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Coloniality, Racialisation, and Migration:
Preliminary Reflections Toward a Conversation

– Ali Kassem –

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Please send correspondences to:

Ali Kassem

Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the National University of Singapore

ali.kass@nus.edu.sg

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Arab Council for the Social Sciences
Alamuddine Building, 2nd Floor
John Kennedy Street, Ras Beirut
Beirut, Lebanon
00961-1-370214
info@theacss.org | www.theacss.org

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Abstract

Migration and forced migration (or refugee) scholarship has received significant critique from various positions across national and disciplinary divides. This paper draws on critiques focusing on Eurocentrism, ahistoricity and the analytical erasure of dehumanisation. It then develops the insights from anti, post, and decolonial scholarship that could generatively contribute to moving beyond extant limitations. Taking the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it briefly sketches the generative potential and contribution of such a re-framing – particularly absent from research focusing on the Arab-majority world. The paper concludes by inviting further research and an advancement of the conversation between migration and refugee studies and the developing ‘decolonial turn’.

Key words: Migration studies, refugee studies, decolonial theory, connected sociologies, Eurocentrism, Lebanon

Migration and forced migration (or refugee) scholarship has received significant critiques from various positions across national and disciplinary divides. This paper begins by highlighting critiques focusing on Eurocentrism, ahistoricity and dehumanisation. It then presents key insights from anti, post, and decolonial theories that could generatively contribute to moving beyond extant limitations – insights that are often not sufficiently brought to bear on migration and refugee scholarship. Taking the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the paper then outlines the generative potential and contribution of such a re-framing – particularly absent from research on the Arab-majority world. It concludes by inviting further research and an advancement of the conversation between this scholarship and the developing ‘decolonial turn’ that has begun a movement to acknowledge, redress, and subvert the colonial legacies of hegemonic knowledges as well as modes of being in the world. Certainly, and as will become clear, this paper does not seek to present a comprehensive engagement nor a systematic conversation between migration and refugee literature and anti, post, and decolonial scholarship. Rather, it seeks to be a synthesis and preliminary reflection inviting the furthering of this conversation, and its incorporation into the study of the so-called Middle East.

Migration and forced migration Scholarship, Eurocentricity, A-historicity, and De-humanization

Migration and forced migration studies is a varied body of work of multiple and significant contributions across social and political theories.¹ Nevertheless, it has increasingly come under critique for a series of unwarranted assumptions, limited approaches and inadequate, unethical, methodologies (Van Hear 2010; de Haas 2014; Garelli and Tazzioli 2013). From the absence of a critical gender approach to its persistent falling into the individualistic subject analysis, much of the literature and policies emerging from it have been claimed as

¹ The conceptualisation of separate fields of study for migration, displacement, and refugeehood is part of a Eurocentric classificatory apparatus that this article, cognisant of the deep entwinement of both the phenomenon as well as the bodies of scholarship that seek to study them, seeks to move beyond. The article therefore approaches migration and refugee studies together, as part of a larger body of work that can be referred to as mobilities scholarship.

unsatisfactory and limited (Donato et al., 2006; Gatt et al. 2016; Levitt 2012; Nawyn 2010; Omata 2013; Rupp 2016).² In this section, I will focus on two key limitations: the absence of colonial history and the depoliticizing absence of an account and incorporation of racialisation and dehumanisation.³

Much of mainstream migration and refugee scholarship often presents migration as a phenomenon of globalisation, modernity and communication. Indeed, the current age has itself been proclaimed the “age of migration” (Castles 2013) where international mobility, movement and interconnectedness are described as the key characteristics of current ‘technological’ and ‘globalised’ times. In this sense, a survey of migration scholarship reveals that it does not sufficiently acknowledge the colonial effect of the current migration waves from ex-colonies, nor the longstanding migration from metropole to colony and from colony to metropole. Accordingly, the movement of both humans and non-humans which has connected the world over the past 500 years, including various forms of slavery, settler-colonialism, ethnic cleansing, missionary settlement as well as labour movement and military mobility, is disavowed. This erasure of the historical colonial invariably constructs a framing of migration as a phenomenon of the *contemporary* where relevant genealogies are erased.

