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Perspectives on (In)Human(e) Displacement and Migration

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Perspectives on (In)Human(e) Displacement and Migration

Compiled by Jordan Carey

Advised by Stan Tag

Spring 2023

INTRODUCTION

As a student of both Fairhaven College and the Honors College, I created an Interdisciplinary Concentration titled “Intersectional Social Science and Multimedia Storytelling with a Global Lens.” The knowledge gained from this study path propelled me towards a senior project that embodies what I am most passionate about and presents it while utilizing a wide variety of complementary media.

During the impactful Winter 2023 course I took with Professor Leah Lippman, INTL 397C: “Transnational Migration: Global Diasporas and Identity,” I found myself with a constantly expanding Google Document of quotes, resources and links. This document was incredibly messy, containing sources from class as well as research from my personal curiosities about the migration landscape. Those pages upon pages of notes inspired the form of this document, which gathers work of different media—poetry, academic research, books, photography, as well as unsortable multimedia projects. Seeing as displacement and migration experiences are complex, diverse, and patterned, I view their study as inherently interdisciplinary. For that reason, as well as the fact that we all resonate with different media in different ways, this document is necessarily interdisciplinary and multimedia.

Although numbers and figures have their place, even within this document, they can only tell a sliver of the nuanced, complex stories and experiences that individuals, communities and millions know so intimately—in their pasts, their histories, their presents, their bodies and their futures. Behrouz Boochani says it well: “I must say that applying this statistical approach cannot penetrate the depth of the issue. The central concern is the opportunity to live well. Only through a profound engagement with the lived experiences of refugees can one realize the extent of the

human disaster, only by listening to the life stories of the prisoners can one understand the torture they have had to endure” (Boochani 144).

As much as I believe in the power of education and knowledge, I strive to prioritize action when it comes to the things I am most passionate about. Therefore, this is the second part of my senior project. The first part was volunteering as a grant writing intern for Collective Aid, an NGO that I volunteered with on the ground in Belgrade, Serbia during my time using Fairhaven College’s Adventure Learning Grant. You can read more about my experience in Serbia on [the blog I kept during this time](#).

I think that the purpose of learning and thinking is so you can better act. That’s what I hoped to gain by creating this document, a framework to support my learning development so that I am more informed as I figure out the most effective way I can advocate for and work towards increasing the freedoms, dignities and rights of asylum seekers. I humbly look towards these works for guidance as I navigate my place in the fight for freedom of movement.

DISCLAIMERS

Due to time constraints, I have not completed thorough “background checks” on each author, creator, researcher and artist in this document. By uplifting their work and voice, I am not necessarily vouching for their character or actions, only for the belief that we can learn something from everyone. I have attempted to center and prioritize authors with lived personal and/or familial migration experiences, particularly migrants and refugees of color (based on the racial constructions that currently exist in the United States, although I recognize that racial and ethnic categorization is constructed and therefore varies throughout time and place). None of these works should be overgeneralized or used to represent the enormous diversity of migration experiences. Every person’s experience is unique, and should be respected as such.

All of these sources deal with one of the most mass human rights violations happening today. Although I intentionally excluded anything that might be considered “trauma porn,” these sources contain themes and mentions of topics that may be triggering for some. To be extremely clear, the fact that this is a (somewhat) academic, scholarly, theoretical project does not mean that people are not currently, right now, this very second, being affected by the violence (is there a word stronger than violence?) of forced displacement and border control. Please take care of yourself and read at your own pace and ability.

It has proven tricky to navigate the genre and aim of this document. It did not take long to realize that creating a comprehensive collection of work that even gets close to scratching the surface of the diversity and expansiveness of human migration would be an impossible feat, especially considering my limited timeline. Yes, I could have zoomed in and focused this document on the experiences of a certain demographic or event, but the resources I wanted to highlight are all over the place, theoretically and literally. I suppose one common aspect that

connects them is that they all resonate with me. This feels uncomfortable to say, because the last thing I want to do is center myself in a project about migration, an issue with which my personal experience is extremely limited and privileged.

However, I think more importantly, these sources are connected by their enactment of creative resistance, authenticity, proximity to lived experience with displacement and/or migration, and dedication to uplift the very truths stifled/suffocated/silenced by colonialism, global capitalism, racism, heterosexism, and every intersecting mode of oppression that seeks to control and dominate. These truths are that every single human seeking asylum is a capable, resilient, intelligent, self-reliant, creative, complex, imperfect, autonomous individual with crucial family structures, religious beliefs, political beliefs, artistic and scientific capabilities, hopes and fears, etc...and even if they were to bring nothing to the table or to a country except their humanity, that would be enough justification to obligate and necessitate the protection of their freedoms, rights, dignities, and futures.

