork. Competent and better educated workers, however, can eventually become citizens and land permanent white-collar positions. Temporary workers often send more money home to support their families and make real estate investments. In contrast, permanent workers typically transfer their families abroad and prioritise investments in their nation of residence (Goswami et al., 2023).

Forced migration, often driven by political instability, economic hardship, and environmental disasters, is an important dimension of global migration politics, particularly in the context of Bangladesh (Rana & Ilina, 2021; Petrova, 2021). As a country highly vulnerable to climate change, frequent floods, cyclones, and riverbank erosion have displaced millions, compelling them to migrate internally and internationally (Solutions, 2012). Socioeconomic factors like poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, lack of access to social protection, depletion of natural resources, or the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change are likely to worsen migration pressures within and between countries (Avis, 2017). The global discourse on forced migration from Bangladesh discusses the economic and social factors that drive people to leave the country, their challenges, and how to improve their situation. It also reflects broader challenges developing countries face, simultaneously managing migration and development.

The Bangladeshi government plays a crucial role by formulating policies to support displaced populations and facilitating international migration as a coping mechanism. Remittances from forcibly migrated individuals significantly contribute to Bangladesh's economy, aiding in poverty reduction and infrastructure development (Islam, 2011). The socio-economic strain of forced migration underscores the need for comprehensive global cooperation and robust national strategies to ensure sustainable development while addressing the vulnerabilities of displaced populations. This critical link highlights how forced migration not only shapes Bangladesh's migration patterns but also influences its developmental trajectory through remittances and policy interventions, reinforcing the intricate relationship between global migration politics and development in Bangladesh.

Migration is frequently seen as an individual's endeavour to better their own and their family's financial situation. Most research on migration concentrates on its financial effects, as discussions on migration and development have shown.

The transnational perspective on migration also emphasises the advantages of movement for individuals, families, and communities in both the country of origin and the country of destination (Mahmud, 2023). Migration was restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed severe travel restrictions. However, migration is anticipated to pick back up after the epidemic passes, providing a chance to address the issues of migrant workers' rights (Shoma, 2021). By offsetting the trade imbalance, remittances have contributed to Bangladesh's improvement in its international credit rating. Their importance in Bangladesh's socio-economic growth is further shown by their sizeable contribution to the GDP of the nation.

In recent decades, there has been an increase in the disruption of external economies and global financial interconnectedness. The recent Russo-Ukrainian War and COVID-19 outbreak are two instances of such disturbances. The global financial system is currently in danger due to growing uncertainty in the American financial system. It has been noted that these elements have an impact on the remittance flow to Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Bank and other pertinent institutions must thus handle remittances with great caution. Given this, Bangladesh may want to consider setting up an expert group to look into ways to make better use of remittances (Goswami et al., 2023).

To advance human rights in Gulf countries, international labour rights organisations and activists have consistently pushed for the abolition of the Kafala system, which restricts the rights of migrant workers. To safeguard Bangladeshi migrant labourers in the Gulf, the government of Bangladesh, non-governmental organisations, the media, and civil society must cooperate. Sustained efforts are required to ensure safe migration, particularly for women, through bilateral labour agreements, the inclusion of gender issues as mandated in the CEDAW convention, and Memoranda of Understanding aimed at eradicating the Kafala system. Bangladeshi embassies should also keep a close eye on the execution of policies and initiatives based on human rights and offer support networks for migrant workers. It is also crucial to regularly interact with nations that hire Bangladeshi labourers (Shoma, 2021).

The government needs to act quickly to prevent people from sending money back home through unofficial routes. Legislation that incorporates internet and mobile banking for official remittance transfers could be introduced. Simplifying and improving remittance-receiving systems would encourage more senders to use formal channels, even during national or international crises.

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CREATIVE

Unveiling history: A photo essay of the untold stories of Korean 'comfort women'

Akshay Maurya

Abstract

This photo essay delves into the harrowing experiences of Korean comfort women during World War II, who were subjected to sexual slavery by the Japanese military. We use the term "victim-survivors" to refer to these individuals, acknowledging both the profound harm they endured and their remarkable resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity. This term also reflects the complex and non-linear nature of their experiences, recognising that not all who lived through these atrocities may identify with these labels. Through a series of evocative photographs taken at the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul, South Korea, this essay sheds light on these women's trauma, resilience, and their ongoing quest for justice.

The museum, founded by the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance, honours the resilience and courage of victim-survivors and educates the public about the atrocities committed against comfort women. Designed as both a memorial and an advocacy space, the museum aims to foster global solidarity, raise awareness about gender-based violence in armed conflicts, and advocate for justice and human rights. Its audience includes survivors, researchers, activists, educators, and international visitors, reflecting its dual role as an educational and advocacy platform. The museum has been met with mixed reactions, inspiring solidarity from many while sparking denial and opposition from Japanese authorities, particularly right-wing politicians and officials. These groups have often sought to downplay or deny Japan's responsibility, further emphasising the museum's significance as a site of historical memory, activism, and ongoing dialogue about justice and reconciliation. By narrating these untold stories through powerful images and detailed captions, this photo essay contributes to a broader discourse on war crimes, gender-based violence, and the critical need to preserve such histories for the education of future generations.

***Trigger Warning**: This photo essay discusses themes of sexual violence, war crimes, and trauma related to the experiences of Korean comfort women during World War II. The content, including descriptions and photographs, may be distressing to some readers. Discretion is advised.*

Introduction

The Japanese sexual slavery of comfort women during World War II stands as one of the darkest chapters in East Asian history. The victim-survivors, primarily young Korean women, were forcibly taken from their homes and subjected to brutal and

degrading treatment by the Japanese military. This photo essay emerges from a field visit to the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul, South Korea, where I delved into the harrowing history of these atrocities, the lived experiences of the Korean comfort women, and the enduring legacy of this crime against humanity.

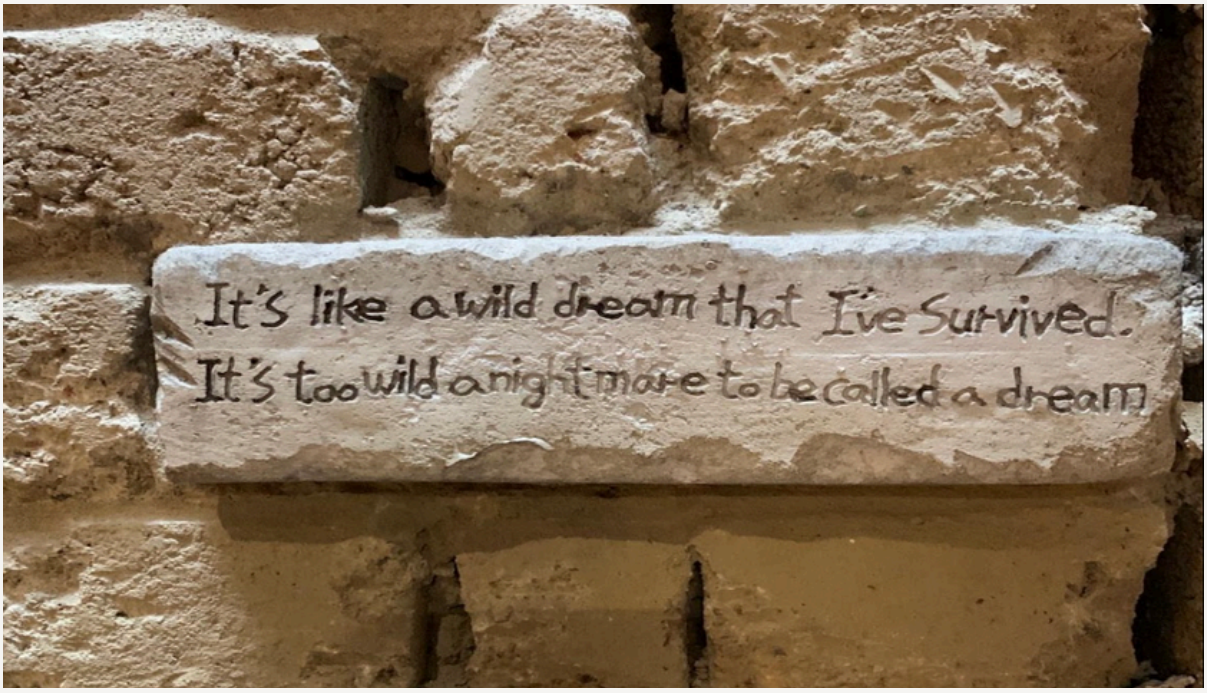
The term "military sexual slavery" is often used to describe the forced sex work operations conducted by Imperial Japan in its occupied territories. However, the phrase remains contested, and its acceptance is far from universal. Historical records reveal that during the 1940s, men and women across Asia were mobilised for various purposes, including reportage, medicine, and manual labour (Chung 2005: 303). Women were recruited through organisations like the Women's Voluntary Labor Corps and the Women's Voluntary Corps to work in munitions factories in Japan and Korea. Yet, the boundaries of these groups were often blurred, particularly in Korea, where the name "Women's Voluntary Corps" was sometimes used to conceal the true nature of forced military sexual slavery (Chung 2005: 304).

Several survivors have recounted their traumatic experiences, revealing that they were taken from elementary schools under the guise of the Women's Voluntary Corps, only to be coerced into becoming military sex slaves in war zones. This manipulation of legal terminology highlights the systemic abuse that these women endured. While "Women's Voluntary Corps" was a legally recognised term, the stark reality of "military sex slaves" was hidden beneath its veneer.