Within such a paradigm, migration is dissociated from its entanglement with historical and ongoing imperialism: from the production of northern and southern national subjectivities across the globe to the formation of (post-colonial) modern citizenship and global connected dependency. For example, when migration in Britain is presented as a recent phenomenon, the fact that movement – often of people classified as British subjects from across the Empire – across the metropole and its colonies is a longstanding historical process

² A key question in this respect is the absence of indigenous perspectives, particularly in settler-societies from North America to Palestine, that would necessitate a radical rethinking of movement and migration that remains beyond the scope of this paper.

³ It must be stressed here that this is not an argument claiming to represent the entirety of the migration literature, nor its limitations. Indeed, there is a large variety of intersecting issues relating to migration, from authoritarian regimes to the crisis of neo-liberalism and climate catastrophe. Focused on a specific contribution emerging alongside decolonial literature to redressing migration scholarship, and aware that the issues around this scholarship are multiple and complex, many key questions must remain outside the scope of this work due to its limitations and the attempt at analytical clarity. It is hoped that future work will undertake this effort.

foundational in the very production of Britain and its cultural and social identity is erased (see Gopal, 2016; Bhabra 2017). In this sense, by approaching colonialism, migration, imperialism and citizenship as separate and distinct phenomena the connections between them are invisibilised and the production of the contemporary nation-state and its social dynamics themselves are inadequately framed (McIntosh et al. 2019; El-Enany 2020). The failure to incorporate this colonial history into understanding current migration flows/patterns has systematically resulted in a failure to frame and understand current migratory phenomena and policies, from bordering to asylum regimes, both in the metropole and in ex-colonies (see Dillender 2011). Indeed, much of the scholarship does not sufficiently incorporate the colonial into its analysis where migration is often presented as the movement of certain individuals from one national geography to another. This applies to present imperialism just as it does to historical colonialism. A re-definition and conceptualisation of migration itself therefore become necessary – ones that explore the deep entanglements and complexities between migration and forced migration to rethink categories such as ‘expatriate’, ‘refugee’ and ‘displaced’.

To further illustrate this, one could look at the connection between spatial mobility and socio-economic mobility which continues to influence the literature as recent scholarship has “all too often defined the migration–development nexus in purely economic terms” (Levitt 2012, 497). Problematic for its over-emphasis on the economic, much scholarship has disavowed the long history which has produced this economic imbalance and the possibilities and impossibilities of movement within it. In this, it often naturalizes global inequality and conceals the production of global dependency. Moreover, with an overwhelming geographic focus on Europe, this has reproduced the West as the ‘land of opportunity’, disavowing North-South dependency and marginalising South-South mobility (Boucher and Gest 2015; Levitt 2012). Eventually, in a clear instance of ahistoricity and presentism, the literature, with erasures, amnesia, and selective remembrance, has left the “hegemonic discourse of migration...still marked by an explicitly Eurocentric stance and a specifically postcolonial arrogance” (Gatt et al. 2016, 3).

On another level, the absence of racialisation and power hierarchies from much migration scholarship presents itself as one of the literature's greatest limitations. A key example regards conviviality and superdiversity. These two cases are important to think through as they are often presented as more critical strands within mainstream migration scholarship that have emerged in response to some of its key limitations. Despite their valuable contributions, both remain wanting as they eclipse power and erase aggressing normativities. Conviviality, for instance, has been shown incapable of addressing "the question of power and inequalities" as it presents accommodation without thinking of "who is in a position of accommodating whom" and fails to investigate "whom an ethos of conviviality serves (more than others), who claims and reaps benefits from it and whose perspectives (dis)appear in, or behind, conviviality; and which subject positions and self-images become available to and reiterated by those who speak from a position of conviviality" (Lapina 2016, 39). Superdiversity, in turn, which has become difficult to define with its myriad uses (see Vertovec 2019), has been argued to be a direct begotten of theories of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism: often suffering from their same limitations, trapped in the episteme of the "neoliberal hegemonic forces of the Global North" and, eventually, reproducing their limitations (Ndhlovu 2019, 38). Most importantly, its erasure of social inequality, subduing of violence and downplaying power render it incapable of offering a satisfactory critical analysis of migratory phenomena and of the migratory experience (Aptekar 2017; Foner et al. 2019). Importantly, the subjective of/in the migratory experience is often overlooked as the political and structural dimensions of migration are erased (Mezzadra 2014).