BOOKS

*If you are able, I encourage you to support your local libraries and bookstores!

Freedom, Only Freedom: The Prison Writings of Behrouz Boochani by

Behrouz Boochani

Regarding genre and anti-genre

“Like much of his work, the journalism in *Freedom, Only Freedom* can be described as anti-genre: a mix of historical document, political critique, on-the-ground reportage, philosophical reflection, psychoanalytical examination, poetic expression and epic” (Boochani xx-xxi).

“...this book is more than a collection of articles and poetry written by Boochani during his incarceration. It is also an example of a shared philosophical activity, a testament to collective struggle, and a unique, creative form of resistance that centres the experiences of the displaced, the exiled and the incarcerated” (Boochani xxiii).

I am eternally grateful for having encountered this book, which I came across at the bottom of a deep internet rabbit hole. I revere Boochani’s work for the ways it talks about nature, its dedication to the interconnectedness of indigenous freedoms with migrant freedoms, and its tight grasp on love and humanness. I have sorted the most profoundly resonating excerpts into broad categories, although I cannot recommend this book highly enough and encourage you (and myself) to read as much of Boochani’s work as you can.

“But no matter how rich we are or what cultural capital we accumulate, we can never, ever re-accumulate time. Exile in Manus Island, like immigration detention globally, is *life theft*” (Boochani 88).

Some historical context

“Behrouz Boochani was born in 1983 in a village near the border city of Ilām during the Iran-Iraq War. He fled Iran in 2013 after the arrest of his colleagues and because of the risk of his own imprisonment for journalism and cultural advocacy in support of Kurdish identity and language... On 24 June 2010, Julia Gillard replaced Kevin Rudd as prime minister and leader of the Labor Party and in 2012, Gillard’s Labor government began sending refugees to Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG, a former colony of Australia) and the Republic of Nauru (a former protectorate)... After replacing Gillard and returning to power on 26 June 2013, Rudd introduced what Boochani calls the ‘exile policy’ on 19 July 2013, which states that any person seeking asylum in Australia by boat without a valid visa after this date will be banned from entering Australia for life. Boochani arrived by boat from Indonesia four days after this law was passed” (Boochani 1).

On the connection between indigenous and migrant freedoms

“The writing in this book investigates the symmetrical relationships between the violence inflicted on the border and within the nation” (Boochani xix).

“We built profound relationships with the indigenous people, with the children, with the birds, the interaction between elements of society, even with the dog that was killed under the brutality of the system” (Boochani 122).

“The proximity of villages to Hillside and West Haus is extraordinary, particularly for people who see this scene for the first time. In some ways, the interaction between locals and many refugees is beautiful, sharing a space in the deep forest and dappled light. From another perspective, it has enormous potential for conflict between the two communities who are both thrown into this situation against their will. In the eyes of many locals, refugees are uninvited guests. It has been disrespectful to build the camps without local consent” (Boochani 139).

On the border-industrial complex

“The cost is always borne by the Australian public, but all profits are privatized into the pockets of the companies and government officials who make up the border-industrial complex. The techniques of repression have been perfected in Nauru and Manus Island, Christmas Island and onshore facilities; the companies have built up corporate structures, physical facilities, worked out the logistics, and put in place the procedural foundation to be able to roll out this type of oppression for all ordinary Australian citizens when and if the government chooses or sees an opportunity to do so. Immigration detention centres built by the border-industrial complex are like weapons of war built by the military-industrial complex; once they are built, they will eventually be used by someone against someone else” (Boochani 157).

“The border-industrial complex expands and profits from new conflicts and tensions rising in the world, and the military-industrial complex’s wars around the world keep a steady flow of refugees fleeing the instability and wars. It is a symbiotic yet parasitic relationship — while the

two complexes keep each other alive in a symbiotic relationship, both of them parasitically feed off their hosts, the tax-paying citizens of their countries” (Boochani 159).

On love, solidarity and nature

“Key to Manus Prison Theory is the role of hope, joy, celebration, pride and love as political acts. One of the most important aspects of Manus Prison Theory is that it is a collective endeavour that grows and expands with every new contribution and collaboration. The articles in this book both highlight the need for creative and collaborative approaches and strategies for dismantling malignant border regimes, as well as for showcasing this collective approach in action” (Boochani xix).

“For Boochani, finding beauty in the face of brutality is a political act, and through this form of creativity he has made cracks in the border-industrial complex” (Boochani xxiii).

“We are reminded of our connections to others, of the ways our lives are inextricably linked to other peoples’ lives. This act of memory-making, of remembering across difference, is also a profound act of solidarity” (Boochani 43).

“Our resistance is the spirit that haunts Australia. Our resistance is a new manifesto for humanity and love” (Boochani 121).

