Special Issue, 2025

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Unpacking Intersectional Perspectives on Migrant Marginalities: Tracing Agency, Solidarity and Resistance

IMISCOE PhD Blog

SPECIAL ISSUE 2025

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Editorial Note

Gunika Rishi, Tulika Bourai

We are currently living in a moment of deepening hostility towards migrants and refugees. Protests against immigration are becoming more visible worldwide, leaving little room for the new challenges that migrants are facing. Global mobility regimes are changing at a rapid pace as deportation systems and asylum policies become more stringent with every shift in policy. Genocidal violence, civil wars, terrorism, and disasters continue to drive displacement on a massive scale, while governments increasingly treat it as a problem to be managed rather than a human reality to be understood with care. This climate produces migrant marginalities not as accidents, but as deliberate outcomes of political and bureaucratic choices. Against this backdrop, we believe there is a need for intersectional approaches that trace not only vulnerability but also solidarity, resilience, and resistance in the everyday lives of migrants.

Vulnerability is not an inherent condition of migrants but is actively produced and sustained by migration regimes and bureaucracies that sort, rank, and regulate lives. The proliferation of temporary statuses, and the weaponization of waiting all serve to place migrants in protracted conditions of insecurity and harm. But these processes are not uniform. They are inflected by complex intersecting hierarchies of race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and age, shaping everyday survival realities of migrants. Alongside these exclusions, migrant communities continue to practice resilience and solidarity to challenge and unsettle the dominant frameworks of authority and power.

This year's special issue highlights how collective strategies of adaptation, such as mutual aid networks, transnational kinship ties, and everyday acts of courage, carve out possibilities for survival and hope even within hostile environments. The purpose of this special issue was to go beyond portraying migration solely as an outcome of distress and instead focus on its positive aspects. The blog articles interrogate how migrant lives are shaped in and against regimes of exclusion while also attending to the agency they exercise in everyday life. The contributions move across geographies and methods but share a common interest by centering lived experiences, unsettling reductive categories, and reflecting on the ethics of producing knowledge in fraught times. The authors belong to diverse disciplines, emphasizing our point that knowledge production in migration studies should not be limited to migration scholars alone.

Organized into four thematic clusters, the issue offers multiple vantage points on

how to unpack migrant marginalities in present times. It begins with a focus on how vulnerability is produced and sustained through migration regimes and bureaucracies. Rather than treating vulnerability as an intrinsic quality of migrants, these articles show how it emerges through systemic processes of surveillance, categorization, and exclusion. Policies that claim to protect or manage migrant populations often generate precarities of their own, leaving individuals caught between the promises of legal recognition and the realities of protracted uncertainty.

From these accounts of constraint, the issue moves to consider how migrants collectively navigate and negotiate such structural uncertainties. The section on everyday practices of resilience highlights acts of solidarity, adaptation, and mutual aid that counter the isolating effects of marginalization. Far from passive recipients of policy, migrant communities mobilize resources, both material and affective, that sustain life in inhospitable contexts. These practices, however, are not simple; they are shaped by unequal access to networks and opportunities, which sometimes reproduce hierarchies within migrant groups themselves. The contributors draw attention to these ambivalences, underscoring that resilience cannot be celebrated uncritically but must be situated within broader systems of power and constraints.

The blog articles under theme three reflect on how migrants carve out spaces of endurance with their small acts of courage every day and exert their agency. Despite the numerous obstacles they face, their sense of achievement stems from their attachment and sense of belonging to a place that was once foreign to them. This theme doesn't downplay the difficulties that migrants encounter in a new location but emphasizes how migrants choose to rise above the vulnerabilities and get over their fears and inhibitions in the process.

The question of how to represent the migrant complexities also raises pressing ethical and political concerns for scholars working with marginalized migrants. Research is never neutral: it risks reinscribing the very categories of vulnerability it seeks to critique. The contributions in this theme engage with such dilemmas directly by reflecting on the responsibilities of researchers to approach their interlocutors with care, accountability, and reflexivity. They ask what it means to study lives shaped by displacement and exclusion without reducing those lives to stories of suffering, and how scholarship can contribute to solidarities rather than extractive knowledge practices.

Running through all these discussions is the role of intersectionality as both a theoretical orientation and a methodological commitment. Intersectionality enables us to see beyond linear narratives of migration, to how multiple axes of identity and power co-constitute lived experiences. It offers a framework for tracing the uneven

distribution of vulnerability and resilience, as well as the diverse forms of resistance and solidarity that migrants enact. By centering intersectionality, this special issue insists that migrant marginalities cannot be understood in isolation, but only through attention to the relational and structural dynamics that shape them.

Taken together, the essays in this special issue offer a multi-layered picture of migration. They expose how vulnerability is manufactured, show how resilience and solidarity are practiced under distress, examine how belonging and identity are negotiated across spaces, and reflect critically on the politics of knowledge production. By tracing agency, solidarity, and resistance within the migration system, this collection of blog articles insists that migrant marginalities must be understood through attention to power, lived experiences, and the ethical demands of research in times of crisis. As active scholars of migration, we urgently encourage academics and practitioners to rethink migration as an adaptation rather than a problem in order to prevent policies from normalising maladaptive practices. We hope that the arguments and debates put forth in this special issue foster future collaborations that challenge the prevailing paradigms in migration studies.

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Manufacturing Precarity

Manufactured Vulnerability: Bureaucratic Violence and the Forced Return of Afghan Refugees

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In late 2023, trucks rolled through Pakistan's Torkham border, filled not with trade material, but with people. Afghan families were ordered to leave Pakistan under threat of arrest. Over 1.7 million refugees, many born in Pakistan, were rendered from one instance to another, illegal. This was a state-orchestrated purge in which bureaucratic tools like documentation, checkpoints, and policy silence became instruments of erasure.

This photographic ethnography explores how refugee "vulnerability" is not accidental but "manufactured" through a toxic mix of legal invisibility, political scapegoating, and administrative neglect. This filed research traces how border lands become battlegrounds for rights, identities, and survival.

This photo-ethnography is based on personal interaction with displaced Afghan families. Permission to use these photographs was provided by the Afghan Diaspora Network (ADN), which owns the copyright. Ethical precautions were made to ensure the dignity, anonymity, and safety of people featured. We gathered voices to highlight often-overlooked experiences related to policy and politics.

Exiled Without a Destination: Families sit beside transport trucks, waiting for forced return. Photo credits: *Afghan Diaspora Network*

Bureaucratic Violence and Legal Invisibility

Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks domestic asylum laws (Mielke& Etzold 2022). Afghan refugees depend on fragile paperwork, such as Proof of Registration(PoR) cards, UNHCR letters, and temporary visas, which are often delayed, denied, or revoked (Mielke and Etzold, 2022).

When documents fail, people fall into what Michel Agier calls zones of exception (Lepoutre, 2003), places where laws are suspended and survival depends on the whims of bureaucracy (Lepoutre 2003). In these spaces, legal invisibility becomes state violence, actively severing access to education, health, or even protection from deportation[1]

This intermediary state can last for months or even years. In one case, a mother of three showed us the charred remains of their ID card, which had been destroyed during a police raid. There is no explanation, and therefore no remedy. Bureaucracy here works flawlessly. Its precise function is to exclude (Mielke, 2022).
This violence is "slow" and layered: dispersed, delayed, and often invisible. But for those living it, the harm is instant and constant (Nixon, 2011)[2]

1. Lepoutre discusses Agier's anthropological study of refugees, which investigates how modern borders and camps define the "edges of the world." Agier investigates how refugee populations are regulated, marginalised, and spatially excluded, raising concerns about the politics of humanitarianism and the creation of statelessness.
2.Nixon introduced the notion of "slow violence." It is a type of suffering that comes gradually and invisibly, primarily impacting underprivileged populations. He contends that environmental deterioration, relocation, and long-term disempowerment constitute gradual violence, particularly for the world's poor. His work is a forceful indictment of how violence that is neither immediate nor dramatic is frequently neglected in public debate and policy.

Waiting under bureaucratic shadows: In the shadow of trucks, entire families wait for answers. Neither here not there! Bureaucracy does not just delays life, it pauses it entirely . Photo credits: Afghan Diaspora Network

Gendered Dimensions of Statelessness

Displacement affects everyone unequally. Women and girls face compound risks: denial of education, restriction of movement, and heightened exposure to abuse (especially upon return).

Nargis[3] - a 17-year-old who fled Taliban rule with her mother, was denied enrollment in Islamabad schools because her documents were "pending." Her mother wept during our interview: "We escaped the Taliban. But here too, my daughter's future is frozen (Varghese et al. 2024; author interview, July 2024)."

While much refugee discourse paints women as passive victims, our fieldwork revealed something different. From organising informal schooling to leading protest sit-ins, Afghan women in exile resist invisibility in quiet but powerful ways.

Lives in transit: Belongings stuffed in plastic bags. No home behind, no clarity ahead. Statelesnness is not an accident. It is administratively produced. Photo credits: Afghan Diaspora Network

3. An initial interview was conducted with her via Google Meet while she was in Islamabad, followed by a subsequent conversation after her relocation to the UK (author interview, July 2024). For security reasons, her real name has been anonymised and replaced with a pseudonym. For more information, refer to Varghese, Kumar, and Ramachandran, 2024

In limbo between lands: Stranded between two countries, these families are claimed by none. Too Afghan for Pakistan, too Pakistani for Afghanistan . Photo credits: Afghan Diaspora Network

Zones of Return and the Politics of Abandonment

When deportation trucks arrive in Afghanistan, they do not deliver people to safety. They drop them into what one aid worker[4] called "administrative deserts." The Taliban-run camps have no infrastructure, legal services, or basic aid. Families arrive at blue tents pitched on dry land, cut off from towns, jobs, and protection.

So why return people to this space? The answer lies in politics, not protection. Deportations serve as diplomatic messaging in Pakistan's tense relationship with the Taliban. Refugees become bargaining chips. Meanwhile, international silence deepens the abandonment. Aid agencies face pressure to scale back. Western embassies offer no routes out. And so, camps swell, rights shrink, and people disappear into systems designed not to care.

Displaced Again: Makeshift tents without water, aid or protenction. Return does not mean safety; it means another kind of exile. Photo credits: Afghan Diaspora Network

4. This insight was shared by a humanitarian aid worker interviewed. She requested that her name, organization, and location remain confidential due to security concerns and the politically sensitive nature of cross-border humanitarian operations (author, interview, July 2024).

(L): The weight of waiting: An elderly man and child sit with a few worm notes. Displacement has emptied their pockets, as well as the appartus designed to keep them safe. (R): A father carries his child toward uncertainty. For women and girls, this journey also means losing rights to move, study and speak.
Photo credits: Afghan Diaspora Network

Rethinking Protection

The plight of Afghan refugees is not an isolated tragedy; it mirrors a global erosion of empathy marked by the weaponisation of paperwork, the criminalisation of movement, and the quiet collapse of moral responsibility.

Survival in exile should not be mistaken for heroism, and resilience must never be a prerequisite for dignity. To shift this paradigm, first, we must demand asylum systems that are just and transparent. Second, treat documentation not as a reward, but as a right. Third, invest in safe, rights-based reintegration programs rather than mere logistical repatriation. Fourth, and most crucially, center the voices of refugees in policymaking processes. Legal invisibility is not accidental; it is manufactured through indifference and can be dismantled by political will. The Afghan refugee crisis warns us, when compassion is replaced by compliance, we do not just close borders, we extinguish futures.

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From Protection to Precarity: Media, Politics, and the Making of Refugee Exclusion in Lebanon

Claude Samaha

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From Discourse to Dispossession

In Lebanon, the labeling of Syrian refugees has never been neutral. It is constructed and weaponized by political actors, then amplified by partisan media to serve shifting agendas. Terms like "guest," "burden," "temporarily displaced people," and "army" do more than describe; they prescribe presence, erase rights, and rationalize restriction. These labels don't remain in policy memos; they surface in clinics, classrooms, municipalities, and everyday conversations, shaping both perception and treatment.

Since 2011, following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, this discourse has evolved in lockstep with economic collapse and political volatility. Initial framings portrayed refugees as temporary guests, allowing the state to defer responsibility. Today, they are scapegoated for unemployment, inflation, and public service erosion. When figures like Gebran Bassil depict Syrians as an "army" and a "disguised occupation" (L'Orient-Le Jour, 2025; Al Mayadeen, 2025), or President Joseph Aoun claims that the "conditions that caused their displacement were resolved" (Reuters, 2025), they aren't making rhetorical detours; they're codifying exclusion. These statements, repeated across media cycles, function as tools of governance. Their echo isn't passive; it scripts public consent, instills urgency, and reframes accountability.