This eclipse of power, particularly in erasing racialisation, seems to resonate throughout the migration and forced migration literature. For example, the attempts of Portes (2011) and Shiller and Salazar (2013) to think of transnationalism have been called out for overlooking the unequal power relations between migrants and hosts, as well as among migrants, in favour of an attempt to unify and harmonise – depoliticising mobility and parochializing the migratory experience (Hirai 2009, 70, as quoted in Herrera, forthcoming). While transnationalism has offered many advances in the migration literature, "the need to include analytical dimensions beyond mere economic considerations when analysing transnational

migratory processes” and to move away from an individualistic approach to movement – both European legacies in the social sciences– remain wanting (Oso and Suárez-Grimalt 2018).

‘Identity’ as a conceptual category is often dominant in these discussions of mobility. Here, human difference appears to be taken as an analytical starting point as its politicization and construction are left insufficiently problematised (Amelina and Faist 2012; Lorde 1984).⁴ Zetter (1991) had long argued for the need to problematise the category of refugees and its construction, analysed in relation to the political services it offers, to acknowledge how identities are produced within power contexts and their power effects. Despite this, in investigating the literature one concludes that it has systematically left identities unproblematised and outside relations of power, especially colonial and imperial relations of power, as it continues in “underestimating the significance of race and racism in processes of migrant incorporation” and interaction among themselves, in relation to the host community and in relation to external social actors (Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou 2014, 636). While intersectional approaches have made significant progress in addressing this question, their usage in much of the literature as “a grid where seemingly fixed identity categories” are placed “reflects the continued stronghold of positivist theorizing” and a European legacy in the social sciences where inequality remains inadequately theorised and insufficiently challenged (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Garcia 2018; Grosfoguel et al. 2016).

In the following section, I present contributions from emergent anti, post, and decolonial scholarship in moving beyond some of these limitations. In order to do this, I will briefly sketch the theoretical position from which these insights emerge to then explore what specifically bringing them to bear on the migration literature can offer.

Decolonial Theorisation: From Historical Colonialism to Ongoing Racialisation and dehumanisation

I will be limited here to a presentation of two key axes from post, anti, and decolonial thinking: firstly, the centrality of connected global histories and a pivoting of the colonial

⁴ For an excellent discussion on the politics of migration scholarship, refer to Hanafi (2019).

experience in sociological analysis and, secondly, the centring of dehumanising racialisation within and beyond phenotype as the structuring force of the 'modern' condition.

In regard to history, Bhabra (2014) argues for a rethinking and a rewriting of social science theorisation to produce one which does not erase the colonial experience and arrive at an understanding of the global interconnectedness of the world, an interconnectedness through colonialism. In this, the "rhetoric of modernity (progress, development, growth) and the logic of coloniality (poverty, misery, inequality), has to be central to any discussion of contemporary global inequalities and the historical basis of their emergence" (Bhabra 2014, 119). History, global history, here becomes of vital importance, and the absence of contextual systematic historical accounts from most social science theorisation is revealed as a key issue, as a key means of erasing the colonial and negating its continued central position in the making of the contemporary world order. Migration, as a key phenomenon of the current world of inequalities, is no exception.

Here, the concept of coloniality emerges as particularly relevant: a term used to refer to Eurocentric modernity's movement, built on an economy of exclusions in the metropole and an economy of erasure in the colonies, in the ultimate pursuit of the denial and disavowal of all that belongs to the outside of the proclaimed Eurocentric "reality" (Vazquez 2012, 242). Focused around three main axes: knowledge, power, and being (lived experiences), coloniality works through a series of techniques to dominate, subjugate and erase the world's pluriversality (Mignolo 2011). In this sense, migrants, forced migrants (or refugees), mobile humans and non-humans as subjects of difference and encounter are key targets of coloniality's functioning particularly in terms of power and being as they are governed, controlled, and aggressed at the intersection of enduring pasts and ongoing presents.