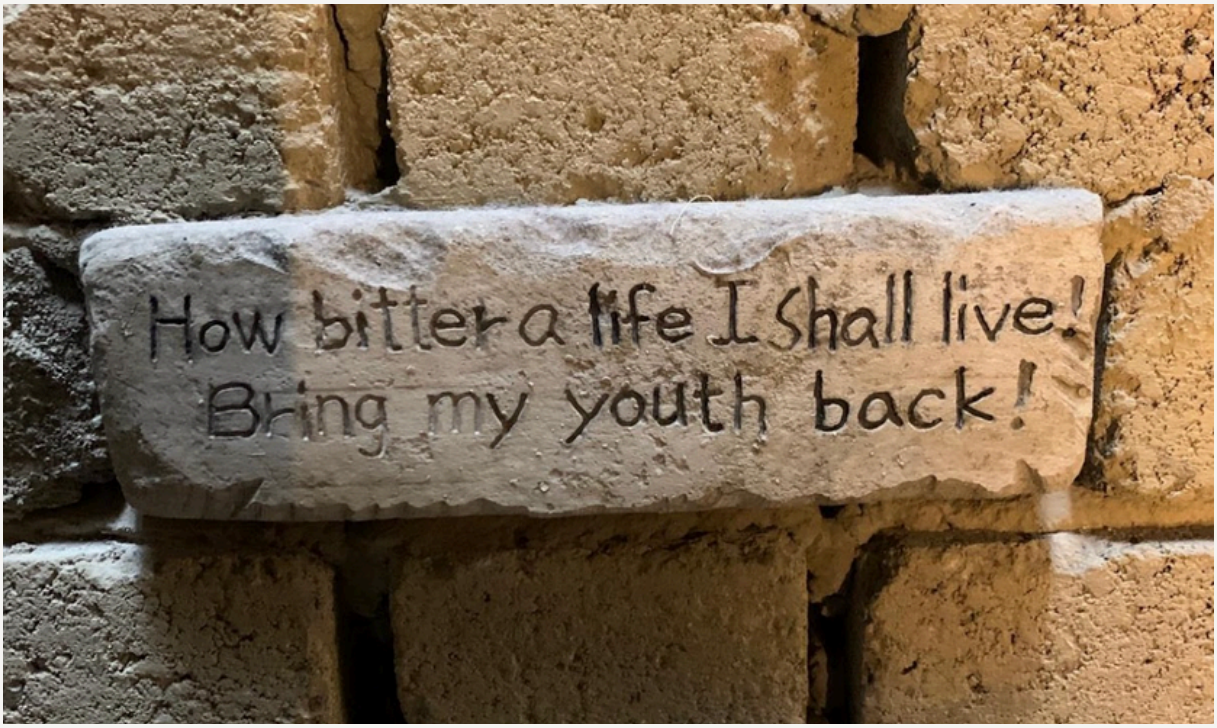
Building upon this historical context, it is crucial to acknowledge the scale of this atrocity. A 1996 United Nations investigation estimated that approximately 200,000 women were enslaved in military brothels operated by the Japanese Imperial Army (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1996). These 'comfort stations' began as early as 1932, with the majority of victim-survivors being Korean, though women from China, the Philippines, and other occupied regions also suffered. The museum not only preserves these painful memories but also serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and recognition faced by the survivors and their descendants.

Echoes in stone: The inscribed voices of comfort women

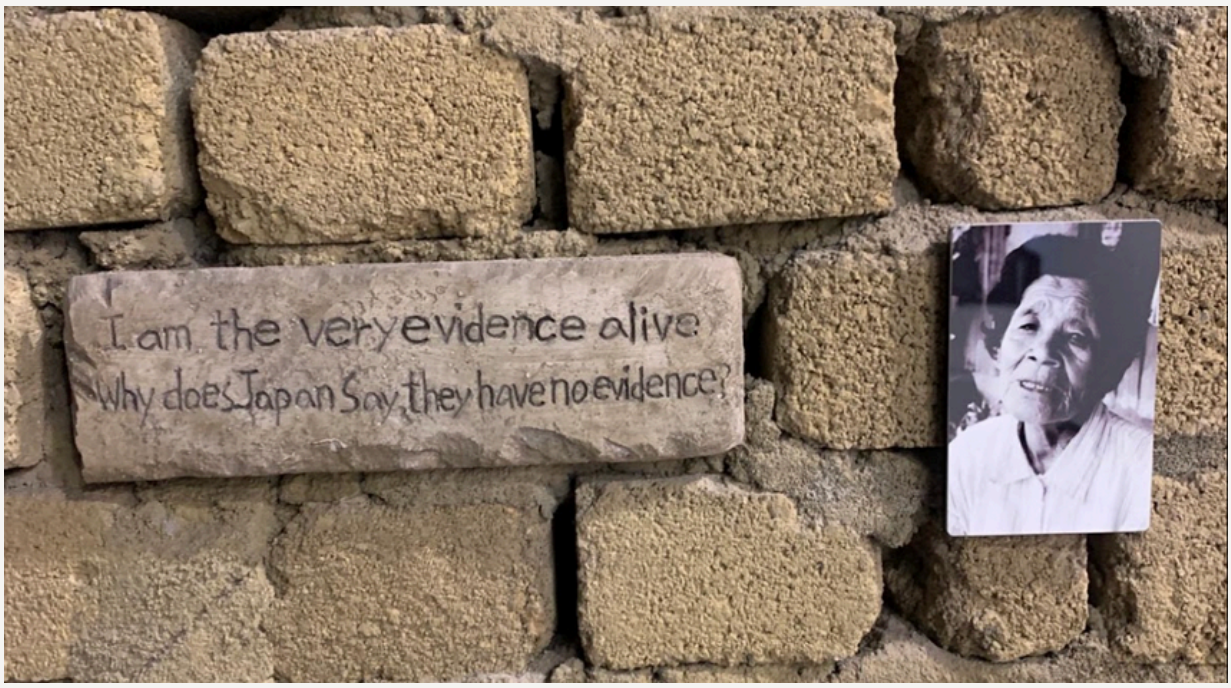
As I entered the museum, I was immediately confronted by the haunting words of the victim-survivors carved into the walls. These carvings represent the voices of the comfort women as shared during interviews, where they recounted their harrowing experiences in the comfort stations. These inscriptions serve as powerful, silent testimonies, capturing the pain, fear, and resilience of the women who endured unimaginable suffering. Each word etched into the stone echoes the voices of those who refuse to be forgotten despite the passage of time.



A Survivor's Reflection: 'It's like a wild dream that I've survived. It's too wild a nightmare to be called a dream.' These words, carved into the wall, encapsulate the harrowing reality faced by the comfort women. The blurred line between dream and nightmare reflects the deep psychological scars left by their experiences, highlighting the enduring trauma that continues to haunt them.



A Cry for Lost Innocence: 'How bitter a life I shall live! Bring my youth back!' These anguished words express the deep sorrow and longing of a comfort woman who was robbed of her youth and forced into a life of suffering. The plea for a lost childhood resonates with the injustice of a stolen future, a wound that time cannot heal.



A Living Testament: 'I am the very evidence alive. Why does Japan say they have no evidence?' This powerful statement challenges the denial of historical atrocities, asserting the undeniable existence of the survivors as living proof of Japan's war crimes. It highlights the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice as the comfort women continue to fight against the erasure of their painful past.

A Hope for Peace: 'These children should live in the peaceful world.' This heartfelt plea expresses a longing for a future free from the horrors of war and suffering. The women express their desire to spare the next generation from the trauma they endured, embodying a universal hope for peace and the protection of innocent lives.

A Beacon of Hope: 'I want to be a hope for women suffering from the same pain to mine.' This powerful inscription reflects the victim-survivor's wish to transform her suffering into a source of strength for others. It embodies a message of solidarity and resilience, offering hope to those who continue to endure similar pain, and serves as a testament to the lasting spirit of those who have survived unimaginable hardships.

As I ascended the stairs, I was struck by a haunting painting depicting a young girl, which signifies that girls as young as 11 years old were "used" as comfort women by the Japanese military. Under Japanese regulations, sex workers were required to be at least 18 years old in Japan and 17 years old in Korea. While some documents specify age limits, the majority of army brothel regulations did not, and victim-survivors were reported to the Korean government as ranging from 11 to 24 years old at the time of their transfer.

Adrift in Innocence: This evocative painting of a young girl on a boat symbolizes the tragic fate of children as young as eleven, who were coerced into becoming comfort women by the Japanese military. The boat, often a symbol of journey and transition, here represents the forced and irreversible passage from childhood into a world of suffering and exploitation. The girl's serene yet sorrowful expression captures the profound loss of innocence endured by these young victim-survivors.

Dark realities: Inside the 'comfort stations' of war

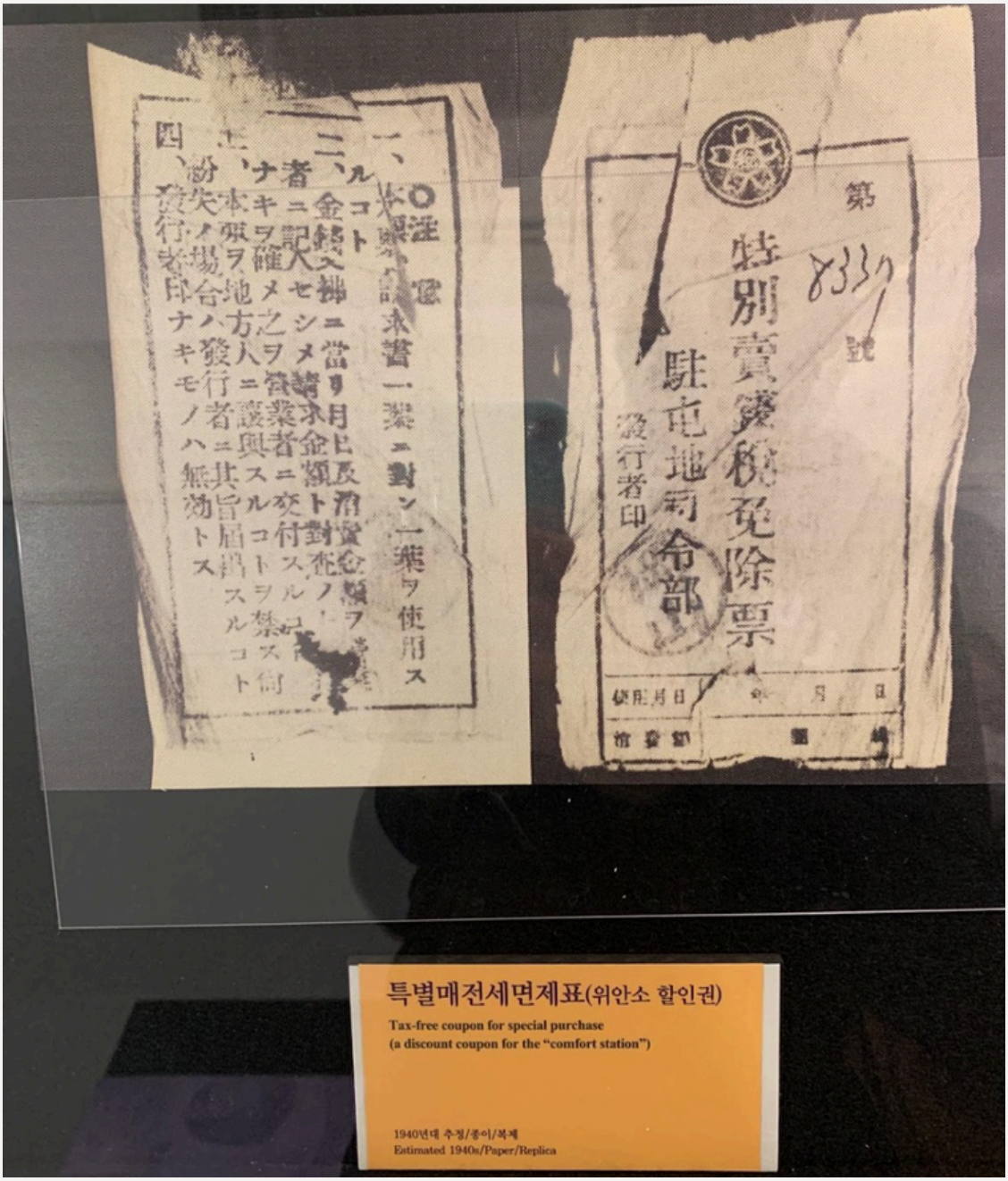
The Japanese military's establishment of military brothels, known as 'comfort stations', in its colonies, including Korea, China, and the Philippines, can be traced back to the early 20th century. These brothels were designed to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers, to boost morale, and prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The women who worked in these brothels were euphemistically referred to as comfort women, a term that obscured the brutal reality of their existence. However, as the UN Special Rapporteur noted (Coomaraswamy 1996), what occurred in these 'comfort stations' was, in fact, military sexual slavery, as the Japanese military primarily targeted women who