Exclusion in Lebanon rarely begins with law; it begins with language. And language

moves: through news segments, donor briefings, bureaucratic forms, and schoolyard slang. It informs how displacement is narrated, policed, and normalized, not just by policymakers, but by the psychology of the masses. These narratives are not felt evenly. Women, undocumented workers, and rural camp residents endure layered stigmas and entrenched invisibility, leaving them more vulnerable to denial of services and structural neglect. In a context where perception shapes policy, reframing the language of displacement is not symbolic; it's strategic.

Narrative Infrastructure and the Politics of Containment

Media outlets aligned with political interests have played a central role in shaping exclusionary refugee narratives. In Lebanon, channels such as Al Manar, owned and operated by Hezbollah and MTV Lebanon, associated with far-right Christian factions including the Lebanese Forces and Soldiers of God (The Conversation, 2024), have repeatedly portrayed Syrian refugees as sources of crime, demographic imbalance, and economic strain. These outlets rarely acknowledge the structural causes of displacement or the rights violations refugees endure (Al Jazeera, 2024).

This pattern extends regionally. In Turkey, outlets like Haberturk and Hurriyet amplify securitized framings during electoral cycles, often portraying refugees as criminal threats or economic burdens (Çetin & Gürelli, 2024). In Jordan, refugee narratives center on instability and demographic pressure, reinforcing containment logics (Mencutek, 2021). These examples demonstrate how editorial alignment and media ownership structure public perception across contexts, laying the groundwork for policy design rooted in deterrence, not protection.

Repetitive labels such as "temporary," "illegal," and "security risk" abstract refugee lives into threats to be contained. Syrians are no longer viewed as individuals fleeing persecution; they are rendered symbols of disruption, monitored, managed, and politically instrumentalized. This discursive logic feeds directly into donor-backed containment strategies. The European Union's 2024 €1 billion package to Lebanon, half earmarked for migration control, is not simply financial assistance; it is a political trade-off (TIMEP, 2025; ECFR, 2024). Aid is embedded in digital infrastructure: biometric registration, surveillance-tied services, and conditional eligibility become tools of governance.

In practice, containment is deeply lived. Syrian refugees face mobility restrictions, shelter policing, service denial, and data-driven profiling. UNHCR's biometric enrollment process in Lebanon, while framed as administrative, introduces serious dilemmas around privacy, consent, and state control (UNHCR, 2023). Similar dynamics play out in Turkey and Jordan, where donor-funded strategies rely on legal ambiguity and technological mediation to regulate refugee presence. These mechanisms are not ad hoc—they reflect a deliberate system of exclusion, sustained by layered stigma, fragmented status, and international compromise.

Terms like "guest," "returnee," and "unregistered" are not benign descriptors; they are

instruments. They determine visibility, legitimacy, and access to protection. And they govern more than policy: they shape who is considered worthy of empathy. Yet refugees and their allies are not passive recipients of these narratives. In Lebanon, Syrian-led organizations such as Basmeh & Zeitooneh and SAWA for Development and Aid have launched social media campaigns and community initiatives challenging criminalizing headlines and exclusionary framings (Al Jazeera, 2024; SOAS LAU, 2025). Women's cooperatives in the Beqaa have used storytelling workshops to humanize displacement, while local solidarity networks, often spanning Lebanese and Syrian communities, have publicly countered xenophobic statements by political leaders. These acts, though small in scale, create spaces where refugees reclaim their voice, shift public conversations, and assert their right to be represented on their own terms.

Reclaiming Narrative, Reframing Governance

To chart a more just path forward, we must begin by confronting the language of exclusion. Syrian displacement in Lebanon is not merely a humanitarian episode; it is a political project, engineered through strategic ambiguity and amplified by media narratives. The challenge is not to fine-tune policy, but to fundamentally reimagine governance.

This requires moving beyond rhetorical critique to dismantle the semantic scaffolding of exclusion. One step is to propose a counter-narrative lexicon, a vocabulary grounded in dignity, proximity, and agency rather than containment and control. For instance, replacing "guest" with "neighbor in crisis," or "burden" with "partner in recovery," begins the work of restoring empathy and activating political imagination. These are not euphemisms; they are provocations. They invite policymakers, donors, and media platforms to rethink who refugees are and what meaningful protection truly requires.

Reimagining governance also means restoring agency to those most affected. Refugees are not risks to be managed; they are rights-holders with lived expertise, institutional memory, and community-rooted strategies. A rights-based framework must dismantle containment logic and invest in participatory mechanisms: direct funding for refugee-led organizations, equitable inclusion in coordination platforms, and transparency in how displacement is narrated and financed.

As refugee-led and solidarity-based initiatives demonstrate, the work of reclaiming narratives has already begun. The challenge is to amplify these voices until they reshape not only how displacement is told, but how it is governed.

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Should we Abandon "Vulnerability"?

Dervla Potter

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"You have to be patient. There's just no space for single men."

Abdi received this response after sleeping rough for five nights outside the International Protection Office in Dublin, Ireland, during the winter of 2023. With no shelter, he wrapped himself in a donated sleeping bag, took refuge in a tent, and waited—for care, for a bed. Abdi's story, like thousands of single male asylum seekers in Ireland, is not one of exception but of design, a consequence of bureaucratic logics that determine access to care not by need but by normative ideas of vulnerability.

In Ireland today, single male asylum seekers have become emblematic of systemic neglect, frequently excluded from shelter, compassion, and recognition. Since December 2023, over 9,000 single male applicants have sought shelter, with just over 1,000 of these accommodated immediately. The rest wait weeks or months for shelter. As of April 2025, over 3,000 still awaited a bed. While public discourse often frames this as a crisis of reception logistics linked to rising international protection applications and the arrival of over 100,000 Ukrainians, the deeper truth lies in the architecture of Ireland's reception system itself. Designed as a "temporary" solution in 2000, Ireland's reception system, known as Direct Provision, has become a permanent, privatised, and deeply fragmented system. Its failures are systemic, embedded in decades of reactive policy-making and outsourcing.

It is striking how much our understanding of the concept of vulnerability shapes and even distorts who we deem eligible for care. Mainstream narratives on refugeehood

often position women and children as the archetypal "vulnerable subjects", thereby implicitly constructing single men as less deserving of protection or care. This binary simplifies vulnerability, treating it as something innate and visible when in fact it is relational, contextual, and shaped by power. Ireland's current reception policy reflects this misconception, prioritising care based on predefined categories while overlooking those who do not conform to such categorisation. Men like Abdi are de-vulnerabilised in institutional discourse while simultaneously subject to immense structural harm. From 2023, those not provided shelter have been continually displaced throughout Dublin city, often facing *intimidation and violence* in the streets. The tendency to overlook the vulnerability of racialised male asylum seekers reflects what Fassin identifies as the moral hierarchies within humanitarian regimes, where care is unequally distributed, not necessarily by level of need, but through implicit judgments about who appears vulnerable and thus worthy of protection. Vulnerability, in this context, becomes a gatekeeping device where only suffering that aligns with feminised, infantilised, or passive imagery is rendered legitimate.

The situation of single male asylum seekers in Dublin demonstrates how vulnerability is not a descriptive label but a political tool that determines who is visible to the state and who is invisibilised. All humans are vulnerable by virtue of interdependence, but governance mechanisms stratify this condition, rendering some lives more protectable than others. This means vulnerability is not only unequally distributed but also instrumentalised. The individualisation of vulnerability diverts attention from the structural forces—migration policy, asylum systems, and differentiated access to rights that actively produce harm. This approach pathologises individuals while absolving institutions.

Should We Abandon "Vulnerability"?

Given its exclusions and instrumentalisation, some scholars question whether the concept of vulnerability should be abandoned altogether. While the language of vulnerability can open up space for rights claims, it often reinforces hierarchical relations between caregiver and cared-for, protector and protected. It reproduces paternalism even as it seeks justice. Others argue that rather than abandoning the concept, we need to rethink it. For example, an emerging conceptual model reframes vulnerability in the context of migration as a complex, context-dependent condition shaped by four key dimensions: it is embedded within social, political, and legal environments; it evolves over time throughout the migration journey; it arises through relationships and power dynamics between migrants and institutions; and it involves multiple interconnected factors—legal, social, economic, and psychological.

This reframing pushes the conversation in a new direction. The challenge is not to abandon nor broaden the category of 'the vulnerable', but to interrogate the category's function and effects. What if, instead of asking who is vulnerable, we asked what makes people vulnerable, who decides who is vulnerable, and what are the consequences of relying on 'vulnerability' for the distribution of care and protection? Vulnerability, seen through this lens, becomes a way to confront injustice rather than manage it. It becomes

as Nancy Fraser has argued, part of a politics of redistribution and recognition that goes beyond symbolic acts of empathy to challenge the very systems that create inequality in the first place.

This is a lesson we can all carry into our professional practice. In my doctoral journey, this has meant engaging in critical conversations about how vulnerability is understood within both my research practice and institutional context, while prioritising the voices and insights of my research participants who live with and navigate the daily realities of seeking international protection in Ireland. For others, this work might involve analysing how vulnerability is measured, evaluating its role in shaping migration policy, or reflecting on how institutions and organisations operationalise and reproduce the concept. Across all contexts, there is a critical need to foreground the experiences and knowledge of those who live within these systems, rather than deferring to external classifications or assumptions.

In the context of Ireland's asylum system, this means looking closely at the ideas and assumptions that divide people into those who are seen as worthy of help and those who are not. It means asking why some people's suffering is noticed and acted on, while others are left out. It also means imagining a new politics of care which does not ask people to perform suffering to be seen but recognises dignity and humanity without conditions.

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Everyday Practices of Resilience

Familiarity to Difference: Digital Solidarity and its Boundaries Among Migrant Women

Yagmur Erdogmus

Yagmur Erdogmus *(she/her) is a PhD researcher in social psychology at Iscte-IUL, Portugal. Her work employs critical discursive methods and intersectional perspectives to study gender, migration, digital community building, and psychosocial processes. She currently examines migrant women's exclusive social media networks, exploring how gendered mobilities and place attachments shape identity, belonging, and solidarity among women from Turkey (funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology). Previously, she worked in humanitarian settings, providing psychosocial support for displaced populations and serving as Focal Point for Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Assault (PSEA) at IOM-Türkiye's Northwestern region. Her research seeks to bridge theory and practice, contributing to inclusive policies and interventions that address the lived realities of minoritized groups.*

What happens when shared language and cultural references, once a source of comfort, begin to obscure difference? As a migrant woman scholar, I relied on various social media platforms that host exclusive communities — international migrant groups, Turkish-speaking migrant groups, women's migrant groups, and more specifically, Turkish-speaking migrant women's groups. These spaces, formed around shared identity markers, carry layers of affective and political complexity beneath their practical function. Initially, they helped us navigate bureaucratic hurdles and administrative confusion. But over time, they revealed themselves as emotional anchors — places where shared migration stories and struggles exceeded institutional guidance and began shaping affective forms of belonging. The fact that these groups are women-only adds another layer: many were created out of frustration with the gendered silencing or sidelining women experienced in mixed migrant groups. In this way, they offer not only safety but the potential for politicization — becoming exclusive spaces where social critique and solidarity can be more openly explored.

In the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, engaging with the online solidarity practices among Turkish-speaking migrant women became a vital means of

coping with what I experienced as a homeland crisis[A1] (such as wars, political upheavals, or natural disasters experienced from diaspora), aligning with previous literature on intensified transnationalism (Baser, 2016; Takeda, 2015). Women posting calls for hygiene kits for women in the affected region (as some women survivors were unable to voice these needs due to conservative dynamics), organizing collective psychosocial support sessions for migrants outside of Turkey, and arranging offline gatherings in different host cities – all from outside Turkey.

Because in the end, how 'lucky' can we be considered that we were not in Turkey during the earthquake? How do you carry on with daily life when your home is in ruins, the ones left behind are hurt, while your immediate environment remains untouched? What kind of privilege is wrapped into that luck: the privilege of mobility, of passports, of being distant enough to be safe, yet close enough to grieve? A Syrian family in Cardiff, for instance, survived physically but watched from afar as their relatives were buried under rubble in Turkey (McGuigan, 2023) – their safety marked less by luck than by displacement. What often appears as luck is actually mediated by structural vulnerability – the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that dictate whose lives are secure, whose resilience is tested, and whose suffering remains invisible (Berlant, 2011).

Source: Sozen, 2023

In the days following the earthquake, reports surfaced of Syrian refugees unable to call for help under the rubble unless they spoke Turkish, along with the inaccessibility of so-called earthquake visas (for resettlement in Europe) and the fear of being deported (Jarmakani & Wallis, 2024). This selective care and silencing, affecting Syrian refugees and historically marginalized groups like local Arabs, Roma, Kurds, and LGBTQ+, reminded me how the "home" I left for its violences can be even more hostile to those excluded from its dominant discourses.

This hostility is not accidental. It is reinforced by populist scapegoating that shifts blame from state failure (Sozen, 2023) onto already marginalized communities. Accusations like "refugee looting" circulate more easily than demands for justice. Crisis becomes commodified – as seen in the Red Crescent's sale of tents to survivors (Duvar English, 2024).