“On the same day that we were brutally bashed, a number of individuals placed flowers in their hair. A sick Rohingya man put two red flowers behind his ears and smiled even as his body was

emaciated and in the worst shape possible. Our resistance was an epic of love...Resistance in its purest form. A noble resistance. An epic constituted by half-naked bodies up against a violent governmentality. All this violence designed in government spaces and targeted against us has driven our lives towards nature.

towards the natural environment,
 towards the animal world,
 towards the ecosystem” (Boochani 122).

Perhaps my favorite chapter in the entire book (although it is impossible to choose) is “‘The Man Who Loves Ducks’: The Refugee Saving Animals on Manus,” which is about Mansour Shoushtari. Here are some excerpts.

“At sunset he puts the leftover food from the dining area onto a plastic dish and gives it to the crabs that live underneath the containers and tents. When I asked him why he feels obliged to feed the crabs he gave me a look that made me feel embarrassed for questioning him. He said: ‘The crabs have been living here on this island for ages — they were here before the prison was built. However, by constructing this prison we humans have violated their territory. They have every right to eat our food.’”

“I asked him about his journey across the ocean and his thoughtful response again referenced animals; in particular, he referred to his pet duck, the one he left with a friend back in Iran.

I had a five-year-old duck. I had left it with a friend back in Iran to look after. Our boat had gone missing out in the ocean for five days. Just when everyone else thought we would die very soon, a feeling came over me that signalled to me that I wouldn't die. I had that feeling

whenever I thought about my duck — I felt that my love and kindness toward it would help me, my feelings toward my duck would stop the boat from going under, I felt my emotional connection to it would end up saving my life” (Boochani 80).

The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You by Dina Nayeri

I initially got introduced to Dina Nayeri's work when I began volunteering at the Collective Aid WASH Center in Belgrade, Serbia. [Nayeri's article "The Ungrateful Refugee"](#) was linked in the orientation materials provided to me, and I instantly resonated with her beliefs and writing style. Nayeri's article published in The Guardian draws from her longer book with a similar title: *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You*. This memoir chronicles Nayeri's experience seeking asylum and being an immigrant, while contextualizing it within the broader landscape of migration patterns and attitudes. I initially borrowed this book from the library, but loved it so much that I eventually bought my own copy to treasure and return to. As someone with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), I have always wondered and worried about others with OCD who lack access to therapies and medications. When I arrived at the place in *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* where Nayeri integrates her experience with OCD into her experience migrating, I felt even more connected to her and increasingly eager to learn from her perspective. I have tremendous respect for her experiential knowledge and unique outlook. Although much of our life experiences differ, her writing and experiences with OCD resonate heavily.

I feel that reading her writing before working on the ground at the Belgrade WASH Center helped me think more critically about my role as a humanitarian volunteer. I would like to believe that I would have felt this way anyways, but reading Nayeri's aforementioned article provided me with the framework and eloquent words to understand my role as obligatory, not exceptional or noteworthy. I did not expect gratitude from anyone accessing showers and/or laundry services at the WASH Center, which helped alleviate the common and problematic

volunteer-beneficiary relationship in which people feel beholden or pressured to express gratitude for services they access. Digesting Nayeri's article supported the mindset I tried to inhabit, a mindset that aims to replace white saviorism and pity with humble solidarity and reciprocity. All of this made the moments of gratitude, kindness and connection that much more mutual, sweet and spontaneous.

Excerpts that particularly resonate:

“What else was there to do? Any ordinary person, if instructed to wait five hours, will find something else to do. But for ten minutes, most people sit and wait. If that ten minutes becomes twenty, they might still find it pointless to try to accomplish anything substantial. In this way, a rational person can be made to squander those five hours, minute by minute. This is the life of a refugee. Madness in increments, by an ever-shifting endpoint” (Nayeri 210).

“Maybe the West wants the same for me—I have been an investment. It would be a shame if I offer no return on that investment. But even if I were to swim against the tide of Western intention, and connect to my native country somehow, would Iran want anything to do with me? I sound like a foreigner. I act like one. Home is never the same, for anyone, not just refugees. You go back and find that you've grown, and so has your country. Home is gone; it lives in the mind. Time exiles us all from our childhood.

Once, on a dark day, a friend quoted the late Jim Harrison to me, an echo of a warning from Rilke: *Beware, o wanderer, the road is walking too*” (Nayeri 336).

“And when do the exile years finally end? My fear is that they never will; being marooned again is at once a refugee’s nightmare and craving. It’s a strange affliction that we immigrants share. The longing to return begins almost the instant the refugee has settled into their host country. The dream of return fuels the desire to live, and until then, to wander. We settle and take root only in each other, planting ourselves like roses at each other’s houses. I like that this is an option, that maybe finding my way back home isn’t an obligation, or even a possibility, for happiness” (Nayeri 345).