were fleeing poverty and forced labour. The majority of Korean women taken for military sexual slavery were from the rural lower classes, possibly to minimise any social unrest occurring as a result of the mobilisation (Chung 2005: 312).

In Korea, the recruitment of comfort women began in 1932, when the Japanese military occupied the country. Photographs show that Korean women were either abducted or lured with false promises of work and then transported to Japanese military bases and comfort stations throughout Asia. Japanese soldiers raped, tortured, and inflicted other forms of sexual violence on the women once they arrived. Although brothel regulations officially prohibited alcohol and violence, soldiers and brothel managers often ignored these rules, with numerous accounts documenting their acts of cruelty and violence. Many comfort women were forced to serve dozens of men daily and were frequently beaten and threatened with death if they refused.

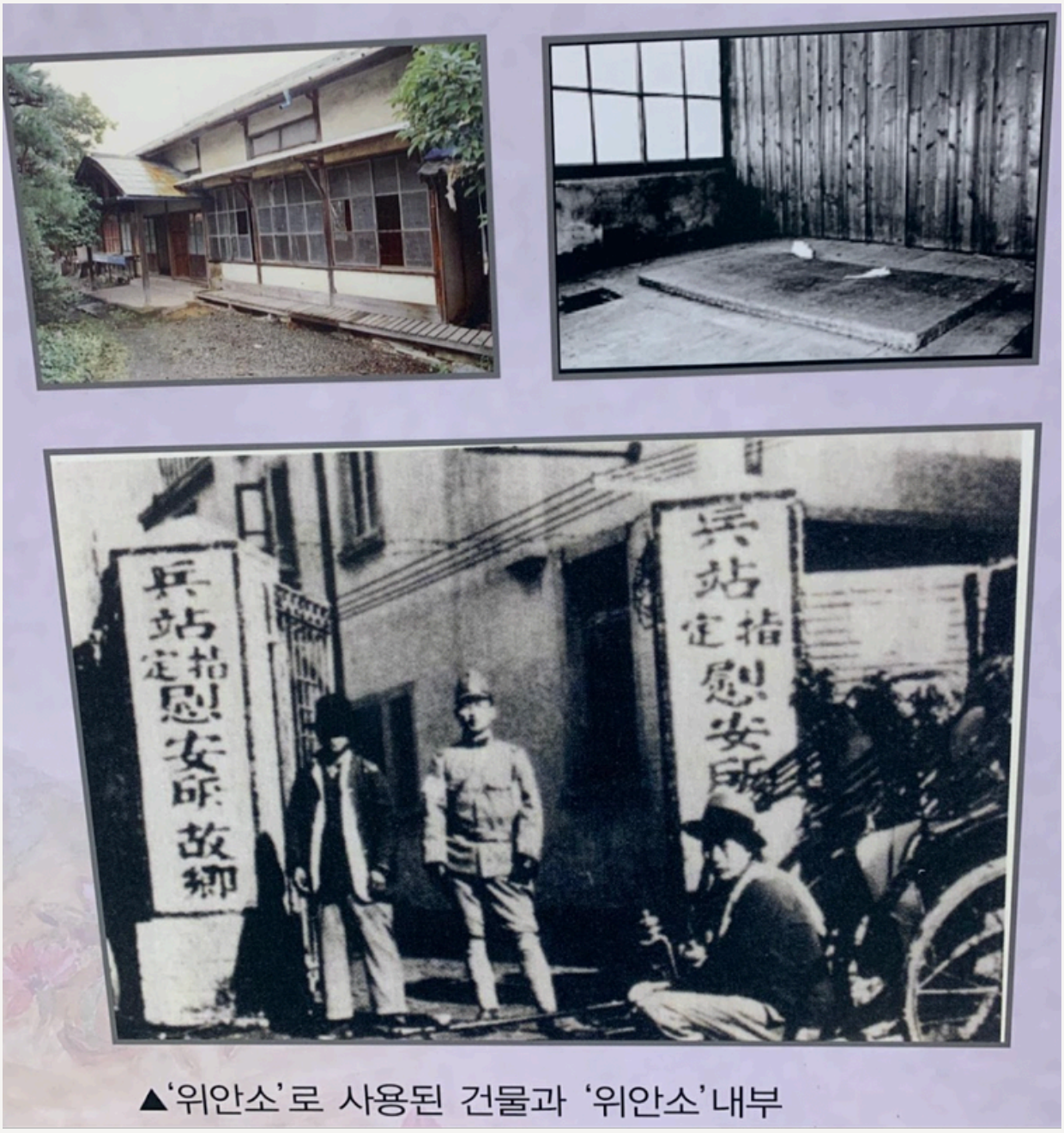
A sombre procession of young Korean women being transported/trafficked to Japanese military 'comfort stations', where they would face unimaginable horrors.

Following their forced arrival at the 'comfort stations', the Japanese military extended the women's exploitation beyond immediate violence. To ensure systematic abuse, they actively incentivised soldiers to visit these brothels. They distributed tax-free coupons and free contraceptives, making access to the 'comfort stations' both convenient and encouraged. These deliberate measures dehumanized the women further and perpetuated their suffering. By issuing these coupons, the military commodified women's bodies, reducing them to mere tools for the soldiers' pleasure and amplifying the tragedy of their plight.



Tax-free coupons were distributed to Japanese soldiers, facilitating their visits to 'comfort stations'.

The comfort station interior offers a chilling glimpse into the harsh conditions these women endured. Stark and devoid of any semblance of comfort or humanity, these rooms were the setting for relentless sexual violence. Photographs of soldiers waiting their turn outside these stations further illustrate the systematic and organised nature of this abuse. The images expose the horrifying routine of exploitation, where women were reduced to mere objects in a brutal system designed to satisfy the soldiers' desires. These scenes, captured in stark detail, convey the relentless and dehumanising cycle of violence that defined the lives of the comfort women.

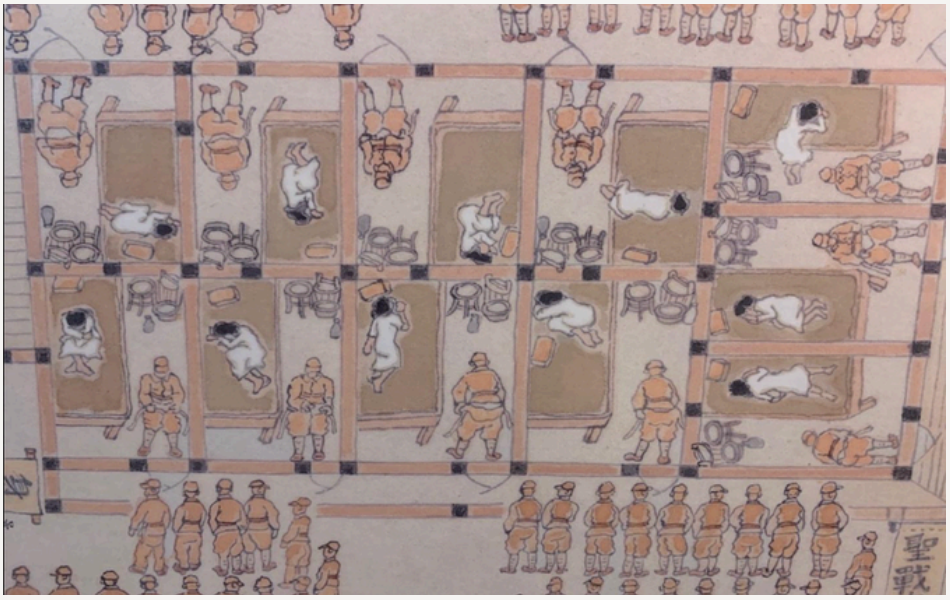


▲'위안소'로 사용된 건물과 '위안소'내부

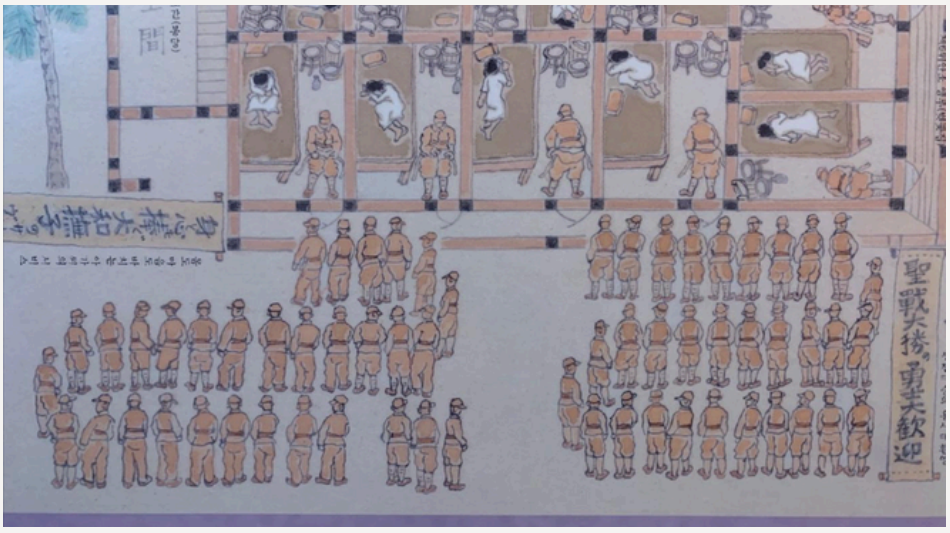
The bleak interior of a comfort station, where women endured constant abuse, juxtaposed with images of soldiers waiting their turn. (Translation of the sign: Buildings used as 'comfort stations' and the interior of 'comfort stations')

The harrowing reality of the comfort stations is further revealed in a shocking diagram that lays bare the grim architecture of these sites of abuse. At the centre of the station were small, cramped rooms where comfort women were repeatedly raped, their suffering hidden behind closed doors. Surrounding these rooms, long queues of Japanese soldiers awaited their turn, a stark visualisation of the relentless cycle of exploitation. The diagram below is a powerful reminder of the systematic and calculated nature of the violence inflicted upon these women, turning their torment into a grotesque routine within the rigid structure of the comfort station.