As the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes unfolded, I found myself confronting the realities of both loss and belonging through the digital networks of Turkish-speaking migrant women. These online spaces appear as welcoming arenas, drawing strength from a perception of multicultural inclusivity shaped by a diversity of migratory experiences (Ghorashi, 2003), while finding familiarity in shared linguistic, cultural, and historical idioms.

The solidarity enacted in these contexts can be understood as an embodied, emotional, and political activity that involves what people do with feeling in particular contexts (Wetherell, 2008). Activities such as mutual aid postings, organizing psychosocial support, and sharing expressions of guilt or relief are all forms of affective labor – that is, the shared, practical labor of negotiating emotion collectively. This labor helps establish and reinforce particular norms around which forms of gendered care and moral response are seen as appropriate or acceptable in transnational crises. At the same time, in relying on shared feelings of affection and belonging, we must also ask what assumptions and exclusions are taken for granted, who becomes central, and who is inadvertently left out of these collective acts of support. As both participant and researcher in these communities, I am entangled in the affective and linguistic dynamics I reflect on. This dual role foregrounds the ethical tension between solidarity and critique: how do we challenge exclusions without undermining care?

Research into national belonging shows that collective identity is often maintained through stable, "essentialist" in-groups (Obradović & Bowe, 2021; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015). Even migrant groups organized around language or gender can reproduce subtle boundaries – shaped by digital literacy, fluency, or how the crisis is framed. The inequalities exposed by the earthquake raised a difficult question: do women-only transnational networks mirror the exclusions of home, or offer a space to challenge them?

These questions continue to resonate, pushing me to grapple with the work of belonging and the limits of comfort in these digital networks. As Mohanty (2013) notes, when de-linked from justice, solidarity risks becoming a soft politics of repair. What matters most is not simply gathering around familiar narratives, but our willingness to engage with discomfort and ambiguity — to recognize that absences and hesitations signal as much as open connections. The challenge is to transform that unease into collective resourcefulness, sharpening rather than dulling our commitment to care, critique, and genuine transformation.

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Negotiating and Resisting: Reflections on Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers'

Ayu Kusumastuti

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Female migrant domestic workers are resilient individuals confronting a global gendered care work system characterised by precarious employment conditions. Despite the precarity, female migrants attempted to organise, develop strategies, and resist in their host countries. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU) in Hong Kong marched for the rights of migrants, fighting against overcharging and advocating for better protections. Indonesia Migrant Domestic Workers Association Malaysia (PERTIMIG) advocates for the rights of domestic workers by promoting decent working conditions and empowering its members' capabilities. This essay originates from a PhD research project on the political agency of Indonesian migrant domestic workers regarding transnational political participation in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). This essay explores everyday forms of resistance by female migrant domestic workers in Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong in relation to their employers.

Negotiate Assertively: The Story of Nurul in Hong Kong

I spoke with Nurul, a member of the Indonesian migrant worker union in Hong Kong, via telephone in Spring 2023. She has lived in Hong Kong for 20 years and reflected that after arriving in Hong Kong, she became smarter, particularly in understanding work contracts and the host country's employment laws and policies.

I apprehended her strong capacity to organise for migrant workers' rights. She established her alliance and mobilised others to demand a reduction in placement costs or agency fees. Her involvement in migrant rights advocacy stems from her negative experience working in Hong Kong. She was a victim of overcharging when she had to pay the agency fee with her salary for her first seven months in Hong Kong. She frequently endured punishment from her boss, who treated her as if she were a child. When she made a mistake, the employers would tell her to stand behind the door for one hour. Nurul decided to terminate the contract after two months of work. Then, she found another domestic job in Macau but received no salary. Her lived experience motivated her to be more knowledgeable about work contracts, to join migrant organisations and unions in order to gain more bargaining power when negotiating with employers.

Now she has a 'good' boss, a day off, and a decent salary. She also successfully negotiated her role as a labour activist with her employer. She said, *"I was honest with my employer about being a labour rights activist. I told them I want a day off every Sunday and on national holidays. I still want to keep learning about migrant workers' rights."*

This highlights her efforts to negotiate their political rights amid challenging working conditions in the host country: reclaiming agency over her future through organising within migrant labour groups.

Freedom of organisation in Hong Kong mirrors their identity as a postcolonial and neoliberal society (Constable, 2009). This demonstrates that Nurul's political agency enables her to negotiate assertively with the employer regarding her civic participation. Not only can Nurul negotiate assertively for positions and roles in Hong Kong civic engagement, but she also understands her role as a 'good' migrant domestic worker who is always attentive and completes all her work.

Resist Silently: A Story of Hani in Kuala Lumpur

Hani has been living in Kuala Lumpur for 16 years. She is originally from Nganjuk Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. She has been working for the same boss for almost 15 years and has a very close relationship with her employer. Her boss treats her like family. This blurs the line between work and personal life, increasing the worker's vulnerability. She admitted that the interaction space for migrant domestic workers is limited to the employer's house. Workers are bound to their bosses, and employers' permission is required. Migrant domestic workers engage in intimate and emotional labour, intertwined with the kin economy and filial obligation. They often find themselves subjected to various forms of surveillance within gendered and racialised social hierarchies (Spitzer, 2022).

In 2019, she began participating in migrant education activities at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur and later became involved in the Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Association (PERTMIG), initiated by IDWF (International Domestic Workers Federation). She was aware that her employers did not want her to participate in this. She navigates her employment status by remaining silently resistant.

"I tell small lies about our activities... Little by little, I tell them about my work with the migrant organisation. I don't go straight to the point. Some employers are scared that their workers will become labour activists."

A female migrant sought to navigate her roles as a labour activist within gendered care work. This demonstrated her everyday resistance to her critical stance and her response to the precarious intersection of immigration and employment status. Participants in Hong Kong are more open and honest about their roles as activists than those in Kuala Lumpur.

Negotiating Assertively versus Resisting Silently

Despite precarious conditions limiting their ability to mobilise abroad, female migrants possess the power to resist. Immigration and employment status shape the hyper-precarity faced by Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). Nevertheless, they can respond by actively submitting. This refers to the obedient traits of workers that enable them to gain more benefits from their employers, such as increased opportunities to participate in unions and migrant organisations. While participants in Hong Kong attempted to assertively negotiate their union participation, those in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) engaged in silent resistance. This shows their agency to pursue goals and to make their own choice. As Ammann (2020), Sherlock (2020), Williams (2017), and Koens and Gunawardana (2021) pinpoint, women's agency brings about female capacity, which disrupts masculinism, enables women to achieve personal goals, and gives women a choice to respond. Protecting female migrants must remain a global priority by ensuring fair, dignified work and amplifying their voices.

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Rooted in Displacement: The Lived Experiences of Tamil Dalit Plantation Labourers' Disparities and Inequality in South Asia

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This *picture was taken at a tea plantation in Kandy, Sri Lanka, on 5 January 2025, during my fieldwork visit.*

Introduction

The Indian Tamil Dalit community, recruited as plantation labourers during British colonial rule, continues to endure the compounded effects of multiple displacements, disparities, and systemic inequalities across India and Sri Lanka. According to Sri Lanka's colonial census, the estate population fell from 123,654 in 1896 to 851,359 in 1946. Indian Tamils —primarily from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities in Tamil Nadu and parts of South India—were forcibly recruited and relocated to Sri Lanka to work in tea,

coffee, rubber, and cinnamon plantations. Caste played a central role in this colonial labour strategy. The British Empire deliberately targeted Dalit communities, exploiting their socio-economic vulnerabilities and pre-existing marginalisation. False assurances of better livelihoods were used to entice or coerce them into harsh and exploitative labour regimes (Jayawardena & Kurian, 2015). These recruitment practices created a crisis of identity for these migrants, who came to be known as "coolie" workers—a label that reinforced their racial and caste inferiority and marked them as expendable within the colonial order. This laid the groundwork for the statelessness and exclusion they would face in the post-colonial era.

Impacts of Colonialism

Colonialism established a systematic framework of legal and bureaucratic mechanisms to regulate migration, labour, and citizenship. Labour contracts, permits, and registration systems were used to categorise populations with rigid legal terms such as "native," "subject," "coolie," and "alien." These categories denied full legal personhood and national belonging to Indian Tamil Dalits, setting the stage for their political exclusion and rendering them stateless in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's independence. In Sri Lanka, Indian Tamil Dalits were known by various labels—Indian Coolies, Malayaga Tamils, Plantation Tamils, and Estate Tamils. These labour identifiers not only fragmented their identity but also contributed to their marginalisation. Both the Sinhalese majority and Sri Lankan Tamil elites viewed them as untouchables due to their association with plantation labour, which was perceived as the lowest form of work and Indian Caste (Jayawardena & Kurian, 2015; Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016). Plantation labour, especially for women, involved gruelling physical tasks, long working hours, and minimal wages. The workers lived in overcrowded, poorly maintained housing with little access to education, healthcare, or state welfare. Generations of plantation workers were denied political rights and treated as outsiders, despite having lived on the island for decades.

Statelessness and Caste-Race Entanglements

The colonial legacy embedded a political economy of inequality, stripping Indian Tamil Dalit plantation workers of access to basic rights—citizenship, fair wages, political participation, and recognition within mainstream society. Their historical exclusion continues to shape their lived experiences, reinforcing systems of caste, class, and racial oppression across national borders. Moreover, the colonial legal and bureaucratic framework laid the foundation for the post-colonial Sri Lankan state to systematically exclude Indian Tamil Dalit labourers from citizenship. After gaining independence from British rule on February 4, 1948, the Sri Lankan government passed the Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948, which rendered approximately 975,000 Indian Tamils stateless. This legal exclusion disproportionately affected the Dalit plantation labourers, whose already precarious existence was further marginalised by the denial of citizenship. Following this exclusion, the Indian Tamil Dalit community faced intensified exploitation and deepened inequalities. Without legal recognition, they were stripped of basic rights—including access to education, healthcare, labour protections, welfare benefits, and political participation. Many were subjected to violence, discrimination, and frequent bullying by local populations, who pressured them to leave the country. The loss of citizenship not

only erased their legal identity but also made them vulnerable to forced repatriation and generations of systemic neglect.

Forced Repatriation & Displacement

In an attempt to address the growing crisis of statelessness among Indian Tamil plantation labourers in Sri Lanka, both the Indian and Sri Lankan governments entered into bilateral negotiations. Initial efforts failed to yield a consensus, but eventually, both states reached agreements aimed at resolving the issue. These culminated in the Sirima-Shastri Pact of October 30, 1964, and the Srimavo-Gandhi Pact of June 28, 1974. Under these agreements, India consented to grant citizenship to or repatriate 600,000 Indian Tamils, while Sri Lanka agreed to provide citizenship and settle 375,000 individuals permanently. However, the implementation of these pacts was deeply flawed. Thousands of Indian Tamil Dalits were forcibly repatriated to India without being given a choice or voice in the decision-making process. Their preferences—whether to remain in Sri Lanka or return to India—were neither acknowledged nor respected. This top-down, state-driven approach disregarded the lived experiences and socio-cultural attachments of the plantation communities, many of whom had lived in Sri Lanka for generations.

Crucially, the repatriation and resettlement process remains an unfinished and unresolved task. The outbreak of the Sri Lankan civil war in 1983 led the Indian government to halt further repatriations. As a result, thousands of Indian Tamil Dalits were displaced within Sri Lanka, while 475000 people (The Commissionerate of Rehabilitation of Tamil Nadu, India Report) were uprooted in India after forced repatriation. Many were left in limbo—stateless, undocumented, or relegated to refugee status—without adequate legal protections, housing, or livelihood support. This history of forced displacement, incomplete repatriation, and the effects of war continues to shape the precarious citizenship and social standing of Indian Tamil Dalit plantation labourers today—both in Sri Lanka and India.

Modern Disparities & Inequality

The stateless returnees or Indian Tamil plantation labourers who were repatriated to India were displaced again as part of the rehabilitation process. Tamil-speaking communities were resettled in non-Tamil-speaking states such as Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and even Gujarat. Notably, the majority of returnees were relocated to forested plantation sectors across India. This unorganised and scattered rehabilitation mirrored the colonial structure of plantation labour exploitation. These communities now face threats of losing their houses, jobs, and continue to experience regional disparities and inequalities, echoing the patterns of colonial and post-colonial marginalisation in India.

Conclusion

In amplifying the voices of a historically voiceless community, this blog underscores the urgent need to address the prolonged issues of multiple displacement, systemic disparities, and deep-rooted inequality faced by Indian Tamil Dalit migrants. This post

foregrounds the everyday realities of this marginalized group and contends that any meaningful effort to tackle statelessness, forced displacement, and climate injustice in South Asia must confront the enduring legacies of colonialism and caste-based hierarchies. Only by confronting these intersecting structures of oppression can this community receive urgent intervention for immediate solutions in permanent housing, employment, and welfare to rebuild their lives.