In this functioning, coloniality establishes a colonial difference: a signalling of a divide and a demarcation between the western, the modern, and the non-western, the non-modern. This difference is the outside "that is constructed by the inside (civilized, imperial)" (Mignolo 2011, 48) where the "European", the Modern, is constructed as the "pinnacle of a progressive transition" colonising "space and time to create a narrative of difference" (Mignolo 2010, 324). In it, and through it, all Others are to be subsumed, enlightened,

absorbed, changed, and eradicated by any and all means. With and through this difference, individuals are robbed of their legitimacy, their rights, and their dignity as they are pushed into the service of specific imperial agendas. It is a situation of all Others turned into *damnés*, *damnés* who are always “either invisible or excessively visible” (Moldanado-Torres 2007, 257).

A crucial point here is that coloniality’s quest for control pivots around racism. Racism here is not “a classification of human beings according to the colour of their skin but rather a classification according to a certain standard of ‘humanity’” (Mignolo 2012, 55). Race is thus defined as a “global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human” produced by institutions of Modernity/Coloniality “politically, culturally and economically” (Grosfoguel 2016: 10). “Humanity” is henceforth not “a transcendental and neutral essence that just anyone can appropriate and describe” but is rather a particular enunciation born out of the western episteme and “based on epistemic and ontological colonial difference” (Mignolo 2009, 17). In this sense, racialisation, including but in no way limited to colour, is the “hidden logic” of coloniality playing out throughout the world: the means used “to degrade whatever does not correspond to the imperial ideals of Modernity and to persecute and destroy whoever disagrees with the racial classification of the world” (Mignolo 2012, 56). Racialisation is therefore constructed through diverse markers which can include (and have included) “colour, ethnicity, language, culture and/or religion” (Grosfoguel 2016, 10).

A key concept here is the invented category of the human: “an invention of Western imperial knowledge rather than the name of an existing entity to which everyone will have access to”: controlled by some, always denied to others (Mignolo 2009, 11). Within this system of modernity/coloniality, the condition of becoming human is becoming ‘modern’. Without becoming human, one has no right(s) to claim(s) and remains outside, “different” and damned, since the very concept of rights when one is not human does not apply (Mignolo 2009). Such is the meaning of dehumanisation: a process of negating being, rights, and legitimacy to situate Eurocentric modernity’s Other as deficient, marginal, precarious, and expendable.

The Migration Literature and Decoloniality

In this section, I will develop how migration might be understood when thought from a decolonial position particularly cognisant of the decolonial interventions outlined above. First, a decolonial perspective readily invites a thinking through migration as a historical phenomenon which has long existed and which must be understood in both continuities and breaks with its antecedents away from a fetishization of the current 'modern' age. Specifically, a decolonial perspective calls for an incorporation of colonialism, since 1492, as a migration-loaded phenomenon where movement and mobility, encounters, exchange and clashes, have been constitutive of modernity itself (see Madokoro 2019).⁵ In line with Mayblin's (2014) arguments around the migration literature's "silences around the colonial rationales that informed early exclusions from rights, as well as around histories of displacement outside of Europe" (Mayblin, 2014, 428), such a reconceptualization holds major effects ranging from theorisation to the possibilities of policy-making. This eventually raises questions as to what is *concealed* when migration and refugees are claimed 'new' phenomena and when the contemporary moment is proclaimed the time of novel and unprecedented human encounter and exchange. To redress this, among other analytical moves, an acknowledgment and analytical incorporation of colonialism's doings across the globe is needed: from under-developing the Global South to partitioning, inventing and enforcing nation-states, borders and 'cultural traits' (see for example, Rodney 2012; Bhabra 2007). In this, the decolonial perspective invites a re-reading of the historical account of human mobility, and the narratives of conquest, control and empire involved, assumed, and essentialised as well as the narratives of the western-centric modern condition's emergence.

This consequently renders a reading of any migratory experience unsatisfactory if it fails to analyse the phenomenon at hand in entanglement with its emergence as structured by colonialism as well as its ongoing legacies. In this, without a proper account of the migratory phenomenon's genealogy and emergence, from the invention of nation-states to their global

⁵ This is surely not an argument to reduce various forms of mobility and movement over the past 500 years into one conceptual category nor to claim that these are one and the same but rather to examine the continuities and effects they hold on one another.

enforcement and from the construction of difference across the globe to its forced globalisation, in addition to a proper framing, contextualisation and interconnected analysis as structured by coloniality as the ongoing global matrix of power (not merely historical colonialism), migration cannot be satisfactorily understood nor engaged. Additionally, this incorporation challenges the inherent normative assumptions around “modern technology” and communication showcasing how migration is not an epiphenomenon of “modern technology” and communication but rather, as colonialism, constitutive of this technology’s emergence – and suffering its effects.