Complete diagram of a comfort station.

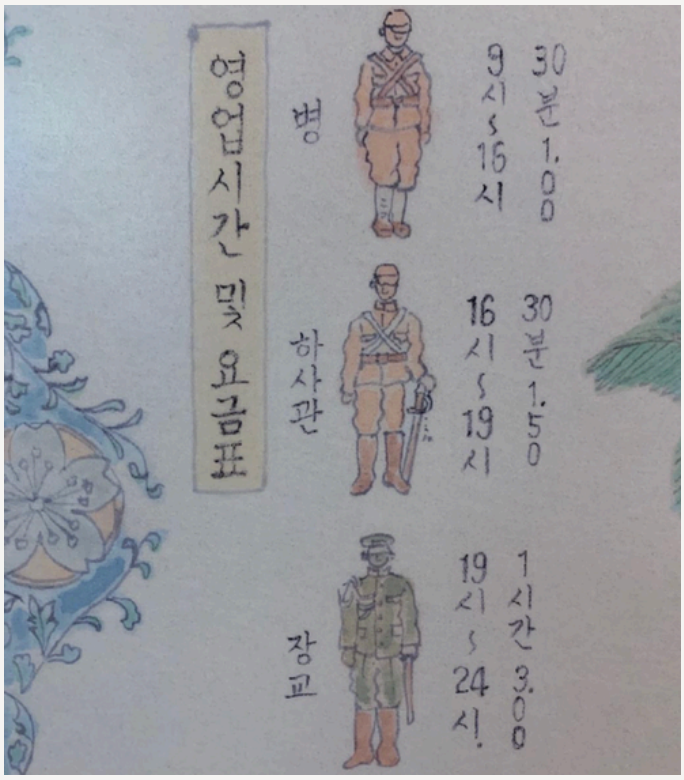


At the centre of a comfort station, there were small rooms in which comfort women were raped.



A long queue of Japanese soldiers waiting for their turn to rape comfort women.

The brutal efficiency of the comfort station system is further underscored by the business hours and rate tables displayed within these facilities. This chart, which varied according to the rank of the soldier, provides a disturbing glimpse into the calculated commodification of sexual violence. For low-ranked soldiers, the business hours were from 9 am to 4 pm, allowing 30 minutes to rape a comfort woman at a cost of 100 Japanese yen. Sergeants were allocated business hours from 4 pm to 7 pm, with the same duration at a price of 150 Japanese yen. Officers had access between 7 pm to 12 am, with 1 hour and 30 minutes allotted at a cost of 300 Japanese yen.



A rate table and business hours chart from a comfort station revealing the calculated exploitation based on military rank. *Translation Credits: Museum Staff*

The regimented cruelty of the comfort station system extended far beyond immediate violence, encompassing regular medical check-ups for venereal diseases as another means of control over the 'comfort women'. Subjected to frequent examinations—weekly, monthly, or bimonthly—these women were monitored to ensure they remained fit for exploitation, with records of these check-ups still surfacing years after the war. The Japanese government supplied the brothels with condoms and emphasised sanitary conditions, yet venereal diseases were rampant. Infected women were often injected with 'Number 606,' likely the mercury-based Salvarsan, and those with severe diseases were barred from returning to the brothels, their fate after that unknown. To protect the health of Japanese military personnel, medical soldiers were stationed at comfort stations to ensure the women were free of sexually transmitted diseases, further revealing the calculated dehumanisation they endured. The discovery of these grim practices, thinly veiled as medical care, left me deeply shaken, a stark

reminder of the depths of cruelty that humanity can reach.

Japanese military doctors perform medical check-ups to prevent venereal diseases among soldiers.

Forsaken and forgotten: The tragic aftermath of war for comfort women

The Japanese military's exploitation of comfort women persisted relentlessly throughout World War II, up until Japan's defeat in 1945. However, even in the aftermath of the war, the suffering of these women did not end. Rather than repatriate the women forced into brothels, the Japanese army often resorted to extreme measures to cover up their crimes. Testimonies from both soldiers and survivors reveal that the military forced many women to commit suicide, killed them by confining them in caves or submarines, or simply abandoned them in brothels (Chung 2005: 313). Many women were left pregnant and suffering from various diseases, further compounding their trauma. As Japan surrendered and the war drew to a close, countless comfort women were left to fend for themselves on the battlefield, with many being tragically massacred or left behind to face an uncertain fate.

Comfort women sit helplessly outside a comfort station, their faces reflecting the despair and suffering endured during and after the war as they were left abandoned and forgotten. (Translation: Korean victim Pak Yong-Sim holds a photo of herself when she was abandoned while pregnant immediately after Japan's defeat). For a more detailed account, please refer to Chung 2005: 314.

The image below captures the devastating physical and emotional scars endured by the comfort women. In the top right corner, Eun-Rye Kim's dislocated shoulder is visible—a result of the violent abuse she suffered at a comfort station. Her medical certificate, shown in the bottom right of the image, stands as tangible evidence of the atrocities committed against her, including the hearing loss she experienced due to this violence. In the top left corner, Pak Yong Sim points to a scar on her neck, a chilling reminder of her encounter with a Japanese soldier at a comfort station in Nanking. When she resisted his advances, he threatened her with a long sword. In her struggle to defend herself, she was cut, causing severe bleeding that required immediate medical attention. These accounts exemplify the immense courage and resilience of the comfort women, even in the face of unimaginable cruelty.

Scars from forced abortions and violence on comfort women, alongside medical certificates.

The map below chillingly depicts the sheer scale of the comfort station system across Japanese-occupied territories in the Asia-Pacific region. Each dot marks a site where systematic exploitation occurred, illustrating the vast scale of this atrocity. Red dots mark locations confirmed by survivors and victims, while blue dots indicate stations corroborated by soldiers. Green dots show stations verified by witnesses, and yellow dots highlight those confirmed through Japanese military documents. This map underscores the extensive reach of the Japanese military's abuse, affecting countless women across a vast geographic area, and serves as a powerful reminder of the widespread suffering inflicted during this dark chapter in history.

A map illustrates Japan's vast comfort station network across the Asia-Pacific region. (Please zoom in on the map to see the locations clearly)

Breaking the silence: The long journey to acknowledgement

For nearly fifty years after the war, the horrific reality of military sexual slavery remained hidden from public knowledge in both the countries of origin of the comfort women and within Japanese society. The Japanese government meticulously planned and executed its policies in secrecy, destroying the majority of relevant documents after Japan's defeat. For decades, the few documents that survived were inaccessible to the public, and the international community largely ignored the issue of comfort women. The surviving victims faced widespread shame and stigma, exacerbated by the fact that most Asian countries were former colonies, economically impoverished, and politically weak. In many cases, governments prioritised economic recovery and diplomatic ties with Japan over seeking justice for survivors, while patriarchal norms and class hierarchies further silenced their voices. This situation contributed to their reluctance to pursue Japan's war responsibilities. Countries like China abandoned their demands, while Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia resolved the issue by accepting small sums of money along with loans and technological training. Furthermore, these governments suppressed the voices of their own people, fearing that any disturbance might halt the flow of economic assistance from Japan.

Patriarchy in these countries further silenced both the victim-survivors and the soldiers who had used the military brothels. The stigma associated with military sexual slavery, often equated with sex work, discouraged women from middle

and upper classes from engaging with the issue. As a result, the victim-survivors of military sexual slavery not only endured national exploitation but also faced sexism and class discrimination. This combination of factors kept the problem buried for decades. It was not until the 1990s that the issue of comfort women began to gain widespread attention, and survivors started to speak out and demand justice. In 1988, the harsh realities of comfort women and 'comfort stations' came to light when Kim Hak Sun became the first woman to testify publicly about her experiences.

As the issue gained public attention, the Japanese government's continued denial of responsibility fuelled anger among Korean women's groups, sparking further activism. In July 1990, the Korean Research Group of Women Drafted for Military Sex Slavery by Japan was formed, followed by the establishment of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan in November, serving as an umbrella group for Korean women's organisations. Simultaneously, more survivors began to come forward. The Korean Council set up a victim-survivors hotline in September 1991, followed by the Japanese Hotline for Military Comfort Women in January 1992. These hotlines served as crucial platforms for recording the harrowing stories of many other women, further amplifying the voices of those who had long been silenced.

Telephone used for comfort women hotline.

A recorder was used to document the victim-survivors testimonies.