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Refugees and Migrants Facing Xenophobia and Bureaucratic Violence as Structural and Everyday Reality in South Africa

Denis Rudasingwa

Denis Rudasingwa *is a Refugee and Migrants activist based in Pretoria, South Africa. He was born in Uganda after his parents fled Rwanda in 1959, seeking refuge from political unrest. Growing up as the child of refugees, he witnessed first-hand the realities of displacement, statelessness, and the struggle to belong. His personal history is deeply intertwined with the broader story of migration—one marked by both profound loss and the resilience to rebuild. Through his writing, Denis weaves history, ethics, faith, and lived experience into a compelling call for empathy.*

I still remember the day a woman I knew from a refugee support group in Cape Town broke down in tears — not because of what she had fled, but because she had just been turned away again from the Refugee Reception Office. *"They said the system was offline,"* she whispered, holding the crumpled papers that had now expired. For her, and so many others, survival in South Africa didn't just mean escaping war or persecution. It meant surviving the slow violence of bureaucracy — the endless queues, the expired permits, the misplaced files, the guards who spoke in sneers.

As someone who has gone through the asylum application, been rejected by Home Affairs, and had my asylum granted by the Pretoria High Court, I have worked closely with migrant and refugee communities in South Africa. I have seen how trauma does not end at the border. It mutates. It embeds itself in everyday life — in the constant fear of arrest during a document check, in the way a landlord doubles your rent because you're a *"kwerekwere,"* in the long wait outside Home Affairs before dawn, hoping that this time, maybe this time, the system will work.

South Africa, like many other countries, presents itself as a democratic beacon. Yet for thousands of asylum seekers and refugees, it is a place of limbo. The bureaucratic system meant to provide protection often does the opposite. Refugee status determinations are delayed for years. Appeal systems are overloaded or simply dysfunctional. Many asylum

seekers live without valid documents, not out of choice, but because the system fails them — and then criminalizes them for that failure.

But this is not only a South African story. Across the world, we see similar patterns: asylum seekers stuck for years in UK hotels or Greek camps, forced to prove their pain over and over again to disbelieving officials. In the United States, Title 42 was used to push back migrants under the guise of public health. In Australia, indefinite offshore detention strips people of dignity under a policy of 'deterrence.' The details vary, but the underlying mechanisms are the same — an obsession with borders, suspicion, and control, masked as protection.

And yet — despite this — people resist. Migrants resist every day simply by surviving.

In South Africa, I have seen how informal networks become lifelines. A Somali shopkeeper hires a newly arrived Eritrean woman. Zimbabwean mothers form childcare co-ops so they can work. WhatsApp groups circulate legal information and Home Affairs updates. Migrants become one another's infrastructure, creating informal systems of support where formal ones fail. This is not just resilience. This is resistance to a system designed to exhaust, delay, and deny.

I've also seen how the trauma of displacement is compounded by xenophobia. Violence erupts in waves across South African cities. I've seen shops looted, migrants beaten, their lives and livelihoods destroyed. But it's not just physical violence — it's structural. It's being told you don't belong, even after living here for ten years. It's not being able to access healthcare because your asylum document has expired. It's the silence from the state when migrants are killed in xenophobic attacks, and the media calls it *"service delivery protests."*

Yet amid this, migrants continue to care for one another. Community kitchens appear overnight. Funds are raised for funerals. Language classes are organized by volunteers. Migrant women form solidarity circles to deal with gender-based violence that is often ignored by the very institutions meant to help.

These acts may seem small. But in a world that seeks to erase migrant lives, they are radical.

What's striking is how these patterns of survival and care mirror each other globally. In Calais, displaced people cook communally in tents and share smuggled SIM cards. In Lesbos, migrant women lead mental health groups in overcrowded camps. In New York, undocumented workers form mutual aid groups to fight for housing rights. Across the world, migrants are not just surviving—they are organizing, resisting, and reimagining what community means.

Still, I cannot romanticize the resilience that Refugees and migrants in South Africa demonstrate in a situation where they seem to be on their own. Nationalist and Anti-

migrant groups like Operation Dudula and March and March started with violent slogans against undocumented immigrants, but over time, with impunity, they gained the boldness to attack also those with valid legal documents, blocking them from accessing basic health care and threatening the children from accessing public schools. The government is silent apart from soft condemnation without any action against these xenophobic groups. This has a huge negative impact on the Refugees and Migrants, but also the whole human race of which they are part. No one should have to be this strong just to exist.

What we need is accountability — from states that criminalize migration, from systems that dehumanize, from media that scapegoats. We need migration systems that recognize humanity before legality. And we need host communities — especially those of us with privilege — to move beyond charity and toward solidarity. This means centering migrant voices, demanding institutional reform, and acknowledging that migration is not a crisis — inequality is.

Migrant communities aren't simply waiting for help to arrive — many are already creating their own networks, movements, and ways of belonging. There's a lot we can learn by paying attention to these efforts. Instead of speaking on their behalf, it's often more powerful to listen, share their stories, and support the spaces they're building. In these spaces, crossing a border doesn't mean losing your rights, dignity, or sense of future.

It's very important to note that asylum seekers, Refugees, and migrants cannot surmount the difficulties that they face without working together with the host community. That's why more efforts should be employed to sensitize the host communities about the reality of the asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to change the poisonous rhetoric that is always told by politicians. The world cannot afford to have two divided groups: Refugees and Migrants abandoned and mistreated by the rest of the world. When one group of the human race is facing difficulties, this, in the end, affects humanity as a whole. The world needs to do away with political rhetoric against Refugees and Migrants but stand with them.

IMISCOE

Provisional Belongings

The Future of Cities: Applying a Migration Lens to Urban Governance

Gülşen Doğan

Gülşen Doğan *is a PhD Candidate in Political Science and International Relations at Koç University. Her research focuses on populism, democracy, multi-level governance, migration diplomacy, with a comparative emphasis on Türkiye, Hungary, and Brazil. She is currently working on her doctoral dissertation, which explores how Türkiye and Hungary use migration diplomacy in their relations with the EU to legitimize and consolidate right-wing populist rule. As part of the Horizon Europe Twinning project BROAD-ER, she works with teams at MiReKoc (Migration Research Center at Koç University), Pompeu Fabra University and the University of Amsterdam to examine the intersection of migration and urban studies.*

Cities benefit enormously from migration. Newcomers bring diverse perspectives, skills, and cultural backgrounds that can strengthen the social, economic, and political fabric of urban life. Yet, many migrants face barriers that prevent them from contributing fully, from financial insecurity and social isolation to discrimination and limited access to services. These challenges not only undermine individual well-being but also deprive cities of the innovation, energy, and talent migrants can offer.

The central question, then, is: How can urban areas respond to migrants' specific needs and ensure their meaningful participation in city life? To answer this, we must look beyond broad principles and examine concrete strategies cities are already using, from multilingual signage in Toronto to credential recognition programs in Vancouver, that can be adapted and applied elsewhere.

Challenges to Integration

Migrants often face multiple and overlapping challenges when settling in a new city:

- Economic barriers: Language difficulties, non-recognition of qualifications, and limited access to professional networks hinder employment prospects.
- Social exclusion: Cultural differences, discrimination, and lack of community ties can lead to isolation.
- Limited access to services: Healthcare, education, and housing may be hard to access due to bureaucratic, financial, or linguistic obstacles.

- Vulnerability to exploitation: Without adequate legal protections, migrants may experience labor abuses or gender-based violence.

Addressing these barriers requires targeted, multi-dimensional approaches that link urban planning, service provision, economic inclusion, and civic engagement.

Addressing Needs for Successful Integration

Cities can adopt a range of strategies to meet the distinct needs of newcomers and support their integration into everyday life :

*Inclusive urban planning: E*nsures that city infrastructure and public spaces are accessible to all residents, including migrants. This can include the use of multilingual signage, safe and inclusive public spaces, and facilities that accommodate individuals with disabilities. In Toronto, public parks, transit hubs, and municipal buildings feature multilingual signs, enabling newcomers to navigate the city independently from day one.

Economic integration: Introduce vocational training programs, language education, and support for entrepreneurship. Align migrants' skills with local labor market needs through mentorship programs and inclusive hiring initiatives. In Vancouver, targeted training and language courses help migrants convert their professional qualifications into locally recognized credentials, opening access to higher-skilled jobs.

Healthcare accessibility: Provide multilingual health information and train healthcare professionals in cultural sensitivity. In Berlin, clinics and hospitals offer services in multiple languages, and staff receive training in culturally competent care to ensure patients feel understood and respected.

Community involvement: Create opportunities for migrants to connect with residents through community centers, cultural events, and local organizations. Encourage participation in public decision-making to foster belonging and political agency. In New York City, community centers host cultural programs and public forums where migrants can share concerns directly with local officials.

Promoting migrant inclusion across economic, political, and social domains works best when cities focus on tangible, replicable measures. In Barcelona, for example, the Municipal Immigration Council gives immigrant representatives a formal seat at the table in city policymaking. Alongside this political inclusion, the city partners with local universities to offer free evening language courses and vocational training, ensuring that migrants can improve their job prospects while building social connections. This combination of political voice, legal access, and education shows how municipal action can translate rights into real opportunities; a model other cities can adapt to their own needs.

Best Practices: Inclusive Strategies from Global Cities

Cities worldwide are pioneering creative approaches to migrant inclusion. Creating vibrant, inclusive cities depends on more than wishful thinking; it requires actionable, proven measures that address the economic, political, and social dimensions of migrant inclusion. Whether it is Berlin's job training programs, Barcelona's immigrant councils, Cape Town's integration hubs, or Bangkok's health advocates, each example offers a practical template for other urban centers to adapt.

Pathways to Employment

Berlin's Integration through Qualification (IQ) program combines language instruction with job training, enabling many participants to secure stable work within a year. Vancouver's Foreign Credential Recognition Program helps skilled professionals, engineers, healthcare workers, and others re-enter their fields instead of being confined to low-skilled jobs. In Cape Town, the Scalabrini Centre supports refugees and asylum seekers with job readiness training, while São Paulo's CRAI hub provides employment referrals alongside legal and language support.

Supporting Entrepreneurship

New York's WE NYC initiative empowers immigrant women entrepreneurs with mentorship, financial assistance, and business development services. Several participants have launched thriving businesses in underserved neighborhoods, strengthening local economies.

Supporting migrant integration benefits cities as much as it benefits newcomers. For global hubs like São Paulo, London, San Francisco, New York, and Sydney, inclusive strategies are not acts of charity but long-term investments. By ensuring migrants can participate fully in economic and civic life, these cities enhance their own competitiveness, innovation capacity, and attractiveness to future residents.

Access to Services

Malmö delivers municipal services in multiple languages, training staff in cultural competence so migrants can navigate bureaucracy and access social services without language barriers. Bangkok's Migrant Health Programme trains volunteers from migrant communities as health advocates and interpreters, ensuring migrants can access healthcare. This has significantly increased healthcare access for Burmese and Cambodian migrants.

Singapore's Migrant Workers' Centre provides mediation, legal aid, and skills training for low-wage migrants, reducing workplace disputes and improving protections. Seoul's Foreign Resident Center offers free Korean language courses, legal advice, and employment counseling, serving as a one-stop integration hub for foreigners living in the city.

Civic Participation and Rights

Barcelona's Municipal Immigration Council gives immigrant representatives a direct voice in policymaking, shaping housing programs and expanding language training. Amsterdam's City Rights Office and Oslo's anti-discrimination campaigns provide safe spaces where migrants can report abuse, seek advice, and learn about their rights. Similarly, San Francisco offers free legal clinics in community centers, helping migrants understand and defend their rights.

Celebrating Diversity

Cities like Sydney and Toronto promote intercultural understanding through festivals and arts. Sydney's Living in Harmony festival creates shared spaces for newcomers and long-time residents through performances, food fairs, and storytelling. Toronto's Cultural Hotspot initiative highlights immigrant neighborhoods with art projects, walking tours, and business showcases, boosting local economies while fostering inclusion.

Language and Social Support

London's Migrants' Resource Centre provides language instruction and social support, accelerating newcomers' integration into both the workforce and community life.

Advocacy and Support Networks

In Japan, support for migrants comes from both government and civil society. The Foreign Residents Support Center (FRESC) in Tokyo provides multilingual consultation on visa procedures, daily life issues, and legal matters in languages such as English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese. At the national level, the Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan (SMJ) advocates for immigrant rights and policy reform while also offering legal guidance and support.

By prioritizing inclusive planning, expanding economic opportunities, ensuring access to essential services, fostering community participation, and safeguarding legal rights, cities can create conditions where migrants not only integrate but thrive. Yet no single initiative, whether Berlin's job training programs, Bangkok's health outreach, or New York's women's empowerment schemes, will be sufficient in isolation. These strategies are most effective when embedded within a coherent vision that simultaneously supports, protects, and celebrates diversity, ensuring that migrants can meet their basic needs while also flourishing. In the end, it is not only migrants who depend on cities, but cities themselves that depend on migrants. Urban centers thrive because of the contributions of newcomers, and building inclusive, resilient, and sustainable futures will require recognizing this interdependence and investing accordingly.