In parallel, the question of humanity and its hierarchy would come to be pivoted where race and racism can be advanced as the key structures of migrant and forced migrant experiences.⁶ In this sense, the argument is that, in the contemporary world-system, the crossing of geographical borders is a crossing of sociocultural spaces which are marked and raced as “migrants do not arrive in a neutral or empty space [...] That is, migrants arrive at a space of power relations that are already informed and constituted by coloniality” where their racial markers hegemonically dominate their experiences (Grosfoguel 2003; Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 122).

An example of this can be found in Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres (2008) as the authors speak of migration in the context of the United States and critique the migration literature for its failure to acknowledge migration as a manifestation of another, deeper problem. To develop satisfactory conceptual tools, they contend that migration research accordingly needs to understand its connectedness to the structuring forces of the contemporary world. In this, they explain that they “consider that the migration “problem” is only the most visible contemporary form of a larger problem”, a persistent problem “that still remains unresolved in its history, a problem that was conceived by the eminent African-American sociologist WE Du Bois, as the problem of «the color line» where the color line and migration cannot be thought of separately” (Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 119). In the world of Gloria E Anzaldua, ‘The U.S-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds’ (Anzaldua 1987).

⁶ For a rich exploration from a Foucauldian perspective pushing for race and racism’s centring in migration studies, see Baldwin (2016).

Specifically investigating migration in the United States, Grosfoguel's (2003) early work had taken the case of Puerto-Rican migrants to analyse and showcase how their experience cannot be understood outside the global matrix of power and ongoing colonial legacies. Those result in the markings they hold that structure their lived experiences: from prospects of mobility to engagement with various social actors. Developing this analysis since, Grosfoguel came to argue that international migration can be conceptualised as a movement unfathomable outside colonial history and the current reproduction of inequality "in the presence of colonial relations between migrant and host populations" after the end of formal colonialism (Grosfoguel 2014, 12). In line with this, I contend here that migrants are not only engaging "different" individuals, but are rather engaging others with whom they are not equally human; humans with whom they are separated by a *colonial difference*. In their relation to the state, to international organisations and to non-governmental organisations, migrants are not simply "humans", they are, rather, marked and raced beings whose rights and duties are different and structured differently, depending on their position along the global hierarchy of humanity established by Eurocentric modernity. As *damnés*, those from the modern world's periphery are particularly wounded by this racialisation. The inclusion of the (global) political nature of their experience promises to greatly shift current analyses and theorisations.

Physical and geographic mobility can henceforth be related to a 'temporal mobility': space and time become differently related since Europe's geographic Others had been turned into its temporal Others (Bhabra 2007). For those moving from 'developing' countries into more 'developed' ones, their movement is one into the 'superior future'. The arrival of a claimed 'historical human' is here constructed as a threat to progress: the entry and presence of Europe's temporal Others threaten its proclaimed linear development. Hence, while significant attention has been recently given to theorise spatial mobility as social mobility, it must be realised that this social mobility is the result of an imagined *temporal mobility* informed by the structuring of the world as unequal and different. In this, the question of identities becomes relevant from a somewhat different angle: identities as markers relevant in their relevance to situating the migrant on the *hierarchy of human* produced and re-produced within the migratory encounter and entwined with the

construction of Eurocentric linear time and history. In this line of thinking, the decolonial perspective problematises what is naturalised when identities are analysed under a dominant conceptualisation of difference as *threat*. Ultimately, “difference” encountered in migratory experiences is no longer assumed to be the source and site of conflict which must rather be reconceptualised and reframed within the larger structures and narratives of modernity/coloniality.

Eventually, migration and refugee experiences are embedded in modernity/coloniality: entangled with inequalities in imaginary terms, codified in the legal system, structured by its history and lived unequally in its present. They cannot, therefore, be analysed without an incorporation of the legacies of empire and ongoing global Eurocentric modernity/coloniality. In thinking through the incorporation of historical colonialism and present coloniality, the urgent need to incorporate history and the hierarchy of the human into migration and refugee studies, especially given rising nationalisms and fascisms, global social and economic crises, and looming environmental catastrophes becomes particularly needed.