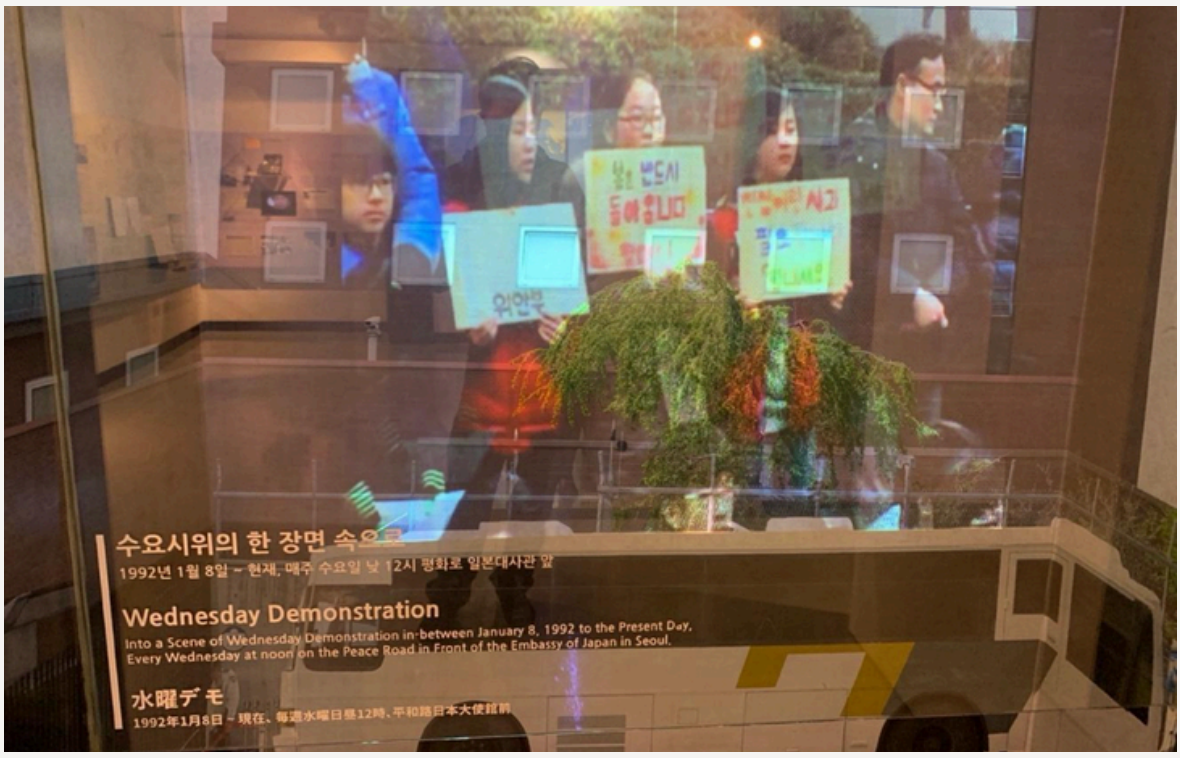
Voices of resistance: The Wednesday Demonstrations for justice

For many years, the Japanese government vehemently denied the existence of comfort women and the comfort stations where they were held. However, undeniable military documents eventually brought the truth to light. Faced with mounting evidence, Japan partially acknowledged the issue but shifted the blame, claiming that private firms rather than the government carried out these

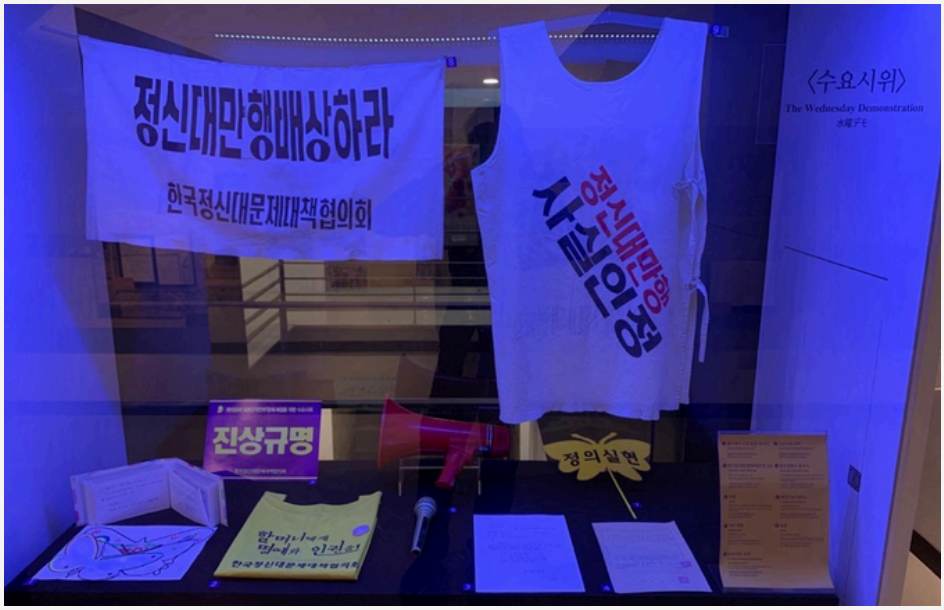
atrocities. This denial of responsibility has resulted in Japan never issuing an official apology to Korean victim-survivors nor offering any legal reparations.

The painful legacy of Japanese sexual slavery continues to resonate not only in Korea but throughout Asia. In response to this ongoing injustice, the Korean Council—a coalition of women's rights groups—began a series of weekly demonstrations. Since 8 January 1992, these Wednesday Demonstrations have occurred outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, symbolising the persistent demand for an official apology and legal reparations (Han and Griffith 2017). Despite decades of activism and advocacy, the Japanese government has yet to offer a meaningful apology or compensation to the surviving victims. Many of these women have passed away without ever seeing justice. The remaining survivors, now elderly, carry the weight of their unresolved trauma as they continue their relentless pursuit of closure and healing.

The Korean Council spearheaded the Wednesday Demonstrations for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, an advocacy group representing survivors and supporters (Kim and Lee 2017; Lee 2014). Founded in 1990, the Council united more than thirty local women's organisations and quickly became South Korea's most influential movement for addressing the injustices of military sexual slavery (Kim 2015; Min 2003). Their unwavering commitment has kept the issue in the public eye, continually pressing the Japanese government for accountability and justice.



In their demand for an official apology and legal reparations, Korean nationals have held 'Wednesday Demonstrations' every week since 1992 in front of the Japanese embassy.



Instruments used at 'Wednesday Demonstrations'.

As the justice movement gained momentum, a powerful symbol of resistance and remembrance emerged: the Statue of Peace, installed in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul in 2011. This statue was erected to commemorate the comfort women and quickly became a focal point of national and international attention. The statue, a bronze figure of a barefoot teenage girl clad in traditional Korean clothing, sits with her fists clenched in her lap and her gaze fixed resolutely on the Japanese Embassy across the street. Beside her, an empty chair invites viewers to take a seat, transforming the act of observation into one of participation. This gesture completes the memorial, turning passive bystanders into active participants in commemoration, consolation, mourning, reflection, and protest.

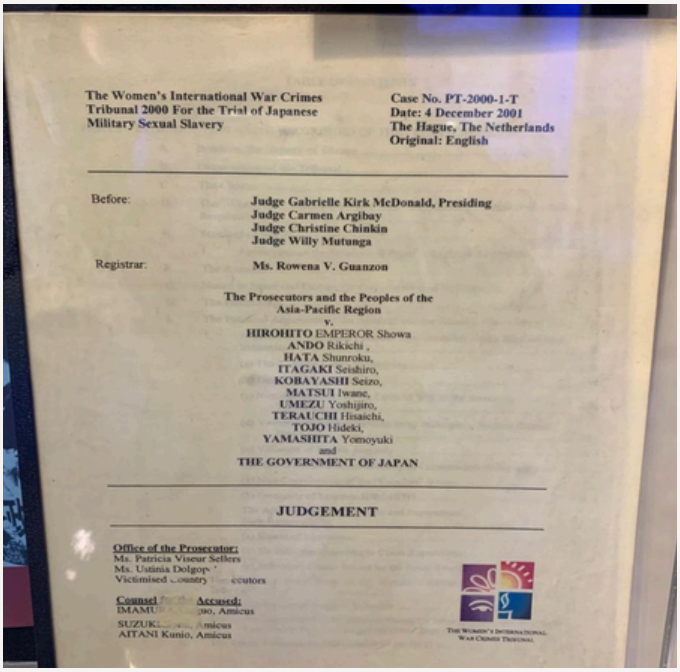
The installation of this statue marked the 1000th Wednesday Demonstration, further solidifying its significance. Since its unveiling, identical statues have been installed throughout South Korea and beyond in countries like the US, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Germany, serving as enduring reminders of the unresolved issue of Japan's wartime atrocities. The Japanese government strongly condemned the installation of the Statue of Peace, demanding its removal and escalating diplomatic tensions with South Korea. When another memorial was erected in December 2016 in front of the Japanese consulate in Busan, South Korea's second-largest city, Japan withdrew its ambassador in protest and suspended negotiations on a bilateral currency swap agreement. It also cancelled high-level economic talks, signalling the extent to which Japan viewed the memorial as a provocation. Although the ambassador returned in April 2017, the issue remained a point of contention. The memorial's rhetorical materiality carried significant geopolitical weight, as demonstrated by continued disputes over its presence. Notably, after South Korea's change in government in 2018, the 2015 bilateral agreement on comfort women was

effectively nullified with the closure of the Japan-funded foundation responsible for compensating survivors (Choe 2018). Local efforts to remove memorials in Seoul and Busan have drawn fierce public backlash, leading to widespread protests and media scrutiny. In Busan, strong citizen resistance forced authorities to reinstate the memorial after its initial removal by the police (Choe 2016). These events illustrate the enduring tensions surrounding historical memory, national identity, and diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea.

Statue of Peace memorial in Seoul, South Korea.

Seeking justice: The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal

The relentless activism of Asian women's organisations over the course of a decade at the United Nations and International Labour Organization culminated in a significant milestone: the establishment of the *Women's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery* in 2000. This tribunal, inspired by the 1967 International War Crimes Tribunal on Vietnam, was a people's tribunal that sought justice for the victim-survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery. It was organised with five judges, including practising judges and law professors, and ten prosecutor teams representing Japan and the victimized countries—Korea, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, Malaysia, East Timor, and the Netherlands. Remarkably, both South and North Korea united as a single team in the prosecution, highlighting the profound importance of this cause. The tribunal's verdict was a powerful statement: it held the Japanese government legally responsible for providing compensation and found ten individuals, including Emperor Hirohito, guilty of crimes against humanity. Although it was a people's tribunal, its rulings have been recognised as legal precedents, reflecting the collective determination to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.