This vision also reflects insights from the Horizon Europe BROAD-ER project (Bridging the Migration and Urban Studies Nexus), which brings together Koç University, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, and the University of Amsterdam to study how cities build autonomy in migration governance. Focusing on three interconnected pathways, city diplomacy, municipal autonomy from central governments, and the role of independent local actors, BROAD-ER shows how cities like Istanbul, Barcelona, and Amsterdam are experimenting

with governance practices that move beyond nation-state-centered approaches. Preliminary findings from the project highlight both the opportunities and constraints cities face as they seek to institutionalize inclusive migration strategies across multiple scales. Embedding best practices within such a multilevel, coherent framework is therefore key if cities are to remain not just places where migrants arrive, but true engines of diversity, resilience, and global innovation.

Materiality of Place-making in Protracted Displacement Among the Bakassi of Southern Nigeria

Rukayat Usman

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Migration experiences do not end upon arrival—this is now well established across the literature. For many displaced communities, it marks the beginning of the anguish of uncertainty of resettlement. This is especially true for the Bakassi people of Southern Nigeria, displaced not by conflict but by a court ruling; they now live across fragmented territories. So how does a community preserve its identity when its homeland vanishes? Drawing from my recent article (Usman and Adebayo, 2025), this post explores how the uprooted Bakassi people (Bakassians, as they sometimes call themselves) fight against the erasure of their identity while attempting to re-root their villages, traditional thrones, and families in multiple spaces of daily circulation across two international boundaries.

Unravelling Displacement: A Court Case, Border Shifting and Shifted Identities

The Bakassi case is unique for many reasons. Unlike most causes of displacement, the Bakassians became displaced because their home left them. They lost their ancestral homeland to a boundary dispute arbitrated by the International Court of Justice. In its 2002 judgement, which changed the lives of Bakassians forever, the ICJ ruled that their homeland –the Bakassi Peninsula – be handed to Cameroon, a territory that had been under the Nigerian government since its independence in 1960. The battle was a colonial patrimony of ill-defined boundaries and unclear treaties between Britain, Germany, and France. The loss of the Peninsula, inhabited by about 500,000 persons, created a rupture in

their identity, questioning the fusion of citizenship, ethnicity, origin/ancestry, and livelihood. This circumstance separated families and broke towns. An estimated 300,000 left the Bakassi Peninsula for Nigeria in efforts to preserve at least two portions of their identity: citizenship and ethnicity, while losing ancestral origin and their major livelihood of high-sea fishing.

Entrance of "New" Bakassi in Nigeria. Source: Author

Attempting to provide a resettlement option for Bakassians, the Cross-River State government, the previous sub-regional political host of the Peninsula in Nigeria, etched out a piece of land (already inhabited by another group – Ikang) and named it Bakassi. This new arrangement was situated inland and served as their political capital. Meanwhile, some three marshy, hinterland, and undeveloped islands, Kwa, Dayspring I and II, part of the erstwhile peninsula, remained as part of Nigeria. These became the closest spaces portraying home between their ceded homeland and their maintained nationality. But to stay connected with all parts of themselves, Bakassians had to remake both objects and the environment that brings a semblance of home, or at least, some parts of it.

Everyday Translocalism: Weaving Worlds, Keeping Identities Whole

In displacement situations, cultural materials are often immobilised and separated from the people for whom they hold meanings. However, Bakassians reveal how place serves as a toolbox for accessing materialities for culture re/making and for re-constructing their identities. They did this by engaging in the translocalism of the everyday. For them, placemaking is about these everyday interactions with space and its constituents, transforming it from a mere location into a place of belonging and identity. It's a continuous conversation, a self-mediated change that keeps culture alive, not in a museum, in the hands and hearts of its people. But what happens when one place cannot hold all that you are?

The aquatic Bakassi have been relocated to a place without access to the sea or rivers, making adaptation considerably difficult. Though some community members are investing time learning other suitable agricultural methods, the overlap of two territories in one space, Ikang and Bakassi, makes access to fertile land difficult. This is because the

host community struggles to protect their resources. Struggles like this constantly remind Bakassians that “New” Bakassi is not theirs, neither does it allow their expression of identity as “water people”. As a means of emplacement, Bakassians embrace translocalism, a strategy reflecting the interconnectedness of origin and destination in migrant experiences. For them, transnational place-making efforts are pivotal as they attempt to re-begin, rebuild, and reconnect with their heritage.

In practice, Bakassians maintain connections to "Old Bakassi," now in Cameroon, by taking risky journeys back for their livelihood – fishing in the bountiful waters of the Atlantic and to connect with their stay-behind family. Sometimes, it is to reconnect with spiritual sites like the healing waters of Anansa, a water goddess, which only an indigene can traditionally fetch. Also, they inhabit "New Bakassi," the resettlement area in Nigeria. This place is riddled with challenges, including political and resource contestations with the original Ikang inhabitants. These challenges reinforce the feeling that the relocation is "just on paper," since their new territory remains unrecognised by the federal government’s delimitation and electoral agency. Aspiring for a better future, their gaze is fixed on unceded islands like Dayspring I & II and Kwa (also spelled Qua). These represent an "aspirational Bakassi," a group of islands with shorelines across the Atlantic Ocean. It holds their hope for a place where their cultural identity can be fully re-rooted, solely theirs, and guarantee benefits derived from both their old and new situations. In living this multi-sited existence, their lives become a dynamic interplay between past, present, and an actively pursued future.

Concluding remarks

The Bakassi experience shows that identity and belonging can transcend geography and international bureaucracies. Through translocal adaptation, the displaced community sustains culture by actively engaging in their own recovery, cultural sustainability, and reclaiming agency in the face of forced dislocation. Unlike many other migrant experiences where placemaking involves shifting roots from one point to another, placemaking efforts for the Bakassi necessitate translocal (transnational) relations. By exercising placemaking and translocalism across three territories and temporalities, they rebuild their lives; they redefine what it means to belong, proving that even when a homeland is lost, the community can find new strategies to re-root and new ways to thrive. This strategy rests on their collective resilience embedded in community, shared memories, practices, and aspirations that fuel their innovative adaptation strategies. What lessons can other displaced groups draw from Bakassi's experience?

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Everyday Politics of Belonging and Non-belonging: A Reflective Field Essay on Nigerian and Congolese Migrants in Delhi

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Pooja Priya *is a PhD researcher in Sociology at University College Cork, Ireland. Her research interest lies in exploring South-South migration and placemaking, focusing on African migrants in India. Her doctoral dissertation examines Nigerian and Congolese students in Delhi, analysing how intersecting identities shape their experiences of placemaking and how they undertake subjective strategies to make home. She has worked as a lecturing staff in Indian universities in the modules of sociology of India, sociological theories and social stratification with a student audience comprising African students. In Ireland, she collaborates regularly with two migrant advocacy groups, Recruit Refugees Ireland and the Congolese Association of Ireland, supporting refugee and migrant communities.*

Delhi, India's bustling capital city, is home to millions of people from diverse backgrounds. It comprises migrants from all over India. Yet, within this diverse city, some groups remain on the margins, trying to make a place where they can belong and constantly experiencing urban exclusion, such as the Nigerian and Congolese migrants. These urban exclusions consist of having lack of spatial access in many spaces within the city. However, these migrants create their own places of resistance as a community, through which they also establish their collective and individual identities and define what it means to be a Congolese or Nigerian in Delhi.

In this reflective essay, I discuss my reflections and observations from my doctoral fieldwork that I conducted in Delhi and with a specific focus on how spaces i.e., Pentecostal Churches and the INA market, have provided the migrants with an array of opportunities beginning with that of building a community, finding housing, establishing small-scale businesses and overall, generating a sense of 'home'. It is also worth looking at how, despite a lack of legal framework in India for Nigerian and Congolese migrants, due to which the migrants lack legal and social rights in India and in cities like Delhi, they continue to be highly visible within the city's social fabric. This visibility is pronounced in globalised spaces, such as upscale malls and diplomatic enclaves. However, this visibility often reflects only a privileged subset of the community, those at the top of class hierarchies, raising critical questions: How do migrants at the margins of class, gender, and religion create a sense of home in Delhi? Where do they feel they belong? I argue that those with social and economic

privilege can more easily navigate within the urban space, making them less vulnerable to racialisation than their less privileged counterparts. My fieldwork focused on how these marginalised migrants forge belonging through religious practices and the maintenance of traditional food cultures.

Pentecostal Churches: Places of Community Building

One of the significant ways in which these migrants develop a sense of community is through their participation in Pentecostal Congolese and Nigerian churches in the city, located primarily in the basements of the apartment buildings. These Pentecostal churches act as counter-spaces wherein they create a sense of friendship or social relationships and create a site of resistance towards the larger exclusionary city spaces, which were embedded in racial prejudice and frequent police scrutiny. These churches have become few of their chosen spaces within the larger city that they would visit besides their place of residence (home), university, and embassies, and which they considered a safe space.

African, or Nigerian, and Congolese food cultures are a fundamental aspect of how their church operates. Cooking and eating traditional Nigerian food is a big aspect of these churches' operations. Cooking dishes such as Jollof rice is an integral part of this cultural expression, which creates a transnational sense of homing and community restoration for these communities. Cooking also became a large aspect of my involvement and presence in these churches.

In my initial days of the visit, I enjoyed watching them cook jollof rice, but towards the end of my fieldwork, I offered to help the ladies in the church, who mostly cooked it. I remember vividly what the Pastor's wife said to me one day, *"My dear, this is how we connect; we Nigerians, we love our food, it makes us feel like home."* Thus, food practices are an integral part of the Pentecostal church, which further turns into a strategy that these migrant communities undertake in their everyday lived experiences in Delhi. However, these food practices were gendered, and through which marginality within the marginalised community could be highlighted. Men were the providers in this food culture who took care of buying African food produce every week and stored it in their homes, while the women collectively carried it from their homes to the churches, wherein they were responsible for cooking it for the Sunday afternoon feast. This highlights how the practice of food culture requires women's emotional labour and men's physical labour, making it a gendered practice.

(L): A female and male pastor conducting a Sunday service in a Congolese Church (R): Testimony service in the Nigerian Pentecostal Church
Source: Author

INA market: Developing Home through Ethnic Food Practices

(L): Yams and crayfish, traditional Nigerian food items in the INA market (R): Bleaching products are being sold for the Congolese migrants in the INA market
Source: Author

Connections to traditional food are not only limited to Pentecostal churches but also extend to local markets like INA in Delhi. INA Market has become a hub for Nigerian and Congolese food over the past decade. One shop in particular, which I call Namal Shop (a pseudonym), plays a crucial role in maintaining transnational identities of the migrants, wherein they continue to derive connections with their home countries. What stood out to me was that this shop catered to food items such as yams, crayfish, and Congolese beauty products, through which it helped these migrants to recreate the Nigerian or Congolese identity of these migrants, but also helped them to maintain their larger African identity and established what I call "mini Africa" within Delhi. However, the experiences of this identity-making do not look the same for the male and female counterparts of this community.

The men from both these communities had the privilege to stay late in the market, negotiate with Indian vendors, and speak Hindi (the local language of Delhi). This

displayed how the movement and mobility of the male members of these migrant communities are gendered, providing them with the spatial rights to move across the city's public spaces. While the women are allowed to move within private spaces wherein their movement was tied to how chaste a woman was. As Dorothy, a Congolese woman, explained, *"Those women in our tribe who are good, we go back home fast; staying outside is not something we are allowed to do. Anyways, Indian men, we are not safe with them, they keep looking all the time because they think we are only good for one thing."* Interestingly, the views of the Nigerian women were different from those of Congolese women, which can be seen through what Samara, a Nigerian student, stated. She confirmed, *"We are not like them (Congolese women), we do not come here only with our men (brother, husband, or father), most of us are here as students, and we go to church, go to buy food whenever we want because we are better than them with money".* This highlights the intersections of gender and class and how that results in marginality within the migrant communities, like the Nigerian and Congolese female migrant community in Delhi.

Conclusion

Overall, this reflective essay draws on my doctoral fieldwork and explores how these migrants in Delhi experience different forms of racialisation and undertake strategies through which they can feel a sense of belonging, accordingly. I identify how their subjective experiences of belongingness vary based on the languages they speak, their class, and gender positionalities. I study this stratified sense of belonging within two specific locales of Delhi, i.e., Pentecostal churches and the INA market, a foreign hub of African goods. I look into how homemaking and belongingness for these migrants is not a fixed place but a process of resilience and adaptation embedded in their everyday lived experiences and personal stories or narratives, wherein these experiences are intersected by their gender and class positionalities.