The Case of Lebanon: Syrian Forced Migrants

In this final section I use the example of Lebanon to present some brief notes as to what a decolonial lens might offer in the study of migration, particularly in incorporating the axes of history and hierarchy of coloniality. I will engage the issue of Syrian refugees as a key topic of public concern, both in the nation and globally, to show the shifts that applying the decolonial lens can generate through the study of a south-south case of forced migration in the Arab-majority region.

Lebanon is a multiparty confessional republic on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean that “never existed before in history. It is a product of the Franco-British colonial partition of the Middle East” (Traboulsi 2007: 75). Invented and expanded in pursuit of an independence from the rest of its surrounding region with a special relationship with France as a beacon of its ‘civilising mission’, Lebanon was set up under Christian Maronite domination and came to

include over 17 religious sects (Salibi 1989, Hakim 2013). With a history far too complex to be engaged here, the country has been through multiple civil wars to survive through a delicate power balance between its three main religious constituencies (Maronites, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims) as it navigates multiple lines of global divisions. Under a claimed 'weak state' with a project of westernisation and neo-liberalism, it is certainly not a homogenous place but is rather a space where multiple groups (co)-exist in parallel, each with distinct founding myths and imagined horizons.

Not a signatory to the Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951 nor to the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Lebanon is host to over one million Syrians, the most present internal Others in the Lebanese imaginary today.⁷ The simplest observation of Syrian refugees' lived experience in the small land reveals their condition as one of a serious "plight" as they are systematically "subject to exploitation and abuse" across social spheres (Saab 2014: 94; Usta et al. 2019; Karis and Aranki 2014). This is a plight that has long predated the Syrian war (Chalcraft, 2009; Thorleifsson 2016). In continuity with this history of exclusion, scattered across Lebanese territory, and Palestinian refugee camps where a state of exception rules (Hanafi and Long 2010; Hanafi 2008), the Syrians' entry into Lebanon particularly since 2011 has had a significant effect on Lebanese society and has greatly aggravated the pre-existing sense of Syrian inferiority where "a new category of exclusion" has emerged with Syrians "increasingly consolidated as Lebanon's 'internal other'" (Thorleifsson 2016: 1079). Indeed, the Syrians are well aware of the stigma of being Syrian, and multiple attempts at negotiating this stigma exist including attempts to "change their accent or other characteristics in order not to be specially indexed or subjected to violence" (Thorleifsson 2016: 1079).⁸

In studying Syrian refugee experiences, several different theoretical framings have been used. Overall, these have consistently revolved around sectarianism, securitization and

⁷ According to UNHCR, there is a little under 1 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon in October 2019. The number of unregistered refugees remains unclear with anecdotal evidence placing it at around 500,000. See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁸ For samples of this theorization refer to Serhan (2018). For a theoretical elaboration of the situation of Palestinian refugees, refer to Perdigon (2015).

various approaches to migration governance with a focus on legal questions (Estriani 2018; Geha and Talhouk 2018; Janmyr 2017; Naufal 2012). These have generally been confined to the governing Eurocentric paradigms of the migration literature as explored in the beginning of this paper. From a decolonial perspective, the terms of analysis shift to questions of colonial history, racialisation and the hierarchy of the human. Indeed, here, the analysis of the crisis must begin with the very partition of the region under colonial rule, the establishment of the different imagined projects of nation-states in the region and the entwined invention of a hierarchy between the Syrian and the Lebanese. In other words, an analysis of the Syrian migratory experience across borders from within Syria into Lebanon, forced under conditions of conflict and war, must begin with an analysis of those borders' invention and the ongoing legacies of colonialism. These unequal borders have been produced sustained and internalised, through various forms of socialisation, passed on from generation to generation. From common jokes to common "wisdom", this order stands firm as its constructs thrive, othering the Syrian "as a threat to the civilized culture and identity of Lebanon itself" (Chalcraft, 2005: 29). Ultimately, it is to this field of unequal power that Syrian migrants entered their smaller neighbour, and it is in this space of unequal power that they dwell. Accordingly, a framing of the Syrian lived experience, for example, as recent and contingent on current socio-economic conditions, governed by Lebanon's dysfunctional state under sectarian power-sharing (Fakhoury, 2017; Cherri et al., 2016), would lack plenty in analysing the lived experience of refugees in its foundations and continuities with colonialism and coloniality.