The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000 For the Trial of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery

Case No. PT-2000-1-T
Date: 4 December 2001
The Hague, The Netherlands
Original: English

Before: Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, Presiding
Judge Carmen Argibay
Judge Christine Chinkin
Judge Willy Mutunga

Registrar: Ms. Rowena V. Guanzon

The Prosecutors and the Peoples of the Asia-Pacific Region
v
HIROHITO EMPEROR Showa
ANDO Rikichi ,
HATA Shunroku,
ITAGAKI Seishiro,
KOBAYASHI Seizo,
MATSUI Iwane,
UMEZU Yoshijiro,
TERAUCHI Hisaichi,
TOJO Hideki,
YAMASHITA Yomoyuki
and
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

JUDGEMENT

Office of the Prosecutor:
Ms. Patricia Viseur Sellers
Ms. Ustinia Dolgopy

Counsel
IMAMU

Accused:
SUZUKI
AITANI Kunio, Amicus

Copy of the Judgement of *The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery*

Faces of resilience: The women behind the history

As we conclude this photo essay, it is essential to turn our focus to the victim-survivors—the women who endured unimaginable suffering under Japanese military sexual slavery. The following photos capture their faces, stories, and the indomitable spirit they carried despite the horrors they faced. Each image serves as a solemn reminder of their pain, resilience, and the ongoing fight for justice. These photos honour their memories and ensure that their voices, silenced for so long, continue to be heard.

Victim-survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery.

As we reflect on the images of the victim-survivors, it is fitting to highlight the profound role of the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul, South Korea. This museum stands as a testament to the resilience of the survivors and the enduring importance of their stories. Dedicated to educating future generations, the museum raises awareness about the history of Japanese military comfort women and advocates for a just resolution to this dark chapter in history. The victim-survivors are honoured in the bricks of the memorial wall, with their images and stories intricately woven into its very foundation. Through these depictions, the museum ensures that their legacy lives on, reminding us all of the need for justice and remembrance.

Victim-survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery are depicted in the bricks of the memorial wall of the War & Women's Rights Museum.

Conclusion

Military sexual slavery represents a profound violation of women's rights, driven by the violence of a powerful imperialist nation against the vulnerable populations of weaker nations. This atrocity was not only an assault on civilians by the state but also a stark example of class discrimination, as the majority of the victim-survivors came from the lower classes. The conditions of war exacerbated the brutality of this system. The complex web of power dynamics—rooted in gender, nation, state, class, and the wartime context—has shaped both the disclosure of these crimes and the responses from states and the public.

In postwar Korea, activists have transformed military sexual slavery into one of the most pressing social concerns, shifting the focus from labour and class issues to humanitarian and women's rights. The country's women's movement has shattered the silence enforced by patriarchy, amplifying survivors' voices and building solidarity with global women's organisations. Additionally, the Korean government has steadily increased pressure on Japan to confront its past, ensuring that the issue remains central to historical and diplomatic discourse .

Despite these advancements, a resolution to the issue of military sexual slavery remains elusive. Japan's reluctance to fully acknowledge and address these atrocities has been a significant barrier, compounded by the complexities of

historical narratives and international diplomacy. This ongoing denial underscores the challenges of confronting historical human rights abuses and achieving justice for the survivors. Japanese lobbying has effectively stymied efforts to address the issue through the United Nations, while Korean women's organisations, once deeply committed to this cause, have had to shift focus toward addressing other pressing issues such as workplace discrimination, gender-based violence, and reproductive rights within Korea. However, the path forward lies in the continued growth of women's power, the deepening of democracy, the increasing influence of Asian nations in global affairs, and the pursuit of equality and peace. Only through these means can the enduring impact of military sexual slavery be fully addressed and justice finally achieved.

***Image Courtesy**: Author*
***Acknowledgement**: All photographs have been taken by the author during his visit on 11th April 2023. The author is grateful to Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea, for funding the field visit and to the museum staff who contributed to understanding and documentation of the issue.*

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"Honey, they hurt me a lot. I want other people to know"

Mireille Kayeye

Abstract

Despite lived experiences of displacement being common within the refugee support sector, accounts of women seeking asylum producing research remain rare—a gap which I wish to address, and which I confront firsthand as both an academic researcher and a practitioner within the refugee space. As part of a large project exploring the lived experience of women seeking asylum in Australia, I use qualitative and visual participatory methods. These included a focus group discussion where I met Bella (name changed for confidentiality), a woman who had travelled to Australia by boat and lived in a Regional Processing Centre (IPC) in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. At the time of the interview, she had been released in community detention awaiting a decision on her protection visa application. As a researcher with first-hand experience of displacement and asylum, one challenge I face is the conflation of refugees and people seeking asylum, overlooking the unique experiences of those who are still awaiting an outcome on their visa application. In my interdisciplinary research, I aim to create a space where the voices of women who are seeking asylum can be encountered. Here, I focus on presenting the voices of the women as they are, to really 'give voice' to women regarding how they experience asylum. I seek to share the experiences of the women I met throughout my research, shedding light on an element of the asylum journey that is commonly omitted.

Introduction

Asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat have always been framed as a threat to Australia's security, shaping the country's restrictive and punitive asylum policies. McAdam (2013) argues that Australia's policies to prevent people seeking asylum from arriving by boat are linked to the country's fear of an invasion 'from the sea', which has led to harsh asylum policies. Decisions such as the Pacific Solution; the subsequent Operation Sovereign Border (OSB) (Hodge, 2015) using military tactics to prevent maritime arrivals; the introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs); and offshore processing centres in Manus and Nauru have left many people seeking asylum stranded in limbo with no hope of rebuilding their lives (McAdam, 2013).

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) highlights that the creation of detention centres has harmed people seeking asylum, including children. RCOA states that "the harm caused by detention is even worse for children because their age and stage of development mean they are more profoundly affected by the environment" (RCOA, 2021, p.4). The conditions in detention are

dehumanising and humiliating, which has contributed to extreme emotional distress, mental health issues, suicides, and self-harm cases.

Moreover, people in community detention also face significant restrictions, despite provision of temporary housing, health and welfare services, and intensive casework support (Marshall et al, n.d.). The women I spoke to in this research project explained that they are not allowed to work. Some can volunteer and engage in unpaid employment however those who have completed their secondary education in Australia are not allowed to pursue further education or enrol in university or vocational programs. Although they are living in society, they are subjected to curfews, unwanted visits from caseworkers, and the requirement to seek permission for overnight stays. More importantly, they face the constant fear of being moved to a regional processing centre at any time without any notice, a fear expressed by young women living in community detention.

Bella, a young Iranian in her late twenties, is currently living in community detention. She travelled to Australia by boat nine years ago to seek asylum. Unfortunately, the timing of her arrival coincided with the new policy targeting those travelling on Australian waters. The new policy, entitled 'Operation Sovereign Borders', utilised the slogan 'stop the boats' to demonise people seeking asylum, condemning them to indefinite offshore detention and torture in prison camps on Manus Island and Nauru (Hodge, 2015). Bella lived in detention centres against her will and was released at some point to live in community detention in Melbourne. At the time of the interview, she had received a letter offering for her to apply to be resettled in the United States. The United States resettlement deal, alongside the New Zealand deal, are agreements to manage people seeking asylum who arrived in Australia by boat to be resettled in the United States or New Zealand, or be assisted to voluntarily return home or to another country in which they have a right to enter or reside. Through presenting this interview, I hope to honour Bella's wish to inform others about the experiences of women living in community detention and hoping for safety in Australia.

I, too, navigated Australia's asylum system for four years before obtaining refugee status and, subsequently, citizenship. This dual positionality of insider and outsider informs my approach to research as I seek to centre the voices of women with lived experiences of forced displacement. The experiences of women who have faced forced displacement are often less visible and their unique experiences are overlooked in both mainstream media and academic discourse. Using an empowerment framework (Rowlands, 1995), my current research being undertaken at the University of Melbourne aims to understand the experiences of women in relation to the power structures and relations they navigate. It moves away from using a deficit lens that sees women as passive

and rather aims to discuss women's abilities, agency, and engagement in personal and collective decision-making practices. I am focused on promoting the voices of women seeking asylum; my lived experience has enabled me to connect with other women, creating a space for lived experience to be explored and celebrated.

The study is interdisciplinary and employs qualitative and visual methodologies, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and photovoice, to document the lived experiences of women seeking asylum in Melbourne and Sydney. The following conversation is an excerpt from this larger project, offering insight into the realities of life in community detention through the perspective of a young woman navigating these challenges.

Interview

Prelude

I met Bella when I was conducting a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) at one of the organisations providing support to people seeking asylum in Melbourne, Australia. That day, Bella sat in the room, together with other seven women discussing their experiences, challenges and opportunities for empowerment as women seeking asylum. She was quiet and did not say much. When I tried I invited her to share what she was thinking about, tears started running down her cheeks. She was upset and visibly in distress, almost whispering "My situation is so difficult, I have to leave Australia." Some of the women speaking in Farsi or Arabic responded with care and empathy, hugging her, and trying to comfort her. I took her outside of the room to another private area and explained that she did not need to talk about anything if she was not feeling comfortable.

Later, Bella came back as I was packing up and leaving to ask if she could speak with me in private. I insisted that I did not want her to talk about a sensitive subject that was making her sad. Bella was determined, adding "I did not want to tell you my experience in front of others because it is a different one and they don't know how bad it is for me." She continued saying that she wanted to speak "so other people can know what Australia is doing to us when we come to seek asylum." She added, "some of the women were in this room for the group discussion, we came the same way, by boat, but they now have a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), but I have nothing." On those words and that insistence, I unpacked my recorder, put it back on the table and hit record.

***Bella*:** When I came to Australia I was thinking this country will give me courage to be who I am. Be a woman. Not punishing, not torturing. But the thing in terms of human rights in Australia, whatever I faced is completely different. They tortured me a lot. I arrived in 2013 on Christmas Island by boat. Then nine months, they kicked me in Christmas Island in detention and then after nine

months, by force without my permission, they sent me to Nauru. I have been at the time suicidal because I was very stressed. I didn't want to go to Nauru.
…

Bella: When I went there. For two weeks I was under RPC one (Regional Processing Centre)… and then after two weeks, they took me to the family camp area. It was a terrible experience I can ever imagine. It was a tent. No accommodation, no air conditioner. It was 35 degrees. And it was rocks everywhere, dust and phosphate everywhere. Many children, families, young beautiful ladies, men and women, they have been struggling living in the tents. For single ladies it was like one tent like this [shows a big room with both hands]. It was six rooms, small rooms, each room has one simple bed and there is a one box plastic box container you can leave your property inside; there is no door, there is no privacy. Everyone shouts, makes noise, you don't feel comfortable. All day, security guards walking up with their boots, voices, listening to music loudly…

Mimi: I'm really sorry you had to go through that. I don't want you to talk about this if it makes you feel uncomfortable.