More than a Student: How Academic Migration Redefined My Sense of Home

Raihana Aliyu Mustapha

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Introduction: The Unique Nature of Academic Migration

Academic migration is a unique type of human mobility that differs from other types of migration in terms of its objectives, processes, and outcomes. International students move for better education and future job opportunities. They often see migration as both a means to an end (instrumental aspirations) and as an experience that is valuable in and of itself (intrinsic aspirations). The fact that academic migration is linked to larger developmental processes shows how complicated it is. For example, students from different cultural backgrounds use different coping strategies. The movement of international students follows its patterns, showing an inverted U-shaped relationship with levels of development. The reason for this is that students' educational goals and abilities have changed throughout time. This leads to a "student migration transition" that includes stressors related to school performance, adapting to a new culture, and forming an identity. These stressors require unique coping strategies that are often different from those needed by other migrant groups. My journey between Nigeria and India illustrates how academic migration gives rise to complex narratives of home, identity, and belonging. Through my experience pursuing higher education across borders, I have discovered that academic migration offers a unique lens through which to understand how educational pursuits can reshape our fundamental understanding of home and cultural identity.

The Start of My Academic Journey: From Kano to Nalanda

I grew up in Lagos and Kano, Nigeria's two busiest cities. I was surrounded by people from all over the country and the world, so interacting with people from different cultures was a normal part of life. As I lived in this lively city, my desire to learn and understand how different cultures interact grew stronger. Globalization and easier access to the internet and satellite TV made me even more curious. They let me learn about cultures that interested me, especially Indian culture.

I left Nigeria for India in 2017 to pursue my master's degree at the renowned Nalanda University in Bihar. The choice was made because of a mix of ambition and adventure. First, I wanted to learn about the Indian culture firsthand, and second, India offered affordable, quality education and scholarship opportunities, which made the decision easier.

Cultural Immersion and the Discovery of Similarities

Upon arriving in India, I was initially amazed by the bustling city and the rapid pace of life. The food was spicier, the traffic was busier, and the cultural norms were unfamiliar. However, as I adapted, I began to see similarities to Nigeria. The people I met were open and willing to show me the ropes of Indian culture. The Nigerian values within me were reflected in the collectivist spirit, the willingness to help, and the respect for other cultures.

Learning Hindi opened the door to deeper cultural immersion for the author. My first Hindi exchange with the staff at my college's canteen was "*Udhay Bhaiya, ek cup masala chai dena please*" (Udhay Bhaiya, a cup of masala tea for me please). He gave me a big smile and couldn't hide how surprised he was. This made me more determined to continue learning the language. Even being able to say a few words in Hindi helped me make friends with locals, market vendors, and anyone else I met. I started celebrating festivals like Holi and Diwali, which became important parts of my story and who I became by the time I finished my master's degree. I was no longer just an ordinary Nigerian student; I was a Nigerian who loved masala chai, momos, biryani, and Bollywood music.

The Return Home: Navigating Dual Belonging

After I received my master's degree and went back to Nigeria, it seemed like I was back in a familiar pattern. The scent of jollof rice, dambu, and dan wake (local dishes), the echoes of Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo languages, and the warmth of family gatherings made me feel at home. However, something deep within me had changed. My time in India taught me a lot of new things, and I missed the intellectual rigor and cultural liveliness I enjoyed there.

Nigeria was still my home, but it didn't feel like it was the only home I had anymore. I missed the intellectual stimulation of my Indian institution, and even the charming chaos of Indian cities. I missed the street vendors (the *momos wala, chai wala, and bhel puri*

wala), the festivals, and my rides on the metro in Delhi. I was born and raised in Nigeria, but I felt really connected to India, where I adopted a second identity and built another home with friends and family who became part of me.

Returning to India: Embracing Multiple Homes

When I received the opportunity to pursue my PhD in India, I didn't think twice about going back. This decision wasn't simply about academics; it was also highly personal. In India, I might be both Nigerian and something else. I knew that coming back would entail dealing with visa complications, finances, and the emotional cost of leaving family again, but going back to a place that felt like home made all these challenges worth it.

Now, I'm not the wide-eyed newbie I was when I initially started my master's program; I'm a PhD student. I can travel around town easily, and I can speak and understand Hindi better than I thought I could. I also take comfort in the everyday activities of Indian culture. My understanding of India is deeply personal, informed by my own experiences of movement and adaptation, leading me to reflect continuously on what "home" truly means.

Cultural Convergence and Identity Formation

My story goes beyond the typical concept of migrating from one nation to another. The complicated interplay of emotional and cultural norms has significantly influenced how I perceive myself now. The Hindi phrase "Ghar jaisa," which means "like home," captures the great feeling of belonging that I am experiencing in both Nigeria and India right now. When I cook Jollof rice with Indian spices or chat to my Indian friends about Nigerian experiences, I am actively engaging in cultural synthesis. This combination has had a significant influence on my migration experience, shifting the focus away from the most common narrative of loss and dislocation and toward personal growth and development.

I discovered that the concept of home extends well beyond where you reside or what race you are. Belonging stems from the harmonious integration of connections with others, life experiences, and cultural contexts. The ever-changing contrast between India's rich complexity and Nigeria's distinct cultural rhythms has resulted in something entirely new and uniquely mine.

What this Implies for Current Migration Studies

My journey from Nigeria to India demonstrates how complicated current academic migration may be. This kind of migration demonstrates the very intimate way individuals travel across boundaries in the contemporary world. For me, it means iteration of departures and returns, where I intentionally maintain my cultural roots while simultaneously developing new ones in the place I chose to call home.

India seems like home, not because it is better than Nigeria. I feel like I belong since the country has helped me develop academically, learn new things, and find who I am. Academic migration is a contemporary method of cultural dissemination and transformation. It is more than simply relocating to a new location; it also entails

significant personal and intellectual development.

This sort of movement allows individuals to form true relationships in their communities while maintaining strong links to their home nations. Therefore, transnational identities are becoming more valuable to both sending and receiving communities. These identities form cultural exchange networks that benefit everyone engaged in the complex process of human migration and adaptation.

How to Make Integration Work for Host Communities

Host communities can assist academic migrants by providing language support programs, cultural mentorship programs, and academic institutions that foster cultural understanding and respect. These programs can help immigrants learn the local language, adapt to their new culture, and share their experiences. Academic institutions can also encourage cultural exchange, fostering understanding and respect between international students and their host community. These strategies promote a two-way process of cultural enrichment rather than just fitting in.

For Students Who Migrate for Education

Academic migrants can maintain their cultural identity while immersing themselves in their new communities by actively learning the host language and making deeper connections with the local culture. It can involve actively participating in community events, festivals, and traditions, as well as sharing cultural practices, which will allow for meaningful cross-cultural exchanges. Getting to know locals and other international students can build diverse networks and improve the academic experience. Lastly, staying connected to one's home culture while trying new things can help grow and prevent loss of cultural roots. These strategies will help academic migrants become active members of their host communities, making them feel a sense of belonging in both their new and ancestral homes.

Conclusion

My journey has highlighted the importance of migration in fostering cross-cultural understanding and personal development. The concept of home is dynamic, encompassing a wide range of places, cultures, and identities. As a PhD student, my understanding of migration in academia has expanded, highlighting the impact of language and culture on where we call home and how migrants in academia handle the complex sense of belonging. I hope that academic migration can help other students grow rather than lose, offering exceptional opportunities to develop transnational identities that improve lives. Finding a place to establish roots doesn't require sacrificing one identity for another, as multiple identities complement one another. My experiences have taught me to be resilient, adaptable, and find a home in the people and places we choose to put our hearts, minds, and energies into, creating lasting relationships and making a positive impact on our communities.

Between Two Worlds: Working Women's Post-Migration Experiences and the Search for Self

Dr. Shatakshi Bourai and Tulika Bourai

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"She carries her past in one hand and her paycheck in the other—each step in her post-migration journey a negotiation between who she was and who she must become."

When we set off from home for the unknown, to pursue our studies and work in a new city, we were excited, hopeful, and determined, like many other women across the world who migrate to access better opportunities for themselves. Over time, however, we began to feel the distance from our family and community as well as from parts of ourselves which we used to take for granted. Migration for work or studies isn't just a logistical change; it's an emotional, cultural, and psychological shift.

It begins rather subtly – missing family gatherings, struggling to find your native food in supermarkets, and explaining your customs over and over. For us, the first disconnect was when we couldn't celebrate a traditional festival in the same way we used to. There were no familiar community events nearby, and even if there were, there was no time off from work to participate. What had once been a lively, shared ritual now became a quiet memory replayed over video calls. That small loss stayed with us.

Belonging Nowhere, Becoming Everywhere: The Inner Conflict of Migrant Women

As women are often inundated with archaic gender expectations, migration does add a layer of complexity. Back home, we were expected to stay close to family, to care, to conform. In the new space, we were expected to compete, to adapt quickly, and to work long hours in an unfamiliar working environment. Our values felt split. We were grateful for the freedom to shape our own decisions, but we couldn't escape the guilt of drifting from cultural norms we once held dear. During this journey, we met many more working migrant women like us, and as researchers, we couldn't stop reflecting on their migratory experiences. A friend who works in southern India told us that she learnt a new language so that she could make friends more easily. Another began dressing differently in order to be noticed by her friends. These changes may seem superficial at first, but they are important steps for cultural integration. Over time, however, they take away from one's identity. One might start to think: Who am I now? Am I the same daughter, sister, woman I was before? Sociologists have described this phase as a form of 'cultural estrangement,' that is, when the environment surrounding you no longer reflects the culture that exists within one's mind.

We remember going to a professional dinner where we were told that we were "progressive" by leaving the house for work, but on that same night, a relative back home told us that we were "too modern" and needed to "settle down". The opposing views of these two ideologies made us consider the prevailing ways of thinking that perpetuate gender inequity.

Digital Diaspora: Navigating Belonging

Identity becomes something we have to continually negotiate in these liminal spaces. At times, we feel as though we don't quite fit in—we're not "local" enough in the destination, but we're also not "traditional" enough in our hometown. But we have found strength in this liminality. We started exercising our agency by interacting with people in online communities—the fellow immigrants and locals who exchanged personal tales, cultural customs, and recipes. These online networks evolved into a contemporary version of home, providing consolation and unity beyond cultural boundaries.

Despite this, social media has two sides. It serves to preserve cultural ties, but it also turns into a surveillance tool, especially to keep a check on a woman's moral conduct. Even well-meaning friends and relatives can question the ethical and moral values we hold based on our social media updates. We realised that although we had moved physically, our culture's expectations and watchful eyes had followed us online, which brings a thought into consideration, i.e, to disengage from social media use, but that will further impact my identity formation.

Holding On, Letting Grow: The Emotional Trade-offs of Migration

We have, however, become resilient. We have been forced to consider which aspects of my culture we wish to preserve, question, or reinterpret as a result of this voyage. We

actively curate our identity rather than only passively inheriting customs. Being away from home has taught us to evaluate our roots critically while simultaneously appreciating them more.

Migration for employment and education is both empowering and confusing for many women, including us. On one hand, we acquire personal agency, new experiences, and financial independence, but on the other also deal with identity confusion, cultural conflict, and loneliness. Society rarely recognises this trade-off, particularly given the emotional toll this trip takes. Subtle yet cumulative is the loss. It's in how a trip to the temple turns into a memory rather than a routine. We are re-rooting ourselves, not just dislocating, which takes strength to do so. It entails having the ability to tolerate contradictions and understanding that growing is about extending the past to encompass the present rather than letting go of it.

Concluding remarks

Policymakers and society at large need to understand that women's migration, whether internal or international, is more than just a labour statistics and remittance issue. Additionally, migration is a very personal narrative of identity restoration. Women must be supported by systems that address their cultural, emotional, and psychological needs in addition to their needs as workers. To ease the transition, we think future destinations and our home communities need to be more tolerant and inclusive. Establishing hospitable environments that appreciate the cross-cultural element that migrants offer, rather than just viewing them differently, is crucial for host cultures. Additionally, it is also necessary to transcend inflexible gender norms that penalize women for pursuing autonomy.