“We are all immigrants from the past, and home lives inside the memory, where we lock it up and pretend it is unchanged” (Nayeri 346).

The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives by Viet Thanh

Nguyen

The Displaced by Viet Thanh Nguyen is a collection of essays about displacement and migration by writers with lived experience. I read this book during a WWU course I took during the winter quarter of 2023, INTL 397C: “Transnational Migration: Global Diasporas and Identity” with Professor Leah Lippman. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity I had to discuss and reflect on it with peers.

Excerpts that particularly resonate:

From Viet Thanh Nguyen’s Introduction

“From everything I remember and do not remember, I believe in my human kinship to Syrian refugees and to those 65.6 million people that the United Nations classifies as displaced people. Of these, 40.3 million are internally displaced people, forced to move within their own countries; 22.5 million are refugees fleeing unrest in their countries; 2.8 million are asylum seekers. If these 65.6 million people were their own country, their nation would be the twenty-first largest in the world, smaller than Thailand but bigger than France. And yet, they are not their own country. They are instead— to paraphrase the art historian Robert Storr, who was writing about the role that Vietnamese people played in the American mind— the displaced persons of the world’s conscience. These displaced persons are mostly unwanted where they fled from; unwanted where they are, in refugee camps; and unwanted where they want to go. They have fled under arduous conditions; they have lost friends, family members, homes, and countries; they are detained in refugee camps in often subhuman conditions, with no clear end to

the stay and no definitive exit; they are often threatened with deportation to their countries of origin; and they will likely be unremembered, which is where the work of writers becomes important, especially writers who are refugees or have been refugees— if such a distinction can be drawn” (Nguyen 10-11).

“The problem here is that the people we call voiceless oftentimes are not actually voiceless. Many of the voiceless are actually talking all the time. They are loud, if you get close enough to hear them, if you are capable of listening, if you are aware of what you cannot hear. The problem is that much of the world does not want to hear the voiceless or cannot hear them. True justice is creating a world of social, economic, cultural, and political opportunities that would allow all these voiceless to tell their stories and be heard, rather than be dependent on a writer or a representative of some kind. Without such justice, there will be no end to the waves of the displaced, to the creation of ever more voiceless people, or, more accurately, to the ongoing silencing of millions of voices. True justice will be when we no longer need a voice for the voiceless. In the meantime, we have this book of powerful voices, from writers who were themselves refugees” (Nguyen 12).

From “The Parent Who Stays” by Reyna Grande

“I wish I could tell you that this is where and how my story ends, with this long-awaited reunification. With my siblings and me arriving at our father’s house and starting a new life together in this great land of opportunity. I wish I could tell you that we got our happily-everafter, and the trauma ended with the border crossing, and as soon as we overcame that barrier the psychological wounds began to heal. Unfortunately for us immigrants, the trauma doesn’t end with a successful border crossing. I believe that for the rest of your life, you carry

that border inside of you. It becomes part of your psyche, your being, your identity...After so many years of separation, we didn't know each other. Though physically we had crossed the border, we'd missed so many years of each other's lives that emotionally and psychologically there was still a barrier between us...It is the central irony of my life that my parents emigrated to try to save our family, but by doing so, they destroyed it" (Nguyen 47).

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ART

Rohingyatographer

According to its website: “Rohingyatographer is a unique photography magazine created by a collective of talented Rohingya photographers based in the world’s largest refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. The magazine serves as a creative platform for the youth to develop their photography skills and use the medium as a tool for self-expression, community development, and participatory action research. By aligning with methods such as PhotoVoice, the project aims to raise awareness about the Rohingya community and their situation, while also providing a historical record of their lives and experiences in the refugee camps” (“About.” Rohingyatographer).

[Sahat Zia Hero](#), the founder of [Rohingyatographer Magazine](#), “is a documentary photographer, writer and human rights activist and consultant... Sahat was born in 1994 in Maungdaw Township, Arakan, Myanmar. In 2012, he was studying Physics at Sittwe University but due to the systematic discrimination against the Rohingya, he was excluded from attending his second year in university. In August 2017, he was forced to flee with his family to Bangladesh where he currently lives in the refugee camps. After his arrival, he worked as a team leader for the Danish Refugee Council. He currently divides his time between freelance photography work for various NGOs and international media outlets, managing the magazine project and working at the Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre” (“Sahat Zia Hero”).

In [this Migrant Voice article](#), [Shahida Win](#), another member of the Rohingyatographer team, is quoted: “‘Day and night, all the time, I have this feeling that I was denied the right to show my personal identity. It was taken away from my basic human rights,’ Shahida explains. *Rohingyatographer* is the refugees’ way of fighting the erasure of their identity” (Tadiello).