Bella: I want to. I want to mention this. I didn't mention it only in front of other people because I feel like on one side, they will never take it and they get upset. And then I was thinking, on the other, it might be this kind of a story might give them courage and they say oh my situation is better than hers. That's the thing I want to mention.

Mimi: Right.

Bella: Eight years and a half they kept me in Nauru. And I have been sexually harassed, verbally and they kept touching my body with their body searches. They offered me to take a bottle of water they offered me to be in relation with them or pay the money; this kind of rubbish thinking from the men like relationship. They said okay be with me, I pay you and then I give you this, whatever you want. This happened many times with the security guards.
…

Bella: In Nauru, they continued to keep me in Australian detention. They said because you are not a refugee. You are not an Australian refugee. That is again, another big bullshit lie. Because all these systems have been under Australian control. Who sent us there? Australia. All lawyers and judges, everything in Nauru who was it? Australia. And then they said no, it's Nauru that's it. They say no, they are working for Nauru. Another big lie after lie, they keep you like this. And in 2018 I came to Australia for medical treatment, but not under Medivac bill.
…

***Bella*:** I have been tortured again in MITA [Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation] Melbourne detention centre for two years and a half. Their body searches, touching my body again, my anxiety and distress became triple time higher. I put the complaint about all of this to the Australian Human Rights Commission and then they sent them to the Minister to release me to the community.

Mimi: Are you living in the community now?

Bella: Now I'm in community detention. I have no permission to work not to study not staying outside after 10 pm; no one can stay in my house. I am not allowed to travel. Ten years and a half I didn't see my parents. I can't do anything.

Mimi: How does that make you feel?

Bella: Like a dead person? I am like in my own grave. Let me ask you, how it feels? They put your leg chained and they say okay you're free to go. You will feel free? Now that's how I feel. They said okay, we give you an opportunity to go to community but with fucking no opportunity to work. They put chains on my leg that's how I feel. The way they give us more money AUD $300 every two weeks, only money to survive which is not enough. I can't help myself, I can't help my family, they said you can't work, so we feel like we are dead people.

***Mimi*:** Tense pause.

Bella: Like how you look after your pet you say okay sit in here, be nice, don't make noise, I will look after you. But that is an animal. I feel like I am like an animal. They throw me this small money like a piece of meat in front of me and say okay, eat it that's it, that's how I feel.
…
Bella: So recently they sent some letters to people… So they said that you can go to the US or New Zealand or Canada. We are not granting you any permanent residency, here. Some of them they were lucky they stayed in Christmas Island, and they brought them in Australia they gave them three years and five years visa now they are going to be granted permanent residency because of what the new Minister is saying. Now for us, they said because you were in Nauru you're not involved in it. How?

Mimi: That must feel so unfair.

Bella: They hurt me a lot darling. Immigration. All the time saying that you jump on the boat you came to Australia? They did things to me with this world, which I will never forget for the rest of my life. The way they tortured me. I can say it is

worse than in my home country. If I say now these things to them, they are gonna say okay, why you don't go back to your home country? They make me feel sick.
…

Bella: They forget that their great-grandparents came to this country Australia by the chain with the boat, same, it doesn't make sense. Australia's economy and everything keep going because of immigrants. Even, they took this land from the land owners, they are not owners of this land, this land belongs to Aboriginals in Australia, not white people. White people came in and took it by force and now they are doing this to innocent people.
…

Bella: I feel like I'm their slave. I don't have freedom darling. Everywhere I go,…I want to go shopping. I don't have the motivation to do anything. I go sit alone by myself. I buy something maybe I change my mood. I look at people, they go shopping. They are with their family, with kids. They are happy, enjoying. But how about me? I sit alone by myself eating bad food. Do you think I would be happy?

Mimi: I saw you earlier, you were very sad.

Bella: Because I'm not happy at all. Nothing makes me happy.
…
Bella: Again, they do a lot of cruel things. Imagine some people randomly, for no reason, they gave them a bridging visa when they were coming out of detention at the same time as me. Some of them for no reason they said okay, you're in the US deal, we're giving you community detention. But this community detention you can't do anything till you have to keep waiting to see when American will be positive. Again, there is another process, you have to wait for your ticket, flight, if it's yes, or no? Some people they received the ticket two days before they cancelled again. Not by themselves, I mean the government, not the people. So, two days before they fly, they said no you're not going to fly today, it is cancelled. We will let you know. So, they make them crazy. They have been waiting so long. I expect them to give me.
…
Bella: I said to my lawyer … I speak out a lot about my story and situation. The thing is I only asked him if he can help just give them pressure to give me a bridging visa. While I'm in country at least I keep myself busy to have little bit income till I get out of this country. Otherwise, I'm getting crazy. I can't control myself anymore because I am facing a panic attack now today. And when something comes up, I can't control my feelings and emotions. I'm not as strong anymore.

Mimi: And for that reason, I think you've already shared enough with me, thank you. (Starting to pack up the recorder, asking Bella to sign a consent form and asking if she has any further questions). You told me about your boyfriend. How did you meet him?

Bella: He came to Australia like me, by boat. They sent him to Nauru; he was struggling for another fucking eight years. He is African and a soccer player. Yeah, he's a good person. He understands me.

Mimi: Thank you so much Bella, it means a lot to me that you shared all of this with me today.

Conclusion

I had a visceral reaction to Bella's interview. I arrived at my house and could not stop thinking about her experience. She had so much anger and had suffered so much pain. Her description of the abuse she experienced at the hands of those responsible for her protection. Yet all she wanted was to be allowed an opportunity to rebuild her life and start afresh…Her body and mind had been so hurt and to witness all that suffering was deeply unsettling.

Her interview was compelling and revealed the inhumane conditions of community detention. It highlighted the violence that occurs in detention centres and the constant fear of not knowing when this situation will come to an end. It illustrated how the body of the asylum seeker is criminalised, humiliated and punished. This manifests in several ways through detention, surveillance, forced relocation, and restrictions on movement. The body of the asylum seeker is subjected to exhaustion, torture, violence, abuse, neglect and lack of care. The asylum seeker body, although a body that is seeking safety and stability is also one that is continuously moved from one space to another within the host country, often without agency or consent. In this case, Bella was moved from Christmas Island detention to Nauru Island, to the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) and back to Community detention in Melbourne. Now she waits to see what the future holds and whether she will be moved again to the United States. Asylum seekers may be transferred between detention centres, deported, or forced to relocate to third countries under resettlement deals. This forced mobility within forced displacement creates a circle of endless states of displacement.

This interview contributes to the wider literature and broader discourse on women seeking asylum, particularly those living in community detention. It highlights the challenges faced by these women, and the hope for an opportunity to rebuild their lives in a country where they have faced pain and suffering. Unfortunately, it also shows the unresolved issue of those living in our communities who are denied the right to stay regardless of how many years

spent waiting and how they have been mistreated in Australia. Bella's situation reveals the systemic ways in which women seeking asylum are treated not as people needing safety and protection but as burdens to be managed and excluded. By denying them stability, agency, and belonging, the asylum system perpetuates cycles of trauma and displacement, preventing them from rebuilding their lives with dignity.

Interview with a woman seeking asylum living in community detention, July 2022

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Uprooted lives: A study of forced migration in 'Chitra Nodir Pare'

Sadiqa Jissan Nabila

Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of forced migration in Tanvir Mokammel's Chitra Nodir Pare, which won seven national film awards for vividly depicting the social situation during Partition in 1947. Set against the backdrop of the post-partition of India, the study analyses the gradually increasing pressure on minorities from society, leading to the displacement of Hindu families in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), particularly in Kolkata. Chitra Nodir Pare (1999) offers a perspective on forced migration by focusing on a family's process of migration, from initial resistance to final acceptance of leaving their ancestral home behind. By employing a close reading of the narrative, symbolism, and characters, this paper will explore the themes of lost identity, belonging, and loss of homeland. Framing the film within the historical context of the partition and its aftermath, this study contributes to the understanding of migration as a complex process rather than a single event. This research also considers the film's significance within the larger discourse on partition depicted in cinema and literature, highlighting the depiction of the overlooked experiences of Hindu migrants in South Asia.

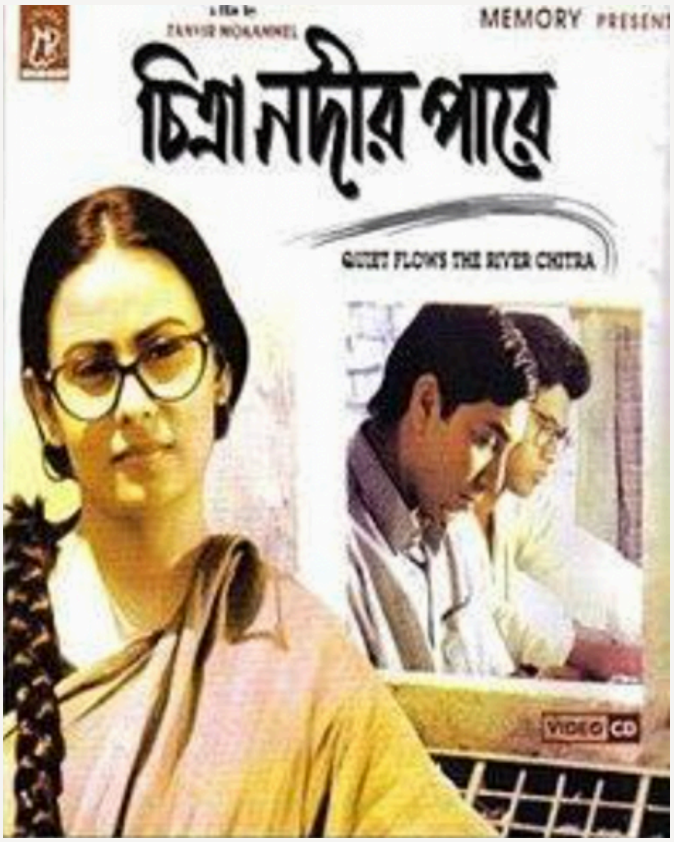

Fig.1. Poster of *Chitra Nodir Pare*

Introduction

The partition of India significantly impacted East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) through forced migration, communal violence, and socio-political challenges. The partition aimed to divide the British Indian province of Bengal to undertake a divide-and-rule process. It led to a majority of Muslim districts being given to Pakistan while the non-Muslim districts were given to India. With approximately fifteen million people displaced as Hindus from Pakistan to India, the migration was characterised by chaos and violence, leading to a major riot between the two communities. This resulted in a large outflow and inflow of people in a short period of time, and a large number of migrants went missing in the process (Bharadwaj et al. 2009).