In the end, our story is one of resilience, but also of reflection. We are no longer the same person who left home, but we are not lost. We are learning to belong to multiple places at once, to carry our culture while questioning it, and to shape an identity that is ours alone

IMISCOE

Knowledge, Ethics, and Intersectional Accountability

Producing Knowledge in Times of Crisis: Migrants, Researchers, and Moral Duties in the Sahel

Habmo Birwe

Habmo Birwe *is a third-year PhD candidate in Geography at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His doctoral research explores the spatial experiences and everyday agency of marginalised groups—particularly refugees and incarcerated people—in the Sahel region. His work lies at the intersection of migration studies, carceral geographies, and political geography. Alongside his academic work, he also works as a consultant for the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), focusing on forced displacement, return dynamics, and community resilience in fragile settings. His research approach combines field-based qualitative methods, critical ethical reflection, and a strong interest in participatory practices.*

In January 2024, as part of my academic research on gender dynamics in forced displacement contexts, I visited a refugee camp in Maradi, a region located in southern Niger. Home to over 17,000 Nigerian refugees fleeing Boko Haram violence, the camp is a place of uncertainty, loss, and survival. I was there as a researcher, not as a humanitarian, tasked with studying the vulnerability of displaced women—asking questions, observing realities, and collecting stories. I came in with a notebook, a list of questions, and ethical research protocols. However, I was not ready for the moral discomfort that followed. From the moment I arrived, people assumed I was there to provide something: aid, money, or connections. I spoke with five refugees, including four women. All of them asked, in different ways: *"What can you give us?"* I had nothing to offer. I explained that I was conducting research, not delivering aid: they looked disappointed, even confused. To them, I was one more outsider coming to extract their stories, their suffering, with no promise of return. I could see it on their faces: I had failed to meet the expectations my presence created.

In research, we often talk about reciprocity, but in contexts where people's basic needs are unmet, this notion is complex. I did not want to lie or create false hope; I explained that their voices might be included in reports that could inform future policies or programs. Yet in a context where survival is a daily struggle, that promise felt hollow.

Beyond Formal Ethics

Standard research ethics revolve around informed consent, confidentiality, and harm minimization. These are crucial, yet in practice, especially in humanitarian settings, they are not enough. In that camp, obtaining consent felt mechanical. I introduced the study, described the risks, and emphasized that participation was voluntary. But how meaningful is consent when the person in front of you believes you hold influence or power? When you are seen as someone connected to institutions or governments that could potentially help? Some scholars refer to this as the problem of "hierarchical consent", where participants agree not because they fully understand the research, but because they feel they cannot refuse (Sultana, 2007). One woman asked me, *"What will this research change for us?"* I paused, and then I told her the truth: probably nothing in the short term. I could guarantee that their concerns would be documented, so that they might inform future frameworks or programs. In a region hit by conflict, displacement, and fragile institutions, hoping for policy change felt distant. It felt disingenuous to promise anything more.

This experience made me question the adequacy of the ethical frameworks we rely on. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argue, research ethics must go beyond paperwork. They must include "ethical reflexivity", a continuous process of examining one's role, impact, and responsibilities. In fragile settings like the Sahel, this means asking not just "Am I following the rules?" but "What kind of relationship am I creating with the people I interview?" and "What expectations am I unintentionally raising?".

Should we give Renumeration?

A big dilemma I faced that day was whether or not to give participants money. I had some cash on me and a part of me felt I should offer something, a token, a gesture. Then I asked myself: would that be ethical? Would giving money turn the interaction into a transaction? Would people respond differently because they felt indebted to me? Would it compromise the sincerity of their answers? There's no easy answer. Some researchers argue that compensation acknowledges people's time and knowledge (Head, 2009). Others warn that it creates dependency or coerces participation. In humanitarian contexts, where aid is limited and people are vulnerable, the line between fair compensation and manipulation can be thin. Still, I believe we must engage seriously with these dilemmas: simply avoiding them by hiding behind "neutrality" or "objectivity" is not enough. We must be honest about the power dynamics we bring into the field. As researchers, we are not neutral observers; we are part of the environment, and our presence has an effect, intended or not. As Bouilly and Desrosiers (2022) remind us, knowledge-making is always embedded in relations of power. This is particularly true when working with communities that have been marginalised or silenced.

From Extractive to Accountable Research

There are ways to reduce the ethical gap. One is through participatory research approaches, where displaced persons are not just respondents, but co-creators of knowledge. This could mean involving them in formulating questions, interpreting findings, or even co-authoring reports (Kindon et al., 2007). It requires time, resources,

and humility, it can, however, lead to research that is more grounded, ethical, and transformative. Another step is to close the feedback loop; researchers often come, collect data, and leave: communities never hear back. We owe it to them at least to return, share findings, answer questions, and engage in continued dialogue. In the Sahel, this is not always easy because of security issues, logistical barriers, and funding constraints. Where possible, even a short return visit, a printed summary, or a community debriefing can make a difference: it demonstrates that their voices matter beyond the moment of the interview.

Reimagining our Moral Duties

The line between researcher and humanitarian is blurred. When we enter refugee camps, we are not neutral. In places where people are desperate for help, showing up with nothing to offer can feel like betrayal. What, then, are our moral duties? I believe they start with honesty. We must be transparent about the purpose of our research, its limitations, and its potential impact. We must listen deeply and respectfully. We must advocate where we can, even if only by amplifying voices through writing or speaking in spaces of influence. But we must also challenge the extractive logic of traditional research. The idea that we can just take people's stories, publish them, and move on is no longer acceptable, especially when those stories are rooted in pain, loss, and survival.

Conclusion

Conducting research in humanitarian settings like the Sahel is a privilege. It comes with responsibilities that go beyond methodology and academic rigor. It requires ethical imagination, emotional intelligence, and moral courage. The encounter I had in January 2024 still haunts me. It reminds me that research is never just about data; it is about people. About trust. About responsibility. And ultimately, about the legacies we leave behind. In times of crisis, producing knowledge is not a neutral act. It is a moral one. And we must strive to do better.

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Theater as a Trade Union's Tool: Staging Resistance and Claiming Recognition

Laura Rakotomalala

Laura Rakotomalala *holds a Master's degree in Population and Development Studies and a Specialized Master's in Sociology and Anthropology from the Free University of Brussels. Her research focused on migration-related issues. Drawing on the sociology of law and the sociology of emotion, she examines how informal workers mobilize legal frameworks and engage in legal practices, with particular attention to the dynamics of collective action and the pursuit of rights.*

Staging Resistance and Claiming Recognition

Shame arises when one feels that they have violated a norm (Ciccone and Ferrant 2015). For the undocumented domestic workers I meet, shame is often internalized due to the social stigmatization stemming from both their migration status and their occupation. Stigma and shame can hinder collective action (Abrego 2011). Yet in Belgium, a group of undocumented domestic workers defy expectations by publicly demanding legal recognition. The core group in the strike comprises a dozen women from the Philippines, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, aged 25 to 63. They have lived in Belgium as undocumented migrants for 6 to 10 years. Most come hoping to support their families back home; others arrive as students or asylum seekers but lose their legal status.

In this blog, I examine how a trade union uses theater to help undocumented domestic workers move beyond the stigma associated with their illegalized status and claim recognition. Their strikes in June 2022, 2023, and 2024 drew significant public attention by combining mobilization under a trade union banner with theatrical performance. Developed in collaboration with Brussels-based artists, these performances draw on documentary theater, a politically engaged form of art that dramatizes real testimonies and events to challenge dominant narratives (Bisiaux 2023).

In addition to attending the performances, I observe the creative process behind them. I participate in union-organized workshops inspired by the movement of domestic workers

in Spain, who use art and theater as forms of protest (Pimentel Lara et al. 2021). These workshops also draw on Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, a method aimed at fostering reflection around the re-enactment of lived experiences of oppression (Ribeiro and Zanella 2023). Though the use of drama provides catharsis, this empowerment is not without its tensions. Because the workshops are embedded within a trade union context, they also implicitly encourage participants to adopt the union's norms and goals, particularly the push to mobilize and take legal action against abusive employers. This expectation demands effort from the women involved, especially when they do not always identify with such confrontational forms of resistance.

Who is to be Ashamed?

Despite the heavy topics sometimes addressed, the performances do not lack a sense of humor. Maya, an undocumented domestic worker from the Philippines, steps on stage in an oversized suit, tiny bowler hat, and fake mustache. Laughter erupts as she introduces herself as *"the abusive employer."* She is soon joined by another worker dressed as a "corrupted politician," her oversized pants barely staying up. The two shake hands. "Why didn't the government listen to the workers but only to the employer?" Maya asks.

Through satire, workers flip the script on who gets to be shamed and who deserves empathy. Humor in this context is a tool of resistance: it shifts the blame, highlights absurdities in the system, and empowers women to reclaim a socially valuable identity.

Seated on the right side of the stage, three actors wear fake plastic masks depicting elderly men with white mustaches. Adopting an air of practiced gravitas, they toy with sheets of paper representing workers' complaint files, tossing them around theatrically. As domestic workers recount the abuse they have endured in front of the assembly, the masked actors cover their ears with their hands and shake their heads frenetically, as if madness has struck them. In the end, the tribunal condemns Brussels' regional Ministry of Employment, ruling that it must grant access to formal work, provide training opportunities, and recognize domestic workers' competencies. In these plays, workers are celebrated for their skill and resilience, like the "octopus" character whose many arms allow her to multitask. They reclaim their stigmatized "traits as an admirable specificity that demands recognition and calls for attention" (Ciccone and Ferrant 2015, 107). In contrast, politicians and employers are often caricatured, making laughter not only comic relief but also an expression of dissent.

Theater as a Trade Union's Tool: Between Empowerment and Marginalisation

While the theater workshops and strikes provide space for expression, they also come with emotional strain. Workers often feel pressured to meet union expectations. During a session organized by the CSC, Lauryn, a domestic worker from Congo, stages her story of abuse. Despite encouragement from union representatives to take legal action, she chooses not to: "It's not fragility," she says. "It's understanding that the patient is also a victim. You can't abandon an elderly woman who depends on you." Her decision reveals

a gap between the union's legal framing of employer abuse and the workers' own moral reasoning.

Beyond feeling misunderstood, many participants also express frustration at the union's limited focus on regularization. *"And what about our papers?"* one worker asks during a workshop. *"We're tired of being undocumented."* Reflecting on her participation in the 2023 and 2024 public performances, another woman tells me, *"I was telling one of the colleagues... these people [the union] are using our name."* This tension is deepened by the workers' limited integration into the union's structures. Practical barriers, like the difficulty of paying union dues in cash or the union's refusal to support a solidarity fund, reinforce the feeling that its bureaucracy fails to adapt to workers' realities or treat them as equal members.

Concluding remarks

Drama can be a powerful tool for marginalized groups, offering voice, visibility, and moments of catharsis (Wallis 2018). For trade union–affiliated domestic workers in Brussels, art has been a tool for reclaiming the narratives around their identity, expressing dissent, and building solidarity. Yet when drama is embedded in a union's mobilization strategy, it can also generate emotional strain.

As workers strive to align with union values by joining workshops and strikes, many feel that their undocumented status remains sidelined. Although the union acknowledges the importance of an intersectional approach to migrant workers, its traditional focus on worker–employer relations and improving working conditions limits its ability to address the broader dimensions of undocumented workers' precarity. Without more flexible and inclusive organizing strategies, undocumented workers risk remaining marginalized, even within spaces intended to empower them. By the end of 2024, many left due to frustration with the trade union's strategies. In addition, regional and federal migration policies remain highly restrictive, with limited access to residency and still little recognition of undocumented workers' labor.

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Intersectional Experiences of International Scholars in Western Academia

Nida Jamshed

Nida Jamshed *holds a PhD in Social and Political Psychology from Clark University, USA. Her research explores how ideological beliefs and norms perpetuate collective violence and oppression, and what socio-psychological factors shape responses to injustice among marginalized groups in repressive political contexts. Drawing on decolonial approaches and multiple theories of intergroup relations, she investigates practices ranging from collective action to everyday resistance. Her work engages with diverse ethnic, racial, national, and religious groups across global contexts.*

We live in a world that has historically and continues to witness cases of mass collective violence, intergroup conflicts, genocide, hate crimes, religious and racial discrimination, climate-induced displacement, political upheavals, and economic-based mobility. Working-class populations, often the least powerful, are the common targets of such calamities and inequalities, forcing them to leave their homes and migrate to foreign lands. A 2024 United Nations report revealed that international migration reached 304 million, doubling since 1990, with women, young girls, and children exhibiting the highest migration rates. This staggering number speaks volumes about global systemic inequalities, power-hungry nations, greedy ruling elites, political violence, and harmful practices of colonization that disproportionately impact the livelihoods and everyday lives of working-class and vulnerable folks, leaving them with no option but to make their move to wealthy countries with the hopes of improving their quality of life and feeding their families.

This blog has been written in the context of the migration of scholars/students/researchers from the Global South to wealthy countries in the Global North and is heavily rooted in migration and intersectionality scholarship, highlighting the nuances and structural complexities in building and navigating everyday life, cultural differences, language barriers, identity, and belonging crises as international scholars in foreign lands, thousands of miles away from origin countries. It also draws from the author's personal experiences and reflections on moving from Pakistan (one of the countries in South Asia and broadly in the Global South) to the United States of America,

to pursue doctoral studies and the similar collective experiences of many international scholars. Please note that, due to space limitations, the author only focused on certain aspects of migrant scholars' journey to the Global North countries.