[Here](#) is an article about Rohingyaatographer published by Visual Rebellion.

You can buy the Rohingyaatographer magazine [at this link](#).

Ehsan Hazaveh

According to his [website](#), Ehsan Hazaveh “is an independent Iranian photographer based in Wellington, New Zealand. He has over a decade experience in [documentary](#) and commercial photography...He has produced three major exhibitions, titled [My Life To Live](#), [Mementos](#) and [Here We Are](#). PM Jacinda Ardern officially opened My Life To Live at the New Zealand Portrait Gallery in 2019. The exhibitions challenge the stereotypical understanding of refugees by amplifying the voices of people with a refugee experience. The exhibitions toured New Zealand to raise awareness and challenge myths about the refugee community” (“About.” EHSAN).

I highly recommend you check out Hazaveh’s documentary work, specifically [“My Life to Live.”](#) [“Here We Are”](#) and [“Mementos.”](#) Click [here](#) to read an article in The Guardian about “Here We Are.”

Serbest Salih

Here is the prelude to [this conversation](#) with Salih: “Serbest Salih is a photographer from Kobani, Syria. He is the Director of [Sirkhane Darkroom](#), a non-profit mobile darkroom and photo lab dedicated to teaching children from Syria, Turkey, and Iraq how to shoot, develop, and print their own photos. By encouraging a new way of thinking and seeing through photography, Sirkhane students have the chance to remain playful while sparking their imagination—the [resulting photos](#) are ones of happiness, light, and hope. The darkroom operates in the south-east of Turkey, a few kilometers from the Syrian border” (Westfall and Salih).

Click [here](#) to read an article in The New Yorker about Salih’s incredible work.

Worthwhile bonus: At the bottom of the aforementioned [conversation between Westfall and Salih](#), Salih recommends (and now so do I) [this musical artist, AlSarah & the Nubatones](#).

According to the bandcamp description, “AlSarah is a Sudanese born singer, songwriter and ethnomusicologist. Born in the capital city of Khartoum, where she spent the first 8 years of her life, she relocated to Taz, Yemen with her family to escape the ever stifling regime in her native country. She abruptly moved to the US in 1994, when a brief civil war broke out in Yemen. Now residing in Brooklyn, NY, she is a self-proclaimed practitioner of East-African retro-pop (“Soukura EP”).

After Migration by Walé Oyéjidé

Creator bio

“Walé Oyéjidé (b. 1981, Nigeria; lives in the United States) is a designer, writer, musician, and lawyer who aims to combat bias with creative storytelling. As the founder of the brand Ikiré Jones, he employs fashion design as a vehicle to celebrate the perspectives of immigrants and other marginalized communities. With the use of fashion photography and prose, his work aims to reframe the lens through which migrants are commonly seen in Western society. Oyéjidé was a TED Global Fellow in 2017. His designs appeared in the Marvel motion picture *Black Panther*, and his work and designs have been exhibited in museums across the globe (Oyéjidé).

Artist Statement

“Since 2000, more than 46,000 refugees and other migrants have died on the dangerous journey crossing the Mediterranean Sea to pursue more secure lives in Europe and beyond. Some flee their homes to escape persecution, others due to extreme economic hardship. Some are welcomed upon arrival, while many face discrimination and intolerance. We are all too familiar with stereotypical images that depict this journey: tragedies and rescue operations at sea; asylum seekers in line at check points; families living in refugee camps.

[After Migration](#) attempts to depict these newcomers differently. Using fashion photography and featuring models who are themselves migrants, the project aims to elevate and humanize their stories through the use of visual culture and to subvert mainstream media representations. These portraits reaffirm self-worth and pride among those who have experienced suffering, but choose not to be defined by it. Rather than be photographed in settings intended to

solicit pity, these men and women are portrayed as regal and stately, resisting representations that limit them to the circumstances of their migration” (Oyéjidé).

You can read more about the Moving Walls project and other artists involved [here](#).

POETRY

“A Study through Homes” by Ae Hee Lee

Click [here](#) to read this poem.

Author bio: “Ae Hee Lee was born in South Korea, raised in Peru, and is currently based in Wisconsin. She is the author of *Asterism* (Tupelo Press, 2024), winner of the Dorset Prize, and *Dear bear*, (Platypus Press, 2021)” (“Ae Hee Lee”).

Excerpts that particularly resonate:

A BBC documentary explains how, at some point, a hermit crab must look for a new home, a new shell to protect its curved abdomen, pliant as a grape, easy cooking target for the sun. It'll meet others by the shore, where they'll line up patiently from largest to smallest, to swap shells that match their present size. A systematic method of survival that benefits everyone—except for the one left out. It sears into my mind. Not the idea of one being left out but the image of the crab, its toy-orange legs flailing, hurrying after a shell with a hole on its roof that will just have to do for an uncertain while.