This study will analyse the film *Chitra Nodir Pare (Quiet Flows the River Chitra)*, which significantly contributed to social understandings of the complexity and psychological impact of migration in Hindu families. After the 1947 partition, Shashikanto's family resisted migration from East Pakistan despite the growing tensions. Though they maintain a friendly relationship with the Muslim neighbourhood along with the budding romance of Minoti (Shashikanto's daughter) with Badol, a series of tragic events forces the family to migrate to Kolkata with heavy hearts. This reflects the reality of many families during and after the partition, who felt compelled to leave their homes due to changing circumstances and safety concerns. This paper will examine how the film challenges the immediate narrative of post-partition migration and how it depicts the gradual erosion of cultural identity and belonging in the communal tension. Therefore, the legacy of partition and communal strife has continued to shape Hindu-Muslim relations in Bangladesh, where the experiences and traumas of partition affect the communities within the region to this day.

Historical context

1947 was a significant year in South Asia as it involved the end of British rule in India, which resulted in the partition of India, giving rise to East Pakistan (Bangladesh). The painful partition triggered one of the largest forced migrations in history, producing a series of long-lasting socio-political repercussions in South Asia. The division of land based on religious fanaticism planted the seed of hatred in the community (Tanveer, Mathur, & Sarwal, 2024). Robbery, riot, and massacre became common. Houses were burned and women were assaulted at large leading to rape and murder, therefore, it is known as one of the most tragic events in human history (Mourya & Mittal 2021).

The forced migration of Hindus from East Pakistan was influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic crisis, political marginalisation, and ongoing unrest. During this period, around two million people were brutally killed in communal massacres (Kulik 2024). The partition of India also greatly impacted economic resources, as both countries (India and Bangladesh) depended largely on

agriculture. The political image of East Pakistan remained unstable, as a result of which poorer sections of society grew poorer while the elite class prospered. By drastically altering the demographic landscape of East Pakistan, the existing communal tensions intensified between the religious groups. The Hindu minorities in the country were socially marginalised and discriminated against, reflecting deeper frustrations and existential crises among the alienated Bengali community. 'Bengali Hindus' from East Pakistan were commonly known as Ghatis, who subsequently suffered due to discrimination in job reservations and financial help from the government. This led to them fostering feelings of being outsiders uprooted from their ancestral homes (Ghosh 2013).

Overview of *Chitra Nodir Pare*

The film is set in Narail, a small provincial town in East Pakistan, which is on the banks of the Chitra River. This is where Shashikanto's family resides. The film focuses on the gentle flow of the river, suggesting a surreal peace that is disturbed by the growing tensions of the human world. Mokammel's use of the river as a symbol is praiseworthy. The river matures, from hosting children playing on its banks to something violent that draws people away from one land to another on boats.

Set against the social background of 1947, the film offers a realistic image of partition through the political unrest and student movement to dismiss military rule and establish democracy in the country. Shashikanta, a Bengali-Hindu lawyer in East Pakistan, faces a major dilemma regarding whether to migrate, leaving behind his undying love for their ancestral home. The Muslim neighbourhood set their eyes on Shashikanto's house after their migration and therefore tried to convince him to evacuate the house for safety. However, Shashikanta stubbornly refuses to leave because of the last promise he had made to his mother.

Shashikanta is a widower who lives lavishly with two children, Minoti and Bidyut, alongside an old aunt in a house by the river. His brother Nidhukanta, a doctor by profession, lives on the other side of the river along with his widowed daughter and wife. Minoti and Bidyut play with the neighbourhood children, and, as a result, Minoti gets involved in a relationship with a Muslim boy named Badol. As they grow up, Badol gets admitted to the University of Dhaka, where the situation is hostile due to political radicalism. Badol gets involved in politics and is shot by the army while in an anti-military student protest. During this period, the community's situation worsened as Hindus became the minority. In a tragic incident, Nidhukanta's daughter Basanti is raped and she commits suicide by drowning herself in the Chitra river. As a result, Nidhukanta leaves for Kolkata in search of security, and Shashikanta is left behind with deteriorating health. While on his evening walk, he suffers from a stroke and passes away by the river banks. Ultimately, Minoti and her aunt set their journey towards Kolkata.

Representation of forced migration in the film

The challenge of migration can include economic, social, and psychological difficulties due to the loss of identity, as people are exposed to deep trauma, or may be forced to migrate under societal pressure. *Chitra Nodir Pare* (1999) provides one of the best depictions of partition and migration in cinematic translations. The differentiation between Hindus and Muslims is systematically established in the film as children from both communities play together. For example, in Bangladesh, there is a slight difference in the language used by Hindus and Muslims. This is referenced as children playfully taunt each other for the way they pronounce certain words that contrast with one another; "do you know Salma-Nazma call a sc-issors, scis-sors?" (Mokammel 1999).

The opening scene of the film is symbolic of refugees' trauma and the pain of leaving their homes. After watching a flock of homeless wild ducks, Minoti turns to her friend Salma and says, "My father says those are the most miserable who don't have a home" (Mokammel, 1999). This reflects the transitory status of the Hindus who were being forcefully uprooted from their ancestral home. The Hindus of Narail are in constant fear of being driven away, which is evident from the film's constant question that they ask each other: "When are you leaving?" However, Shashikanta remains adamant about his decision not to leave his ancestral home for fear of losing his identity. In one scene, he confides in a friend about how the neighbouring Muslim community is pressuring him, to seize his property. It is a sign of danger when the neighbourhood turns out to be an enemy.

As the film progresses, the existential crisis intensifies. The use of Bengali folk songs signifies the pain of loneliness and the crisis of cultural identity, which shapes Shashikanta's pain throughout the film. Self-centredness is a common characteristic among the Hindu and Muslim characters as a result of the riot. As Muslims eye the property of the Hindus left behind, they try to protect the properties of their ancestors. For example, when Shashikanta's old aunt dedicates her time to planting saplings, Shashikanta taunts her by saying, "What's the use of planting saplings now? Who will eat the fruits?"

The refugees are treated harshly in both ends of Bengal, as it becomes evident from the lifestyle of the Bangladeshi Hindu refugees in Kolkata. Large families begin to take shelter in a two-room apartment that is dark and shabby. Refugee girls without any families take up work in the brothel to feed themselves. Therefore, women were highly vulnerable during the period of partition. Mokammel incorporated many elements of social evils such as poverty, class distinction, and gender inequality in the film to portray a realistic image of society in the 1940s. One interesting aspect is the character of a madman who stops people with the question, "Are you coming or going?" In an interview, Mokammel stated "We are all temporary in this world; the madman's uttering of

coming or going offers a non-viability of leaving one's motherland. To me, the sheer idea of the partition is nothing but madness" (Mukhopadhyay 2023). In *Chitra Nodir Pare*, the river serves as a symbol of unity and peace for the people of Narail. Shashikanta exhibits an undying love for the river Chitra, and therefore, in his final moment, he rests by the bank of the river and passes away. With the passing of Shashikanta, the women of the house are left vulnerable, therefore, they leave for Kolkata with the hope that 'Time Will Heal Everything'.

Analysis of key themes in *Chitra Nodir Pare*

Gender assault and communal abuse

The brutality of the migration left women and children as primary victims. Lower-class women were often assaulted and socially isolated. In *Chitra Nodir Pare*, Minu's younger brother Bidyut was physically abused by a Muslim man for urinating in the Muslim graveyard, therefore, he became traumatised to the extent that he had to be sent to Kolkata in search of a better life. However, life in Kolkata is not easy for refugees because of the lack of income sources or living space in the crowded city. Towards the latter half of the film, Minu's cousin Basonti, a young widow, is also gang-raped by the village men, leading her to commit suicide. Another factor leading to the forced migration of the Hindu minorities in East Pakistan is the large value of dowry demanded by the bridegroom's family to marry the daughters of the Hindus in the country. Failing to meet the expectations of the community, families chose to migrate for an affordable living. This vivid portrayal provides an accurate picture of the social image surrounding the unprivileged section of society. The fear surrounding the safety of the women at home forced the breadwinners of the families to migrate to Kolkata.

Condition of the economy during the social riot

At the beginning of the film, Shashikanta and his friend discuss the social context of the court cases that involve seizing the land of the Hindus who had migrated to Kolkata. Hence, the rise of the Muslim middle class leads to the fall of the Hindu middle class. Minorities are suffering widely, and the government neglects the rights of these communities. Corrupt business officials of Narail bought abandoned Hindu lands at a cheap rate and sold them at a high price. This caused the mishandling of properties and the concentration of power in the hands of a few rich upper-class Muslim families while minorities suffered psychologically and physically.

Loss of identity

The film contextualises the feeling of societal loss experienced by millions of people during migration. The mass migration, therefore, reflects the devastating impact of the fragility of cultural identity prevalent in that period. Shashikanta experiences profound personal loss as he grapples with the idea of abandoning the property of his forefathers. His internal conflict intensifies as he silently sits by

his window to listen to the traditional folk songs of the fishermen of the Chitra. The emotional weight of leaving home drastically impacts the well-being of Shashikanta, and he passes away with a heavy heart. This powerful portrayal of life emphasises how home is more than a mere physical structure; it is deeply woven into collective memory.

Conclusion

Tanvir Mokammel's film offers a poignant image of forced migration as a result of the aftermath of the 1947 partition of India. It masterfully depicts the gradual erosion of the Hindu-Muslim relationship due to the political unrest in East Pakistan. The moving reflection on the life of Shashikanta and his family deals with the psychological and emotional trauma that they endure while being forced to abandon their ancestral home. This systematic uprooting through a series of events is indeed torture to helpless minorities. *Chitra Nodir Pare* explores the themes of lost identity, belonging, and socio-economic crisis in the homeland. The powerful symbolism of the river Chitra is associated with the changing social dynamics in the country. The film portrays the neglected aspects of forced migration, such as the social exploitation of women, the economic crisis of minorities, and the deeply rooted cultural trauma as a result of the displacement of Hindu minorities. In conclusion, Mokammel's powerful cinematic portrayal offers insight into the experience of partition by Bengali Hindu minorities. It serves as a reminder of the long-lasting effect of forced migration on collective identities, resonating with the ongoing challenges endured by displaced communities worldwide.

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