In much of the scholarship, the discrimination of Syrian refugees is understood as being a result of "strains on the host country" across the various sectors of daily life, from education and health to labour. In Lebanon, this is said to be aggravated by persistent grudges from the recent days of the Syrian army's presence in the country (from the end of the civil war in 1991 until 2005), whereby discrimination against Syrians is framed as "due to the history of the Syrians in Lebanon" alongside a sense of security threat (Hamadeh 2019: 379; Chahine, Al-Masri and Abala 2014). Here, hostility against Syrians is presented as a form of "animosity...inflamed both by security problems from rebel groups or ideological affiliates

and by Lebanon's negative history with the Syrian regime" (Baylouny and Klingseis, 2018: 113). Further, the literature claims that "Syrians, who are more likely to work for lower pay, have caused unrest and struggle in many of the host villages" as they have competed with Lebanese workers (ILO 2014; Naufal 2012; Christophersen 2014). Often offered as a natural and justified result of economic and non-economic competition in the presence of limited resources, the "blaming" of Syrians and the ensuing discrimination against them emerges as "somewhat expected, backed by much literature on migrants" (Baylouny and Klingseis 2018: 113).

Yet, upon scrutinising the Lebanese field one realises that there is little competition as Syrian workers dwell in the sector of unskilled, informal, and low-skilled work – a sector that Lebanese citizens standardly refuse to occupy and that has long been saturated with Syrians (Chalcraft 2009; Errighi and Griesse 2016). Indeed, one quickly realises that this framing conceals the value Syrian refugees bring to the Lebanese labour market and the fact that Lebanese business owners are "clear economic beneficiaries" of the Syrian migration crisis (Turner 2015: 398; Fawwaz et al 2018). Under-researched, the position of Syrian migrants in the Lebanese economy and their unacknowledged contribution to it including as 'entrepreneurs' (Harb et al. 2019, Alexander et al. 2019) reveals the inadequacy of the economic competition lens as the source of exclusion, stigma and violence against refugees. Realising that the campaign against Syrians is led by the ruling socio-political elite, one realises that the present account is lacking in analysing the continuously rising xenophobia against Syrians, as the demonisation of both the Syrian state and the wider Syrian population goes unchallenged and the specific terms of this xenophobia go unexamined. This raises the question of what such an account conceals.

From a decolonial perspective, the first analytical move would be to relate the division of labour between Syrians and Lebanese people in Lebanon, between befitting and unbecoming work, to the racialised hierarchy of the human between Syrian and Lebanese. The second move would be to reframe the experience of exclusion and discrimination: no longer perceived as exclusively or essentially resulting from labour competition. Surely, this is not to

deny the effect of labour competition or the specific local history of the Syrian regime nor the scapegoating of Syrians by Lebanon's ruling class, but it is to say that such an analysis remains wanting. Here, the suggestion is that the very construction of Lebanon's identity and the presence of Syrians in the 'superior' Lebanese space is, per se, a threat to the country's imagined standing and uniqueness in the region and what renders such discourses and practices possible. Under such a framework, one identifies the policies of the modern Lebanese state - a colonial institution - and their "inhumanity", with what Sagieh (2015) has aptly termed a "manufacturing of vulnerabilities" towards Syrian refugees. From such a position, the Syrian experience of violent rejection and its very possibility and establishment become deeply connected to a global issue sustained by coloniality and reproduced by local actors, from Lebanese politicians to NGOs, where the Syrian is racialised, marginalised, inferiorised and stigmatised in their *humanity*. This would raise different research questions, different projects, and different analyses. These would include an analysis of the role of Syrian refugee's religion and *Muslimness* play in producing these conditions under Lebanon's Islamophobic order (Kassem 2023) as well as other markers of their racialisation – including phenotype. Importantly, it must be noted here that this is not claiming that this Syrian plight is mono-causal or that this analysis offers a complete understanding of it. Rather, it is to claim that this is an essential structuring force within it that must not be continuously erased.