...

I'm tired, so I read about how policies attempting to restrict immigration constantly fail, unable to forbid the body, the cities and deserts it carries inside, the winds wrinkling its lakes, the finches darting not only above but under its airport ceilings. I'm tired, so I lie down. The earth

spins for me and the dead continue their orbiting. It gives me strength to remember there is no such thing as an immovable object.

“Not one more refugee death” by Emmy Pérez

Click [here](#) to read this poem.

Excerpts that particularly resonate:

“Songs

for the Guatemalan

boy with an Elvis belt buckle

and Angry Birds jeans with zippers

on back pockets who was found

shirtless in La Joya, one mile

from the river. The worn jeans

that helped identify his body

in the news more times

than a photo of him while alive.

(I never knew why the birds

are angry. My mother said

someone stole their eggs.)

...

Half of our bodies
are made of water, and we can't
sponge rivers through skin
and release them again
like rain clouds. Today

at the vigil the native singer
sang we are all connected
by water, la sangre de vida” (Pérez).

“Changing Places in the Fire” by Li-Young Lee

You can read and listen to this poem [here](#).

Excerpts that particularly resonate:

“I tell her, I sang
in a church choir during one war
North American TV made famous.
I fled a burning archipelago in the rain,
on my mother’s back, in another war
nobody televised.

...

And of all the things we’re dying from tonight,
being alive is the strangest,
surviving our histories is the saddest.
Time leaves the smallest wounds,
and your body, a mortal occasion
of timeless law,
is all the word I know” (Lee).

ACADEMIC WORKS

Summary of Key Migration Issue: Carving out humanitarian protections, but not under the “refugee” label

This summary was written for a WWU course I took during the winter quarter of 2023, INTL 397C: “Transnational Migration: Global Diasporas and Identity” with Professor Leah Lippman.

As of September 2022, the US had given “humanitarian parole” for around 50,000 Ukrainians and most of the 86,000 Afghans evacuated from Kabul since 2021. Humanitarian parole puts asylum seekers in a state of limbo, since it is temporary and does not provide them with a pathway to citizenship or permanent residency (“Top 10 Migration Issues”). In some cases, such as the cases of Venezuelans and Ukrainians, infrastructure for visa-free travel or labor agreements already exists with neighboring countries. Under these circumstances, neighboring countries enact temporary protections to try to get ahead of the inevitable swells in populations with irregular status by providing a non-permanent way for migrants to stay and work legally (Selee and Benton).

Although those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) can legally work, they are ineligible for the resettlement benefits given to refugees and asylees. They can apply for political asylum and immigration benefits, but TPS in and of itself does not lead to permanent status or other sustainable solutions (Kerwin). As a key current migration issue, the topic of temporary humanitarian protections raises questions such as the following: What is the relationship between labels and the people they categorize? In what ways do labels dictate realities and futures, and in what circumstances might labels be dictated by realities? In what ways and circumstances might labels oppress versus give freedom? For instance, labels can be utilized as a tool to determine who needs extra support, but they can also be used to “other,” segregate and divide in harmful

ways. Humanitarian Parole can create an uncertain relationship between individuals and governments by forcing asylum seekers to prove that they have an urgent need and financial security (Uatanabe).

Many refugee advocates are alarmed by the mass denials of Afghan parole cases, especially when compared to the quickly-processed parole given to the tens of thousands of Ukrainians via Biden's private sponsorship program (Montoya-Galvez). As of August 2022, one year after the United States withdrew from Afghanistan, fewer than 10,000 Afghans out of the 50,000 who had applied for U.S. humanitarian parole had their cases resolved. Only 1,000 of those 10,000 had been approved ("Top 10 Migration Issues"), meaning 90 percent were denied. In November of 2022, around 63,000 Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) applications were still being processed. These SIV applications were for "Afghans who had worked with the United States and allied governments, covering an estimated 315,000 applicants and relatives" ("Top 10 Migration Issues").