The journey of migrant scholars for pursuing higher education in Global North countries begins with many structural challenges, starting first with costly language and subject matter exams (e.g., IELTS, GRE, SATs) essential for the admission process, without any guarantee of acceptance into their preferred institution(s), putting an extreme financial burden on scholars. If students manage to gain admission, the next challenge is the mentally and physically taxing task of obtaining a visa through a costly process. The visa acquisition starts with compiling numerous documents to support the visa application, again without any assurance of approval, even after dedicating countless hours to document preparation and incurring substantial visa fees. Importantly, the application process for foreign academic institutions and the associated visa process can become more challenging for first-generation and working-class scholars who might lack adequate information and resources from the beginning. The visa acquisition process is inherently unequal and greatly influenced by passport privilege – putting people from Global South countries into uncomfortable circumstances ranging from heightened background checks, extended wait times, to outright visa rejections, regardless of the completeness of submitted documents.

After this physically and mentally challenging journey, the immigrant scholar arrives in a foreign land, facing a new set of obstacles from learning and adapting to unfamiliar cultural and societal norms, racism, unequal access to opportunities and resources, and maneuvering through a complicated bureaucratic system that can impede academic achievement and success. Scholars from low-income and marginalized backgrounds, particularly international or immigrant students, often bear the burden of needing to understand academic norms and the 'hidden curriculum' - the unspoken, unofficial rules and values that govern academia and its measures of success. Frequently, these scholars lack familiarity with the academic language, lack funding to generate substantial research output, face more difficulties in publishing their work in mainstream journals and outlets that value scholarship only produced by Western scholars.

The Western academic system is deeply exploitative and is built in a way that favors scholars from advantaged countries who are well-versed in mainstream academia (Bou Zeineddine et al., 2022). The academic progress is often evaluated using standard criteria, assuming a uniform academic background for all scholars. This inequitable system fails to recognize the complexities and nuances in international scholars' experiences, neglecting their cultural, social, and linguistic diversity, combined with identity-based prejudices, biases within disciplinary norms, underrepresentation of diverse voices in knowledge production, and complete disregard and devaluation of knowledge produced by marginalized groups.

Addressing societal challenges and promoting social change requires inclusive academic environments. Migrant scholars deserve respectful and welcoming spaces that value their perspectives and provide opportunities and resources for their personal and professional growth. While Western academia is characterized by inequalities and power struggles, it can also be a rewarding space for many international scholars, especially those who are the first in their families to attend college or come from working-class backgrounds. For these individuals, the experience can lead to personal growth and empowerment as they carve their paths in a competitive academic landscape and beyond.

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A Letter from Abroad: Motherhood Penalties, Migration and Allyships for Social Justice in Academia

Abigail Sepenu

Abigail Sepenu *is a PhD candidate at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. Her research explores gender, migration, and health, drawing out the strengths of diasporic communities in supporting the postpartum mental health of immigrant women in Sweden, Germany, Canada, the UK, and the USA, and jogging their cultural memories about traditional practices from their origin countries that promote healthy postpartum to foster transformative participatory change. Abigail also has an MSc Global Health from Uppsala University, Sweden, and an M.A. Social Protection from Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences, Germany.*

To my daughter Adama,

I've had to sort through a cocktail of emotions to write this letter, perhaps due to the fact that I'm simply sick of missing home. Too often, the enormous guilt of not being there for you and your brothers gets the best of me. Contrary to what you might expect, this guilt stems from my own internal struggles, not from the judgment of others who accuse me of putting my career before my family. Did I ever tell you that the 4years your father was away in London for his PhD were, by far, the toughest time of my life? Between my full-time job as a medical doctor and keeping up with your full-on 18-month-old energy, not to mention the never-ending demands of my pregnancy with KB, I was constantly burned out. I woke up each day desperately hoping for help. Instead, all I got from friends and family was high praise and admiration for my seeming strength: 'You are such a strong woman', 'You are such a supportive wife'. No one ever questioned your father's commitment to our family for leaving us behind to pursue his dreams.

The canker of 'double burden' disproportionately affects women, who perform most unpaid care and domestic tasks alongside their professional jobs, leading to stress, exhaustion, and diminished work-life balance.
Source: OpenAI

So imagine my surprise when six years later, I left to pursue my own education, and I was asked: "Who will take care of your children?", "How will your husband manage three children alone?" The double standard could not be clearer: it lends itself to underscoring the toxicity of our societies' insistence on fitting – mostly forcing – women into archaic gendered roles while at the same time, giving men wings to fly. In our Ivorian society, a woman's lack of choice and agency is a virtue, and her ability to shoulder too much weight while suffering in silence is celebrated as strength. My goal, if it's the last thing I do, is to make sure you grow up protected from these ills of our society. While my dedication to this ideal remains unwavered, it is not my focus for this letter. I want to tell you the story of a dear friend, Leelah Forbes.

When Leelah and I first met, I was a first-year master's student (my prior medical degree was completely irrelevant), and she was a third-year PhD student and a teaching assistant for my course. The disparity in our educational attainments was the least of the differences between Leelah and me. I was a big-bodied Black woman and an immigrant on a temporary student visa, navigating a merciless culture shock. Leelah, on the other hand, was slender, White, Canadian, and seemingly at ease in every space. Yet, our shared passion for social justice drew us together. It trumped all our inherent differences. Ordinarily, the dynamics of a student-tutor power imbalance are hard to navigate, let alone strike a friendship through. Thus, while we worked closely together on an EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) project – Leelah as a Project Coordinator and I as a Research Assistant, we never anticipated it would lead to friendship.

This was my first student job for which I couldn't be more grateful, as my growing financial difficulties did not seem to hold any promise of relenting. I know this might be confusing for you since I mentioned in my previous letters that the reason it was necessary for me to leave you and your brothers to study in Canada was to ensure a secure financial future for us. In my defense, that was my expectation prior to leaving the Ivory Coast. That expectation was, however, rather short-lived and quickly replaced by

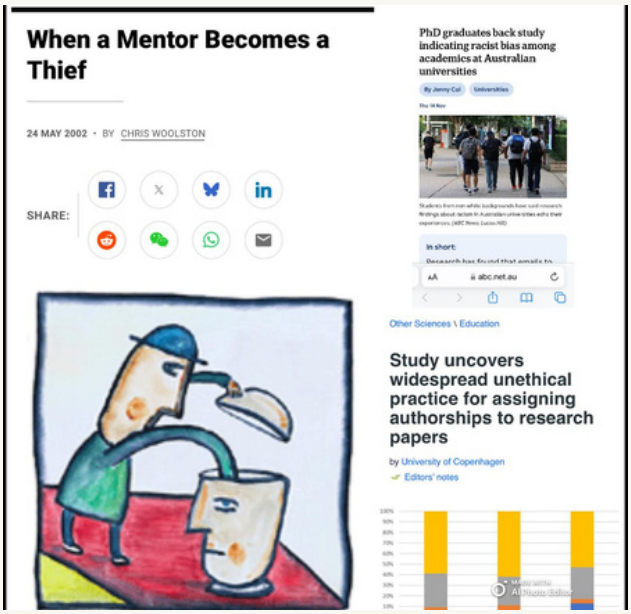
my current harsh reality. Monthly rent for the apartment I share with another student is more than the yearly rent for our 3-bedroom house in Yamoussoukro. The cheapest meal on the dinner menu at a neighborhood eatery costs more than our entire family's weekly groceries. These high expenses completely blindsided me, but they pale in comparison with my high tuition fees. I assumed that governments of developed countries, like Canada, invest heavily in education at all levels, making it affordable and accessible to their people. Though somewhat naive, my perception was not entirely wrong: education in Canada can be affordable–just not for international students. Our fees are disproportionately higher than domestic students' fees. From 2014-2020, there was an increase of $20,000 in international students' tuition fees, whereas domestic students' fees increased by less than $200 in the same period. Adding further complexity, for every job advertised, there is the disclaimer that priority would be given to Canadians and people with permanent residence. So while our opportunities are limited, our costs are higher. It's been argued that the growing internationalization of higher education in Canada is merely a neoliberal or marketing strategy to generate huge revenues for the country. Pardon my use of big words – it is a deliberate attempt to stimulate learning. Look up 'neo-liberal' in the dictionary and tell me all about it in your next letter.

Immigrant students face significant challenges working part-time to pay for high university fees
Source: OpenAI

Adama, I don't write to you about my financial difficulties to burden you with worry – I do so because, for too long, we allowed the wrong voices to tell our story. That is, in large part, due to our failure to pass down our truth from mother to daughter, from one generation to the next. Not anymore – 'Until the lions have their own historians, the tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter' ~ an old African proverb. So, keep a record of these letters and tell our story, whatever form your voice might take. As for me, thanks to my savings from working as a medical doctor in Yamoussoukro for over a decade, I can manage for now. Unfortunately, many international students are not half as lucky – they all but trade hard labour for degree certificates. With constrained alternatives, they work

night shifts in retirement homes and day shifts at industrial warehouses, with no time or energy to spare for their studies. Contrary to an erroneous popular perception that international students come from elite backgrounds in the Global South and can afford these high fees, many of the international students' families are unable to support them financially and, in fact, expect remittances from them.

Segueing from my story with Leela to high tuition fees might seem random, but it's really not. Even if it was, who can blame me? The issues of international students are so compounding, it's impossible to talk about one without touching on many related others. The lack of equitable tuition fee policies for international students was one of the focus areas of the research that Leela and I worked on. More specifically, we explored ways that educators and, by extension, policymakers can include nuanced perspectives of international students in EDI initiatives. Before long, we completed and submitted for publishing our research that had been in the works all summer long. Leelah worked closely with the head of EDI to have our work published. I wasn't involved, but I trusted her until delays and evasions made me uneasy - evasiveness was completely out of character for Leela, given her penchant for forthrightness. The distance between Leela and me continued to grow as all my efforts to nudge her up to some update proved futile. However, I was a Black international student working in a predominantly White department; between navigating systemic barriers and passive-aggressive affronts, there wasn't much energy left to give in to paranoia. For me, self-preservation came second only to oxygen in my lungs. If I confuse you with a personality alien to you, I apologize. In my future letters, I will tell you all about how much of my old self I've had to bury to make others feel comfortable around me.



Publication headlines related to students being denied authorship

Weeks later, I received an email from the head of EDI admitting to what he described as an "embarrassing omission" of my name from the list of co-authors of our research. This hardly came to me as a surprise; I had read many reports of international students being denied due recognition for their contribution to research work. He added that the 'error' was corrected only because Leelah insisted my name be included, or hers be removed as

well. Things began to add up. Leelah eventually confessed. She kept things to herself because she knew I would have stopped her from putting herself on the line. She wasn't wrong, but what she missed was that I wasn't afraid of a personal sacrifice if it meant challenging systemic barriers, not just one supervisor's 'mistake'. Getting remotely close to achieving that is not as simple as getting one supervisor to retrace his steps and absolve himself of any wrongdoing with a sorry attempt at placating me. A lasting social change is often born out of rather circuitous efforts for which one must be willing to exercise patience, be persistent, and most importantly, have an eye for the bigger picture. However, in the famous words of Goethe, *"as long as he strives, man will err"* – Leelah made a mistake only because she dared to take a stand, which cannot be said for many. But while I appreciate that her heart was in the right place, narrowly focusing on my individual rights, Leelah missed the opportunity to fight for the rights of many more immigrants, silenced by omission for many generations to come.

So, even at the risk of bruising her ego and jeopardizing our already tenuous friendship, it would be remiss of me not to have pointed out the double standard in Leelah's approach to events as they unfolded. How could she care so much as to put her neck on the line for me but not trust that I might make some meaningful contributions to that cause? – not to mention our shared goal of promoting equitable participation in social justice through the inclusion of international students' nuanced perspectives into addressing issues confronting them. If Leelah had trusted me with my own lived experience and come to me, I would have advised that the publication process run its course, after which we would have had all the leverage we needed to publicly call out the head of EDI on his undoing, setting an example for other departments.

I'm sure you realize we've come full circle on the subject of double/contradictory standard (the so-called 'rules for thee but not for me') as it applies to gender and race from pre- to post-migration. You will find such inconsistent standards in various spheres of life. Yours is to resist them and advocate for fairness for yourself and everyone. However, in your attempt to advocate for others, you must bear in mind that people are the experts on their own lived experience. If you must lend them a hand, do it from by their side, arm-in-arm; not from ahead of them – you will never see the way. I want to end here with a promise to give you the pertinent details of how Leelah and I managed to navigate newly formed eggshells in our friendship journey, unite in our differences, and forge a true allyship to fight against injustices perpetuated against immigrant students.

With all my love, Momma.

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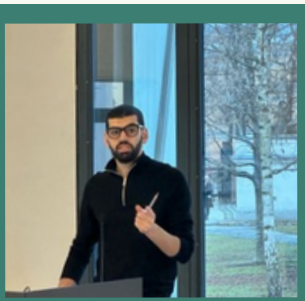

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