To further illustrate, I will use the example of Syrian children's education in Lebanon. From under-resourced schools to an inability of refugees living in tented settlements to access formal education, Syrian children's education has certainly been a major challenge in Lebanon (Culbertson and Constant, 2015). Indeed, it was not until UN agencies agreed to cover the registration fees of Syrian refugees that Syrian children began to access the Lebanese state-run school system (Culbertson and Constant, 2015). Even then, they were mostly placed in "second shifts" in the evening and were subject to serious practices of exclusion and neglect (Culbertson and Constant, 2015). Throughout, the Lebanese state, local and meso-level authorities as well as schools sought to "segregate Lebanese from Syrian students for fear that the latter would affect the learning of the former" (Crul et al.,

2019: 8). In parallel, Syrian teachers were not allowed “to teach in public schools or any programmes run” by the Lebanese ministry of Education and Higher Education (Crul et al, 2019: 11). Syrian children were forced to study the same curriculum as Lebanese children, a curriculum administered in either French or English, despite the fact that education in Syria offers the majority of subjects (including the sciences and maths) in Arabic. As a result, even “high achievers” in Syria were faced with insurmountable barriers, and given no support to overcome them (Crul et al, 2019; Culbertson and Constant, 2015).⁹ The centrality of language in this topic, and the seemingly unjustifiable position of the Lebanese state to refuse and allow Syrians an education in Arabic or to allow Syrian teachers to teach, indicate its entanglement with the question of coloniality and the invention of separate identities across the region where language and citizenship are key axes of racialisation. With this, various questions are raised and can accordingly be rethought for different kinds of research: from municipal rules that enforce various discriminatory curfews on Syrian refugees, to state and ministerial regulations that subjugate and manufacture Syrian precarity in the Lebanese labour market.

Based on the above, Lebanon’s refusal to ratify the Geneva convention on refugees can no longer be understood as, for example, an act in obedience to “Arab neighbourliness” where “the ‘good-neighbourliness’ argument between Arab countries holds and according to which, Lebanon should not employ the term ‘refugee’ since to do so would put the state in a position that could violate the good neighbour principle” (Janmyr 2017: 441). Refusing to ratify the Geneva Convention is rather linked to a rejection to commit to the resettlement of *Muslim Arab* Syrians in the country. A decolonial invitation would be to think through this exclusion as a structural phenomenon which persists so long as the Lebanese imagined identity and difference are understood as a proximity to Europe and determination for *whiteness*. Both history and power are consequently brought to the fore and the different distribution of power can accordingly be understood in continuity with the colonial past and the imperial present in an increasingly unequal world.

⁹ For a good groundwork on how the Lebanese state’s policies produce this, see Janmyr’s (2016) report titled “Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon”.

It is through such a theorisation that an adequate agenda of intervention may be developed and where “aid” can be rethought and redirected. A better understanding of the clear gap between policy and practice, especially relating to the inability of UN integration policies to work in Lebanon (Buckner et al. 2018) can be here explored. Pursuing this lens, the expectation that the Lebanese state could be a source of refugee provisions and protection, attempts to showcase Syrian refugees’ vulnerability, offer local and host communities aid for their ‘generous reception’ of Syrian refugees, or improve the refugee experience through integration programs and refugee-host community activities (Charles and Denman, 2013; Culberston et al., 2016; Habib et al., 2019), is suspected to have little effect on changing the current refugee experience. In light of the arguments presented throughout this paper, one realises that a different framing from that of aid and integration is needed to address the quandary of the Syrian lived experience in Lebanon – as well as that other similarly marginalised groups including Palestinians and (women) domestic workers from across Asia and Africa.

Conclusion

This paper began with showcasing some of the limitations of the migration and forced migration literature, particularly regarding the absencing of colonial history and the concealment of power and its racializing dehumanisation. Then, I presented two key axes of decolonial thinking that allow us to move beyond these limitations: the centring of colonial history in the formation of the contemporary condition and centring the racialised hierarchy of the human in analysing contemporary phenomenon. Accordingly I posited that a migrant is a marked subject of modernity/coloniality dwelling in the global colonial matrix of power. I then sketched the inclusion of this thinking in the migration scholarship delineating potent possibilities and insights. Taking the case of Syrian forced migrants in Lebanon, the paper then briefly illustrated how such an approach can offer crucial interventions into theorisation, analysis, and policy. In this sense, this article specifically argues that furthering the engagement between post, anti, and decolonial work and migration and refugee scholarship is urgently needed, and significantly generative.

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