In October of 2022, the United States ended the possibility for Afghans to arrive via humanitarian parole. According to a U.S. senior administration official, the objective behind phasing out the ability for parole is to "ensure future Afghan arrivals have a direct pathway to permanent legal status in the U.S. and don't need to undergo further processing at a domestic government-operated housing facility" (Montoya-Galvez). Phasing out parole is an attempt to prevent future arrivals from Afghanistan from being stuck in the same legal limbo that tens of thousands of asylum-seekers are currently in. The hope is that they can receive permanent residency, not just the temporary work visa offered by humanitarian parole. Shawn VanDiver, president of the AfghanEvac coalition, said: "This is a big deal because it creates a permanent pathway for these folks. It gives Afghans who arrive here a permanent, more durable sense of

belonging. And they can start getting involved in their communities and work faster” (Montoya-Galvez). However, the parole phase-out might further endanger Afghans who believe the Taliban could harm them but who do not fit into the three categories of this new “Enduring Welcome” operation. The three categories are: “immediate family members of U.S. citizens, permanent residents and evacuees resettled over the past year; those who qualify for a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) because of their assistance to the U.S. war effort; and the ‘most vulnerable’ refugee program applicants” (Montoya-Galvez). Among the asylum seekers potentially excluded by Operation Enduring Welcome are the tens of thousands of Afghans who have submitted parole requests from overseas locations (Montoya-Galvez). The Afghan Adjustment Act would allow Afghans a pathway to citizenship, but Congress has yet to agree to implement this. Due to such limited options and long waiting times, many Afghans opt for traveling irregularly (“Top 10 Migration Issues”).

Humanitarian parole, albeit a temporary protection, is not as quick and easy to obtain as one might think, especially for Afghans. Seeing as the U.S. embassy in Kabul closed in August of 2021, Afghans would have to travel to a third country containing an active U.S. embassy or consulate after the U.S. determines them to be eligible for parole. After initial forms are filled out, applicants must obtain fingerprinting and medical screening, among other procedures. Those filing for parole must themselves pay for these in-person procedures, and might have to wait up to several months in this third country (Uatanabe).

Upon arrival, Afghans granted humanitarian parole face additional challenges. Unlike Refugees and SIV holders, Afghans granted parole do not receive resettlement benefits such as health care, food stamps, and assistance finding shelter. Humanitarian organizations have depended on private resources to aid paroled Afghans, while Congress has yet to pass the Afghan

Adjustment Act or provide other similar support. There are numerous media reports of translators and other direct contributors to the United States government that were abandoned in Afghanistan and face serious danger. U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has affirmed that the Special Immigrant Visa is not “well suited to the urgency and volume of humanitarian needs in Afghanistan now” (Uatanabe). Clearly, the current system setup and supplementary tools are not sufficient to deal with the crisis in Afghanistan.

Many Venezuelans also suffer from uncertain statuses in Colombia as well as other Latin American and Caribbean countries. Colombia’s 2021 landmark legalization program gave almost 2.5 million Venezuelans temporary, decade-long legal status referred to as Temporary Protection Permit (PPT) (“Top 10 Migration Issues”). However, many Colombian institutions do not accept the PPT, leaving large numbers of Venezuelans unable to access education, health care, or other services. Likewise, many Latin American and Caribbean countries “led the way with temporary regularization programs in 2021; a year later three-quarters of Venezuelans were unable to access basic services, food and housing” (“Top 10 Migration Issues”). Clara Gamizdeluna, deputy programmes director in Colombia for the International Rescue Committee, praised the decade-long residency status, but admitted that many public and private institutions still do not recognize the new document.

Also, it is estimated that there are at least 162,000 *caminantes* (migrants traveling by foot) in Colombia who are not covered by the PPT program and are most vulnerable to exploitation and violence (Dupraz-Dobias). Eduardo Stein, Joint Special Representative of UNHCR and IOM for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, said: “Host countries have shown continued leadership in responding to the crisis through establishing regularization initiatives and facilitating access to health, education and other social services. Regularization, however, is only

a first step to integration and needs to be followed by policies that allow refugees and migrants to be self-reliant” (“Three-Quarters of Refugees”). Some argue that, instead of composing temporary measures, Latin American countries could have broadened the definitions of refugee status existing in many national laws to extend refuge to Venezuelans (Selee and Benton).

The West has provided many temporary protections to Ukrainians fleeing Russian violence, although rarely do countries provide formal refugee status or protections leading to permanent residency or citizenship. Unlike many other migrants, Ukrainians were already able to travel to the European Union without a visa. Therefore, the temporary protections given to Ukrainians by the EU are not a new pathway, it is an extension enabling Ukrainians to stay in the EU for longer than they otherwise would have been able to, without repercussions or as much bureaucratic overwhelm (“Top 10 Migration Issues”). Ukrainians with humanitarian parole can stay in the United States for two years. Depending on the longevity and intensity of the war in Ukraine, the U.S. might have to think about “status normalization” legislation (Bon Tempo). Not only has “parole as an exertion of executive branch power historically resulted in pushback from Congress,” but one can reasonably predict the U.S.’s Republican-led Congress critiquing President Joe Biden’s parole usage (Bon Tempo). It will surely be contentious in this current political climate where immigration matters remain highly controversial.

Temporary protections like these have both advantages and disadvantages: vulnerable people are able to get protection more quickly than they might otherwise, but the protection is temporary and might not offer refuge from the uncertainty that comes with such flexible policies. Although policy makers can implement these protections with less resistance, the makeshift solutions “risk undermining the integrity of the global refugee system if seen as replacements rather than complements to the formal system” (“Top 10 Migration Issues”). One key drawback

of temporary protection programs is that they are generally based on executive discretion as opposed to legal obligations; therefore, they are not necessarily bound by the fundamental human rights principle of non-refoulement (Kerwin). This can create uncertainty and fear, which can have detrimental physical and especially mental health effects. An analysis of temporary protections used in Australia, Germany and Denmark from 1999 to 2005 discovered that people granted temporary protection experienced social and financial difficulties, family separations, and a heightened sense of uncertainty and political exclusion (Kerwin). While creating fear and uncertainty for asylum seekers, this sense of the “unknown” simultaneously appeals to governments. The provision of temporary status allows leaders to stall making permanent decisions when the outcome of global conflicts—such as the invasion of Ukraine or the authoritarian regime in Venezuela—is to be determined (Selee and Benton).

According to the general consensus of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Council of the European Union (EU Council), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and refugee advocates: “temporary protection programs should not be used as a substitute to refugee status, to delay a grant of refugee status, or to deter and deny entry to those seeking protection. Rather, they should be used to safeguard persons who are in substantial peril and who do not meet the refugee standard or who cannot avail themselves of the refugee determination process” (Kerwin). There is a legitimate fear that temporary protections might be used to substitute, not supplement, lasting refugee protections: “According to the European Union (EU), temporary protection should not be used ‘to prejudge’ refugee determinations. ECRE supports temporary protection only in emergencies when individual refugee determinations are not ‘immediately practicable’ and when temporary protection will enhance the likelihood of admission and territorial protection. UNHCR views temporary

protection as a stepping stone that can safeguard those in immediate need until a more durable solution can be secured” (Kerwin).

Humanitarian Parole provides insufficient protection to vulnerable people and families. Given the circumstances from which they flee, migrating individuals and families require a more permanent state of protection (Valdez et al.). Research from the Migration Policy Institute suggests that receiving countries may discover that providing legal status early on creates previously unrealized economic benefits (Selee and Benton). Currently, most integration services are designed and implemented with permanent arrivals in mind. However, if integration services are oriented towards temporary flows as well, creative solutions can be enacted in ways that simultaneously benefit the global economy, the human rights and dignities of asylum seekers, and local interests (Selee and Benton).

Summary of “The Black Mediterranean: A View from Sicily” by

Alessandra Di Maio

This summary was written for a WWU course I took this spring 2023 quarter, HNRS 350:

“The world’s most dangerous border: Refugees, the Mediterranean, and the journey to Germany” with Professor Cornelius Partsch.

“The Black Mediterranean: A View from Sicily” by Alessandra Di Maio explores Europe’s colonial legacy on the Mediterranean, Italian-Libyan relations, Black lives, and the entire African continent. Di Maio contextualizes the replication of these violent hierarchies, crucially noting that migrant routes often align with ancient slave routes from as far back as the Roman Empire. Slavery may theoretically be illegal, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights technically exists, but slavery has not disappeared, just weakly and lazily disguised itself. Global capitalism still exploits African labor, and the Mediterranean is a key actor in this continued violence. The Mediterranean is referenced as “possibly the largest graveyard in contemporary history” (Di Maio 40).

Di Maio argues that migration is both less binary and more patterned than its public perception—less binary regarding arbitrarily constructed definitions of “migrant” versus “refugee” and racial identity in Sicily (which was intermittently considered part of Africa), and more patterned because migrations are not random. Di Maio expands on the latter point, writing that migrations are produced and patterned, as well as controlled by surveillance and detention systems. Furthermore, the policing and murdering of Africans in the Mediterranean are “situated in the accumulated violence against Black people globally” (Di Maio 50). A continuation of Western colonialism, the European Union does a lot “behind the scenes,” such as training the Libyan Coast Guard and outsourcing pushbacks.

In looking towards the future, Di Maio looks towards local governments, civil disobedience, art and inherently collective resistance. For instance, Palermo Mayor Leoluca Orlando has done a lot to include migrants in Sicilian society, such as instituting the “Charter of Palermo on International Human Mobility,” abolishing the need for residence permits, and modeling the multicultural inclusion of residents into his community (Di Maio 48-49). His leadership in refusing the 2018 Minister of the Interior’s “Security Decree” to deny migrants humanitarian protection also resulted in the decree’s eventual repeal. Beyond resistance in local communities, Di Maio calls for “transnational political and poetic alliances” and the advancement of counter-narratives (Di Maio 51).

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